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Book Review: Christian Ethics: Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights. By Ethna Regan. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010. Pp. 243. Price: £31.25 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-58901-642-2

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encounter with the father (Luke 15:22–24). For Twelftree, re-entry into the family appears to be a consequence of this salvific encounter between father and son, and not part of a process. Although the older brother does not accept the father's reception of the younger son, I would be reluctant to discount the possibility that the father's embrace of the son signals the implicit restoration of the son to the household, given the father's status as *paterfamilias*. The ensuing celebration, then, acts as confirmation of this. The brevity of Twelftree's argument in this section has not convinced this reviewer, but his interpretation certainly provokes further discussion.

On a very practical note, Twelftree provides a bibliography at the end of the book, which is divided according to the works consulted for each chapter. It would have been helpful if he had included reference to this secondary literature in the footnotes. This book is accessible for a wide audience; however, I would be cautious about recommending this book to those who are not equipped with the skills and resources to evaluate some of the discussions, arguments and conclusions.

Christian Ethics

***Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights.* By Ethna Regan.** Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010. Pp. 243. Price: £31.25 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-58901-642-2.

Reviewed by: Michael Shortall, St Patrick's College, Maynooth

Ethna Regan concludes this exploration of a theological engagement with human rights by noting the observation of George Newlands that theologians have exerted far less energy on the human rights culture than those of other disciplines (*Christ and Human Rights: The Transformative Engagement*, p. 177, n. 5). Motivated by her own personal experience, particularly with children on the streets of Port of Spain, Trinidad, and rooted in critical academic research, the previous 222 pages successfully attempt to respond to this implicit challenge.

Yet why is there such a disparity? In large part, it is a historical and political legacy. Rights language was entwined with the Enlightenment project that intellectually sidelined questions of faith and politically privatized religion out of the public sphere. Contemporary theological reflection on rights is marked by the subsequent dilemma—accept rights and so quietly accept the presuppositions of the Enlightenment including its counter-Christian elements or react robustly against all the elements that have come to make up modernity and so reject rights language.

Across the denominations, then, theological engagement can be divided into two categories; namely, those characterized by 'presumption' and 'suspicion.' On one hand, many make "predictable arguments" presuming the "unproblematic nature of the move from human dignity to human rights once the theological «foundation» or «analogy» is prepared" (J. Lockwood-O'Donovan, 'Historical Prolegomena to a Theological Review of Human Rights,' *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 9 (1996), p. 53). But on the other hand, many significant voices are suspicious, concerned that rights-language can act as a 'Trojan Horse' allowing contradictory impulses, such as individualism, possessiveness and conflict, into the Christian tradition. Either way, presumption or suspicion can hinder fostering serious dialogue.

Regan is conscious of both and so refuses to succumb to the worst of either—permitted, in part, by her initial definition of human rights. She refuses to offer a conceptual definition that focuses on designation or classification and, instead, offers a normative definition that looks to how they operate or function. She describes human rights as a ‘dialectical boundary discourse of human flourishing, positioned in ethics as protective marginality’ (p. 47)—hence the title of the book. By doing so, she argues that rights are not the only or even the primary form of moral language but act in a manner that facilitates other forms of ethical discourse. It is a remarkable humility in an age that is saturated by rights language. Yet it is exactly this that allows for the serious dialogue that the book wishes to promote: ‘What is called for is reciprocity of critique, a reciprocity that challenges contradictions in both religious and secular use of human rights discourse’ (p. 46).

She is further helped by how she proceeds. This is not a work of theological deduction and so by-passes the failing of ‘presumption’ identified above. Instead, it explores key themes and concerns that overlap between modern theologians and those committed to the advancement of human rights. It therefore contributes to the dialectical movement between the call to continually insist on the dignity of the human person as *Imago Dei* and the prophetic stances of those who condemn actions or structures incompatible with such dignity (See, W. Prinicipe, ‘The Rights of the Human Person as Saved by Christ,’ *Gregorianum*, 65 (1985), pp. 389–429).

She draws upon many contemporary theologians, philosophers and political theorists. The most significant sources for engagement are Karl Rahner, Johann Baptist Metz and Liberation Theology. She begins with Rahner’s concentration on the human being whereby he reasserts its unique mystery that demands universal respect. But in order to counteract his idealism, she then draws upon Metz’s insistence on a political response required by solidarity with those who are victims. Finally, she engages with theologians of Liberation Theology, their sense of urgency and sensitivity to need for structural change. Of this part of her book, I personally found the chapter on Metz the most interesting.

As a work of theological exploration, Regan also takes account of the theologians of ‘suspicion.’ To this end, she particularly focuses on Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank and Daniel Bell. While accepting a key point that theology should not be restricted to a very limited public sphere, she rejects their tendency to caricature rights as always atomistic and selfish. ‘Our placing of human rights as a boundary discourse in ethics avoids the reduction of the fuller dimensions of justice to the protection of human rights, yet it reminds us that we cannot bypass these concrete issues of protection and provision in our search for human flourishing’ (p. 204).

As explorative, this book makes no claims to be comprehensive. In fact she consciously brackets out some issues: two of which are particularly important. Firstly, she offers no exposition of human flourishing which rights protect. Secondly, there is no sustained reflection on the meaning or operation of secularism. Both inevitably help define rights and prioritize which rights ought to be promoted: the first by way of an ordering linked to the individual and common good, the second by way of the cut-and-thrust of the political sphere.

To return to the question of disparity: in a world so thoroughly dominated by human rights language, theologians remain familiar with, and often attend to, other moral traditions. In her exploration, Ethna Regan offers a genuine contribution in mapping a way in which human rights language can be engaged with in a manner that mutually enriches each tradition. It is to be recommended to students and anyone interested in reflecting further.

Church History

Faith and Patronage: The Political Career of Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire, c.1560–1629. By Benjamin Hazard. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009. Pp. 222. Price €35.00 (hbk). ISBN 978-0-7165-3048-0.

Reviewed by: Mary Ann Lyons, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

In this, his first monograph, Benjamin Hazard presents an important pioneering study of the political career of a leading, yet in many ways, little understood figure within Irish émigré circles in early modern Europe. Best known as the founder of St Anthony's College in Leuven, Franciscan provincial of Ireland, archbishop of Tuam and ardent opponent of the Jesuits, Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire (Florence Conry), was a man of many parts, a fact recognized by John McCafferty, director of UCD Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute who, in his foreword to this publication, styled Ó Maolchonaire as 'an exile, ... a courtier, an intriguer, a partisan patron, a poet, a theologian, a bishop, an administrator, a militarist, a pastor, a friar' (p. xvii). The wisdom of Hazard's decision to focus specifically on Ó Maolchonaire's political career is borne out in this detailed, comprehensive and revealing reconstruction of a neglected dimension to his subject's career and the circumstances in which he operated in Ireland, Spain, Spanish Flanders and Rome.

This well-written book is divided into four chapters, each detailing a distinct phase in Ó Maolchonaire's career, namely his upbringing and family background (c.1560–90), his rise to prominence (1592–1609), his mission to the Spanish court at Madrid (1609–18) and his realignment from Leuven (1618–1629). In Chapter one, Hazard shows how increasing pressures exerted by the Tudor administration on the Uí Maolchonaire, who were historians, and on other professional families in Connacht and Ulster changed their experience of traditional landownership, patronage and alliances. He argues that the expropriation of their ancestral property and Flaithrí's education as a hereditary Gaelic chronicler and poet caused significant dislocation in his early life and shaped his public career. While the relevance of some material featured in this chapter is questionable, and although no explanation is given for Ó Maolchonaire's decision to join the Franciscan order, the discussion effectively explains his family's gravitation towards the strongest Gaelic advocate available—the Ó Domhnaill—and his subsequent enduring adherence to the Gaelic elite, specifically the Ó Domhnaills and Ó Néills. Furthermore, it explains Ó Maolchonaire's allegiance to the Spanish Habsburgs over the Tudors and Stuarts.

In Chapter two, Hazard tracks the evolution of Ó Maolchonaire's career in Spain from his admission as a student to the Irish College at Salamanca. The origin of his long-standing antagonism towards the Jesuits is clearly explained. In detailing Ó Maolchonaire's