

is not only, or even primarily, of an intellectual bent. Yes, the formation of a novice certainly includes the study of the Rule, yet a novice really learns how to be a monk by living as one—and the abbot teaches best by example. Similarly, promoting a praxis-oriented approach, D. writes, “Christianity isn’t just a philosophy but a way of life that demands everything” (109–110). When Christian education left the monastery and went to the university, something was lost, and D. is right to suggest that we need to recover experiential knowledge as an essential way to hand on the faith. To know about Jesus is not enough for a disciple if it does not also shape the way we live every day. D.’s real target is “the false distinction between church and life” (131).

Certainly, some readers will find themselves objecting to D.’s decidedly pointed analysis of family life (chapter 6), education (chapter 7), work (chapter 8), sexuality (chapter 9), and technology (chapter 10). Nevertheless, even in such disagreement with D. on particular issues, the ways and extent to which Christian faith should influence the whole of our lives remain essential questions for Christians to consider. While some will be attracted to the “costly” form of Christianity that D. advocates, many will not—no monastic community to my knowledge (regardless of the degree of its asceticism) has a waitlist for admission.

At the heart of this work is the question of how Christians should engage the world. Hopefully, this essential question is not overshadowed for the reader by multiple reasons to critique D.’s version of a seemingly one-dimensional Benedict Option. Yet, by appealing to the practical spirituality of Benedictine monasticism, D. identifies a vital aspect of any strategy that hopes to transform the world: the daily practice of Christian faith.

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*Materialism.* By Terry Eagleton. New Haven: Yale University, 2016. Pp. x + 176. \$24.

Eagleton, Distinguished Professor of English Literature at the University of Lancaster, UK, and author of more than fifty books on various social issues, sets forth in this book a critique of various forms of materialism and the philosophers who conceived them. He nowhere offers a detailed presentation of any of these philosophies but instead cites passages from different works and critiques them for their strengths and weaknesses. His comments are frequently insightful and quite often witty as he points out what he sees as defects in the treasured view of other materialists besides himself. In the first chapter, for example, E. offers a review and critique of various forms of materialism (dialectical, historical, mechanical or reductive, cultural, speculative). Without identifying fully with any of them, he settles provisionally for what he calls somatic or bodily materialism: “it takes seriously what is most palpable about men and women—their animality, their practical activity and corporeal constitution” (35). In chapter 2, he endorses the view of Merleau-Ponty about the body not as an object of thought but as an ongoing activity: “having a body is, for a living creature, to be interinvolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and to be continually

committed to them” (37). Hence, there is no real distinction between soul and body, as to have a soul only means to be alive, not dead. “We need to be able to reason in order to survive and flourish as material creatures” (45). Given Christian belief in the doctrine of Incarnation, even God shares our animal nature. Aquinas would agree that “the whole of our knowledge springs from our engagement with material reality” (51). Human beings, of course, are linguistic as well as sensory animals: “Our sensations are mediated by language, as a snail’s are not: and it is this above all that allows us a degree of self-distance and thus of critical self-reflection” (53). At the same time, we humans are also different from advanced computers, as our practical decisions are grounded in feeling perhaps even more than in reason. In chapter 3, E. notes that human beings “know the world only as it manifests itself within the context of their practical activities” (65). Hence, in line with Marx’s philosophy, human labor is not a commodity to be bought and sold but a form of human self-transcendence, “the free realization of one’s sensory and spiritual powers as enjoyable ends in themselves” (76). Finally, Nature exists independently of us, yet is mediated to us by the culture in which we find ourselves and which we continue to shape by our practical decisions.

In the last two chapters of the book, E. discusses what Marx has in common with Freud, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein. All three are materialists in the sense of being preoccupied with life in this world, but in quite different ways. For example, Nietzsche is interested in power for its own sake, but Marx for the way it is used to protect or contest vested material interests. Marx and Freud both believe that “ideas or activities function in relation to the material basis of social existence” (87). Both Marx and Wittgenstein see language as a product of social interaction. But whereas for Wittgenstein language is autonomous, for Marx it is “what opens up reality, not what cuts us off from it” (124).

By way of personal comment, I would recommend this book to those trained in classical, especially Aristotelian-Thomistic, metaphysics. For, with his clear emphasis on the body rather than the mind or soul as the source of all human activity, E. is offering a clear challenge to the ontological priority of form over matter in classical metaphysics. Agency for change is exercised bottom-up in and through the body rather than top-down via an immaterial substantial form. Yet body and soul are never divorced from one another; the body is “meaningful matter” (50). To meet E.’s challenge, as I see it, the classic distinction between the natural order and the supernatural order should be subject to critique with some form of pantheism as the preferred God–world relationship: the supernatural order becoming manifest in and through the natural order (“Philip, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” [John 14:9]) and the natural order only existing in virtue of its intrinsic involvement in the higher-order world of the spirit.

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