



The Book Reviewer

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JULY 2011

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Darwin's Pious Idea by Connor Cunningham (Theology)

Connor Cunningham is a professor of philosophy and theology, and he also has a very firm grasp of what constitutes scientific objectivity, and of modern scientific discoveries in physics and astronomy. He shows convincingly what science can and cannot do; the new atheists cannot explain away such subjective experiences as mind, consciousness, language, ethics, poetry, music, philosophy, and religion. The answer of the new atheists is absurd: such subjective states are simply "agitated atoms."! No one has ever seen an atom, which remains as much a mystery as does the concept of God. We can assume atoms, and electrons, protons, neutrons,

etc....and discover how things work—but see them, no.

Darwin understood the use and the limitations of science, which the present group of neo-Darwinists do not; nor do the opposite wrong-headed group, the Creationists. With humor and with apt illustrations Cunningham explains and rejects the theories of both groups, who wander into philosophy and theology without understanding the terrain. He says that the scientists, such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, make a caricature of religion, and the Creationists caricature science, and both are irrational. He does, however, value and respect the breakthrough theory and the

insights of Darwin himself; hence the title, *Darwin's Pious Idea*.

Professor Cunningham also examines the frequent use of "the problem of evil" by atheists to explain their views. He asks, how can anyone reject God on the basis of the problem of evil? He quotes Thomas Aquinas— "if evil exists, then God exists." Aquinas is not saying that God created evil, but that evil is a subjective concept, and therefore irrelevant, even non-existent, to "pure science". The notion of free will, which is the answer to the problem of evil, would of course also be just "agitated atoms" to the scientists.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle (Children/Teens)

Madeleine L'Engle's book is science fiction for children and teenagers, but adults may also enjoy and appreciate its themes of good and evil, conformity and non-conformity, and especially its solution for all conundrums—love.

Like J.D. Salinger with his *Catcher in the Rye*, Ms. L'Engle had some trouble in trying to publish this in the 1960s be-

cause of adult concerns about their children in that time of non-conformity and individualism run amuck.

The book has remained a minor classic, with lovable characters like Mrs. Whatsit, who tells the children that "life is like a sonnet; you are given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself."



Reviewed by Clare Dinno



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Life is Beautiful

Silence by Shusaku Endo; Translation by William Johnston (Fiction)

In 1638, nearly a century after Francis Xavier first brought Catholic Christianity to the people of Japan, Fr. Sebastian Rodriguez, the fictional Jesuit missionary of this novel whose story is based on a real life figure, travels from Portugal to secretly enter Japan. His mission is two-fold—to locate and minister to the depleted Christian community which was forced underground by the 1614 Edict of Expulsion when priests and Christians were martyred or exiled unless they apostatized; and to determine the truth of a rumor that had reached the Jesuits that a beloved and devout provincial in Japan had not been able to withstand the terrifying torture to which Christians were systematically subjected and had “trampled” on a sacred

image, which was the official demonstration of apostasy.

Once in Japan, Rodriguez and his companion Jesuit are led by a suspicious character, Kichijiro, to a Christian community where they administer the sacraments to the long-suffering faithful who have sustained their faith through adapted rituals. The wretched condition of their lives is shared by the two priests, as they huddle by day in a lice-infested hut, surviving on bits of dried potato and fish.

Rodriguez is moved by the simple and profound faith of these humble Japanese and is tremendously grateful for the priesthood that allows him to bring them God’s graces through the sacraments. But this very identity puts him at the highest risk, and soon he

is running for his life after Kichijiro, his Judas, reveals the priests’ location to the authorities. Having witnessed two of their most devoted Christian friends being martyred in horrible fashion, Fr. Rodriguez begins a desperate and excruciating struggle between saving his own life so that he can continue God’s work, saving his fellow Christians by apostatizing, or saving his faith by dying for it. During the balance of the novel, Endo forcefully portrays the fluctuation in devotion that occurs in response to outside influences that play on our pride, induce fear, and wreck our security, despite how firmly we believe. Rodriguez is left to ponder why, throughout grueling trials, God seems to witness all in utter silence.

Reviewed by Susan Triplett

The Shattered Lantern by Ronald Rolheiser (Spirituality)

The image of the lantern is taken from Frederick Nietzsche, who more than one hundred and fifty years ago declared that God is dead. After that pronouncement, and even well before, many people have, whether knowingly or not, allowed a felt presence of God to slip away. The loud clamoring of the new atheists, and our own busyness and inattention, has compounded a sense of banality and godlessness. This has given rise to a pervasive spiritual hunger where New Age spiritualities have found an

opening. Traditional religions are losing ground, especially among the young, who wander off to Tibet or to local gurus to find themselves.

Rolheiser’s prescription for this malaise is that this hunger and restlessness can be met with prayer and attentiveness (which Buddhists call mindfulness); a simple paying attention; finding a quiet space in our day where God can be found, still very much present and alive. “The existence of God, like the air we breathe, cannot be proven; God does not enter our lives at the con-

clusion of a mathematical formula, or a philosophical syllogism...We must live in such a way that we give birth to God in our lives.”

Rolheiser concludes with a litany of beatitudes: Blessed are they who do not take life for granted; who see God in everyday occurrences; who say yes to something higher than themselves; who develop the heart of a child and the heart of a Virgin; who make an option for the poor; and whose discipleship includes the discipline of prayer.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno