

identify the movement with the Church, and be blind to the value of the all the other ways of being a Christian. Pope John Paul II has been trying to avoid this by bringing the various movements together and encouraging them to cooperate. I think he is succeeding. But in any case Giussani's insights, developed and nurtured in the Communion and Liberation movement are not any more (if they ever were) the exclusive property of that movement. They are embodied in these books for anyone to read. And read them we should, if we are interested in the experience at the heart of Christianity; the experience of Christ's humanity.

Stratford Caldecott
Oxford, England

¹ These quotations are from pp. 108-9 of *The Religious Sense*. Giussani goes on to explain that the Greek for "up" is *ana*, hence "analogy": the impact of the real awakens us to the structure of the world, which is that of analogy.

* * *

The Geometry of Love: Space, Time, Mystery and Meaning in an Ordinary Church by Margaret Visser, (Toronto: Harper-Collins, c. 2000). 322 pages including notes, bibliography and index. \$35 Canadian, cloth.

The Geometry of Love is an account, historical, architectural, iconographical, mystical, of one church, Sant' Agnese fuori le Mura, St. Agnes outside the Walls, in Rome, where St. Agnes, the early

Catholic martyr is buried. Visser's intention is not to give the sort of account one would find in a guide book or a book of art history. She wants to give the meaning of the church and of the important objects in it. She tells the story of a Japanese tourist in Spain which captures very well what she sets out to do.

"I remember sitting at the back of a tiny, isolated church some years ago, on top of a hill in Spain. A Japanese tourist was driven up to the front door and led round the building by a guide he must have hired in the town some distance away. The guide told him, in English, the dates of various parts of the building and then proceeded to dilate upon the superb stone vaulting. The tourist did not even raise his head to look at this. He stared aghast—as well he might—at a horrific, life-sized painted carving of a bleeding man nailed to two pieces of wood. When the guide had stopped talking, the man gestured wordlessly towards the statue. The guide nodded, smiled, and told him in which century it had been carved."

Margaret Visser knows that to really understand a church it is not enough to memorize dates and architectural influences, but one must enter, as it were, into the soul of the church, must attempt to discover what meaning it had to those who built it, what meaning it has to those who worship in it today. As such, her purpose is admirable.

Visser invites her readers to imagine they are taking a walk

through Sant' Agnese Church themselves, and she makes the arrangement of the building the organizing principle of her book. She starts on the sidewalk outside and ends up at the tomb of St. Agnes. On the way she touches on church history, mysticism, theology, saints, the liturgy, the sacraments, bells, as well as more conventional topics such as sacred art, architecture and archeology. She devotes much space to the catacombs, especially those adjacent to Sant' Agnese Church itself.

In general this book is a success, and I think it might well make some realize that a church represents far more than than can be examined and discussed within the categories of most current academic scholarship. Unfortunately, Visser, a Catholic, often underplays the supernatural elements of the Faith, perhaps in an attempt to appeal to secular readers. For example, her discussion of mysticism is seriously flawed, equating any profound but natural experience—such as a child realizing that "Tomorrow I'm going to be five!"—with mysticism. And somehow she considers the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus's statement that one cannot step twice into the same river or the statements of modern physicists "conflating space and time" or "waves and particles" as examples of mysticism.

She states the doctrine of Papal infallibility in an ambiguous way—"infallibility does not refer to what the pope himself thinks, says, writes, or even publicly announces. It is the

Church as a whole that counts when it says what it believes...." This certainly falls short of the "*ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae*" of the First Vatican Council's definition of papal infallibility. Nor—one last example—is it true that in the confessional a penitent's sins are absolved "in the name of the Church," but rather in the name of Jesus Christ.

Thus this book could be useful in helping a secular reader to see that there is much more to a church, and *a fortiori* to the cosmos as well, than meets the eye. But if pressed, much of its theology is weak, and one would hope that after reading this book, our secular reader would go on to stronger stuff.

Thomas Storck
Greenbelt, Maryland

* * *

Compassionate Conservatism: What it is, What it Does, And How it Can Transform America, by Marvin Olasky, *The Free Press*, New York, 2000, 226 pp, \$24.00 (US), \$35.50 (Can.), hardcover.

What is most interesting, perhaps, about Dr. Olasky's latest book is that it has been superseded by events. The compassionate conservatism he documents and espouses has become the policy of President George W. Bush, who is striving to implement it as this is written. To many of us, compassionate conservatism sounds like just another empty political slogan. I initially thought that it was at best a spin doctor's attempt to soften the image of