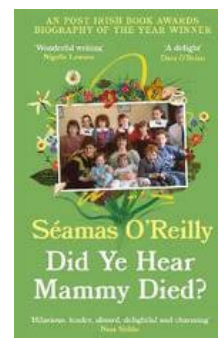


**Séamas O'Reilly: *Did Ye Hear Mammy Died?*** p/b, London, Fleet, 2022



Séamus O'Reilly was three years old when his mother died of cancer in her early forties. She and her husband Joe, an engineer had given birth to eleven children in that time, of which the third youngest, Séamus grew up to tell this amazing story. The book's title came about because at just three years old, Séamus did not really understand the meaning of death and kept asking when she would

be home again. At the huge wake after Sheila O'Reilly died Séamus went around the whole gathered company saying *Did Ye Hear Mammy died?*



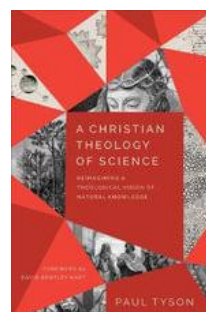
The story of how Joe O'Reilly, quietly spoken deeply committed Roman Catholic in Protestant Northern Ireland, highly regarded engineer, gadget man, film buff and sweetaholic heroically raised eleven children who all succeeded in school and went on to lead fulfilled and worthwhile lives. The story is told humorously and ingeniously through Séamus' memories no doubt with much prompting from the other ten siblings, in order Sinead-Dara-Shane-Orla-Maeve-Mairead-Dearbhaile-Caoimhe-Fionuala-Conall. The humour in the book is sharp and energetic, although some of the effects are lost on Aussie readers, not being familiar with the Irish character references. Our book club members uniformly enjoyed this happy/sad true life story told with wit, passion and honesty. 5 stars.

**Review of Paul Tyson: *A Christian Theology of Science: Reimagining a Theological Vision of Natural Knowledge***, p/b, 208 pages, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2022; with an excellent glossary of terms used, index and bibliography.



This is a remarkable book which turns most science and faith books on their head. Tyson points out that it's always "science and faith" not "faith and science"! (p.27) and suggests that science is overrated (p.169), blind to its own theoretical premises (p.160), has become a functional idolatry, and above all, scientific advancement threatens the ecological viability of modern civilisation as we know it. (p.47). He argues that Science does not deserve its status

as the first truth discourse in Western society and that Christianity has a greater claim to first truth discourse.



Here is a paragraph to consider deeply: *In the age of continuous upheaval produced by the great acceleration, surveillance capitalism, global financial alchemy, unprecedented refugee flows, staggering military hardware, and global environmental degradation and climate change, are we still hoping that science will save us?* (p94). Tyson quotes Jacques Ellul...*we become the tools of our tools* (p.94). We do not need reminding that only a small part of the globe enjoys the technical riches enjoyed by modern science.

Tyson reaffirms what is now biological science's three worst kept secrets and largest problems. After all this time we still have no viable clue to the origin of life on this planet; the "survival of the fittest" is no longer viable and the materialist neo-Darwinian conception of nature is almost certainly false. (p.87).

In relation to the well trodden science and faith debate Tyson notes three different approaches and will argue that none of them are satisfactory! First there are the *professional scientists who are simply good scientists at work and pious Christians in their own time and sit comfortably with a functional-demarcation outlook ...their two worlds simply don't touch.* (p.83) I am sure we all know such folk and it is difficult to involve them in much discussion about science and faith.

Secondly in what he calls *autonomous overlap*, Tyson acknowledge the remarkable contribution of scientist priest John Polkinghorne and others like him who, while recognising that faith cannot be proven on scientific grounds, there remains a case to be proved. There are highly intelligent and

competent believers attacking the atheistic notion that religion is for uneducated and unintelligent people and upholding the view that faith and a scientific outlook can coexist. He acknowledges the effective work of the Melbourne based ISCAST, the Cambridge Faraday Institute alongside the philosophic work of Michael Polanyi and Alvin Plantinga. (p.84).

In spite of the labours of this valiant group of thinkers and their many excellent books, Tyson is not happy. Such scientists and others who write on 'science and faith' have adapted themselves to modern secular knowledge truth categories, and argue for *discrete discourse territories that are science's proper domain and religion's proper domain*. (p.84). For Tyson this does not work if one takes God to be the ground of **all** reality. (p.85)

Thirdly Tyson discusses the Young Earth Creationist movement which he calls *Integration*. Tyson notes that *to those who uphold clear territorial distinctions between science and religion*, the Creationists do damage to both science and religion and *to an outsider this is bad science and bad religion*. (p.85). In reply the Creationist movement cannot accept *the manner in which Christians who claim adherence to miraculous and metaphysical truths can accept a double-truth outlook on reality*. (p.85) Thus Tyson seeks a completely new approach to the faith and science issue.

The heart of Tyson's argument is the **replacement** of the current egocentric epistemological foundationalism (EEF - science) as the West's first truth discourse with theocentric ontological foundationalism (TEF - Christian faith). He challenges Christians to view Science through the Truth lens of Christian Theology instead of the other way around. Coming clean in Chapter 6 Tyson confesses that he does not believe there are any such definable things as science and religion. He argues there are many sciences. In support of this he returns to his acceptance of Aboriginal knowledge systems which we are coming to understand today as a genuine form of science. (p.120).

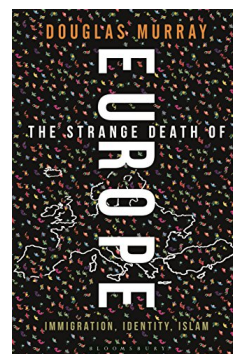
In chapter 8 Tyson engages fruitfully with the Myth and History debate and concludes in chapter 9 with the need for an **integrative Zone** for Christian faith and philosophy...perhaps a relationship of constructive friction. He notes *Without friction between the bow and the string, the bow does not sing!* This is an important book. I warmly commend it.

**Douglas Murray: *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam***: h/b, London, Bloomsbury, 2017.



English writer, Associate Editor of the *Spectator* and prominent international debater, Douglas Murray has charted the extraordinary transformation of Europe since German Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the floodgates of Germany to all migrants in 2015. In that year illegal border crossings to Europe numbered over 1.5 million and in 2016 0.5 million. Numbers began to decline from 2017 but never less than 0.3 million each year. Since 2021 numbers have begun to climb again to 0.4 million due to the Russia/Ukraine/Syrian wars. Britain, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Greece, France, Holland and Spain have been the major accepters of migrants but virtually every

European nation has accepted large numbers of immigrants.



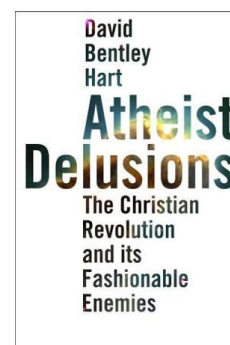
Inevitably these vast numbers of immigrants from many nations have radically impacted the culture of receiving countries often for the better but also putting European governments under enormous pressure to provide housing and employment. Religion wise a very significant proportion of immigrants to Europe have been committed followers of the Islamic faith from many different languages. Murray charts these impacts in considerable detail and inevitably there is a focus on Islamic extremism especially in relation to the treatment of women including incidents of mass rape in Germany, Islamic homophobia, the Rushdie and Charlie Hebdo affairs and large scale attacks in Madrid, London and Paris.

At the same time Murray charts what he calls the “tiredness” of European culture. Recovery from world wars, a decline in Christian faith, failed flirtations with Communism and Fascism, economic collapses, the failure of philosophic ideas and systems, and in Germany the pain of Nazism, all contributed to this sense of where can we go from here. Murray charts these impacts with flair and deep knowledge of politicians, philosophers and politicians of every perspective, key players and writers including Houellebecq who challenge the so called gods of the Enlightenment ..reason, rationality and science. This is a book whose story is still unfolding. Watch this space and mind how you go in Europe today, to quote a famous detective. 5 stars.

**David Bentley Hart: *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, p/b, New Haven & London, The University Press, 2009**



American polymath David Bentley Hart is a writer of 19 books, a philosopher, critic, religious scholar and theologian with over one thousand essays/reviews and papers to his credit. His particular interests include Christian metaphysics, philosophy of the mind and Indian and East Asian metaphysics. He is a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church but counts himself as about a third rate Christian. His writing style has been called baroque and I must admit I had my online dictionary out far more often than for most books I read. *Atheist*



*Delusions* is written in the form of an essay with minimal footnotes and no long list of secondary resources at the end although within his text he interacts with a great many historians and philosophers of religion.

*Atheist Delusions* is a stunning piece of writing. From beginning to end (241 pages), Hart maintains the reader's strong interest even though the subject matter is quite challenging. There is something in his clear, learned, energetic writing which keeps the reader alive and excited. In a vigorous not to say ferocious opening attack Hart has written a demolition of C20th/C21st modernity, with his chief targets being Daniel Dennett, the late Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Phillip Pulman and what he calls their *dreary, fundamentalist atheism*. Hart contrasts these writers thin arguments with the quality of Enlightenment philosophers like Nietzsche, David Hume, Voltaire and Edward Gibbon with their *unparalleled passion and visionary intensity*. (p5f).

In the second section of his essay Hart attacks *Modernity's rewriting of the Christian Past*, coming to tors with scholars like medieval champions Jacques Le Goff and Jonathan Kirsch who readily blame the growth of Christianity for the destruction of classical civilization. Hart argues that in fact *it was the Church's monasteries alone that saved classical civilisation from the total eclipse it would otherwise have suffered*. Again in the East also, *Hellenic wisdom was preserved in the libraries of Greece, Syria and Asia Minor*.

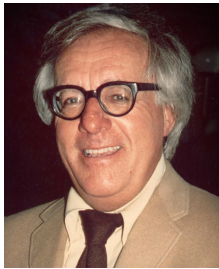
One of Hart's most scathing attacks on “Enlightenment” history is the notion that Christianity fought against the development of modern science when in fact it was a long line of Christian scholars and thinkers who consistently paved the way for scientific progress and saved many manuscripts in their monasteries that would otherwise have been lost.

Enlightenment historians are also quick to blame Christianity for all the religious wars in Europe following the Reformation, a series of disasters that had much more to do with the acquisition of land and power than any particular theology. The real “age of darkness” Hart notes is the C20th, *the most violent century in human history...willing to kill on an unprecedented scale*. (p106). Hart quotes Heidegger: *we have made an ideology out of science*.(p. 231) and asks Will “post-

*Christian” become “post-human”?. Our Western culture of the primacy of the will leads to total individualism; no shared obligation; private lives; private culture...but absolute spontaneity is an illusion. (p. 226). Hart’s challenging conclusion is that we have reached the age of perfect unreason...but, true reason is knowledge perfected in wisdom.. and a rational life involves the ability to grasp what one does not know.*

*Atheist Delusions* will require attention and energy but the effort is well worth it. 5 stars and rising.

**Review of Ray Bradbury: *Fahrenheit 451*: p/b, London, HarperCollins, 1996 (1954)**



American writer Ray Bradbury who died in 2012 is regarded by the New York Times as the writer who brought science fiction into the mainstream of everyday literature. *Fahrenheit 451* was his breakthrough novel with its fast moving tension and ideas. When it is read for the first time in 2023 as in my case, it makes a new impact with its central idea that all books must be burned and culture should be dominated by large screens in every home with their diet of film/story/action.



Whilst there remain in Victoria several major book shops and numbers of second hand book shops there are many homes in which books are hard to find. In our excellent monthly book club my wife and myself are the only members who still buy the books if we don't have them on the shelf. All the other members read online.

Bradbury's novel is brief (184 pages in my small HarperCollins edition), believable, edgy and rather sad. The hero Montag is a fireman, one of a small trained group of men whose task was to locate and destroy every book in the city and its owners. After meeting a rebellious young teenager who refuses to accept the dominant lifestyle demanded Montag begins to have second thoughts. Whilst some older folk like me might long for a quieter, slower lifestyle the modern technically dominated world rushes by with ever increasing speed and dynamism and it is easy to get left behind.

The number 451 in the title refers to the temperature at which paper burns my itself and is a symbol of the easy destruction of books. In every culture from ancient Greece onwards there have been times when books were deliberately burned because they contained material and ideas the ruling party did not want their people to know and read. Bradbury's tale of book destruction ends up with a society which manages to destroy itself without the aid of books and it climaxes with a few hardy souls who have taken the trouble between themselves to memorise the great books of all time including the Bible. Bradbury himself apparently was a low tech guy with a very vivid imagination and a deep thinker. I very much enjoyed reading this novel.