

the methods of historical-critical scholarship in seeking the ‘original’ or ‘literal’ meaning of a text, but may well come to different conclusions from many of its practitioners because we start from the belief that God can and does choose to reveal himself in human history, that he has done so progressively through the life of Israel and of the Church, and crucially that a vital aspect of that progressive revelation has been the Church’s constantly developing understanding of the scriptures.

The fruit of the ‘Method C’ approach is shown in the next three long and excellent chapters dealing with Benedict and Ehrman’s treatment of the identity of Christ, his miracles, the resurrection and the second coming. Without slavishly following him, Ramage is able to show that Benedict’s reading of the NT texts is as plausible as, if not more so than, that of Ehrman over and over again, *on their own terms*, once the presupposition is abandoned that God would not involve himself, and has not done so, in human history. With copious footnotes drawing in the work of numerous other important historical Jesus scholars, particular Dale Allison, John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright, Ramage has produced in these three chapters a supremely able apologia for traditional Catholic readings of the Gospels that stand up to the most careful historical-critical scrutiny.

This is always provided, as indicated, that we accept a different set of presuppositions from those that undergird Ehrman’s work and much like it which rejects (e.g.) the divinity of Christ or the resurrection on historical grounds. Ramage succeeds in showing that ultimately such conclusions are question begging, being founded as they are, however implicitly, upon a modern naturalism that excludes traditional readings *a priori*. This point, though obvious when one thinks about it, is so well made, so clearly demonstrated and so important in helping people to acknowledge the value of historical-critical methods without being afraid of losing their faith that it alone makes Ramage’s book a vital contribution both to scholarship and to the Church.

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SOUNDINGS IN THE HISTORY OF A HOPE: NEW STUDIES ON THOMAS AQUINAS by Richard Schenk OP (*Faith & Reason: Studies in Catholic Theology and Philosophy*), *Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, Ave Maria, Florida, 2016, pp. x + 332, £41.50, pbk*

What is new about these studies is not immediately obvious. Ten of the book’s eleven chapters were published before, between 1988 and 2014, but publishing them in book form makes them not only more easily accessible but probably also gives them a new readership. The fact that most of Schenk’s academic work is available only in German is another

reason why a book from him in English can be called ‘new’. More significant though is his approach to Aquinas, which is genuinely fresh in interesting ways. For he reads Aquinas contextually in a deep sense of that term – looking at his thought historically, in reference to his sources and his contemporaries, and in the light of later and current philosophical and theological developments and discussions. Where Aquinas is sometimes presented in relation to such contexts in ways that can seem contrived (you know from the beginning that by the end ‘Aquinas will rule ok’), Schenk’s method involves genuine dialogue: Aquinas is relativized and corrected, the limits of his thought are clearly recognised, and the need for further developments highlighted. The gain is that the strengths of Aquinas’s thought then stand out more clearly.

As examples of corrections to received interpretations, for example, chapters 2 and 3 show that two cherished ‘thomist’ principles – ‘every action of Christ is for our instruction’ and ‘grace does not replace nature but perfects it’ – are not original with Aquinas but have their roots in earlier theological and, in the case of nature and grace, philosophical work. As examples of fresh illumination, chapters 4 and 5 consider themes not often treated in standard considerations of Aquinas, the themes of work and mourning. Chapter 5, “‘And Jesus Wept’: Notes towards a Theology of Mourning’ is a very beautiful reflection, at once intellectual and deeply human, on a theme in Aquinas that has not received much, if any, attention. It offers much to Christology and to pastoral theology.

Schenk’s many years working in Germany equip him to engage with recent and contemporary German-language philosophy and theology. In chapter 6 he engages Balthasar’s well-known argument that the commandment to love obliges us to hope for the salvation of all people and thus to trust that hell is empty. Schenk shows some of the consequences for good theology that follow from bracketing out the likelihood of final loss, something he fears Balthasar does, the consequence basically of lessening and even losing some of those tensions or antinomies that protect the divine mystery from those who would claim to know too much. (One wonders though why Balthasar’s critics do not take seriously his insistence on the difference between hope and knowledge).

The second main part of the book gathers essays on medieval theologies of religion. This may be surprising for some, to think that medieval theologians would have anything to offer on what seems like a very modern question. But of course they do, having considered not just the status of Jewish religious belief and practice, but also the beliefs and practices of other pre-Christian religions. Judaism is of course a special case for Christians and within Jewish religious practice circumcision has a particular significance. Schenk shows how negative and positive evaluations of Jewish religious practices can be traced back to Jerome and Augustine respectively. These contrasting evaluations appear again in the writings of Aquinas’s medieval predecessors and contemporaries: Peter Lombard and Richard Fishacre on the negative side, Hugh of Saint

Victor and Hugh of Saint Cher on the positive side. The story continues with Thomas's contemporaries Bonaventure and Robert Kilwardby.

Kilwardby is the theologian who figures most in this second part of Schenk's book, at least in chapters 7, 8 and 11. Better known among thomists for his archiepiscopal condemnation of Aquinas in 1277, he is given something of a thomist rehabilitation here for his theology of religions which is very well developed. It is of interest in its own right but also as a counterpoint to Aquinas's approach: questions about faith, grace and salvation inevitably open the door to Christological concerns.

Of the remaining chapters two deal with more familiar thomistic themes, analogy and sacrifice. Chapter 9 provides a fascinating insight to modern German theology, particularly that of Benedict XVI. It traces the development in Przywara's considerations of his *analogia entis*, the shock dealt by the moral disaster of the Holocaust to any metaphysical optimism there might have been in such a theory, and the subsequent preference, in the work of Przywara's student Söhngen for example, for an *analogia crucis*. It helps to explain the preference for Augustine and Bonaventure in the work of Söhngen's best-known student, Josef Ratzinger, as well as testifying to the impact of Karl Barth in modern German Catholic theology. One wonders whether a stronger appreciation by thomists of the roots of the 'doctrine' of analogy in the threefold way of naming God (causality, negation, eminence) would overcome the tendency to contrast dialectic and analogy too quickly.

Chapter 10 is another splendid essay, this time on the theme of the true sacrifice. Schenk offers first a summary of contemporary configurations of the question, looking at Jünger, Girard and post-process theologies on the suffering of God. He looks at historical pre-figurations of the question – we are back with Fishacre and Kilwardby offering negative and positive evaluations of sacrifice, with Aquinas then developing his own more ambivalent evaluation. Recent Roman Catholic re-figurations of sacrifice are problematic for different reasons – Rahner for his excessive optimism about progress and self-evolution, Balthasar for his introduction of sacrifice into the life of the Trinity itself. John Paul II's location of sacrifice within *communio* testifies to his appreciation of Eastern sources while opening the door for a fresh appreciation of Aquinas's understanding of sacrifice.

Schenk's opening chapter is on the Dominican Order and Thomism, whose missions are to serve the Church's intellectual life and universal mission, and to do so by promoting community and communication, collaboration and conversation. Schenk's book is a wonderful contribution to this service, seeking as it does to lead humanity, through communications that are stimulating but always imperfect, towards the *communicatio perfecta* of the Trinitarian life.

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