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Review: Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God

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that many will undoubtedly feel as they follow the author's argument for eradicating mysticism from the evangelical community. In these sections he tackles the sticky issues of divine guidance, the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, and the nature of personal relationship with God.

This book could perhaps be improved by the addition of an appendix explaining key Bible passages in connection with the themes of the book, attention to the relevance of personality differences in the process of spiritual development, and further development of the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical interpretation. It is questionable whether Johnson's presuppositional view of Biblical authority is ultimately consistent with his challenge to epistemological subjectivism.

Johnson is to be commended for producing a volume that can be recommended to lay men and women in the Church. It contains much that will stimulate and challenge their thinking about matters central to living the Christian life with courage and conviction. Ministers and theologians should weigh its arguments against any mystical tendencies present in their own views and practices regarding the spiritual life. *JETS* recently carried two articles on "Evangelical Spirituality," one from "A Biblical Scholar's Perspective" and the other from "A Church Historian's Perspective" (March 1988). In Johnson's volume we encounter a sustained analysis of evangelical spirituality from a Christian philosopher's perspective.

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Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God. By Nicholas Lash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988, 313 pp., $29.95.

Lash has reflected in his various works a strong interest in the question of the multi-dimensionality of human experience as it relates to the being of God. This oddly (or interestingly) titled work seems to be the culmination of such thought and labor. From a desire to examine the dominant perspectives on human experience in the west, particularly as they arise from the Cartesian/subjectivist influence (and its inherent distortions of what it means to be human), Lash has as his purpose to set forth a more full-orbed and processive view of human personhood, one that is in keeping with the Judeo-Christian theological tradition.

In coming to this discussion of man as he stands before the addressing presence of God in the world as the past, present and future, and within the whole of that which constitutes the human, Lash employs a number of paradigms by which he explicates his argument. This very procedure makes reading this text often a "choppy" process but, as the author notes, the very deep-rootedness of Cartesian subjectivism and its view of humanness has required a "step by step" process in order to assist the reader toward a "different" paradigm and an "overarching narrative" of person, experience, knowledge and God. Indeed the book works secondarily as a parable of the point at hand.

Initially the author clarifies the dominant Cartesianism of the modern west. In doing so Lash carefully, and usually with patient cogency, describes the truly problematic implications imbedded in such a view. Western man's inwardness, his seeing his "true self" tucked protectively away from all external tensions in life, has falsified humanity and its relation to the world and distorted his notion of God to the extent that he has come to experience what some have called an "eclipse of

God." Our anthropological dualism has blinded us to the God who lovingly comes to us to transform the whole of life in and through us.

Lash's initial theological paradigm, then, as reflecting this problematic "real inward" versus "outward" dualism, comes from W. James, especially as unfolded in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Despite his desire to bring unity and empirical clarity to what "religious experience" means, Lash shows that in fact James ends up by portraying the realm of the "religious" as a specialized capacity within some (not all) persons, a capacity that is actually severed from "externals" and that makes of those special people the "geniuses" that later adherents simply follow from a distance (cf. Luther, Francis of Assisi, G. Fox). For theological (as distinct from psychological) reasons, Lash contests the assertion that only those persons having a psychological make-up prone to such "experiences" can live "in relation to the creative and redemptive mystery of God." In this way Lash has made room for a different way of seeing.

The author makes use of the conceptualizations of such disparate religious thinkers as Schleiermacher, Newman, von Hugel and Buber. After working to extricate Schleiermacher from the "misunderstanding" of Hegel's negative response to *The Christian Faith*, Lash points to a critical development in Schleiermacher whereby religious experience and that which is external to the experiencing human (e.g. culture) are brought toward reconciliation and unity. In Newman, Lash finds a theological description of man and history much in keeping with the basic direction of his own argument. In opposition to Cartesian "private states of feeling" Newman saw the essence of the personal via an "inclusivism" that believes human integrity and maturity to be the fragile results of a constant dialectical interplay between various constituent forces such as feeling, doing and knowing. This pattern is the "sacramental expression of the vector of God's action in human history" whereby the Christian quest for integrated personhood is attained. But it is primarily with von Hugel and Buber that the major elements of Lash's portrayal of human experience and God are brought into focus. Von Hugel gave much consideration to the nature of religious experience in the earlier part of this century. Against both the Cartesian and Jamesian conceptions of private inward states he reckoned human experience "inclusively" as the ongoing interaction between one's acting and being acted upon in all spheres of human living. Christian experience is set in light of a Christological notion of a processiveness toward completed humanity, the "experience of participation in . . . a school for the production of persons"—i.e. "a school whose pedagogy is structured in suffering negotiated and interpreted after the pattern of the suffering of Christ." Lash asserts that in this way von Hugel was able to avoid the Cartesian distortion of the inward ("exclusivism") while working toward the cultivation of the three-sided (mystical, intellectual, institutional) nature of human character.

Lash then expresses his own re-forming of the Christian perception of human experience and God in the developmental process of the "personal." From the beginning, but especially in the last major section, K. Rahner's transcendental Thomism plays a marked role. Serious theological reflection brings about a reunification, a wholeness of human complexity before the mysterious simplicity of the transcendent God as actively and immanently triune. Here, in all of life, God is experienced. This is not to be found in "unusual" experiences but within the limits of "the ordinary." God in his beauty, love and creativity as Spirit, God in his otherness and unexplainability in death and chaos, God as the Word once spoken, God as dynamically present and eternally active is bringing unity and reconciliation. By God's address and presence, the world becomes sacrament and the commonplace is illuminated. This is seen preeminently in the event and breakthrough of Easter in all of life. God has bound himself into the human world in

order to make the "image of man his own image, the image of the Imageless One." In this way, via this "imaging," there will be breathed into human history the very presence of the Spirit by whom man's "self-severing" may undergo substantial healing.

In responding to Lash I must emphasize that this book is a significant work by one of the most important contemporary British theologians. What Lash is seeking to re-form needs re-forming. What he is working to establish ought to be established. The corrupt notions regarding God, humanity and human experience that derive from Cartesianism need to be vigorously set upon. The relation of the whole of human life, including the social and political, to the presence of the mystery of God must be asserted and clarified afresh. Yet for numerous reasons this reviewer experienced a continual yes, no, yes, no, and finally no in the process of interacting with this work. One question that kept troubling this reviewer was "Why is Lash writing this?" The book often reads more like a series of articles than as the single work it set out to be. Occasionally the issues, while crucial in themselves, seem somewhat trite, somewhat hackneyed. Beyond this, Lash's use of James as the "whipping boy" for the outworking of his thesis began to take on political or, at least, a "class" orientation. James on his "Harvard chair" (oft repeated) and the Jamesian interest in genius, which is inherently an elitist reckoning of pure religious experience, is most irritating to Lash. It apparently has rankled his vision of the equality of the "ordinary," of religious and processive egalitarianism as screened through moderately Marxist spectacles. Thus, Lash is regularly willing to build his argument on "impressions," on what "seemingly is taking place" in order to arrive at partial truths, overstatements and half-adequate criticisms of James for the sake of unpacking Lash's own proletarian, religio-philosophical fury on his so-called bourgeois opponent.

The whole of this volume is a phenomenological theological enterprise, often constructed upon a questionable metaphysical foundation. It sets forth a God who is experienced pervasively (panentheistically) so as to eliminate on a basic level the obvious but despised reality of distinctions. What is ironic is that the attack on the elitism of James' "Harvard chair" is given by one writing from his own elitist Cambridge chair. As a well-known theological ethicist asked not long ago: "Is Lash still beating up on James?" Yes, it seems so.

In the final analysis the conclusions of both James and Lash and their theologies "from below" inadequately explicate the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the experience of the One who is. If all of life is in some sense a reflection of the immanent "holy," then all real distinctions, distinctions that even Lash is wont to make, are erased. As K. Barth noted: "There is here the threat of an awkward turnover from a divine determining to a human determinateness. . . . The human determinateness, the experience and attitude of the knowing subject might well be exalted into the criterion of theological knowledge" (20). As such, Lash's version of community with God and the overcoming of the eclipse of God in the world by the restoration of human community as metaphor and sacrament falls prey to the un-Biblical outcome of all such methodology—i.e., the glory of the human becomes decisive for the divine rather than the decisiveness of God for us in Christ being the only possible basis for the healing of the human. God's revelatory Word must be the presupposition. Lash has partaken afresh of the nineteenth-century outcome: the knowledge of a god made in our own image taken from the content and idea of our own freedom and relations.

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