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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *God Still Matters* by Herbert McCabe

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THE FURROW

It was in his role as Messiah that Jesus was most misunderstood by his disciples. In Mark this concept is inextricably linked to the Cross. As soon as it is introduced, it is followed by the first prediction of the passion. The whole gospel is a lead-up to the death of Jesus on the Cross. Here Jesus demonstrates for us what it is to be fully human, to be fragile, dependent and to give oneself in love. Here also God is revealed, the God of Jesus Christ, God with us and God for us.

This is a very readable book, accessible to the general reader, and yet, revealing a depth of scholarship. The author deals with important and complex questions in a masterly way, for instance, the human psychology of Jesus, the nature of miracles and the meaning of exorcisms. Harrington deals with the subject matter under a series of headings, but does not just give a general idea of how Mark portrays Jesus. His treatment is very comprehensive and includes commentary on all the main gospel passages. I recommend this book highly to all who are interested in Scripture and in particular to those who hope to gain a better appreciation of St Mark's Gospel.

EDMOND CULLINAN

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God Still Matters. Herbert McCabe. London/New York: Continuum. Pp. 264. Price £16.99 stg.

Herbert McCabe, who died in 2001, was an outstanding English Dominican scholar and preacher. His working career spanned the entire latter half of the twentieth century and he has left a lasting legacy through his writings, teaching and preaching. His scholarship ranged widely over theology and philosophy, wherein he showed a deep immersion in the thought of St Thomas and the philosophy of Wittgenstein. The current collection of essays and homilies bear witness to the breadth and depth of his scholarship, the lucidity of his expression, the power of his preaching and his passion for social justice. Many will have read his *God Matters* (1987), a previous collection of essays which he arranged himself. This present volume is a posthumous collection edited and introduced by Brian Davies, OP. It follows a very similar format to that of the earlier collection. The essays are grouped under four headings: God; Incarnation and Sacraments; People and Morals; Sermons. In all there are twenty-five pieces.

A number of characteristics of his work strike one from a reading of these essays. They include: his anchorage in the thought of Aquinas; his use of the philosophy of language; his profound appreciation of the Eucharist and his view of its centrality to the very being of the Church; his concern for justice, equality and good inter-personal relationships; his awareness of the reality of sin and the greater reality of forgiveness.

Three of the major essays in the collection are explicitly on the teaching of Thomas: 'Aquinas on the Incarnation', 'Aquinas on the Trinity' and 'Aquinas on Good Sense'. Elsewhere he also takes his bearings from Thomas, as for example in his essays on God, the Eucharist and morality. He has a unique facility in bringing Aquinas to life for his

readers and applying his thought in a creative, refreshing fashion. He can take scholastic language and make it alive and accessible for the non-specialist reader in a way that few can do. For example, those who might want a helpful exposition of what we understand by the term 'transubstantiation' will find McCabe's essay on 'Eucharistic Change' particularly useful. He outlines the traditional teaching in very clear terms. He shows that 'change' in this context is almost a misnomer. We are talking, here, more in terms of creation than of change: 'What happens, then, when we consecrate is that the body and blood of Christ become present as our food and drink to constitute our sharing in the coming banquet of the kingdom. This happens not by any change in Christ himself but by a miracle, comparable to creation, in which the whole existence of our bread and wine become the existence of Christ ... the body of Christ which is present not naturally but sacramentally' (pp. 121-122). For McCabe the Eucharist is the central sacrament: 'Other sacraments are sacramental by their relationship to the Eucharist' (p. 128).

All good theology is genuinely pastoral, directed to the elucidation of faith and its practical expression. This quality of McCabe's work can be found throughout these essays. His essay on 'Original Sin' will illustrate the point. He begins the essay by noting a shift in perspective on the world among young people, from the optimism of the sixties and seventies to desperation today, manifested in substance abuse and other escapist activities. He claims that their view of the world is negative, a view which he suggests is not too far removed from the perspective of St John's Gospel. 'John's Gospel (and his epistles) are much in tune with a generation that simply cannot afford the cheerful optimism of the past' (p. 168). He goes on to show that the doctrine of original sin can speak to this view of the world – 'a sin with which we are infected from our origins' (p. 170). It is a radical malfunctioning of our desires and emotional life, a privation of love blocking people from seeking the truth about themselves. It is only when we are secure in love that we can see the truth about ourselves. This love is made evident to us in the death and resurrection of Christ. While the Cross is 'the whole human race showing its rejection of itself. [T]he resurrection is the Father's refusal to accept this self-rejection of man' (p. 176). A love has been released in the world, which is liberating, enabling people to be secure in facing the truth about themselves. It is a love that overcomes fear and enables people to live in true friendship. The pastoral challenge is to allow that love to be manifest in our midst, showing how in word and deed it offers the only sane alternative to the depression and escapism of so much of contemporary culture.

This is a collection of essays that will interest the academic, the pastor and the preacher. The variety of topics covered as well as the fact that they practically all deal with central Christian themes means that this compendium will certainly stand the test of time.

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