

Book Reviews

On Aquinas by Herbert McCabe, O.P., ed. Brian Davies, O.P. (London: Burns & Oates, 2008), xii + 180.

I ONLY met Herbert McCabe on one occasion. The mutual friend who introduced us said, “Herbert, I tell everyone that you are the father of Wittgensteinian Thomism.” McCabe looked slightly astonished at this description, and then said, “Well, perhaps if ‘Wittgensteinian’ were understood as a privative.” I suspect that many who think of themselves as “Thomists” would share McCabe’s astonishment at the application of this label to him. Whatever his book *On Aquinas* is, it is not “Thomism,” as that term is typically used, whether of the “strict observance,” “transcendental,” “Gilsonian” or any other familiar sort. This is, I suspect, what might make this book so useful to readers, even those who are Thomists.

Herbert McCabe was born in 1926 and entered the Order of Preachers in 1949. His brief moment of notoriety came when, having been made editor of the British Dominican journal *New Blackfriars* in 1965, he was removed from that position because of an editorial occasioned by Charles Davis’s departure from the priesthood and the Catholic Church, in which he said that he agreed with Davis that the church was “quite plainly corrupt,” but did not think that this constituted a sufficient reason to leave her. McCabe was reinstated as editor in 1970, beginning the first editorial after his reinstatement with the words, “As I was saying before I was so oddly interrupted. . . .” Apart from this incident, his influence was in many ways hidden in the background of twentieth century theology and philosophy. While at Cambridge in the 1960s and 70s, he influenced such students as Terry Eagleton, Denys Turner, and Eamon Duffy. He also exerted a significant influence on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, Anthony Kenny, and Brian Davies. Yet he published very little during his lifetime: two series of lectures, one on the Sacraments (*The New Creation*, 1964) and one on ethics (*Law, Love and Language*, 1968), a collection of essays and sermons (*God Matters*, 1987), and a brief

question-and-answer catechism (*The Teachings of the Catholic Church*, 1986). Since his death in 2001, however, he has become quite prolific. Because he never spoke off-the-cuff on public occasions, he left a large, if disorderly, body of written texts behind him that have appeared in a steady stream of publications in the past few years. Though this stream can be expected to run dry at some point, this most recent volume evidences no sign of any diminishment of intellectual depth.

On Aquinas represents a series of lectures McCabe gave over the course of two terms at Blackfriars in Oxford that purported to be an introduction to Aquinas. What it in fact offers, after a brief and breezy (certainly too breezy, for most tastes) introduction to Thomas's life and legacy, is a philosophical anthropology that is developed in dialogue with Aquinas. McCabe's account of what it means to be a human being develops in this way: beginning with living things and how they differ from non-living things, he moves on to discuss how sensate living beings (i.e. animals) differ from non-sensate ones, and then to how humans differ from other animals; from there the rest of the book discusses humans beings as languages users who are able to formulate reasons for their actions and thus live together in a way that differs from other animals. McCabe pays particular attention to moral reasoning, but also to the "inner senses," something that Anthony Kenny once described as "not one of the more satisfactory parts of [Aquinas's] philosophy of mind" (*Aquinas on Mind*, 39), but which McCabe uses to describe the human animal's distinctive way of inhabiting a world. This account of human being is sometimes done by means of an exposition of Aquinas, sometimes done in conversation with Aquinas, and sometimes done by means of digressions in which Aquinas is more or less left behind.

What, then, is the account of human being that McCabe offers? Human beings are animals that possess the ability to transcend the individuality that comes with embodiment so as to enter into that characteristically human form of relationship that we call "friendship," which means that human being is a "being *with*" (54). Such sociality is not accidental but essential to humans as rational animals. To see why this is the case, one must appreciate that, as McCabe interprets it, "rationality" is really nothing but the ability to use language.

McCabe discusses his views on language and thought in the context of his discussion of the inner senses and of Aquinas's view that it is only by *conversio ad phantasmata* that human reason attains its natural end. McCabe says Thomas is correct in maintaining *both* that thought is not a physical process *and* that thought requires some connection to a physical process, namely our turning to the sense images that we possess as a result of our

physical, sensual existence. However, McCabe does not think Aquinas argues the latter point as well as he might, because he has a largely instrumental view of language. McCabe believes that modern reinterpretations of Aquinas by Geach, Burrell, Turner, and Kenny do a better job than Aquinas himself in clarifying the connection between thought and language. McCabe writes: "Aquinas is quite clear that every thought we have can, in principle, be expressed in language; what he does not say is that human thought *has* to be the significance expressed by some bodily symbols because human thought just is the capacity to use language" (133). McCabe sees himself and his fellow interpreters of Aquinas as sharing with Thomas a non-Cartesian understanding of "the vital connection between being a rational animal and being a linguistic animal" and differing only in the direction that their analysis runs: "*we* analyse understanding and thinking in terms of human communication whereas *Aquinas* analyses communication in terms of understanding and thinking" (133).

One might think that McCabe is making too little of the difference that this reversal of analysis makes. By beginning with the physical activity of human communication, and indeed identifying thought with the capacity to use language, does McCabe not end up collapsing thought into a physical process? McCabe thinks not. Just as the meaning of a word is not reducible to physical sounds—otherwise the words *Buch* and *livre* could not mean the same thing—so too thought is not reducible to a physical process. Both thought and linguistic meaning, while inseparable from physical processes, are not reducible to those processes. The advantage of starting with meaning rather than thought, according to McCabe, is that we have clearer access to the relationship between meaning and words than we do to the connection between thought and physical processes, and thus what it means to be a being that is both rational and an animal is more fittingly discerned if we begin with reflection on human communication as a matter of both meaning and words (134).

Thus if we understand human beings as rational animals, and we understand reason in terms of the capacity for linguistic communication, then it is language-use that is the specific difference between humans and other animals: "it is because of language that we are alive in a different way from other animals and it is because of language that we are self-transcendent in a different way from other animals" (34). Non-rational animals come to know something by possessing its form or "pattern of meaning" (35) in their senses; humans come to know something not simply through receiving it into their senses, but by its pattern of meaning being taken up into language, such that it becomes a part of "the whole structure of communication that is unique to the human animal" (44).

How does this lead to the view that human being is essentially, and not merely accidentally, being *with*? If reason is the capacity for language, a capacity that is actualized in the use of language, then one cannot be a rational animal apart from membership in a linguistic community, because language is by its very nature communicative. The animal life of sensation is an essentially private existence: my sensory experience of a book is different from your sensory experience of the same book. But the linguistic life of reason is inherently communal: barring instances of equivocation, the word “book” when I use it means exactly the same thing as the word “book” when you use it (121). One can detect here, of course, Wittgenstein’s reflections on the impossibility of a “private language,” but what is interesting is how McCabe uses this as a way of showing how the definition of the human being as a “rational animal” necessarily implies the definition of the human being as a “political animal.”

It is from this conjunction of the rational and the political that McCabe’s further reflections on virtue and the moral life flow. For example, while one cannot be rational (i.e. a language user) without a linguistic community, it is equally true that one cannot be part of a linguistic community without being a language-user. Similarly, the life of friendship, which is the true form of human political life, can only be lived by virtuous people, but people can only become virtuous by being friends. As McCabe puts it, “Virtues can only be taught by friends. Friendship can only be sustained by virtues” (69). In both cases we see a circularity, but not a vicious one. What he wishes to ensure is that we never abstract human beings from their communal contexts, whether this be the community of the species of human language-users or the more particular communities in which moral virtues are fostered. At the same time, he shares with Aquinas a keen awareness of the limits of human communities, and that the human capacity for friendship, a capacity that is rooted in our capacity for language, can only be fulfilled by “the friendship that God grants us in his grace” (105).

This is what I take to be the underlying argument of the book. But the book contains far more arguments than this one: arguments about the nature of the good life, the relationship of the acquired virtues to the infused virtues, the immortality of the soul, and so forth. What one does not find much of is what people — especially those people who call themselves Thomists — might expect in a volume entitled “On Aquinas.” There is little or no discussion of *esse*, or analogy, or the real distinction. That is not necessarily because McCabe has no interest in at least some of these topics. For example, he edited the volume in the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa theologiae* that dealt with questions twelve and thir-

teen of the *prima pars*, in the appendices of which he expressed rather strong views on how analogy ought to be seen in Aquinas (views that were somewhat at variance with those Thomas Gilby expressed in the introduction of that same volume). And even in this volume he suggests that the notion of “human rights” makes little sense apart from the “metaphysical foundation” of an acknowledgement of God as the author of nature (156). Yet it is significant that when it came to introducing Aquinas to those who attended his lectures, his focus was not on metaphysical questions but rather on the human linguistic animal and the kind of perplexities it finds itself in as it seeks to lead a fulfilling life. In beginning here, McCabe pays homage to both the bulk and the brilliance of the *secunda pars* of the *Summa*. At the same time, such an approach swims against the Thomist tide that presumes that one must get Aquinas’s metaphysics straight before one can understand the rest of his thought.

It is those who swim with that tide who are likely to find *On Aquinas* most astonishing, and irritating. McCabe’s arguments are made with a punchy Chestertonian prose style that delights in saying astonishing things as if they were the most ordinary common sense, so as to make one question that adherence to assumptions that often substitutes for rigorous thought. I typically find myself confronting one of McCabe’s arguments by first objecting, “Well, this can’t possibly be right.” Then, in trying to figure out exactly what is not right about it, I discover that behind my objection lies some intellectual nostrum that I imbibed in the course of my education and had never bothered to ask whether or not it was true. Even when I decide that McCabe is wrong, I am intellectually edified by the rigorous thought demanded of me in figuring out exactly why he is wrong. And perhaps it is in this, his capacity to intellectually edify by means of a rigorous regard for truth, more than in the actual conclusions that he reaches, that McCabe shows himself most truly to be one of Thomas’s brethren. N V

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The Church of the Holy Spirit by Nicholas Afanasiev, trans. Vitaly Permiakov, ed. Michael Plekon (*Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007*), xx + 327.

PERHAPS the reader will have had the experience of a miscommunication that occurs when two parties believe themselves to be talking about the same thing, but it turns out they are each focused on a different

dimension of the thing. For example, both people could enthuse over what a great dinner party it was, but the one might be talking about the pot roast and the table setting, while the other might be talking about the conversation and the fellowship. It takes some time, some attentive listening, and some careful analysis to realize that although the same topic is being named ("dinner party"), actually two different kinds of attention are being applied.

The reader is invited to such an encounter with Nicholas Afanasiev in this book, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*. He will be speaking about the Eucharist and ecclesiology and ministry, but the dimension he is actually focusing on is "[t]he Church [as] an organism filled with grace . . . because she lives and acts by the Spirit. The Church is the place of the Spirit's activity. Without the Spirit there is no life in the Church, no activity, no ministry; in short, there is no Church." This pneumatological assumption leads him to conclude that all members of the Church possess a priestly ministry which finds expression in the local eucharistic assembly, and from this "eucharistic ecclesiology," as it has since come to be called, Afanasiev traces the outlines of the ministry of laics, various specialized ministries, the origins of the episcopacy in the ancient presiding presbyter, and an understanding of the universal Church. He is discussing the Church, and its hierarchical structure, but he is all the time affirming that "the Church has principles of its own" because the Church is not a human organization but a divine establishment.

This work was Afanasiev's doctoral thesis in 1948, but he continued revising it until his death in 1966, and it was only posthumously published in 1971. It is now brought to the English-speaking world in a 2007 translation by Vitaly Permiakov (doctoral student at the University of Notre Dame), having been shepherded into existence by Fr. Michael Plekon (Baruch College of the City University of New York) whose life work consists of mining the riches in the Paris émigré school of Orthodox theologians in the twentieth century. But if this is the first appearance of Afanasiev's book in English, it is not the first appearance of Afanasiev's influence. His original studies were in canon law in Belgrade, until he came to teach at St. Sergius in Paris from 1930–1940. Ordained in that final year, he served as pastor of an Orthodox parish in Tunisia until his return to St. Sergius in 1948. There he was in the circle of Sergius Bulgakov and Cyprian Kern, and the three of them had a profound influence upon Fr. John Meyendorff and Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, who brought to the United States the concept of eucharistic ecclesiology and liturgical theology (*theologia prima*). Afanasiev was furthermore appointed by Patriarch Athenagoras I to be an official ecumenical

observer at the Second Vatican Council. Fr. Aidan Nichols notes that Afanasiev's studies in eucharistic ecclesiology were the only works of an Orthodox theologian to be mentioned in Vatican II's working sessions and drafts, and so embodied in *Lumen Gentium*. This book is the fountainhead of dialogues that have occupied the past century.

The book is an argument, really, a polemic that reminds us that the Church is a holy and spiritual people because they enter it drenched in the Holy Spirit. Afanasiev took to referring to the baptized as "laics" precisely to remind them of this, and the first three chapters concern their royal priesthood, the ordination of laics, and their ministry, successively. The term "laic" seems to be a neologism by Afanasiev, according to a footnote by the translator Permiakov (ch. 1, fn. 4). "Strictly speaking, there is no such word in Russian, at least there was not until Afanasiev. It seems that he coined the word on the basis of Greek to create an analogy to the term 'cleric.' He uses this term so as to connote the 'sacred rank' which the 'laic' is—the 'laic' is not a non-cleric in a modern sense of a 'lay person,' i.e. one not initiated into a sacred order." Permiakov uses "lay person" to translate the Russian *mir'anin* (Greek *biotikos*), but alongside this Afanasiev uses the term *laik* in Russian (Greek *laikos*) in order to assert that the person baptized is "initiated into a sacred clerical order, the royal priesthood of God in Christ. When speaking about laics, Fr. Afanasiev deliberately makes it sound as if he's speaking about a clerical rank, an ecclesiastical office, if you will." There are special ministries within this holy body, of course, but since in baptism Christians receive grace to perform worship (*latreia*), they must be considered consecrated and ordained to this activity of *leitourgia*. (This is not far from Thomas Aquinas's emphasis upon sacramental character giving a new power for taking part in sacramental worship.) This leads Afanasiev to speak about the laity "concelebrating" the Eucharist, since "the eucharist is the *leitourgia* celebrated by God's people gathered in the temple of Christ's body." And since the Church exists through sacramental, administrative, and teaching ministries, Afanasiev can treat each of these in his chapter on the laics.

Chapter four identifies special ministries: the apostle, the evangelist, the prophet and the teacher. "The variety of the gifts of the Spirit not only creates the common ministry of God's people but also the special ministries fulfilled not by all but by a few." Some persons are set apart for building up the body of Christ. The gift of apostleship is bestowed for ministry, and while the ministry of the apostles cannot be repeated or passed on to successors, the apostolic work of ministry is continued. The evangelist continues to preach, for the sake of individual conversion to bring people into the churches founded by the apostles. The prophet

does not add to tradition, but exists for upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. Teachers are learned theologians who are at the service of the Church.

The general principle behind all ministry is that "there is no ministry without gift but no gift without ministry." This is true for ordained ministers, as well, treated in chapters five through seven. Afanasiev does a simultaneous historical and theological analysis of the episcopacy. It is likely that more recent historical scholarship will bring greater clarity and precision, and occasionally a correction, to what he says, but his theological analysis is valuable for concluding that "the structure and order of the Church originate in the eucharistic assembly, the foundation for the Church's entire organization." He will connect Eucharist and episcopacy. "This means that wherever the local Church appears, there the ministry of presiders is established. From this follows one of the fundamental principles of eucharistic ecclesiology: no local church can exist without the ministry of presiders." His own historical reading of the first decades concludes that there was a council of presbyters and among them one senior presbyter had oversight (episcopacy). "The New Testament presbyter-bishops were neither bishops nor presbyters but bishop-presbyters." Although the terms "bishop" and "presbyter" at the outset "did not designate different but the same figures," the one who was first among them eventually received a high priestly ministry, and the monarchical episcopacy was established.

This sets up the conclusions in chapter eight which views all activity in the Church under "the power of love." The Church recognizes the place of law in empirical social life, but essentially grace is the unique mover of all that happens within the Church. "Consequently, the organizing principal in the Church is the Spirit and this excludes every other principle since this would be external to it."

There will be challenges facing the reader because Afanasiev thinks in a way typical of Orthodox theology namely, with antinomy. In Pavel Florensky's study of the concept (*The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*) he defines it thus: "Antinomicalness does not say, 'Either the one or the other is not true.' It also does not say, 'Neither the one nor the other is true.' It only says, 'Both the one and the other are true, but each in its own way. Reconciliation and unity are higher than rationality.'" Because Afanasiev has this antinomical quality of thought, he could be misunderstood by one side and another. Schmemann spoke of the liturgy possessing a cultic antinomy because at the heart of the liturgy there is a cultic expression of the radical abolishment of cult. It looks like a temple, but it is not; he looks like a priest the pagans might recognize, but is not; it looks like a

religious sacrifice, but is much more. All these things—temple, priest, sacrifice—have passed through the hypostatic union.

In a parallel manner, Afanasiev has identified a hierarchical antinomy. Just when he sounds like he is describing the dinner party's pot roast, we discover he is in fact describing something more important. He is describing relationships that do not fit into either the world of law or the world of anarchy, and that is why he will be misunderstood by both the "clericalizer" and the "laicizer." Or, to borrow two of his terms, "church administration was neither aristocratic nor democratic, for it is not the will of man but the will of God through the revelation of the Spirit that is active in the Church." Just when one thinks he is on the side of the laity against the hierarchy, he assumes the apostolic importance of the hierarchy, and one realizes the distinction is a false one. He has been trying to make the false distinction evaporate under the heat of a new theology, a eucharistic theology. All things must pass through the hypostatic union before they are of any value in describing the Church, including the relationship of priest and laic. But, then, this is what theology is about, and what it demands of us. Theology is thinking on the level of the divine, and eucharistic ecclesiology would be thinking about the Church on something other than a human level. Afanasiev moves in a different world. And dislocating our mental patterns is one of the values, and pleasures, of the book. N.V.

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Georges Cottier. *Itinéraire d'un croyant* by Patrice Favre (*Tours, France: Éditions CLD, 2007*), 258 pp.

THIS IS an interesting and pleasant read on a significant Catholic thinker of the second half of the twentieth century, Georges Cardinal Cottier, theologian of the pontifical household under Pope John Paul II and professor of philosophy (emeritus) at the Universities of Geneva and of Fribourg, Switzerland. The reader of this journal should recognize the name Georges Cottier, since, as editor-in-chief of the French edition of *Nova et Vetera*, he is the senior editor of its English edition.

Authored by the religion editor of the newspaper of Fribourg, *La Liberté*, this book is written in the form of an interview, and the questions span the entirety of Cottier's life. Hence the subtitle of the work: *Itinerary of A Believer*. Indeed, the book proposes to serve as "both a biography and . . . a meditation on events and persons met, on God's presence in life

and in the Church" (10), and on this score it more than delivers. The author and interviewer, Patrice Favre, demonstrates a refreshing adeptness in Catholic theological and philosophical thought—refreshing, at least, for those on this side of the Atlantic who suffer under the clumsiness by which inept journalists routinely discuss the most superficial of things Catholic, if not of matters generally religious.

Despite being born and raised in Geneva, the city of Calvin, Georges Cottier grew up with a keen sense of a "grand Catholic culture," thanks in large measure to the influence of his friend and mentor, the great Thomist theologian and the founder of *Nova et Vêtera*, Charles Journet. It is no exaggeration to maintain that Journet's influence stands behind nearly every word penned by Cottier throughout the entirety of his life. During Cottier's collège years, Journet spent each Saturday in Geneva expounding upon the beauty and grandeur of the Catholic faith to interested young Genevan Catholics. From Journet Cottier learned how to resolve the conflict between science and faith—and how his Catholic faith compelled him to oppose the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s. Indeed, Journet's group became such a hotbed of "spiritual resistance in Switzerland" during World War II (24) that even non-Catholics, mostly French refugees, came to listen to Journet. On this score Cottier is resolute: "For me, Nazism and communism belonged to the same order, the same totalitarian state, the same danger for the Church. Journet put us very quickly on guard against anti-semitism, the cult of the Nazi race. . . . There was no doubt in me on these issues" (19).

Cottier emerged as an ardent witness of such "spiritual resistance" during his university studies, which he began in 1941 at the University of Geneva. In his first public lecture to fellow students in December of 1943 at the age of twenty-two, Cottier chose to denounce the closing of the University of Oslo by the Nazis. However, while many of his fellow students fell to the allure of communism in their opposition to Nazism, Cottier was never fooled by the false romanticism by which so many westerners viewed Marxist thought. Denouncing the "cult of violence" integral to Marxism, Cottier delivers one of his many penetrating insights into the Marxist mind: "The Hegelian spirit, in conjunction with a kind of Darwinism, is foundational to Marxism. Marx's history operates like a great animal. The consequence, whether one wishes it or not, is a primacy given to the irrational and to force" (34).

A committed Christian and a reader of Maritain on being, Cottier would not take the bait of another philosophy *du jour* at the French universities: John-Paul Sartre's existentialism: "At bottom," Cottier contends, "Sartre is on the side of the vast current of modern philosophy that considers God

as man's rival. Sartre refuses to accept that he is a creature, since he sees this as a negation of human freedom. The consequence of this rejection is that moral action has no absolute source. Everything is permitted if God doesn't exist: is this not at the heart of today's culture, the idea that everything can evolve, that everything is relative? If I can determine my own values and standards, why can't I change them? This is the key moral problem of today" (39–40).

On July 2, 1945, Cottier took the Dominican habit. Responding to questions related to consecrated life, Cottier offers some spiritual gems that would benefit any religious to ponder anew (43–48): "Poverty is the Gospel! Jesus was poor. The religious lives detached from worldly goods to show that the values of the Kingdom are primary"; "What saves is the knowledge that we [religious] are as weak as others. . . . [W]e [religious] are always inferior to the task. But this [ministry] is the affair of the Holy Spirit, whose servants we are"; "Celibacy allows us to welcome those who suffer particular affective wounds, those who are completely lost. For them our hearts as priests must remain ready to serve. The father of a family cannot open his door to just anyone at any time, but a religious can"; "There is no 'trick' to remaining faithful [to one's religious vows], all one need do is pray!"; "A virtuous act is always a free act. [The vow of obedience] assumes that one *wishes* to obey: I have freely decided to submit my will to a superior. If obedience is not this, it is pure putting on."

In 1946 Cottier was sent to Rome to study under Garrigou-Lagrange, the great Thomist who nonetheless shared some sharp differences with Journet and Maritain (Journet once called Garrigou-Lagrange a "great theologian with a primitive mentality"). Still, Cottier admits to breathing deeply in the air of a revived living Thomism seeking to engage the modern world. This was a very different neo-scholastic Thomism from the one that, nine years before becoming Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger suggested was incapable of dialoguing with our present culture (see *Salz der Erde. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald* [Munich: 1996]). Cottier instead tells of enjoying "the grace of studying St. Thomas directly from the text, from the *Summa* itself" and not simply from the reductive formulaic syntheses of the manuals (55). Like Journet, Cottier believed the manualist tradition exhumed the mystery of God from Thomism by presenting the *Summa* as if it were the Code of Canon Law.

Interested by the religious elements of Marxism, Cottier returned to Geneva to finish his dissertation, subsequently published as *The Atheism of the Early Marx* (*L'athéisme du jeune Marx* [Paris: J.Vrin, 1959]). Not the fruit of philosophical reasoning, Marx's atheism, Cottier argues, was instead the result of a pure willful choice, of a defiant, Promethean rejection of God

in order to make man himself god (57–58). As a consequence of his doctoral research, Cottier became the expert in the Church on Marxism at a time when the Church and the world were most confronted by it. Regarding Marxism Cottier does not mince words: “It is an atheist and a totalitarian system. It denies both God and the human person, in the name of the Party and of the collective” (112).

Participating in the Second Vatican Council as the private theologian of the archbishop of Aix-en-Provence, Cottier played a significant role in the drafting of *Dignitatis Humanae* and of *Nostra Aetate*. He admits that the post-conciliar period has been a trying time for the Church, what with “too many bishops passing a blind eye” to priests “holding the faithful hostage to liturgical improvisations, which is a form of clericalism,” and with too many priests letting “their feet slip off the pedals” in the face of the pressing evangelizing needs of the Church (97–98).

On the controversy surrounding artificial contraception, Cottier discloses that, before the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, he himself saw nothing morally wrong with the birth control pill. However, by his own admission, this was on account of “an inadequate understanding of the science. I thought the pill was a kind of medication that ‘helped nature’ in that it prolonged the woman’s period of infertility, though in truth it blocks the natural process” (188–89). Cottier was also friends with the Swiss Dominican who was secretary of the commission established by Pope Paul VI to examine the morality of artificial contraception. As most know, this commission rendered a favorable judgment on the matter in 1966. Instead, Paul VI went with the opinion of the little known Polish cardinal, Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II. “When the encyclical [*Humanae Vitae*] came out,” Cottier acknowledges, “I immediately saw that I was wrong and why the Pope was right” (192).

Pope John Paul II named Georges Cottier theologian of the pontifical household—the pope’s private theologian, as it were—in 1989 at the age of sixty-five (Cottier had been present for a homily by Wojtyła during the seven hundredth anniversary of the death of Aquinas, at which time he thought to himself, “Too bad he’s Polish, he’d make a good pope!” [124]). He remarks that his work as the papal theologian consisted mostly of checking the content of the documents destined for the Pope’s approval (“never before had a pope written so much!”), among the first of which was the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (“This is a work that the Church *must* use!”). Singling out the great encyclical on the renewal of moral theology, *Veritatis Splendor*, Cottier notes that five or six versions of this document came before his desk before it was finally published in 1993. Cottier wrote his own commentary on the encyclical, *Deviens ce*

que tu es (Become What You Are) (Parole et Silence, 2003), wherein he develops the Pope's efforts at reestablishing the link between truth, the good, and human freedom. In this work he also takes issue with the Darwinian notion that morality is simply the result of an ongoing evolutionary process, and that it is therefore nonsensical to speak of an objective moral law written in the human conscience.

As for *Fides et Ratio*, the first version of which John Paul II himself wrote in 1986 but which was not issued until 1998, the thrust of this encyclical, Cottier observes, consists in its proclamation of reason's ability to know the real, to know with certainty, to know good and evil, and to know God. It seeks to counter the crisis facing truth itself, to reverse the human mind's retreat from the demands of truth and from its ability to attain it—and the ability of faith to come to reason's aid, to lift reason out of its metaphysical crisis, to give reason the certitude of faith (130, 151–52).

Continuing to address the modern spirit, the Genevan Cardinal notes how scientific progress has, for all its advantages, helped distract us from the “real” human drama: the fact that eternity enters into the frailty and brevity of human life. “Man plays out his eternal destiny here below,” Cottier remarks, “and we can lose our souls! God wants all men to be saved, but if my freedom rejects God's love, God will respect my rejection. The human condition is dramatic, but that is our dignity . . . God's goodness is quite different [from that of someone who makes light of our sins], since he went to the extent of giving up his Son on the Cross. This proves that sin is no small affair! Rejecting God's love is no small affair” (214).

The book concludes with some reflections on the challenges facing the Church's attempt at dialogue with Islam (222–24). Cottier firstly points out the problem of Islam's failure to distinguish the spiritual realm from the temporal/political one. Second is Islam's problematic regard for the role of women. Third is Islam's refusal to allow for a critical reading of the Koran. Fourth is the Islamic view that God is totally beyond human knowledge, that God acts in history with a freedom that remains absolutely independent of all rational logic. Fifthly, noting that a developed understanding of the human person marks one of the great contributions of Judaeo-Christianity to the world, Cottier expresses concern over what the absence of such an understanding in Islam spells for religious freedom. And finally, the Cardinal reminds us that Islam has spread by war and conquest since its inception.

On a personal note, I close by noting that I took Fr. Cottier's metaphysics course at the University of Fribourg the year before he was appointed theologian of the pontifical household. What I beheld in the classroom twenty years ago shines forth fully in this book now: a profound

and penetrating spirit, a brilliant mind, and a shining example of a Thomism that engages and challenges contemporary culture. I warmly recommend this book for anyone who can read French and who wishes, even if for a brief couple hundred pages, to sit at the feet of a true master. **N·V**

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