

of American religion as monolithic and absolute in its theological positions. Smith ardently disagrees with that assessment, and argues instead that CWA, at least, is not at all absolute in the stands it takes. She demonstrates that its political efficacy relies on its ability to shift political position with the use of rhetorical tactics, and 'become almost anything it needs to be' to exert and maintain its power (p. 190).

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Oliver Davies, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 288. £65.00.

This is an ambitious book. It proposes a major reorientation of theology, both methodologically and substantively. The methodological shift is to centre theology in the meaning of Christian life, specifically the Christian act (as distinct from the meaning of texts and doctrinal systems abstracted from that life). Oliver Davies sees this to be a natural counterpart to the way the new scientific view of the human now points to the centrality of embodied act in human life generally (as distinct from the centrality of thought, which had dominated in modernity). The substantive shift is to rehabilitate the doctrine of the exalted Christ as the key site for theological enquiry. The guiding question for theology now becomes 'where is the exalted Christ at work in the life of the world' (as distinct from his existence in a heaven beyond). This too finds its natural counterpart in new science, specifically modern cosmology which has no place for a heaven 'outside' the world.

The theological anthropology underlying this is crucial. With a central focus on integrated, embodied, human life and activity, theologically understood as the act of Christ's body in the world, Davies is able to claim an earthed and engaged basis for all his theological enquiry. As such, actual transformation within the world becomes an essential part of its hermeneutic. That is to say, the exalted Christ is revealed precisely in transforming human praxis and specifically in Christian praxis, not primarily in texts or ideas. Davies then trawls major doctrinal themes in the light of this reorientation. Trinity, Spirit, the church, sacrifice, human freedom, are all reviewed through the lens of this non-dualistic metaphysic and transformational hermeneutic.

Davies deploys an impressively wide range of scholarship and erudition in this enterprise, as well as fertile creativity. Thus the congruence with contemporary science, especially neuroscience, is supported by reference to

some fascinating areas of recent research. The underlying debt to Scotus for much of this theological trajectory is also well mined. So this is a rich, multi-layered, stimulating (if sometimes dense) discussion, which certainly repays careful attention.

Nonetheless, there are issues to pursue. The claim that this is a major reorientation of theology depends, in part, on distinguishing transformation theology from liberation theology (which clearly shares many of its overall concerns). Davies duly makes some distinctions – but the debt is still considerable, it seems to me. More important, the decision to pivot so much on the doctrine of the exalted Christ-in-the world is presented somewhat arbitrarily. I was persuaded by the end of the book that it is genuinely fruitful. But so are other starting points. So is fruitfulness enough justification? Perhaps its congruence with the new science is the real driver – but then that would imply a kind of priority to the current scientific agenda which I do not sense more generally in the book's theological method.

Finally, is there a lacuna which opens up in the very passion of Davies' commitment to an engaged theology? To make the positive case for Christ in this world as the integrated acting *humanum*, Davies is bound to reject dualisms of almost every kind. But that in turn leads him also to be very wary of all talk of transcendence. This is surely unnecessary: radical transcendence (as distinct from merely contrastive transcendence) should include the transcendence of dualism itself. It is also worrying: without a robust concept of transcendence, it is hard to resist the reductionism which Davies himself wants to refute.

None of this detracts from the proper challenge of this reorientation, nor the overall integrity of the endeavour. It deserves our engagement with it, as surely as it demands our engagement with the world.

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Ferdinand Christian Baur, *History of Christian Dogma*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert F. Brown (Oxford: OUP, 2014), pp. 416. £75.00.

In Vincent of Lérins' famous formula, dogma is that which has been believed 'everywhere, always, by all'. As such, it could obviously not have a history. Is the history of dogma then inevitably inimical to the object of its study? Both conservatives and liberals have claimed that, albeit with