

Overall, the quality of this volume is quite varied: some pieces are very stimulating, others I think approach the theme from a misoriented angle. The same can be said of the quality of writing: in some cases, more editorial work would have been beneficial, better to adapt the (originally spoken, I presume) conference papers to written publication. Collected papers of this sort are marked by some intrinsic limitations: some very good papers suffer from being simply too short – one is left clamouring for more; while, taken together, the parts composing the whole do not leave one with a definitive or coherent vision, like one might expect from a monograph of a similar size by a single author. What does unite the pieces is an evidently shared enthusiasm for Newman and a desire to take to heart the significance of his canonization. The Epilogue is right to point out that Newman not only had a great capacity for friendship in his earthly life, but he continues to inspire it even now.

BEDE MULLENS OP
Blackfriars, Oxford

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF RITUALS: A TOPOLOGY OF THE PRESENT by **Byung-Chul Han**, translated **Daniel Steuer**, Polity, Cambridge, 2020, pp. 104, £12.99, pbk

More than might be realised, sociology and kindred disciplines are shaped by superstars, prophets, and seers whose works generate tribal affiliations and much exegesis. These rise and fall from the stratospheres they occupy where their visions transcend discipline affiliations. Even with the growth of the Internet, where each can be publisher and critic on Youtube, blogs, and other outlets, those of the stellar still shine forth. Luminaries such as Bauman, Bourdieu, Foucault, and, of course, that idiosyncratic genius, Slavoj Žižek, often unknown to the public, fill assembly halls of universities with hundreds coming just to see them. It might be said that Han is one such superstar on the rise.

Bauman, himself a Polish Jew living in Leeds, England, argued that displacement and exile were necessary qualifications for intellectual distinction. In that regard, Han seems well qualified. Coming from Seoul, South Korea, he teaches at the University of the Arts (UdK), Berlin. Much engaged with German culture, he is the author of twenty books, fifteen of which have been translated into English. This study might confirm his ascendance. First published in 2020, it has been reprinted twice and then three times in 2021. Unusually, BBC Radio 3 had a series of five talks, entitled ‘The End of Ritual?’ devoted to themes in this study.

Han is a philosopher operating in media studies notably dealing with the rise of a digital society. He uses lively titles for his studies, covering power, eros, violence, beauty, and the art of lingering. Very widely read, his concerns are with the exhaustion of society, the illusions of transparency, and entrapment. His diagnosis is of the fatefulness of modernity, its cul-de-sacs, where exit signs of religion have disappeared. To that degree, though not his self-designation, he is very much a post-secular thinker. He follows a long heritage going back to Baudelaire of chronicling the emptiness and boredom of modernity. As with other critics of the dark unfolding of society, there is an odd pre-lapsarian property to his writing, yet he manages to duck well potential charges of nostalgia.

The novelty of the work lies in Han's elevation of ritual to the status of an exemplary setting for the communal recognition of symbols. Notably, he is not concerned with the performance of ritual, or indeed, memory of it, but instead deals with the precarious and elusive rightful dispositions for their proper appraisal and reception. Indicative of the unexpected concerns of the study is a telling critique of the compulsion of authenticity (chapter 2). Likewise, striking, is Han's reverence for ritual, notably its powers to encapsulate by closure, to enable openings to emerge (chapter 3). Detached from theological superintendence, there is a slightly anthropomorphic property to his analysis. Revitalisation is of analysis, not of Deity. Creatively, the claims rituals make, notably a command to be still and attend, are re-set in the context of critiques of a digital society in ways that are both innovative and credible. Easily dispersed, these precarious properties of restraint generate justifications for their conservation to read rites rightly. In a sense, the study is a paean for the loss of reverence for rituals and the delicacy of regard they deserve, which is now lost, hence their disappearance.

Although he has an early background in Catholic theology in the 1980s and moved from an initial degree in metallurgy, there are few liturgical or theological sources in the book. Likewise, apart from a brief reference to Durkheim, sociology is invisible in a work whose title might suggest reference to it. Given these exclusions, why review the book? For both disciplines, there is a wealth of conceptual innovation to mine. If superstars come and go, so too do concepts. Thus, two decades ago, theological references to community were discounted by sociologists as useless, given the numerous conflicting definitions of it. It is salutary that Han re-centres its importance. In the past three decades, ritual has moved to the centre of sociology as a pivotal term. In theology, ritual seems a term associated with the deadening hand of rubrics, arcane Tridentine regulations that generated dead ceremonies of rite to be overturned by liturgical renewal. But what liturgists scorned, sociologists embraced, for to them, they revealed the governing rules of enactment that shaped and characterised rites. The

anthropologist, Victor Turner, led the way in discovering their potential uses.

Recognising the dangers of nostalgia, (also ripe for present papal condemnation) Han treats the issue of the disappearance of ritual as a means of reading the pathologies of the times, especially the erosion of community. As conceived in terms of gatherings, rituals are treated as symbolic acts with powers to bind together. The outcome is to move the study from concern with the topology of the social to the issue of its ecology, its need for conservation in the face of digital erosion. As networking and interaction move to the digital, the oxygen of the social is thinning; hence the need to avoid it receiving the last rites. By implication, rituals are presented as the source for its resuscitation, however, archaic, artificial, and regressive they might seem. Thus, ritual is transposed to being an exemplary site set to draw out reverence for symbols and for the recovery of their fragile but also resistant capacities to counteract the seemingly endless powers of the digital. So here, ritual is set to usurp these.

There are three notable properties to the study. The first relates to its style, which is almost aphoristic, containing with remarkable conciseness a wealth of insight. The text sparkles with intellectual energy and, as some have noted, reads like a manifesto. Secondly, there is an unusual sharpness in the text that suggests powers of connection to the immediate. This is expressed in its diversity of chapter titles from the first, 'the compulsion of production' to the last, 'from seduction to porn'. These reflect an overall concern with issues of excess, what he terms the pathology of 'too much' (p. 89). Thirdly, the diversity of topics might generate the charge of 'essayism', of the disparate unintegrated into a narrative, perhaps reflecting the fragmentary basis of the times. Attendance on a diversity of topics often generates needs to sacrifice claims for an integration of concerns. Increasingly, in works dealing at the interface of sociology and theology, as in this study, it is not possible to write a conclusion.

Han makes much of the notion of religion as *relegare*, the need to attend and this relates to his interests in the notion of lingering, of waiting (p. 45). Productivity, flexibility and openings undermine the incentive to linger. His notion of lingering facilitates regard of thresholds which he treats as 'temporally intense transitions' (p. 35). The unfolding digital world, for him, has no place for silence, which he treats as sacred (pp. 37–39). Sites for rituals are profaned when reduced to sights. In his chapter 7, 'the empire of the signs', Han's domain concerns are that 'ritual signs cannot be assigned a determinate meaning' for they are to be understood by reference to their excess, their superabundance, hence, to be read as enigmatic (p. 62). But that dismissal of intelligibility of symbol collides with a more central dispute over transparency of ritual. This follows on from his first English translated work, *The Transparency Society* (2015)

which concerns loss of mystery and curiosity. Han turns conventions in regard to liturgy on their head, suggesting that they should be inaccessible, implicit in meaning, unapologetic and demanding in the claims they make.

Transparency was the domain ambition liturgists held for rite in the reforms of Vatican II where they presumed that the manifest facilitated accessibility. An enormous literature has now gathered around critiques of transparency and the ambiguities it conceals, which disguise the dark. Transparency relates to disenchantment, the loss of magic (this echoes Weber) and applied to art, renders it Protestant. In his words, Han argues that: ‘the imperative of transparency fosters an animosity to form. Art becomes *transparent* with regard to its meaning. It no longer seduces. The magic veil is cast off. The forms do not themselves *talk*’ (p. 25). For him, transparency relates to excess, the vice of the digital age. It relates to the compulsion of overproduction of data (pp. 82–83). In chapter 10, Han treats pornography as ‘a phenomenon of transparency’ so that in making all apparent, the mystery of sex is killed (p. 86).

Liturgists never did learn that rites exercise magnetic powers by the stewardship of their fixedness, not their capacity to be unfixed, for the indifference so facilitating capricious re-arrangements often characterises their reception. As he suggests, ‘in life, things serve as stabilizing resting points. Rituals serve the same purpose. Through their *self-sameness*, their *repetitiveness*, they stabilize life. They make life *last*’ (p. 3). Perhaps like icons, it is their unoriginality that is the source of grace. As in so many recent works, of late, death looms in chapter 5. It is aptly entitled: ‘A Game of Life and Death’. Sharing, recognising, but above all seeking out the intangible depths rituals can generate mark the ambitions for this work. Rituals are treated as fundamental, as fragile resources to be domesticated. To follow his definition, rituals involve ‘*symbolic techniques of making oneself at home in the world*. They transform being-in-the world into a *being-at home*. They turn the world into a reliable place’ (p. 2). Perhaps the earlier work that reflects such themes is Peter L. Berger’s *The Homeless Mind*. Far from rituals being the home of the nostalgic and complacent, Han makes a strong case for the benefits of them being treated as rooted and familiar. So stabilised, they can be read properly for what they can and might unfold.

The telegraphic nature of this stimulating and highly original work is riddled with sociological and theological implications. Unusually, a sophisticated reading of philosophical sources is channelled into a sense of contact with the immediate, the digital and the unexpected in ways that are highly stimulating. It is rare to encounter so much rich material in a study so brief but so insightful. At a time when the digital appropriates networking and all forms of communication, drawing on well selected philosophi-

cal sources, Han makes a strong case for the necessity of rituals and points well to the prices of their disappearance.

KIERAN FLANAGAN

University of Bristol

IN QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL ADAM: A BIBLICAL AND SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION by William Lane Craig, *William Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2021, pp. xx + 421, \$32.38, hbk*

It is always interesting for a Catholic theologian to observe how important topics in Catholic theology are treated among non-Catholic theologians. The latter can illustrate for the former how different theological tendencies can play out when the guidance of the Church's teaching is not in view. One issue of particular interest in a post-Darwinian world is that of human origins: when did the human race originate and how many human beings were there initially? Catholic theology is normally concerned here with the doctrine of original sin and its relationship to the findings of the natural sciences, including population genetics. Back in 1950, Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* favoured monogenism (our descent from one couple), saying it was 'in no way apparent' how polygenism (descent from a wider population) could be reconciled with Catholic teaching on original sin. Catholic theologians who accept the scientific evidence for polygenism have tried to show that its compatibility with original sin can in fact be made apparent, while others who accept monogenism have tried to show how the latter is compatible with the genetic evidence of a wider breeding population.

Similar positions have been taken up among evangelical Protestants. William Lane Craig is a philosopher of religion, well-known for his work on divine attributes, his Neo-Apollinarian Christology, and his Molinist position on human freedom, who has now made an impressive study of the biblical and scientific issues involved in the 'quest of the historical Adam', responding critically to Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight's *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science* (2017). While the latter's starting-point was a now standard polygenist account of genetic evidence for a human population that has never gone below some thousands, from there proceeding to ask how Scripture should be re-read in that perspective, Craig chooses to begin with the interpretation of the Bible. Having familiarized himself with a great deal of Old Testament scholarship on the primaeval narratives of *Genesis* 1–11, he offers in Chapters 2 to 6 an admirably thorough and detailed treatment of the