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Review of *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* by Nicholas Lash

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poses that such theologies need to correct and discipline themselves by the generic concepts of world, God, etc., thus derived. Here at last the procrustean bed of the supposedly generic universal concept of God or the world is brandished admonishingly at all, and particular sectarian theologies are warned to cut their thought to the pattern or else "they must be held deficient or misleading in important ways" (p. 80).

This is a bracing and invigorating introduction to American revisionist theology. It will be useful in graduate seminars on theological method, especially if read in conjunction with a variety of other approaches.

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Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God. By Nicholas Lash. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. 313 pages. \$12.95 (paper).

At first glance, *Easter in Ordinary* appears to be a critical commentary on William James's presentation of religious experience in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and other works, with considerable scholarly substantiation for Lash's case based in analysis of numerous theologians and scholars (including Hegel, Newman, Descartes, Buber, Schleiermacher, and von Hügel). Lash devotes roughly a third of his book to direct critique (usually adverse criticism) of James, with the primary themes of the critique of James resonating through the remainder of his study. Lash's method is thorough and detailed, verging at times on the tedious as he examines the intricacies of arguments and sources. But *Easter in Ordinary* is not a book *about* James or Hegel or Buber or any other author. This is not a secondary source. Lash uses the ideas of various writers as "building blocks" to articulate his own theological position concerning "human experience and the knowledge of God."

Lash makes his case by distinguishing himself from James, which he does with great effectiveness and some repetition. Lash notes that religious experience is for James an isolated phenomenon. Religious experience itself is limited by James's definition to that which is distinctively "religious," unlike other experiences. Religious experience stands apart. For James, religious experience is known individually, with an exclusive emphasis on the feeling state of the perceiver. Lash describes James's treatment of religion as "notoriously individualistic" and "an affair of the private heart" (p. 22).

James's isolation of religious experience from the rest of life also isolates the ones who perceive religious experiences. James focuses on an "elite," a gifted few religious geniuses who become the "first class citizens" for purposes of religious

sensation and who were the exclusive focus for his study in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James's elitism is made clear in his "curious analogy" of optics: the science of optics is based on the experience of those who see; those who cannot see may accept conclusions in trust, based on facts they cannot see for themselves (p. 28). In terms of religious experience, those not among the elite who have direct religious sensations are like the "blind" who can only accept conclusions based on the perceptions of others. Theirs is a second-hand religion, and they are likewise relegated by James to inferior status. As the subjects of experience, religious geniuses are thereby segregated by James from the rest of humanity.

Lash also criticizes James' attempt to isolate "pure experience" from contamination by contact with the rest of life, including "the ills of intellectualism and institutional sclerosis" (p. 68). Lash notes that for James, "those who might most clearly approximate to the condition of 'pure experience' would seem to be either newborn babes or grown-up people whose adulthood had been in some way deferred or dislocated" (p. 68). With sharp irony, Lash finds such "infantilism, semiconsciousness, or insanity" to be a peculiar "ideal condition" for communion with God (p. 68).

Lash also finds James's account of religious experience to be "infected by the kind of fundamental dualism as subject to the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, subject and object, thought and thing, which is now commonly referred to as 'Cartesian'" (p. 35). Epistemologically speaking, James's religious genius is an individual who experiences in isolation. Lash urges that "Surely this combination of a contrast between sensation and thought as distinct sources of knowledge, on the one hand with, on the other, the emphasis on the privacy of sensation, suggests that we are in the company of the Cartesian ego, sitting inside the skull wondering whether it can make reliable contact with the world 'outside' the 'mind'?" (p. 64).

With Cartesian dualism comes the Cartesian doubt and anxiety, "the terror or self-importance (twin faces of egotism) which leads us to suppose that we can only find identity, security, and peace in the measure that we establish ourselves as the explaining centers of a world whose center of explanation we so anxiously seek." (p. 225). In view of the Cartesian "quest for certainty," Lash explains, it is no surprise that James concentrates on the individual experience of the religious genius. Lash explains that "James felt obliged to offer the example of the saint as a kind of surrogate natural theology, a demonstration of the reality of the divine not by argument but by eloquent performance" (p. 77).

Lash states his theological position by distinguishing himself from James. He urges that religious experience cannot be isolated. There is "no such thing" as "pure or raw experience," our "private" experience is never "entirely 'naked,'" nor is it innocent" (pp. 12, 57). Lash identifies the relational and social context for religious experience (or any other kind of experience), standing in basic agreement with Rudolf Otto and H. Richard Niebuhr. He recognizes that our perceptions and expressions of experience reflect the formation of culture, social history and relationship. We do not perceive in isolation. Lash explains that "The symbolic, linguistic, affective resources available to us are given by prior experience, and by the culture, the traditions, the structures, institutions, and relationships that bring us to birth and give us such identity as we have" (pp. 57-58). For Lash, the community—not the individual—is the ultimate context for religious experience.

In terms of epistemology, Lash notes the dialectical relationship and "mutually critical correlation" between experience and interpretation. Lash explains that "the accounts that we give, the interpretations that we offer, make a difference to the experience itself, constitute an internally constitutive feature of that experience" (p. 248).

Lash also perceives a dialectic at work relative to knowing and not knowing in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine "leads, at every turn, to both affirmation and denial" while also preventing us "from getting stuck in one-sidedness" and the idolatry of "misidentifying some feature of the world with God" (p. 267). In the terms of this creedal dialectic, God has bridged the gulf between world and God. But God is still radically other than the world. God is available for relationship with people, but not available as personal possession. Through this dialectic of knowing and not-knowing, available and not available, the Christian doctrine of God provides "identity-sustaining rules of discourse and behavior" and serves to "enable us, in every area of our ordinary human existence and experience, to live in relation to God: in other words, to pray" (p. 271). The dialectic provides "a pattern of self-correction," an "unceasing dialectically corrective movement" for "our propensity to freeze the form of relation into an object or possessed description of the nature of God" (p. 271). Lash's argument is complicated, but convincing. The dialectic concerns both how we know and how we live. Relative to the doctrine of the Trinity, Lash presents dialectic as means of knowing religious experience, and community as context for knowing religious experience.

Lash will not allow "the religious" to be ghettoized. In this regard, he consistently contradicts James. Lash refuses to set apart an elite caste of geniuses as the exclusive of best subjects of religious experience. And he refuses to identify specifically religious experiences or phenomena as the only occasions of communion with God. Although Lash recognizes that some experiences are more important than others for relationship with God (p. 251), he maintains that "the religious" properly includes and is included by all of life. In Christian terms, the fulfillment of Easter (*finis* and *telos*) concerns the ordinary, not the esoteric (p. 294). One sign of this truth is sacramental activity, which uses elements such as bread and wine and water, and which is "not esoteric" but "interpretive of the ordinary" (p. 294). "The religious" concerns ordinary life and ordinary people. There is "Easter in Ordinary."

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Heidegger and Christianity. By John Macquarrie. London: SCM, 1995.
viii + 135 pp. \$19.95 (cloth).

John Macquarrie has been associated with the name Heidegger among English-speaking readers since the publication of his translation, along with Edward Robinson, of *Sein und Zeit* in 1962. The present volume is a synoptic view of

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