

THOMAS AQUINAS AND KARL BARTH: AN UNOFFICIAL CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT DIALOGUE edited by Bruce L. McCormack and Thomas Joseph White OP, *Eerdmans*, Grand Rapids, 2013, pp. viii + 304, £ 23.91, pbk

This book is the third in a series of dialogical works exploring Barth and Aquinas that have emerged from conferences convened by the editors. Navigating a methodological course between the Scylla of mutual caricature and the Charybdis of false consensus, the volume identifies a surprising degree of convergence between the two seminal thinkers. The result is a mutually illuminating dialogue of surprising fruitfulness, which will—in its content as well as its form—serve to catalyse further refinements in doctrinal perception.

The authors explore five key doctrinal themes, each examined by two scholars, one with ‘Barthian’ expertise, the other with ‘Thomist’ (although, as evidenced throughout, such expertise are not mutually exclusive). A masterful introduction by Thomas Joseph White situates Barth-Aquinas dialogue within contemporary scholarship and historical development. White presents both thinkers as offering a unified vision of theology proper and economy; both present responses to the challenges of modern epistemology, reflecting their distinctive theological accounts of the interaction between theology and contemporary intellectual culture. If White continues to exegete Barth with such incision and lucidity, he will in time emerge as the most significant Catholic commentator on Barth since Balthasar.

Robert Jenson and Richard Schenk tackle questions *de Deo Uno*. Notwithstanding Barth’s shift toward an event ontology, Jenson highlights a surprisingly metaphysical treatment of the divine nature in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, including a willingness to appropriate the categories of Heideggerian ontology in service of traditional realist theology. Schenk’s essay, whilst not responding directly to Jenson’s, notes that the limits of Thomistic metaphysics (God as principle, not object) open onto the highway of discipleship, the ‘experience of non-experience’ (p. 60) that is the starting point for theology as *sacra doctrina*.

The second locus explores the intra-Trinitarian relations: Guy Mansini—drawing on St Benedict and Dietrich von Hildebrand—examines the appropriateness of deploying models of the divine processions derived from the moral categories of humility and obedience, tracing the contours of a Christocentric approach that protects divine aseity. McCormack’s essay affirms the complementarity of Barth and Aquinas’s account of the relationship between processions and missions, whilst noting that an interval between the immanent and economic Trinity (held by some Barthians) implies an *analogia entis*.

Keith Johnson and Thomas Joseph White relate Christology to soteriology and protology: Johnson explores issues of ‘natural theology’ in a Christological context, arguing that differing accounts of the creator-creature relationship underpin a divergence in Christology. White, meanwhile, reflects on the *communicatio idiomatum* and the hypostatic union as its ground, noting Barth’s self-conscious retrieval of pre-modern ontological categories despite his development of Chemnitz’s *genus tapeinoticum* in light of the Son’s unique reprobation.

The fourth locus explores questions of grace and justification: noting the robustly anti-Pelagian stance of both thinkers, Joseph Wawrykow situates their divergence in questions of merit and the Thomistic rejection of the Lutheran *simul*. Barth’s criticism of Thomas on grace, however, is presented as having purchase over rigid neo-Thomist readings typified by Bartmann, rather than Aquinas himself. Amy Marga’s complementary essay examines the doctrine of justification, returning to the primary sources in the light of the *Joint Declaration* and Hans Küng’s book: a deep affinity between Barth and Aquinas emerges from their

account of the believer's relationship to their new personal history in Christ, rather than from more traditional questions of grace's mode of operation.

John Bowlin and Holly Taylor Coolman examine moral theology, under the rubric of 'election, providence and natural law'. Bowlin highlights a shared commitment to a social theory of obligation, noting that whilst Barth's hyper-Augustinianism is formally (if not materially) indebted to Hegel, Aquinas does not begin with post-Kantian actualism. Coolman's adroit exposition of Aquinas's rich concept of law (particularly the status of human action as created participation) indicates the presence of an *analogia legis* in the *Summa's* treatise on law: that law has Christology as its foundation and *telos* is undoubtedly a point of convergence with Barth.

Throughout, Barth and Aquinas are presented not primarily as primogenitors of theological trajectories with a shared vector away from Liberalism (*pace* Reginald Cant), but as theologians offering distinctive doxological grammars. The authors' ability to identify fertile points of connection—without yielding to a Procrustean consensus—attests to the value of shared dogmatic reflection as a means of moving beyond the illusory comforts of inherited caricatures.

Material dogmatic convergence, however, may conceal a formal disagreement regarding the 'shape' of theology and the prominence given to particular articles of doctrine (for example the extent to which election can serve as the governing theological principle *par excellence*): by isolating individual doctrines with an almost surgical precision, the relation of particular 'theological organs' to the 'body theological' is potentially overlooked. Indeed, it is clear that such differences in theological form are a function of a more properly basic disagreement regarding matters of fundamental ontology and the metaphysics of knowing: this, indeed, was the subject of an earlier work by the editors, exploring the *analogia entis*. Nonetheless, that this qualification clearly emerges from the text attests to the honesty of its exploration of fertile lines of dialogue without elision into the chimera of a *tertium quid*.

Perhaps most edifying, however, is the book's overall tone and style: the volume is an exemplary instance of the shared theological reflection that ought to characterise ecumenical relations. Benefiting from its status as a dialogue of individual theologians rather than ecclesial communities (alluded to by the presence of 'unofficial' in the subtitle), the contributors are freed to exchange suggestions and offer non-binding—even provocative—interpretations. As a fraternal quest for the truth, the simplistic binary application of 'Catholic' and 'Reformed' is robustly avoided, seeking instead to elucidate the inner logic of each thinker on their own terms. This, as McCormack notes in the afterword, is ultimately grounded by a shared communion in the truth, thereby witnessing to the theological vocation as an exercise of the glorious freedom of the children of God.

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IN DEFENCE OF WAR by Nigel Biggar, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013*, pp. xii + 316, £25.00, hbk

Any work which sets out not only to defend the just war tradition, but to argue for the justice of particular historical conflicts is bound to court controversy. When the particular conflicts defended include 'the British prosecution of the First World War in 1914–18' and 'the American-led Coalition's invasion of Iraq in 2003' (p. 331) then the task would for many critics of just war seem somewhat ludicrous. So it is to the credit of Professor Nigel Biggar that he not only