

being of beings all the more fully' (194). Barth's cross, however, encompasses a far more ambitious account of the ontological difference between the divine and human, located within the being of Jesus Christ. As Stanley puts it, 'Barth's understanding of the cross is far more vibrant theologically than Heidegger's, and this is in no small part because of Barth's more ontologically rich interpretation of Luther.' (194) In conclusion, Stanley diagnoses Heidegger's problem as the obverse side of Barth's achievement: an inability to engage with thesis 20 of the *Heidelberg Disputation* and its claim that, 'He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.' By dealing theologically with the 'manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross', Barth was able to develop an ontology which avoided the pitfalls Heidegger discerned with an 'onto-theology', but which did not simply 'cross out' being, as Heidegger did. In the end, Protestantism can be seen as developing its own unique elucidation of the 'is' at the heart of the question, 'What is Protestantism?'

The book is an impressive work of Protestant theology and post-Heideggerean philosophy. Stanley offers exciting new approaches to both Heidegger and Barth, maintaining more nuanced readings of their ontologies than are often found in theological works. The capacity to read Heidegger faithfully without deferring to the pervasive readings of Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion is highly laudable in this regard. That said, the second half of the book, on Karl Barth, is even more breath-taking, arguing against the standard readings of Barth which are instantiated in the work of Bruce McCormack and the over-emphasis on 'analogy' in the wake of Von Balthasar's engagement with Barth. In place of these standard accounts, Stanley begins with Barth's early doctrine of God, expressed through the maxim 'God is God', before tracing its development through the Anselm book (*Fides Quaerens Intellectum*) through to the latter volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. As Stanley sees it, the underlying ontology evinced in this progression is a concept of ontological difference articulated not as 'dialectic' or 'analogy' but christologically, finding its apogee in Barth's late essay, *The Humanity of God*.

In light of this impressive reading of a particularly Protestant metaphysic, the book offers itself as an essential text for anyone interested in plotting the development of Protestant theology, but also the particularities of the interplay between philosophy and theology at a general level. All in all, this book could well be the most important work of creative Protestant metaphysics of recent decades, recommending Timothy Stanley as an exciting new prospect in the Anglo-American theological sphere.

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## *Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams*

Benjamin Myers

New York: Continuum, 2012; x + 135 pp, \$24.95, pb;  
ISBN 978-0-567-59971-1

### SUMMARY

Benjamin Myers offers a beautifully composed, clear summary of the theology of Rowan Williams. To achieve this, he draws out the influence of Wittgenstein, Hegel and Freud, as well as Augustine, Vladimir Lossky, Sergius Bulgakov, T.S. Eliot and Donald MacKinnon. In conjunction with biographical details, Myers demonstrates Williams' unique apophatic and poetic methodology. The theology that emerges is not only a picture of an untamed, unpredictable Christ, but an unconventional, unsuspected faith marked by a discontinuity and alterity that, although finding resonance with Karl Barth, offers its own unique vision.

### RÉSUMÉ

Benjamin Myers livre ici un résumé clair et bien écrit de la théologie de Rowan Williams. Il montre que se sont exercées sur sa pensée les influences de Wittgenstein, Hegel et Freud, ainsi que de Saint Augustin, Vladimir Lossky, Serge Bulgakov, T.S. Eliot et Donald MacKinnon. En rapport avec des détails biographiques, il présente l'approche apophatique et poétique unique de Williams. Il en découle, non seulement une théologie qui dépeint un Christ insaisissable et imprévisible, mais aussi une foi non conventionnelle et inattendue, caractérisée par la discontinuité et l'altérité, qui, tout en trouvant quelques résonances chez Karl Barth, apparaît comme une vision tout à fait unique.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Benjamin Myers präsentiert eine wohl aufgebaute, klare Zusammenfassung der Theologie von Rowan Williams. Zu diesem Zweck legt er die Einflüsse von Wittgenstein, Hegel und Freud dar, wie auch die von Augustinus, Vladimir Lossky, Sergius Bulgakov, T.S. Eliot und Donald MacKinnon. Anhand von biographischen Einzelheiten zeigt Myers Williams' einzigartige apophatische [nicht aussagbare] und poetische Methodik auf. Die Theologie, die dabei herauskommt, zeigt nicht nur das Bild eines ungezähmten, unberechenbaren Christus, sondern auch einen unkonventionellen, unvermuteten Glauben, der von einer Diskontinuität und Andersartigkeit gezeichnet ist, die – obwohl sie einen Widerhall bei Karl Barth findet – ihre eigene, einzigartige Sichtweise bietet.

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While some volumes are written merely to inform or defend, *Christ the Stranger* is composed with an eye to delight. In sixteen brief chapters – vignettes more than expositions – this slim volume offers a clear and compelling sketch of the views of Rowan Williams, the previous archbishop of Canterbury, of sociality, tragedy, language, boundaries, tradition, growth, mission, saints, desire, hope, prayer, fantasy and renunciation. The

result is a beautifully composed introduction to one of the richest theological minds of our generation.

Short enough to be read in a single sitting, the volume is perhaps best read as a series of brief, lunch-break sized meditations. A prologue at the beginning and interlude in the middle of the chapters describe Williams' poetic grappling with the strangeness of Christ in three famous paintings: *Resurrection*, *Christ Pantocrator* and *Our Lady of Vladimir*. These serve not only to frame and embellish the chapters, but also to reinforce Myers' presentation of Williams as an apophatic and poetic theologian invested in teasing out the boundaries of language. This impulse is further intimated with a pithy line from one of Williams' poems introducing each chapter. Equally important for framing these chapters, Williams' theology is said to fall into three broad periods: an early period dominated by a Wittgensteinian question regarding language and sociality, a middle period dominated by a Hegelian question regarding social order, and a later period dominated by a Freudian question regarding human desire. These questions emerge roughly within the early, middle, and late chapters, thereby connecting the chapters to developments within Williams' thought.

In what way, then, does Williams' theology sketch not only Christ as a stranger, but, indeed, a faith that is characterised as strange? Among the numerous ways Myers elicits this theme in Williams' work are the following: Williams replaces the familiar Western autonomous self with an odd, vulnerable apophatic humanity (18); God is portrayed as working through the tragedy and the foolishness of the cross, not the familiar logic of natural law or objective norms (27); the resurrection is seen as a permanent disturbance, something distinct from normal history (30); the Church is characterised as born in trauma and existing in rupture and discontinuity (31); the light of Christ is depicted as making one a stranger to a flimsy, constructed self (32); the work of Christ is seen as estranging us from a fallen world (33); Christ appears on the cross not as someone familiar, but as a stranger who robs us of our standard use of language (34, 121); rather than supporting an uncritical repetition of formulae, orthodoxy brings out the strangeness of familiar Scripture and tradition (46); at every stage of the church's journey, the gospel is said to become 'stranger and more difficult' (49); saints are put forward as unbalanced individuals whose 'weirdness' demonstrates the strange world of God (77, 104); eschatology suggests something radically new, a future that is 'strange and unforeseen' (96); prayer is a 'stammering, hopelessly inefficient language' where we are saturated with meaning such that God's nearness makes God strange (101, 103); in confession we recognise our tendency to make ourselves strangely distorted (108); art is credited with opening up the strangeness of the world, thereby overthrowing our idolatrous fantasies (111); holiness is claimed to be recognising the 'strange objectivity' of God (112); Christ's presence in this

world involves a 'strange hiddenness' (113); and writing is not for assertion or comprehension, but put forward as a way to open oneself up to what is strange and unfamiliar (122).

As the above litany suggests, Myers tells the story of a theology that arrives at the same alterity and discontinuity as Karl Barth's, yet in a journey that works from the puzzles of ordinary human relationships up rather than from a Trinitarian logic down (6). However, in spite of these resonances, Myers is not interested in reconciling Williams with Barth; on the contrary, at one point he shows where Williams misreads Barth. Rather, the Williams Myers presents suggests a mind too original to be framed in light of any one theologian. Theologians such as Augustine, Sergius Bulgakov and Vladimir Lossky must play important roles in the discussion, as well as the influences of Dostoevsky, T.S. Eliot, Donald MacKinnon, Iris Murdoch and Gillian Rose.

Equally embellishing the volume and accenting the theme are Myers' introductory comments and occasional narrative smatterings of Williams' unconventional life. Born and raised in the off-beat town of Swansea, Wales, an illness prevented a normal childhood. At Cambridge he was drawn to an overlooked, unusual mentor (Donald MacKinnon) and chose to study the unconventional theology of Russian Orthodoxy. In debates within the Anglican Communion, Williams strives to rethink matters, offering unusual, controversial stances. Behind all of this, Myers detects the development of a poetic methodology in Williams – a habit of examining things until what was familiar becomes strange (xiii, 2). Even the picture on the cover of the book plays into this biographical theme, presenting a curiously bearded cleric with overgrown eyebrows and a rather large wooden cross around his neck.

Although not all will be in agreement with the various elements of Williams' theology (this reviewer was not), undoubtedly readers will be delighted by this graceful and clear portrait of one of the most significant contemporary theologians.

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### *Religion and the Public Order of the European Union*

Ronan McCrea

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; hb, 314 pp,  
£54.99; ISBN 978-0-19-959535-8

#### SUMMARY

This book explores the nature of the relationship between religion and politics in the various member states of the European Union. Ronan McCrea provides thoughtful and helpful answers to the questions provoked by this topic. Recognising that a variety of different approaches exists within the European Union – from the established