

translated the currently popular “mechanistic approach to the world . . . into a living tradition” (314).

H. insists that the trend toward these reductionist conceptions of reality is no reason to despair, for intellectual fashions change every bit as much as other fashions do. Still, they predominate in accord with the strength of the emotional and ideological appeals made by their adherents, which is H.’s explanation for the success of the modern atheist movement. For his own part, H. employs his rhetorical talent in the manner of an Augustine or a Cicero—not to cloak a lack of understanding or judgment, but to spur his readers toward further investigation of the truth of things. This book greatly enriches an otherwise impoverished literature on the topic.

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Upward: Faith, Church, and the Ascension of Christ. By Anthony J. Kelly, C.S.S.R.
Collegetown, MN: Liturgical, 2014. Pp. x + 176. \$19.95.

Toward the end of his monumental study, *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor counsels how Christians might proceed amid the challenges secularity poses: “We have to struggle to recover a sense of what the Incarnation can mean” (753). His words came to mind as I pondered Kelly’s rich and pathbreaking new book. K.’s book focuses on Christ’s ascension as the *telos* of the incarnation—not its termination, but its goal and extension. He writes, “The ascension means that [Christ] is now present in the fullness of his humanity . . . because of his ascension, the whole concreteness of his life and mission, along with the mysteries of his life and death, come together within the divine universal act of transformation” (131–32).

K. draws on Jean-Luc Marion’s notion of the “saturated phenomenon” to display and explore the multidimensional originality of Christ’s ascension in the experience of faith. And, though K. carefully examines the relevant New Testament texts, he contends that “it is not so much a question of finding the ascension in the writings of the New Testament, but more a matter of interpreting those inspired writings in the light of the ascension as the exaltation and ever-present activity of Christ” (16). Indeed, one can affirm that the ascension is the presupposition of the gospel and the very condition of the church’s liturgical worship of God through the risen and ascended Lord.

Christian faith holds in dynamic and indissoluble tension both the particularity of the crucified and risen Jesus and the universality of the ascended Lord, who is “at the right hand of the Father.” Thus the ascension grounds the real presence of Jesus Christ in word and sacrament. But his is a new mode of presence; it is indeed a presence that does not preclude a sense of real absence, not through any deficiency in Christ, but because we are not fully apt to recognize and embrace him. In a striking assertion, K. insists that “it is not Christ who has become disembodied, but we human beings are not yet fully embodied in him as we are destined to be” (94).

Here, then, is a crucial and distinctive mark of K.'s book: his reflection on the "expanding Incarnation" (v, and *passim*), Christ's continuing and generative embodiment. The risen and ascended Christ's transformed humanity is the prime theological analogue for a fuller understanding and appreciation of corporeality, embracing also Christ's eucharistic body and his ecclesial body. "The different aspects or realizations of Christ's Body are so interwoven that one has a sense of a corporeal field of incarnational communication rather than of separable entities" (87).

Implicit in K.'s elucidation of the ascension, then, is a distinctive Christian vision of reality. "What is implied is a vital new field of interactive communication between Christ, the Head of the Body, and the faithful as his members. Though the ascension is a metaempirical event, it does not imply for the ascended Jesus a metasomatic or disincarnate state" (59–60). Indeed, it reveals the destiny of created reality to be eschatologically fulfilled in and through somatic relationality. Far from being absent or removed from the ongoing history of salvation, the ascended Christ, through the Spirit,

incorporates his followers into his Body . . . above all through the Eucharist, which is uniquely Christ's self-giving within and for the church. In the Body of Christ, the natural dimensions of bodily being are transformed and become freshly perceived when set against the horizon illuminated by Christ's resurrection and ascension (140–41).

An "ascensional" perspective provides a significant contrast to prevailing views in contemporary culture. On the one hand, "the transformed materiality and vitality of the cosmic body of Christ" counters "the 'soul-less' body of materialistic modernity"; while, on the other hand, the relationality of the *soma pneumatikon* counters "the 'disembodied soul' of a rootless postmodernity" (135). Theology, in light of the ascension, articulates a distinctively Catholic sense of reality: one that is sacramental and communal, transformative and cosmic, comprehensive and universal.

An ascensional perspective also bears epistemic implications. Not only does the continual liturgical exhortation "*Sursum corda!*" seek to raise our consciousness to the heights and depths of the mystery celebrated, it also enables and promotes a refined sensibility. In chapter 6, "The Ascension: Out of Sight and the Eyes of Faith," K. invokes the venerable tradition of the "spiritual senses" and their promising retrieval in the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Sarah Coakley. K. writes, "Christian consciousness stirs with new perceptions marking a progressive interiorization and expansion of the Body of Christ. Thus the horizon of faith is illuminated and enlarged by the ascension of Christ in whom the glory of true life is revealed" (120).

The thrust of these epistemic considerations is not to reduce or constrict the sphere of scientific and technological reason. Rather, with John Henry Newman, they seek to stretch the power of intellect to embrace and appropriate the affective and the aesthetic as bearers of unique cognitive significance. Thus full scope is accorded "the reasons of the heart," freeing the imagination to soar upward. With this fine book K. has provided the theological community a gift to be savored, pondered, and prayed.

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