



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

This review appeared in

THEOLOGY

Dated SEPT-OCT 20 01

with compliments

The Edinburgh Building
Shaftesbury Road
Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
www.cambridge.org

Telephone +44 (0)1223 312393
Fax +44 (0)1223 315052

A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy,

Robert S. Corrington (Cambridge University Press 2000),
268 pp, £37.50/US\$59.95 hbk

This is a dense and pretentious book in the philosophy of language. Its essential thesis is that words and other sign signals have meaning in particular contexts, outside of which they do not carry the same significance: 'Each sign series has its own provenance of power and meaning and is jealous of its own semiotic stock' (p. 20). 'The perennial struggle' is between 'secular and religious sign signals' (p. 193). Corrington thinks that the sign signals of Christianity are suffering from 'semiotic entropy' and increasingly do not speak to a 'post-monotheistic world' (p. 194).

Monotheism, characterized as 'patriarchal' and 'western' is not seen as a realistic possibility. For Corrington, 'the divine is an order of nature not a creator' (p. 11). He thinks it surprising that people should think that 'philosophy and theology ever had a different subject matter' than nature (p. 22). He regards monotheism as a 'product of wounded narcissism' and as 'one of the least sophisticated strategies and idea clusters possible in the face of the fragmented powers of the whence and the whither' (p. 163).

However, though Corrington sees no future for Christian symbols he believes that sign signals from earlier ages can still speak to us. Ecstatic naturalism is sensitive to 'the haunting power' of 'the sacred fold' revealed by 'sign vehicles' such as Stonehenge (p. 157) or Delphi (p. 188) or an ancient and 'religiously powerful tree' (p. 178). The sacred fold is also disclosed through dreams (p. 75ff.).

However, the supreme sign of the sacred is the overwhelming power of human sexuality: 'If ever there was a god or goddess worthy of both fear and worship the sacred fold of sexuality is the prime candidate' (p. 241).

Paul Badham

University of Wales, Lampeter

