

housewives, soldiers, or whatever the politically correct infant now prefers. In a wide-ranging survey of Old and New Testament texts, he presents the liturgical action as the 'soul' of the Covenant between God and Israel (old and new). Through the Paschal mystery of the Incarnate Logos — the new and everlasting Covenant — the cosmos comes in history to its anticipated goal. To animate the Christian life, then, the Church's worship must do simultaneous justice to all these dimensions. Here are the principles that govern all else *Der Geist der Liturgie* has to say. It will readily be seen how radically opposed they are to anthropocentrism, politicism, and sentimental subjectivism: currently the besetting sins of so much Western Catholic worship.

The deeply un-Protestant nature of Ratzinger's understanding of salvation comes across in the repeated assertion that the *Einmal* — the once and once only Sacrifice of Christ — is now the *Immer* — an ever-present reality in the Church. This gives his liturgical thought a very proper affinity with Eastern Orthodox liturgiology ('There is a green hill far away'. with its distant retrospective on the long past Passion, has been described as the least Orthodox hymn ever written!). Although there are specifically Latin Catholic features to this work (the apologia for a prominently placed Eucharistic tabernacle, for instance, as the sign of the Church's metahistorical goal and the encomium on plainchant as the 'abiding measuring rod for *musica sacra*'), the overall sensibility can not unfairly be described as neo-Byzantine. It comes as no surprise that Ratzinger wishes to take Byzantine-Slav iconography as the normative reference-point for liturgical art. In circles hostile to traditional Latin liturgy, Byzantinisation is the only remedy for the ills of the *Novus Ordo* one can see.

Allusions to Hebrew philology and Schopenhauer's metaphysics remind the reader that the author is not only a Roman cardinal looking wistfully East. He is a German professor as well.

AIDAN NICHOLS OP

NATURAL AND DIVINE LAW: RECLAIMING THE TRADITION FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS by Jean Porter *Wm. B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999. Pp. 340, £18.99 pbk.*

In this study of natural law theory, Professor Porter examines the emergence of ideas amongst the Scholastics between the years 1140 and 1274, giving attention to the conception of human nature and the framework for practical legal judgment, as these came to be formulated prior to their expression in Aquinas. As the very warm appreciation by Professor Nicholas Wolterstorff in the *Foreword* suggests, this 'at heart, is an essay in intellectual history' (p. 12), and

it is the fruit of research undertaken in Oxford, where she clearly enjoyed not only the freedom of a year's study, but also the collegiality of scholars whose work she employs in the presentation of her arguments here. Porter takes the trouble carefully to make her own translations of original texts, an indication that she is searching for the roots of the theory in the soil of its time and culture, and that she intends to use the insights gained there for obtaining clarity in contemporary discussions of the natural law. For what extends this piece beyond the study of the writings of Scholastic moralists is her interest in employing their ideas to provide for ourselves a 'distinctively Christian account of the moral life' for which this period furnishes 'one of the richest resources'(p.15). Thus the points of contention within the present debates regarding natural law are kept before the reader throughout the historical investigation, and the concepts gleaned there are shown then to be relevant to matters of sexual and social ethics that are presented in the final two chapters of the book.

Porter suggests that these two 'horizons' be brought together by the reader, and so she seeks 'to draw on historical texts in the service of moral reflection' (p.20), but that is where the difficulties of the project are located, and where I think this is not quite so straightforward a task as she makes it seem. There are two issues here: one concerning the method of the book itself, and the other concerning the assumption she makes that moral theology is a method. For the first, Porter undertakes a hermeneutic exercise which puts our questions to the Scholastics for a possible answer. The questions we have are entangled in a complex problematic, formed in a philosophical ethics around the logic of moral realism and in theological ethics around the relationship of faith and reason. The issues that appear here — concerning the naturalistic fallacy, the existence of a pre-conventional foundation for morality, and the possibility for knowledge of good without the Gospel — all of these, she rightly recognises, are currents that perplex moral theologians in their work today. She understands them all to hinge on the concept of nature, the answer to which may be located in the Scholastic understanding of nature. For it avoids the naturalistic fallacy by being already a 'moral interpretation', it provides 'intrinsic moral principles' with which social and legal practices may be determined and challenged, and it sets out 'the normative aspects of human nature' with which divine affirmation of the goodness of creation is manifest to and in human beings.

One appreciates here the challenge of her project, for to chart a course between a scriptural literalism suspicious of any kind of natural philosophy, and an ecological theology with its willed construction of the nature we need, between the forces of which contemporary moral theology is held in thrall, to try to hold open a

middle way. Thus she is concerned both to demonstrate the reality of this nature and to assert the theological conviction with which it is envisaged, in order to argue that nature can itself be the ground for this *via media*. Such efforts to delineate a naturalism in ethics are periodically made to heal the rift of humanity and nature that opens up in modernity, and Porter has herself been interested in examining the usefulness of pre-modern thinking for its resolution. In her first book, *The Recovery of Virtue* (1990), Porter argues for the adaptability of Aquinas' interpretation of natural good for this purpose. Yet the question concerning the method of this appears with the word 'reclaiming' in its title, for this is already a postmodern practice of mining the past to meet our needs, and so risks wielding of a hungry power over history. The danger is not only that our assumptions about what nature is are read back into historical texts, and thus that the strangeness of these texts cannot speak to us, but that the very thing we need to believe are made to seem more sure as a result of their purported endurance over time. Thus, the notion of 'an ordered totality' within which human life may be meaningfully constructed takes on a life of its own in her writing, and this supposedly ordinary notion is made to seem exactly what the Scholastics too were thinking about. However, this notion bears our understanding of nature as that space within which human beings make their special appearance and in which diversities of all kinds can be seen and located, into medieval thinking of nature, and in the process, a reification occurs that generates a stable foundation to meet our crises. Can this be the way for a moral theologian to think?

As for the second, there is a consistent assumption through this book that moral theology is a method, a technique for the application of concepts in different situations in order to reach a practical conclusion. So the opening summary of chapter four begins, 'The test of any moral concept lies in its application' (p.187). This way of understanding moral decision is, however, a modern intervention, which requires the positing of such concepts in the first place, as 'prior to theological reflection', and indeed as prior to social expressions that vary across time (see e.g. p. 216). Not only am I unconvinced that there is a realm of concepts which exists prior to thinking them, and thus that these concepts are already set up as intermediaries between humanity and God, I am even less convinced that thinking by means of concepts will heal, rather than further express and repeat, precisely the diremptions out of which they appear. These doubts suggest to me that we need to be less concerned with concepts than with the conceiving of God, and so less pleased that we reach the end of an argument than that we reach the end of our lives. Moral theology needs not to attend to syllogisms but to the performance of the faith, to a way of thinking that apprehends God as the world comes to be experienced, and this open to the

future of God in each act of daily life. For Aquinas at least, this is surely what is meant by acts of intellection that do what they say, so that for us to engage in such thinking ourselves in the way that he opens. These are matters of faith that belong at the heart of an ecumenical ethics, and that may even restore to reason its own highest possibility.

SUSAN F. PARSONS

NO BLOODLESS MYTH: A GUIDE THROUGH BALTHASAR'S DRAMATICS by Aidan Nichols OP, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2000. Pp. 268, £16.95 pbk.

The volumes of Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theodramatik* — now fully translated by Graham Harrison as the five volumes of *Theo-drama* — are an immense achievement. This, surely, is a judgement one can hardly contest. An engagement with this odyssey today demands, I would suggest, not only patience with a style and manner of theologising which appears both strikingly original and yet strangely anachronistic, but also, quite probably, the leisure of a long summer vacation! This at least was the way I originally got through it. Today, Balthasar arrives amongst us — or at least amongst the majority of us — as the name of a formidable theological and literary 'achievement'; a body of work comparable to the *Church Dogmatics* or *Theological Investigations*. This may be an obvious enough point; nonetheless it would seem to raise a somewhat deeper question. For how are we to read Balthasar today when flesh and blood theologian disappears behind the mask of theological authority? And this can surely be no slight issue in the work of a theologian for whom the very matter, or *Sache*, of Christianity lies in the logic of handing-over and bestowal. What gift, if gift it be, has Balthasar bestowed on us? Aidan Nichols in his series for T & T Clark, *Introduction to Hans Urs von Balthasar* is helping us to discern.

In the first volume of this trilogy, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics*, Aidan Nichols exhibited a remarkable ability to synthesise and summarise the sprawling seven volumes of *Herrlichkeit*. Here, in *No Bloodless Myth*, he repeats the feat with, if anything, the more demanding and complex argument of *Theo-Drama*. Nichols is a companionable, indeed one is tempted to say incomparable guide, remarkably sure footed and assured — if not overly interested in allowing his party of admiring tourists to linger long. He does not have much choice in compressing several thousand pages into a mere 250 page commentary.

The point of *Theo-Drama* is not to reinvigorate Christian theatre — just as the point of *Herrlichkeit* was not to bolster a specific Christian art. Rather, what Balthasar's whole endeavour is directed towards is drawing to the centre of the stage the very 'drama