

Reviews

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUMMA THEOLOGIAE OF THOMAS AQUINAS BY JOHN OF ST. THOMAS, translated and introduced by Ralph McInerny, *St. Augustine's Press, South Bend, Indiana, 2004, Pp x+182, \$27.00 hbk.*

AQUINAS'S SUMMA: BACKGROUND, STRUCTURE & RECEPTION BY JEAN-PIERRE TORRELL, O.P., translated by Benedict M. Guevin, O.S.B., *The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2005, Pp x+156, \$17.95 pbk.*

Introductions to the *Summa Theologiae* are most successful when they recognise that St. Thomas's desire to offer a brief and clear introduction for beginners in *sacra doctrina* is qualified '... in as far as the matter allows' (*ST* Prooemium). Thus multiplication of unnecessary material and repetition is to be avoided and likewise the order of instruction is to be followed; nevertheless, one who approaches the *Summa* will not find thoroughness and completeness sacrificed for pedagogical utility. A good introduction to the *Summa* then will, whilst not necessarily covering all the things one needs to acquire to understand the *Summa*, at least cover some of them, without at the same time inhibiting the acquisition of the rest of the material one needs to master. Of the two books to be considered here, McInerny's succeeds in this task whilst Torrell's does not.

McInerny's book is a translation of an essay by John of St. Thomas written to explain the order and connections of all the material in the *Summa Theologiae*. Collected together with two other essays, it formed an extended introduction to the same author's *Cursus Theologicus*. Here McInerny presents it on its own, again to help explain the order of material in the *Summa*, though one also suspects that if in addition to its usefulness for understanding the *Summa*, a reader also felt moved to consider John of St. Thomas's further work, the translator would not be distressed.

The book is divided into two parts; the first considers why there are three parts to the *Summa* and how the individual treatises in each part are related. The second part looks at the three parts of the *Summa* in more detail. All the major topics of the *Summa* are considered and reading it one acquires a good overview of the work as a whole. Most likely to prove surprising to today's reader is John of St. Thomas's division of the *Summa* into God considered in himself (Ia Q2-43) and God's causal activity distinguished as efficient (Ia Q44-119), final (IaIIae and IIaIIae) and redemptive (IIIa). However, since this model is compatible with Chenu's *exitus-reditus* schema, it is unlikely to prove objectionable. Insofar as the book only intends to set forth the order and connections of the material in the *Summa*, it succeeds in its objective and does so without prejudice to any further material the student will need to master. Indeed McInerny's comment that the *Summa* '... was written for theological, though not philosophical, beginners' (p. x) is a recognition both that material other than this book will need to be acquired and a suggestion of what else will have to be included in that material. On these grounds then the book fulfils the requirements of an introduction and is to be recommended.

Torrell's book is the more ambitious of the two. Not limiting itself to a discussion of the *Summa's* structure and order, it also attempts to situate it in '... its historical, literary, and doctrinal settings' (p. ix). Beginning with a brief account

of St. Thomas's life, it then offers two chapters on the structure of the *Summa*. A fourth chapter discusses various types of medieval literature, relates the *Summa* to them and considers some of Thomas's sources. The last two chapters discuss the history of the *Summa* from the death of St Thomas to the present day.

Whilst there is much to admire in Torrell's book – indeed all the chapters contain useful information – nevertheless on certain points of detail his explanations are inadequate. For example how does Thomas's 'strong personality' (p. x) bring unity to his sources, and what type of claim is being made here? What criteria are being used to determine the importance of the sources? Hence, why is it that Thomas only 'discretely disagrees' (p. 74) with Augustine on occasion but does not '...hesitate to depart from Aristotle when he deemed it necessary' (p. 76)? It might be that Thomas is more the Augustinian than the Aristotelian but that claim needs substantiation. Specifically, it needs to consider work done in the English speaking tradition (O'Callaghan, Klima and Haldane for example) on the decidedly non-Augustinian character of Thomas's epistemology and its role in Thomas's semantic theory.

However, Torrell's fundamental error stems from his assessment of the role of philosophy in the *Summa*. I want to make four comments: Firstly, why is it that knowledge of the living God of the Bible '...is not attained until he has been understood as a trinity of persons' (p. 21) ? The thing to which 'the living God of the Bible' refers is the same thing as is investigated by reason alone and since *sacra doctrina* includes within itself those truths about God accessible to reason alone and is used by Thomas interchangeably with *sacra scriptura* (*ST* Ia Q1 art 8), there is no need to limit knowledge about the living God of the Bible to understanding him as a trinity of persons. Secondly Torrell's deist/living God of the Bible contrast is ill-judged. It seems to identify a philosophical account of God with 'deist philosophers' (p. 21). However, no scholar investigating those things that can be known about God by the use of reason alone thereby takes a deist position in an objectionable sense. Rather the objectionable character of deism depends on its limitation of God's involvement in the world, a position no Thomist *qua* Thomist, whether of a philosophical persuasion or not, can adopt.

Thirdly since *sacra doctrina* is true, arguments offered against it cannot be demonstrative (*ST* Ia Q1 art 8), and its claims then cannot be incoherent or else in principle contrary demonstrations would be possible. One way of showing that a claim is not incoherent is to try to demonstrate its truth, as Thomas does for example in the Five Ways and which, if successful, negates the charge of incoherence. Another way is to offer support for one's view by refuting the arguments offered against it. However, in both cases philosophical reflection is required and in neither case is the character of *sacra doctrina* negated. As Thomas describes *sacra doctrina* (*ST* Ia Q1 art 8), it is philosophically robust enough to withstand that form of assessment.

Fourthly Torrell frequently criticises what he terms a 'deductive method' for theology (p 51–2, 102, 113), preferring instead an ostensive one. The derivation of the general resurrection from Christ's resurrection in *ST* Ia Q1 art 8 is cited as an example of this ostensive method (p. 52) and a correlation is made between ostensive theology and the Latin term '*ostendere*' (p. 51). It is not obvious what Torrell has in mind here but if the intention is to use a derivative of *ostendere* to draw a distinction between deductive and ostensive methods, the passage quoted does not support it. There Thomas compares other sciences and *sacra doctrina*. No science proves its own principles, rather it argues from these principles to other matters in the same science and *sacra doctrina* is said to be no different. However, given that Thomas uses '*ostendendum*' to describe the derivation of conclusions both in the other sciences and in the science of *sacra doctrina*, then

since the other sciences will include demonstrations within their derivation of conclusions, the *ostendere* derivative must include demonstrations within its intension. Moreover, since demonstrations are types of deductions, then deductions are included within the *ostendere* derivative *a fortiori*. That being the case the passage cannot distinguish a deductive method from an ostensive one but only as one type of ostensive method.

To get the best from Torrell's book one needs to ignore what he says about philosophy in the *Summa* and matters related to that. To the extent that the book is wrong on the role of philosophy in the *Summa*, it inhibits the reader from mastering the material they need to acquire and as such fails as an introduction.

DOMINIC RYAN OP

SCATTERING THE SEED: A GUIDE THROUGH BALTHASAR'S EARLY WRITINGS ON PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARTS by Aidan Nichols OP, T & T Clark, London, 2006, Pp. vii + 266, £60 hbk.

In 1955 Hans Urs von Balthasar considered all of his writing to date (with the exception of his compilations of Augustine) 'as an attempt not to underestimate the utterly mysterious step that revelation takes beyond the eschatology of the Old Covenant (which must be understood prophetically!) into the eschatology of the New and eternal Covenant' (*My Word in Retrospect*, p. 25). Nichols here turns to Balthasar's writings on philosophy and the arts from 1925-1946, thereby shedding light on this early, all-consuming theme of eschatology. The principal appeal of this volume for an English-language audience lies in its summation of untranslated and often ignored material. Eight of the thirteen chapters, for instance, painstakingly present the lineaments of a study on eschatology many Germans consider unreadable, viz., the three-volume *Apocalypse of the German Soul* (1937-1939). Anyone unwilling or unable to work through this text in particular will highly prize Nichols's latest. Surreptitiously, the lack of existing English translations permits Nichols's humour and clear prose to shine more evidently than in previous volumes where he was perhaps too reliant upon bulk-quotations. This makes wading through the murkiness of early balthasariana more enjoyable, even if the reader is confused at times – as when reading Balthasar – just whose voice one is attending to.

Chapters one (pp. 1-8), two (pp. 9-15), and three (pp. 17-32) summarize single essays beginning with Balthasar's first publication at the age of 20, *The Unfolding of the Musical Idea: Attempt at a Synthesis of Music* (1925). It is often cited for its use early use of *Gestalt* theory so central to his later Christology. Complementary to Nichols's analysis here are two articles by Francesca Aran Murphy, 'The Sound of the Analogia Entis', *New Blackfriars* 74 (1993), pp. 508-521, 557-565. Next, the key to 'Art and Religion' (1927) is shown to be the word '*Hingabe*', for it shows the twofold nature of 'surrender' to objectivity of the Absolute and the beautiful; united through the subject's response, together they most fully enliven human subjectivity and so creativity. Lastly, Nichols interprets 'The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves' (1939) as Balthasar's *via media* between the excesses of the *nouvelle théologie* and the Thomism of the strict observance on the subject of which epoch stood most normatively for Catholic theology. His answer: no epoch of the Church entirely trumps another, so let us take what is best, even from modernity, in order to express truth more fully.

Chapter four (pp. 33-44) introduces *Apocalypse of the German Soul*. According to Balthasar, 'Eschatology can be defined as a teaching about the relation of the soul to its eternal destiny, whose attainment (fulfilment, assimilation) is its apocalypse' (*Apokalypse* I, p. 4; Nichols, p. 36). He uncovers the often unstated