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Review: 'Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Mohler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology'

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Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology. By Michael Himes. New York: Crossroad, 1997. xi + 356 pages. \$39.95 (paper).

In this work Michael Himes sets out to establish the place of Möhler as the most important figure in the formation of Catholic ecclesiology as a field of systematic theology. Since Möhler's theology took some significant turns during his brief but substantial career of sixteen years, Himes is also concerned with tracing out a unifying theme. He finds this in Möhler's continuing concern for a theological anthropology that respects simultaneously the freedom and transcendence of God and the freedom of human beings.

Himes explores Möhler's work within the context of the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement. He argues that *Die Einheit in der Kirche* resolves the tension between the Spirit's presence in the individual and in the historical community with its sacraments and magisterium. It does this by treating the church as an organism in which all external realities are expressions of internal realities. Himes notes here Möhler's similarities with Schleiermacher, but also some key differences, among which is that for Möhler the reality of God must always be clearly distinguished from the spirit of the community.

The most obvious danger in not emphasizing this distinction is that God can be treated as less than God. But Himes brings out how it was also important for Möhler that the human community retain its own distinctiveness and freedom. It is this anthropological concern, Himes argues, that motivated the major changes in Möhler's later works such as *Athansius der Grosse* and *Symbolik*. In contrast with the pneumatological, ascending approach of *Einheit*, *Symbolik* is christological and descending, with an emphasis on externality and authority. However, Himes traces through the five editions of *Symbolik* the process by which some of the initial positions of *Einheit* were reincorporated to strike a balance. Himes then treats the fifth, uncompleted edition as an "unfinished symphony" and, working also with notes taken by Möhler's students, claims that Möhler moved in the direction of appreciating that the working of the Spirit is not confined to the church. The church functions therefore as a "sacrament of redeemed humanity," fanning the flames of the Spirit present in the world.

This final argument is methodologically daring, fascinating, and speculative. What Himes establishes most strongly is that Möhler's *Symbolik*, for all of its differences from *Einheit*, is not simply in diametric opposition to his early work, but shows that he continued to develop, and in those developments moved toward a balance. This point alone would constitute a major contribution. Beyond this, Himes offers a clearly written, comprehensive study of one of the most important, but in the English-speaking world often neglected, Catholic theologians of the modern world. It belongs in every college theological library.



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