

Reviews

ST THOMAS AQUINAS: *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. VII: Father, Son and Holy Ghost (1a xxxiii-xliii), by T. C. O'Brien xxii + 300 pp. 1976. £6. Vol. XLVIII: The Incarnate Word (IIa i-vi), by R. J. Hennesey OP. xx + 204 pp. 1976. £4.60. *Blackfriars*; London, *Eyre and Spottiswoode*; New York, *McGraw-Hill*.

With these two eagerly awaited key-volumes the new sixty-volume edition of the *Summa* in Latin and English which began to appear in 1964 is now complete, and while it would be premature to attempt at this point to make a reasoned assessment of this great achievement it may be proper for one who has been privileged to review every volume as it has appeared to express his appreciation of the public spirit with which, in a period of unanticipated and increasing economic stress, the publishers have courageously carried it through to the end with praiseworthy restraint in the matter of price, and of the skill and persistence with which the General Editor, Fr Thomas Gilby OP, whose recent death we all have cause to lament, not only planned and guided the whole project but contributed more than a dozen of the volumes and appendices to several of the others. The series is a fitting memorial to this learned and sympathetic Dominican.

Volume seven needs for its proper understanding to be taken together with volume six (Fr C. Velecky, 1965), the two together constituting St Thomas's systematic exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. As Dr O'Brien remarks (Introduction, p. xix), it is best seen as a treatise on the divine names, though 'not on the names imposed on God by a philosophic evaluation of created effects—the topic in Ia xiii—but on the names God has given himself by his revelation in Jesus Christ'. No one more than St Thomas is conscious of the inadequacy of human language—even divinely provided language—to describe the inner mystery of God. He would, I think, even agree with modern linguistic philosophers that he is writing about the linguistic habits of theologians, but he would insist that what the theologians themselves are doing is not talking about their own linguistic habits or manifesting the linguistic behaviour to which they are prone under certain specifiable psychological and sociological condi-

tions but talking, however inadequately, about God. Unless it is understood that this is what they at least believe themselves to be doing, there will be a complete failure to grasp the point of the minute conscientiousness with which in his treatise on the Trinity St Thomas expounds and defends the correct use of the traditional language about God. He does not believe himself to be simply formulating a coherent system of symbols, like a modern logician expounding a calculus in axiomatics, still less to be juggling with words in accordance with rules laid down by Popes, Councils and Fathers, but to be talking intelligibly and truthfully, though obscurely and inadequately, about God himself. Thus he can say that the less precise sentences even of the great Augustine are to be 'not so much developed as explained away,' *non sunt extendendae sed exponendae* (I, xxxix, 5 ad 1; III, iv, 3 ad 1). And he can say simply that it is 'better' to declare that the divine Persons are distinct by their relations than by their origin, though they are distinct by both (I, xl, 2c).

Dr O'Brien's translation is excellent. His footnotes are amazingly ample, both in the range of their references and the helpfulness of their explanations. On pp. 66f he gives an illuminating amendment, *casualis* for *causalis*. P. 83, ll. 3-6 are rather slipshod. P. 107, l. 4, for 'doubled' read 'having the force of two'. P. 148, l. 12, for *secumfert* read *secum fert*. P. 149, l. 22, for 'This property' read 'This personal property'. P. 189, l. 28, for 'whereas' read 'although'.

Fr Hennesey's volume forty-eight, on the Incarnation, really needs to be taken with the two following volumes to provide a full exposition of St Thomas's Christology. As it stands, it provides a detailed statement and defence of the Chalcedonian doctrine. Fr Hennesey tells us:

According to G. Geenen [St Thomas] had a better knowledge of

the Greek Fathers than his immediate predecessors or contemporaries, although his knowledge of the Latin Fathers was less remarkable: since most of the great debates about the Incarnation were in the Eastern Church, this is especially important. I. Backes credits him with introducing the authority of St Cyril and of Constantinople III into medieval theology. He was the first scholastic of the high Middle Ages to quote the texts of Chalcedon and other early Councils [p. 178].

If these judgements stand, St Thomas's Christology should be of contemporary interest, for, largely as a result of Dr John Meyendorff's *Christ in Early Christian Thought*, the commonly held dogma in English-speaking circles that Greek Christology to all intents and purposes came to an end at Chalcedon, and had ceased by then to offer anything creative anyhow, seems at last to be on the point of revision. Certainly it appears that the Fifth Council (Constantinople II), if not the Sixth and Seventh, was needed in order to make the Chalcedonian teaching about Christ's person altogether explicit. This does not mean that Chalcedon was itself defective, only that (perhaps like Vatican I) its bearing was not immediately evident. Its real triumph, as Meyendorff shows, was to make plain, in its insistence upon the one divine Person and the completeness of the human nature in Christ, that Jesus underwent the totality of human experience and that he who underwent it was—and is—God. In St Thomas's words, 'to the hypostasis alone are attributed the operations and properties of the nature and all that pertains to the nature in the concrete' (III, xxii, 3c). And here, perhaps even more than in the treatise on the Trinity, it is

imperative to emphasise that such Christological statements as this, in spite of all the limitations of human language, are describing genuine facts about reality and not just conforming to certain agreed conventions about the use of words. As Fr Hennessey remarks (p. 109), there is a short section of this treatise which is pure speculation; but it stands out sharply from the rest and St Thomas clearly saw that it did. And I would suggest that the really important outstanding problems of Christology (such as those of the character of Jesus's developing human knowledge and of his relation as Christ to the human race and the universe as a whole) offer far more fruitful and coherent possibilities for a Christology that starts from Chalcedon than for the neo-Nestorianism, neo-Adoptionism, kenoticism and process-thinking that have been so common in recent years.

But St Thomas, of course, did not have to cope with our situation, though he has a great deal to offer us in it. Fr Hennessey has done his work skilfully and helpfully. On p. 7, l. 8, a sentence is missing. P. 35, l. 28, for 'nature in the incarnate Word' read 'incarnate nature in the Word'. P. 69, l. 16, for 'has existence' read 'has real existence'. P. 157, l. 13, a clause is missing which suggests that a woman's beauty makes her suitable for marriage!

St Thomas, like St John Damascene, gives us, Fr Hennessey tells us, 'not the whole reason why the Incarnation happened, but a greater insight into what it involves. . . . His effort is to show *how* the revealed mysteries are true in our thoughts. It is not so much a question of deducing theological conclusions as of recognising the interrelation of the articles of faith' (p. 177). And this really goes for the *Summa* as a whole.

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AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, by Aylward Shorter. *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1975. 167 pp. £2.

THE PRAYERS OF AFRICAN RELIGION, by John S. Mbiti. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1975. 193 pp. £2.50.

The entry of black Africa into a wider world has taken place at a time when, doubtlessly by an erroneous parallel with technology, all human achievements are expected to reach full flower without any painful period of growth. Thus, the emergence of African democracy, African socialism, the great African novel, African phil-

osophy, African theology, all of course full grown, is eagerly expected, and when they appear in disappointing forms they are greeted with cynical disillusion. The growth of 'authentically African' philosophies and theologies requires not simply Africans trained in Western philosophical and theological methods, but a self-appropriation of