

not only Christian relationships but Christian revelation because it diminishes the radical social and ethical demand of Christ.

There can be little doubt that Kierkegaard lives up to Backhouse's thesis. To show that this great pessimist was marginally more pessimistic than was previously thought would be little achievement; but there is a hidden relevance. The parallels between mid-19th-Century Denmark and early 21st-Century world culture are remarkable. True, the field of discussion has shifted from national culture to economics; but economics has become the world culture, the culture of calculation, of the corporation, of competitive markets, and of personal success. This culture is as vulnerable to the Kierkegaardian polemic as were the established church of Denmark and the pretensions of Nordic cultural superiority.

Martensen's avatar today is constituted by the mainstream American (and latterly European) Christian denominations which have committed themselves to involvement in national politics. Since modern politics revolve around economics, the churches are ineluctably drawn into a position on economic theory, in all respects parallel to the nationalistic and imperialistic cultural theories prevalent in 19th- Century Europe. Grundtvig's equivalent in our society are the more or less independent, evangelical congregations (often as so called Mega or Media churches), mainly in North America but spreading in Europe, which proclaim the Prosperity Gospel. Preachers of prosperity argue that corporate ambition and greed are not only acceptable but an important part of Christian life. The interaction between this brand of evangelism and the establishment produces a spiritual situation that is analogous to what Kierkegaard confronted. Today's economic and social outsiders perceive themselves as tomorrow's establishment and promote the power of that establishment in anticipation of divine promotion. The fact that personal economic success has replaced personal nationalistic hubris does not alter the basic paradigm.

In a sense therefore, Backhouse's focus on nationalism is too narrow to do justice to either his own thought or that of Kierkegaard. Nationalism is but a manifestation of the larger Hegelian enemy that Kierkegaard wanted to destroy. That enemy is theologically justified corporatism, the philosophy that the group creates and has a superior claim on the individual. Hegel believed that the nation itself was a kind of corporation of corporations. Whether it is convention that makes the man (or woman) or his tribal connection, the essential Kierkegaardian evil is the presumption that 'belonging' is prior to 'being'. Not until the 20th Century did it become clear that the corporate is a very different category than the national. Today it is the corporate that threatens the existence of independent nation states as well as individuals. Our culture is one of pervasive corporate presence with the persistent threat of corporatism through the corruption of individuals as well as political processes. It is not just Patriotism that Kierkegaard condemns, it is all corporate Ambition. Few of us in our pursuit of corporate success may be prepared to appreciate just how relevant Kierkegaard remains.

MICHAEL BLACK

DEATH AND AFTERLIFE : A THEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION by Terence Nichols, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010, pp 220, \$22.99 pbk

This is a lucid and readable introduction to the problems of the 'afterlife', which is at its best when presenting the importance of philosophical ideas to a Christian perspective. On pages 73–5, for instance, there is a short section entitled 'Descartes and the modern period' which, for all its brevity, is an excellent summary of a shift in thinking associated with what Nichols calls 'modern science' but which is perhaps better seen as the 'Enlightenment science' that began to

break down in the twentieth century. Nichols sees how crucially important a shift it was when Descartes started to think of the soul not as 'the life principle and principle of organisation of the body and the self' (p.74) but as effectively synonymous with the mind, 'a thinking substance'. Bodies became nothing more than complex machines; minds became spiritual substances somehow located 'inside' them and somehow able to drive them forward. Philosophers turned to the mind/body problem and lost interest in souls (Anthony Flew's introduction to *Body, Mind and Death* is still a stimulating though limited account of the trends involved and his selection of writings remains useful).

In taking this turn, the philosophers lost something that Aristotle and Aquinas had seen and that was regained in different form through the writings of philosophers like Heidegger in the twentieth century. Enlightenment science had produced a self-sufficiency of the material world which still feeds the gut understanding of so many today who simply don't see the point of theology when, they believe, there is clearly a self-sufficient world of objects all around – bodies that are born and die, planets orbiting in regular rhythm, tables that day in day out stay happily where they are, and so on. The theologian appears as someone who fusses about unnecessary extras that can simply be ignored – such as souls. The Thomist position, which rightly remains at the very heart of Catholic (in particular) theology, undermines this presumption. The soul is 'what makes the body a substance and an independently existing thing' (p.67). As the 'substantial form' of the body, it is neither another substance inside it nor a superfluous entity that can be discarded altogether, but something without which it is impossible to make sense of bodies at all. In other words, it is no good theology thinking that it can vacate the physical realm and set out its stall in some kind of ethereal spirit-world above it. Nichols sees this very well, and it guides him through the complexities of understanding notions such as 'immortality' and 'resurrection'.

There are faults. At times it seems to me that philosophical rigour is sold a little short. The Anglican Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright, is a great favourite in this book, but what he says is often confusing. Concerning the ascension we are told (in a quotation from Wright) that we are dealing with 'two different kinds of what we call space, two different kinds of what we call matter and also quite possibly...two different kinds of what we call time.' This kind of 'bring on the multiverses' language hardly makes itself clear. On page 43 Wright is quoted calling the resurrected body 'transphysical'. Transphysical?! 'It is physical, but it also transcends the limits of our space-time universe'. But what does this mean? There is a similar quotation from John Polkinghorne (p.144) where it is suggested that the risen Jesus may be in an 'alternate universe'. Nichols is not talking nonsense. He quite rightly sees that physicists are beginning to develop theories about what they themselves call radically different kinds of universe, and Polkinghorne has written interestingly about these developments. But Nichols does have a tendency to be a little pat in his assessments.

The book begins and ends with 'Dying Well', pointing out that though we might prefer (as a wag once put it), to meet our end by keeling over and 'waking up dead' (perhaps like those unfortunate people who fall asleep at the wheel of their cars), there is much to be said for the sort of preparation of self and others which comes from a period of dying. There are excellent observations here, reminding us that this book is useful from a pastoral as well as philosophical viewpoint (it also has helpful analysis of biblical material and the background of ancient Judaism)

Because Nichols has Aquinas to carry him through the analysis of beliefs about the 'afterlife', the occasional lapse into easy solutions is held in check. But occasionally one wishes the book had more steel. On page 130 Nichols tells us that 'Like Aquinas, I think of the soul as the form, that is, the formative or organising principle of the body. In this view, without the soul the body would

disintegrate into its component molecules.’ The form is therefore more than a simple pattern. It is what Nichols calls ‘a holistic cause’, something not just rearranging elements that could perfectly well exist in some other structure, but giving them the possibility of being in any sort of structure at all – the possibility of being independently existing things. ‘However,’ he goes on, ‘there is little support for this in contemporary science, so I do not insist on it’. Instead he says that it is enough, like Polkinghorne, to call the soul the ‘total informational pattern of the individual, which develops throughout life’. But does this ‘middle way’ between simple pattern and holistic cause make sense? And what exactly is the ‘contemporary science’ that has sent Nichols from the arms of Aquinas to those of Polkinghorne? Nichols’s powers of explanation deserve not to be sidetracked in this way. On the whole they are too good for that.

MARK CORNER

THE PEN AND THE CROSS : CATHOLICISM AND ENGLISH LITERATURE 1850–2000 by Richard Griffiths, *Continuum*, London, 2010, pp. 260, £19.99,

The Pen and the Cross describes the ways in which Catholic writers of the last century and a half produced a distinctively Catholic literature. Richard Griffiths quotes Rowan Williams’s definition of such literature as writing that ‘could not be understood by a reader who had no knowledge at all of Catholicism and the particular obligations it entailed for its adherents’. This is a useful definition and for most of the book Griffiths is faithful to it. He writes with the authority of a former professor of French at King’s College London and one who has diligently read his way through a veritable library of books, many of which must have afforded very little critical gratification. Professor Griffiths was encouraged to embark on this study by admirers of his much earlier work on the French Catholic revival of the 19th and 20th Centuries, *The Reactionary Revolution*. He records of that enterprise that it caused some young French students to refer to him as ‘the man who had read more appalling French novels than anyone known’, and during the earlier part of this book we are certainly relieved to think that in undertaking his laborious research, Richard Griffiths has saved us the trouble of reading some very dull English novels indeed.

The early chapter on Catholicism and British Society in the 19th and early 20th Century is very valuable. Griffiths compares the English and French situations and describes the social and legal status of Catholics at this time and the (rather ludicrous) anti-Catholic literature put out by novelists such as Charles Kingsley (and Wilkie Collins, although Griffiths does not mention him). He identifies recurrent themes of nineteenth-century Catholic novels, such as renunciation and conversion and the importance of the priestly role. I found the section on the early 20th Century Catholic literary scene particularly interesting and useful; Griffiths traces the development of the early Catholic novel from its primarily sentimental and didactic manifestations to the more complicated productions of the new century. He gives a thorough account of why the novels of the time were so preoccupied with social class and of the general tendency of European Catholicism to favour political movements which later became identified with fascism. Many modern writers of course assume that Catholicism is naturally synonymous with a taste for despotic political systems, and the subject of Catholic politics re-emerges later in the book.

Although Griffiths includes poetry in his account of English Catholic literature, one suspects that he is more comfortable with the novel. His chapter on the ‘Solitary Genius’, Gerard Manley Hopkins, is unexceptionable but he has nothing new to say about the poetry. Hopkins is also an awkward subject in that he cannot