

This book is a rich confection, tending to the indigestible; I have indicated only some of its many ingredients. It is given to rhapsodic moments, but for the most part it is tersely written. I found its own form elusive, having the impression that it approached its subject—the incarnation as the 'archetypal manifestation of beauty' (p.208)—from many different places all at once. I was irritated by several of its critical asides, aimed as they are at idealist 'postmodernists' (Kevin Hart being the worst offender), but whose real faults seem to be that of holding a position too close to Murphy's own. But my chief worry with the book is that, while it warmly welcomes Hans Frei's stress on the scriptural story as the 'form' in which Christ is to be known, that form is so abstractly rendered that it is in danger of occluding the 'perversity' of the Christian imagination. While agreeing with Murphy that the scripture is a 'work of art', but 'no escapist fantasy' (p.207), an icon of Christ 'embodying in the flesh both the cross of meaningless[ness] and the resurrection of meaning' (p.149), I nevertheless miss in her account a real sense of that fleshliness, and thus of its undecidability; a MacKinnonesque perplexity at the shock—and perverse ambiguities—of seeing beauty in horror.

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A VISION BETRAYED. THE JESUITS IN JAPAN AND CHINA, 1542-1742. By Andrew C. Ross. *Edinburgh University Press, 1994.* pp.xvii + 216. £29.95

Both the specialist and non-specialist reader will find Ross's latest book on the history of the Jesuit missions in Japan and China both stimulating and provocative in more ways than one. The author, who has written on mission history and theology before, and in particular in relation to Africa, now approaches the Jesuit enterprise in East Asia from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century with several important questions, which—remarkable as it may seem—have often been overlooked by the experts in the field, and namely: what exactly was it that the Jesuits were trying to accomplish in Asia? Was there an *underlying vision* that inspired these missionaries and which would account for their choice of one course of action over and against another? And finally, why did their pioneering efforts end in such apparent and total failure in both Japan and China? The search for some possible explanations has resulted in the present volume. The book, consisting of two parts (Part I on Japan and Part II on China), opens with an introduction that briefly sets the scene by providing an *apologia* of the author's decision to undertake an analysis of the history of both the Japanese and Chinese missions within the covers of a single book. While duly acknowledging that the two present quite different historiographical questions, Ross convincingly argues that they can be studied together, insofar as they were both to a large extent part of a unified missionary strategy developed by Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606). He was appointed in 1573 as the personal delegate of the Jesuit General Superior in Rome (hence his title of 'Visitor') to Asia, and

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was thus responsible for the government of both missions in the final decades of the sixteenth century. Together with his fellow Italian, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), he was undoubtedly one of the outstanding leaders of the Church in the Far East. The author describes how these two men, inspired by Francis Xavier's pioneering efforts, embarked on a bold and hitherto unexplored course in the overseas expansion of Christianity. Rejecting on principle the established methods of forced conversion employed by some of the Spanish conquistadors in Latin America and the Philippines, they saw as their principal task the necessary accommodation and adaptation of Christianity to the sophisticated civilizations of the East. This goal was pursued in the hope that, by rendering the Christian message culturally intelligible and thus acceptable to the peoples of the Orient, the Japanese and the Chinese would become Christians of their own accord. Ross contends that this approach necessarily implied an interpretation of the faith founded on the firm conviction that 'both Japanese and Chinese culture contained elements of truth and morality upon which Christian faith could build' (p. xii-xiii). It was by acting on this belief that their policies broke free 'at a deeper theological and philosophical level' from 'Europeanism—the belief that the European experience is the Christian experience and is definitive for all humanity' (p.xv). Hence, they succeeded in 'shap[ing] the missions in such a way as to challenge the Eurocentric understanding not only of Christianity but of history and culture' (p. 32). He suggests—and this is a theme revisited in his conclusion—that this can be chiefly accounted for by two factors: the humanist values that characterized the intellectual training they received in their native Italy and the spirit of discernment instilled into them over a long period of Jesuit formation through the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus.

It is in this context then that Part I succinctly recounts the history of the 'Christian century in Japan'—to use a phrase coined by Prof. Charles R. Boxer—beginning with the Portuguese discovery of that land in 1543 and Francis Xavier's activities there from 1549 to 1552. This is followed by an overview of Valignano's most important policies and a brief look at the conflict between the Jesuits and the Friars before and after the 1597 martyrdom in Nagasaki. The story comes to a close with an account of the brutally systematic attempts of the Tokugawa military regime in the first decades of the seventeenth century to eradicate Christianity altogether.

Part II goes on to describe the painstaking efforts of Matteo Ricci and his successors in China to enter into an intellectually meaningful dialogue with Confucian scholars on terms acceptable to the Chinese *literati*. It summarizes the numerous successes as well as the often sudden and unexpected setbacks the Jesuits experienced in this attempt 'to present Christianity as something that completed what was ancient and true within China's own history and culture' (p. 148). Ross clearly illustrates how this course of action on the part of the Jesuits caused

almost immediate alarm in European ecclesiastical circles, ultimately leading to a condemnation by the authorities in Rome of their efforts to accommodate Christianity to Chinese traditions, in what has come to be popularly known as the 'Chinese Rites controversy'.

The principal merit of the present work lies in its re-examination of several key historiographical questions. One such question is the interpretation of Valignano's uneasy dealings with both the Portuguese and Spanish authorities. We see Valignano desperately trying to nurture the growth of a native Japanese Church, free from external colonial constraints and interests. This explains why he never saw the aggressive promotion of Portuguese commerce as one of his priorities. Even more alarming in his perception was the pressure being exerted by Spain through her representatives in Manila to open Japan to the Spanish mendicant friars, who had been banned from travelling there by the Pope himself, and to Spanish merchants. Ross points out that Valignano originally intended to exclude anyone coming from the Spanish dominions—including Jesuits—as he feared the potentially adverse effects a massive Spanish presence might have on the missionary enterprise in a country like Japan, where the Church had been dependent since the beginning on the Portuguese *Padroado*. Consequently, Valignano's efforts to prevent the members of other religious orders from coming to Japan was not simply the fruit of personal animosity towards the Friars—though such feelings may not have been completely unknown to him. One may at times wonder, nevertheless, whether Ross has not perhaps oversimplified the terms of the Jesuit-Friar conflict. A perusal of primary sources clearly shows that there was often, in fact, more than one opinion within both the Mendicant and Jesuit camps as to the correct *modus procedendi* with regard to the other side. Turning his attention to China, another controversial case the author takes up is concerned with the role Ricci, Verbiest, and Schall attributed as missionaries to their 'scientific apostolate'. Ross takes issue with those who have in recent years suggested that western scientific knowledge was a crude bait unscrupulously used by these men to conceal the 'hook of Christianity' (see p. 131). To this he responds by reminding us that Chinese scholars became interested in Ricci's scientific knowledge only *after* he had shown himself to be well-versed in the classical texts of China. Moreover, Ricci was well aware from the outset that the 'world view of Chinese intellectuals was a unified one in which science, philosophy, ethics, religion, and technology formed an interrelated whole' (p. 146). Accordingly, Christianity had to be presented as a 'complete philosophy' embracing all of the scholar's moral and practical concerns.

From the technical side, the abundance of typographical errors and misspelt foreign names is an unfortunate flaw that should have been eliminated by the copy-editor. The bibliography is relatively basic and the author's decision to leave out many fundamental secondary works in languages other than English is disputable. Moreover, the inclusion of a

greater selection of primary source material would have been much appreciated by the reader. Despite these minor shortcomings, this thought-provoking book—written from the viewpoint of a theologian and Church historian—contributes some extremely relevant questions and novel interpretations concerning the historical role of European Churchmen in Japan and China and the significance of that encounter on Asian soil in centuries past.

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RELIGIOUS TRUTH FOR OUR TIME by William Montgomery Watt.
One World Press, Oxford 1995 Pp 109. £5.95.

Since the Enlightenment the easy acceptance of the objective truth of a religion has suffered somewhat. Partly this is due to the continued dominance of empirical and historical criteria for judging truth claims. Along with the development of literary criticism, these standards have tended to create doubt about the truth of religious texts which seem to be often non-factual and subjective interpretations of events, if not fictional creations. Moreover, the greater awareness we have today of the multiplicity of religions, each making claims about the revelatory activity of God, tends to generate a certain scepticism about their objective veracity, especially when the different religions seem to make exclusive, but contradictory claims to possess truth. Montgomery Watt is both a Christian and has spent a life time in the study of Islam. He is thus aware of both of these problems. He seeks to present a basis for judging the truth of a religion that not only makes sense in the face of these challenges, but also is one which is open to seeing the same truth manifested in a variety of religions. Moreover, he argues that the co-operation of members of different religions is necessary, if religious truth is to make an impact in the secular and often materialist world of today.

Watt suggests that we should see religious language as pictorial or 'iconic.' An icon 'being a two dimensional representation of a three dimensional object, that is, something known to be inadequate, yet accepted as a representation of a reality.' An example of this would be using the word father for God. God is really only something like a father, yet the word used does convey something true about a real entity. Watt wants us to move away from thinking that all language is either used literally of things that are real or, if not used thus, is thereby referring to things that are unreal. As 'iconic', religious language may, indeed, succeed in expressing the truth of the realities it deals with better than literal language, just as a portrait of someone may give a fuller and deeper impression of that person than a photograph.

Religious texts give particular portrayals of the world, of human history and of God's activity within it. The truth value of these is vulnerable to rejection when historical criticism questions their factual accuracy. This problem is deepened when literary criticism exposes the long process of re-working and re-reading of religious texts, removing the