

Book Reviews

Visioning Augustine by John C. Cavadini (*Oxford: Wiley Blackwell*, 2019), xxvi + 322 pp.

THIS VOLUME OF TWELVE ESSAYS by a leading American Catholic theologian brings together a number of analyses of key Augustinian themes from research conducted during the past thirty years. These chapters have already appeared in learned journals before their re-edition here. This collection of essays is occasioned by requests from the author's colleagues and students, as he states in the preface. The publication of these articles in a single volume constitutes an important milestone in the evolution of contemporary Augustinian studies. The strength of Cavadini's approach is his mingling of insights from textual, historical interpretation astride his adoption of a systematic theological perspective. There is also the slightly contrarian (and therefore welcome) impulse to take seriously the views that Augustine actually held, as opposed to the views that are still inaccurately ascribed to him.

The overall impression of this multivalent portrait of Augustine is refreshing and somewhat bracing as well. Nevertheless, Cavadini steers clear of claims that move too far beyond the texts he is working carefully to unveil. As such, his approach is a sober corrective to an overly hermeneutical approach that would over-emphasize his philosophical novelty (e.g.: an existentialist *avant le lettre*) at the expense of his theological specificity. This collection is also a properly academic work, not a general treatment. As such, this book corrects some recent popularizations of Augustine that glossed over the more demanding claims Augustine makes on his readers.

As standalone essays, the book's chapters deal with key themes that preoccupied Augustine, namely the Trinity, sex and the body, the Eucharist, creation, salvation, and the relationship between philosophy and theology. In line with the guild of historical theology, Cavadini shows an interest in the structure of Augustine's arguments. Such a focus yields insights, such as the comparison between *De Trinitate* and *De civitate Dei*. Usually cited for their vast differences in form and argument, Cavadini shows that these two major works actually converge on the nature and value of an apologetic approach while neither ever cedes the category of the revelatory to that of the neo-Platonic as Augustine's intellectual plumbline.

Some surprises emerge nonetheless, such as the idea that mercy is a hermeneutical key for Augustine. This is mentioned in the foreword to the book by Mark Therrien, a former student of Cavadini's, and the author delivers on this claim at several junctures. Some of the best surprises are the asides and pointers to richer insights that appear in the footnotes. Somewhat missing is an attention to Augustine's extensive biblical commentaries, although of course that is determined by the focus on the great contested themes in the *magna opera*: *De civitate Dei*, *Confessiones*, and *De Trinitate*. However, there is some analysis of Augustine's sermons in chapter 5, an effort to probe to what extent Augustine simplifies his portrait of God there, in comparison with his treatment of God in *De Trinitate*. The answer, it turns out, is that he does not simplify: both works share the structure of faith seeking understanding.

One feature of Cavadini's articles is the subtle way he engages in dialectical reasoning when it comes to Augustine's critics. Yet, he foregoes explicitly dialectical engagements in favor of a straightforward engagement with the primary texts. The exceptions to this tendency are few but very telling. One is Cavadini's adroit acknowledgement of Rowan Williams's view of the *imago Dei* as the proper analogy for the Trinitarian relations in God. For Cavadini, the ecclesial location of a converted, faithful person is a corrective to Williams's "over-spiritualized" interpretation of self-transcendence. According to Williams, the assent to true justice and charity is sufficient to identify the faith of the individuals who will make up the *totus Christus* in the fulfillment of time. But, in Cavadini's way of construing it, "true worship" suggests a visible, ecclesial locus for each Christian. Herein lies the anthropological analogate for the Trinitarian life of God.

Another dialectical moment comes with a brief mention of Colin Gunton, whose critical reading of Augustine became a touchstone back in the 1990s, representative of a certain set of Evangelical and Orthodox thinkers who were worried about the influence of neo-Platonism on Augustine and thence the Latin tradition. Sticking to his exegetical brief, Cavadini includes a careful footnote that corrects Gunton's oversight on Augustine's use of language regarding the theory of signs and the difference between the presignified and the signified. Citing the correct translation of the Latin for "signs," Cavadini is able to diagnose Gunton's imposition of the modern distinction between the abstract and the concrete, which actually serves to exaggerate the Platonic character of Augustine's aim. The reason for mentioning such caveats is to point out the fact that Cavadini engages in the struggle for Augustinianism by taking the high road of textual exegesis very seriously. His mind cuts through the meat of ideas sharply and leaves the reader with a picture of Augustine that is more exact

than other efforts to shoehorn Augustine into simpler intellectual moulds.

In choosing to deal with specific themes in specific texts, Cavadini conveys several strong points that belie large swaths of Augustine's historical reception. Take the vice of lust for instance. In chapter 6, which deals with sexual desire, Cavadini sees links between the passion of lust, initiated as an act of will and born of pride, and a complete hamartiology that specifies Augustine's elevated sense of the soul's active involvement in sin. This far more exact, complex analysis stands against the view that sin is a simple fallenness of natural, biological proportions. Yet, while the insight into the way lust works is lucid and accounts for much of what moderns miss, it does not account for what Augustine says at points in his later anti-Pelagian writings about the bodily promptings to sin. Nor does such a position take into account the view expressed, for instance, in the *Enchiridion* that sin has two categorical causes, one of which is ignorance. This does not imply that Cavadini is wrong about lust, but rather that he is almost right. Augustine's intellectual cartography knows many terrains.

What this close attention to Augustine's notion of (willful) passion does do is call out those anemic yet popular misconstruals of Augustine as a figure who hated the body. Such views, epitomized by the critiques of Elaine Pagels or Peter Brown (named by Cavadini), wish that "more positive" views of sexuality had prevailed. Cavadini unmasks such blithe criticisms thus: "Augustine had very positive sentiments toward sexuality, but not toward what he called 'lust' in its specifically sexual sense" (111). This sense of positive sexuality relates to the theme of another chapter that is devoted to the sacramentality of marriage. Here, Cavadini deftly plays off Augustine's fulsome notion of nuptial desire over against the far narrower notion of sacramentality in Chrysostom, a notion that is tied inextricably to the role of the husband exclusively. Deploying the nuptial analogy lightly, Cavadini is convincing in showing that, akin to Pope John Paul II's theology of the body (properly understood, something subject to much confusion), Augustine's depiction of the sacrament of marriage is not a blessing of desire, but an admonition for self-gift.

On a couple of occasions, Cavadini stretches hermeneutic credulity somewhat, such as the chapter dealing with the Eucharistic thrust of the *Confessiones*. It is unclear to me why the broader sense of ecclesial form is an insufficient category for grasping Augustine's sense of God's mercy. At least in that text, as Cavadini admits at the outset of the chapter, the Eucharist is barely mentioned. There are only a few occasions such as this in which the speculative or the homiletic value of theology carries Cavadini beyond the bounds of Augustine's own concerns. This is not necessarily a detraction to the volume, but clarity about where exegesis of Augustine's

text ends and creative interpretations begin should be more forthcoming.

The matter of the differences between the earlier and the later Augustine has been an interpretive conundrum for centuries, and it is one area that Cavadini leaves relatively untouched despite the occasional intriguing reference to the *Retractationes*. What Cavadini does handle extremely well is the relationship between philosophy and theology. According to Augustine, this interdisciplinary relationship reflects both the insufficiency of philosophy alongside its paradoxical necessity, as a heuristic. The *visio* of God, granted by God's grace, is—in effect—a response to this heuristic. Cavadini takes Augustine in *De civitate Dei* XI to mean that “the Platonists may know the destination to which we must travel, but faith provides a pathway to the God of human beings through the human being who was God” (289–90).

This metaphor of vision as applied to God is here played up in the book's title with respect to the theology of Augustine, and it is a good one, considering the extent of Augustine's own development of themes like the beatific vision and illumination. Nevertheless, those themes are not treated in this volume, and neither are some other great themes such as free will, predestination, or original sin, despite appearances in passing. That is to say, this book does not offer a comprehensive treatment. It is more a series of brilliant rejoinders on precise, interpretive matters of Augustine's theologically dense writings.

It has been said recently that Augustine is being rediscovered as the muse for understanding religious experience for the entire Western tradition. This may be the case, but the theological framework of that journey of faith cannot be elided, and this volume testifies to that imperative. There are competing views of Augustine afoot in the academy more broadly, but Cavadini presents by far the most plausible of them, which is not to say that there are not contradictions or even aporias to be found in his writing. But, in this volume at least, we are privy to the lucid results that come from the close engagement of historical with systematic theology. The philosopher's Augustine has not been banished, but the limits of philosophical Augustinianism are nowhere clearer than in this careful, deeply informed set of essays that gives us a more visible sense of Augustine's mapped horizon.

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The Achievement of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Introduction to His Trilogy by Matthew Levering (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019*), xxii + 253 pp.

MATTHEW LEVERING is tired of the fighting between Thomists and Balthasarians, and he is calling for a truce. As a performative enactment of peace, he has written a book about Hans Urs von Balthasar that says almost nothing bad about its subject. To do this, he has to steer clear of the meatier parts of Balthasar's trilogy (the *Glory of the Lord*, the *Theo-Drama*, and the *Theo-Logic*), which contain ideas that he has previously critiqued and (he gives fair warning) will continue to do so. Nevertheless, this book is not a pabulum of a thousand, blooming, theological flowers but rather a sympathetic treatment of how Balthasar grappled with key modern ideas.

After the insightful foreword by Cyril O'Regan, Levering states his irenic goal in the introduction: He has written his book "for theologically educated readers who mistrust von Balthasar *or* who mistrust von Balthasar's critics" (15). He proceeds by means of the inspired idea to focus on the first volume of each part of the trilogy. This allows Levering to zero in on the foundational ways Balthasar will treat the transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth respectively in each part.

A further happy inspiration (perhaps suggested by Edward Oakes's outstanding *Pattern of Redemption*) is to connect each part of the trilogy with three major modern thinkers with whom Balthasar is in dialogue: Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche respectively. Levering reads the *Glory of the Lord* as a "Kantian critique of Kant," the *Theo-Drama* as a "Hegelian critique of Hegel," and the *Theo-Logic* as a "Nietzschean critique of Nietzsche." Here the book clearly states the limits of what it will accomplish and even, with an excess of modesty, denies being the important endeavor that it is.

In the following three main chapters of the book, he provides an overview of the relevant modern thinker, followed by a summary of Balthasar's introductory volume. While doing so, he calls attention in particular to the moments in which Balthasar agrees with or argues with his modern interlocutors. Levering praises Balthasar for his ability to listen to modern concerns while keeping a critical distance from the aspects of modern thought that are opposed to the Gospel. These summaries are for the most part accurate and deceptively simple; Levering has absorbed an enormous amount of material that he presents clearly in comparatively few pages. Occasionally the summaries feel a little too much like lists of bullet points rather than a coherent treatment of themes, but this approach has the advantage of thoroughness.

In the first chapter, Levering tackles the theological aesthetics presented in *Glory of the Lord*, in contrast to Kant. It is well-known that Balthasar ordered his trilogy in opposition to Kant's three critiques. Rather than begin with truth (more accurately, with the mind's structures) as Kant did in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Balthasar began with beauty. Levering uses a clue from Balthasar's *Epilogue*, the one-volume conclusion to the trilogy, to the effect that Kant's transcendental apperception provides a way to think about the unity of the experience of form (*Gestalt*) that is central to Balthasar's aesthetics. Yet, as Levering demonstrates, Balthasar believes that "the unchanging ground that unites all appearances, all of nature, is divine triune self-surrendering love manifested in Christ," rather than Kant's synthetic unity of self-consciousness (79).

In following through on this clue from the *Epilogue*, Levering makes an original contribution to understanding Balthasar's relation to Kant. I was surprised, however, that Levering did not focus on the more relevant issue in Balthasar's aesthetics, namely, the status of form (*Gestalt*). Balthasar alluded to this point of contention with Kant in a famous interview, when he stated, "[Karl] Rahner has chosen Kant, or if you will, Fichte, the transcendental approach. And I have chosen Goethe, my field being German literature."

At first, this might seem like mere eccentricity, or, worse, anti-intellectual romanticism. But Balthasar explains by highlighting "The form [*Gestalt*], the indissoluble, unique, organic, developing form—I am thinking of Goethe's poem 'The Metamorphosis of Plant'—this form, which Kant does not know what to do with, even in his aesthetics."¹ Here Balthasar is presenting a fundamental dichotomy: Is form something that the person generates by the spontaneous activity of the mind? Or is form primarily received by the person? The first approach is Kant's, the second Goethe's.

For Kant, form is located in the structures of the mind, in particular in its *a priori* regulative categories, and *not* in the matter of the appearances (see *Critique of Pure Reason*, A20/B34). For Balthasar, drawing on Goethe, form is presented as *Gestalt*, found genuinely in the thing itself and expressed in the thing's appearances. *Gestalt* is first and foremost received; it comes to one from the outside. While there is an active role

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Geist und Feuer, Michael Albus: Ein Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Herder-Korrespondenz* 30 (1976), 75–76, quoted in Peter Henrici, S.J., "The Philosophy of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 149–67, at 154.

for the knowing subject (something Balthasar treats in the first volume of the *Theo-Logic*, as Levering accurately presents it), truth is truly a dramatic encounter with the beauty of an other—and, ultimately, with the divine Other. It is not a (Kantian) transcendental monologue, but a drama in which the transcendentals are fully in play in extramental reality. This receptive stance vis-à-vis the world is the most fundamental difference between Kant and Balthasar.

In the second chapter, Levering tackles the titanic figure of Hegel as he appears in the *Theo-Drama*. Levering acknowledges the previous and more encyclopedic work of Cyril O'Regan on this topic, and to a lesser degree Ben Quash, with whom, however, Levering has interpretive disagreements. Hegel is so fundamental to the *Theo-Drama* precisely because the drama transitions from the more contemplative and metaphysical stance of the aesthetics to the historical reality of the triune God's action in Christ for our salvation. Hegel is the great modern Trinitarian thinker of freedom within history (prior, at least, to Balthasar, as this reader would argue!), and his project is so close to Balthasar's that it must be addressed.

To Levering's presentation I would add that Balthasar in many ways accepted the terms of the importance of the Hegelian subject-object encounter, which is fundamental to all the parts of the trilogy, as is also the question of freedom that arises from this encounter. Yet Balthasar judged Hegel to be undramatic, as Levering observes, because ultimately there is room for only one player on the Hegelian stage, namely, absolute spirit. I would note as well that much of what Balthasar rejected in Hegel derives from the latter's particular reading of Luther: the ultimate unfreedom of the finite vis-à-vis the infinite, as well as the interpretation of the inner-Trinitarian relations in terms of conflict. This chapter concludes with a satisfying summary of many important points in the first volume of the *Theo-Drama*, a book that gets insufficient scholarly attention.

Chapter 3 is a treatment of Balthasar's *Theo-Logic*, which concerns truth, in light of Nietzsche's reorientation of truth away from concepts and toward the will to power. Balthasar granted to Nietzsche the importance of truth "for life" (and here Levering notes in passing another significant dialogue partner throughout the whole trilogy, namely, Martin Heidegger). Nevertheless, Balthasar repeatedly insisted on the necessity of a will to loving service in the action of knowing, a stance that for Nietzsche could only be an anti-human expression of sickness.

Levering gives some attention to the question of the relation of love and truth. Without putting it in these terms, Levering wonders whether Balthasar has an excessively Franciscan prioritizing of will over truth. Levering comes down in support of Balthasar's fundamental conviction

that only the lover can truly know. This discussion could be furthered by noting a closely related idea, namely, "freedom." For Balthasar (like some of his contemporaries, such as John Paul II), "freedom" does not refer solely to the faculty of the will, but rather is an outgrowth of both intellect and will. Freedom applies to the whole human person. "Finite freedom" at its most basic evokes the original created reality of being not-God and of being given a metaphysical "space" of one's own, dependent upon God but not monistically identical with the divine. In this sense, it echoes while correcting the *eros* of freedom explored by the German idealists, that is, spirit's striving for infinity. This striving is both intellectual and volitional.

In the concluding "Epilogue," Levering's detached tone is replaced with a mild *cri de cœur* concerning the needlessly polemical stances of the neo-Scholastic and "nouvelle théologie" schools toward each other: "When two sides that agree with each other in their fundamental faith commitments . . . blame *each other* for the prevalence of classical liberal theology in the Catholic theological academy, then something has gone badly wrong" (226).

Levering notes the impatience of Balthasar and many of his fellow travelers with the neo-Scholasticism in which they were trained. Indeed, Balthasar would complain that the radiant mystery of Christ was reduced in Christology courses to a thorny hedge of heresies and their defeat. Against Balthasar's dismissal, Levering defends the much-reviled neo-Scholastic manuals and their role in seminary formation. "A more differentiated reading of the neo-scholastic theologians of the first forty years of the twentieth century shows a number of very bright lights, despite the inevitable existence of flaws in neo-scholastic approaches" (208). Indeed, this rebalancing is needed. Whatever their failings, post-Tridentine and modern scholastic thinkers engaged a difficult polemical situation and made many contributions to philosophy and theology. And textbooks are perhaps not the best genre on which to base judgments of entire schools of thought.

Nevertheless, Levering's presentation of Balthasar's critique of neo-Scholasticism omits mention of the ways in which Balthasar persistently appropriated and even developed the *philosophia perennis* he was taught. Thomas Aquinas comes in for criticism in various theological matters, but metaphysically Balthasar was fundamentally a Thomist, if an atypical one. The philosophical skeleton of his entire theological project in the trilogy is the analogy of being: Between created being and divine Being, there is a similarity with a greater dissimilarity. Thus, creaturely beauty, goodness, and truth can be an echo of the divine Being that is beauty, goodness, and truth itself. Balthasar bolstered this analogical structure by tying it closely to the *distinctio realis* between essence and existence. "Essences are limited,

but Being is not. That division, the 'real distinction' of St. Thomas, is the source of all the religious and philosophical thought of humanity."²

Because of the real distinction, the creaturely side of the analogy of being is so inescapably marked by finitude and contingency that it seems unable to image the infinite. Indeed, Karl Barth indicated it could not. In response, Balthasar's theological project depends upon a philosophical concern that is indebted to Aristotelian thought: how to justify the existence of finite beings metaphysically, over against a Plotinian tendency to depreciate multiplicity as a fall from the primordial One. As he put it in *Glory of the Lord*, "nature . . . is good in its radical otherness to God."³ Balthasar finds the source of the goodness of finite otherness—of "not" being God—in the triune God himself: "the 'not' ('the Son is *not* the Father,' and so forth) possesses an infinitely positive sense."⁴

In this way, Balthasar's *analogia entis* finds its ultimate ground in the distinction and unity of the Trinity. This Trinitarian metaphysics is certainly not a conventionally Thomistic approach, but neither is it conceivable outside of Thomistic categories.

In any case, Levering's call to mutual respect is both deeply Thomistic and thoroughly Balthasarian. Both great thinkers had synthetic minds, capable of appreciating many diverse schools and thinkers. In Balthasarian terms, both are valid theological "styles" that enrich the Church. Perhaps this book will be the beginning of a more fruitful dialogue that leaves behind heresy hunting and contemptuous dismissals. N.V

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² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 112.

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 339.

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 2, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 261.

Autism and the Church: Bible, Theology, and Community by Grant Macaskill (*Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019*), 239 pp.

GRANT MACASKILL HAS WRITTEN one of the first books seriously examining autism from a theological perspective. Obviously, much of this is pastoral theology, as salvation is essentially the same independent of neurotype. As an openly autistic Catholic priest who has also thought about these questions, I read this book from a unique perspective. Some reflections require contextualization in evangelical Christianity, of which Macaskill is a part, but in general, his reflections are applicable to Catholicism as well.

This review will cover four main topics in Macaskill's work: his biblical exegesis, analysis of autism, practical suggestions, and views on human sexuality.

Macaskill admits near the beginning the challenge he has with the theology of autism: "The biblical writers had no category that matched the modern definition of autism, which means that we cannot find texts or passages that obviously inform our thinking about it" (2). He repeats this at the beginning of his section on the Bible, warning against proof-texting (43–44) and proposing that the Bible offers a *framework* for theological engagement with autism.

Reflecting on the Sermon on the Mount, Macaskill notes that Jesus does not choose examples from what is useful for production (harvest) or can be used in sacrifice (sheep). Instead, "his examples involve things with no utility or value (grass and lilies) and things which would be considered unclean (ravens), and he indicates that God cares for and clothes these things in ways that exceed any human ascription of worth" (78). This provides a framework to value people, particularly those on the spectrum, as God does not value people for mere pragmatic abilities in religion or social life. Macaskill repeats this emphasis on God's valuation: "The very core of the gospel story involves a recognition that God loves the unlovely, the things that are generally considered difficult to love and that are typically treated with contempt, and makes them pivotal to a work of salvation that itself centers on a moment of extreme unloveliness" (80).

Macaskill concludes from studying 1 Corinthians: "The church is not a safe place just because in is the church. It is a safe space when the values of God's kingdom are straightforwardly implemented and applied to the welfare of each member" (97). In a Catholic view, where one can be more or less fully representative of the Church (Mary being the perfect model of the Church), I think we could say that implementing the values of God's kingdom is becoming more fully the Church.

Macaskill sees accommodations like sensory-friendly Masses in Romans 14 and 15. He uses similar principles to those that Paul employs in describing the “weaker” and “stronger.” These chapters “involve very specific applications of the principles of unity and value” (118). Macaskill explores how the primacy of God’s election bears upon value judgments regarding those who require others to help them. We tend to assume that the weaker brother in Romans is deficient compared to the stronger, but Macaskill questions this as a prejudice on our part. He recalls Paul’s point that God chooses the weak, and Paul’s use of the analogy of the body, where weak and strong are equally part of the body (119–20). These Pauline texts should lead us to value those who struggle, such as autistics.

In disability literature, there is currently a debate between a medical model of disability (the disability is disabling in itself) and the social model (the disability is disabling insofar as society does not make room for it). In autism, there is a related movement called neurodiversity: it emphasizes that autistic brains are primarily different not defective, without denying autism is disabling. Macaskill addresses these issues, taking a balanced approach with which I generally agree: “The positive significance of diversity can be affirmed alongside the acknowledgement that autism can have genuinely disabling effects, which are often specific to context. More subtly, this can lead to reflection on the extent to which the ‘disabling’ of autistic persons is a function of the world in which they live, which is constructed around the preferences of the neurotypical” (25).

Macaskill also confronts how the Church itself, unfortunately, can be the source of such social disability: “Within the church, we often form a sense of inclusion through ‘normal’ social practices, and those same practices influence the ways in which we ascribe relative value to other Christians” (100). Obviously, autistic Christians often are socially awkward and fail to measure up to normal socializing. He notes that inclusion that depends upon normal social practices is not the way of Jesus. Jesus chose things that others despised as part of his work, surrounding himself with tax collectors and sinners, and allowing immigrants and prostitutes to be listed in his genealogy.

Macaskill challenges the evangelical tendency to make salvation depend upon a conscious experience of receiving salvation at the moment one accepts Jesus. He aligns himself more closely with a Catholic understanding of infant baptism. He states, “‘Belonging’ to the church . . . is something that is constituted outside of our own consciousness by our union with Christ” (108).

He goes on to make an important point regarding autism: “At the heart of so much that is difficult in the experience of autism is the need to find

some kind of control over the world in which we live" (160). Obviously, as Jesus is the Lord of history, our control will always be limited. Autistics can do much within that limited control: we can control our sensory input or our social situation, which can help us flourish as Christians. Later, he notes, "We should remember that Christian ethics embrace the whole of life and are oriented toward the flourishing of the believer in Christ" (183).

Macaskill wants autistics to use things like our precise use of language to reflect on the Bible: "Those with autism might read the Bible in a way that is particularly constructive and that may be helpful to others" (186).

Not surprisingly, Macaskill supports accommodating autistics in the Church. He begins with the modern expectation in many evangelical circles: a Bible Study, then service, then a social. He explains that the first Christians did not have such liberty to schedule their Sunday, since many were either hired laborers before Sunday was a holiday, or else were slaves. It is likely today that an autistic member can only manage to come for the hour of worship (Mass for us Catholics), but that does not take anything away from their Christians identity (123). In this regard, Macaskill accurately notes how exhausting social gatherings (even Mass) can be for autistics: "Sensory and social experiences are often exhausting for autistic people and, consequently, also for those who care for them. They may enjoy them and value the fact that they participated in them, but they may need to recover from the experience in ways that others do not" (124).

He observes sadly regarding the experience of autistics in the Church: "Many autistic individuals, or their families, will testify that fellow Christians have failed to bear all things or endure all things, and have not been kind. This is something of which we must repent" (155). We all need to help overcome this tendency to isolate Christians with irregular traits.

When dealing with autistics at Church, Macaskill notes, "it is important to distinguish 'adaptation' from 'camouflaging,' which merely masks a problem by superficially imitating the behaviors of others in order to fit in to their expectations" (156). Indeed, when one reads online about the experiences of autistics—especially those diagnosed later in life—this "camouflaging" comes up regularly. Often the exhaustion from this camouflaging, or else the inability to maintain it in a particular situation, leads to a diagnosis.

Macaskill goes on to emphasize, "true adaptation involves more than just masking behaviors in order to fit in; it involves addressing the things that keep us from flourishing" (156). This is a key point when considering things like sensory-friendly Masses for autistics and for others with sensory issues: they are to help us flourish in Mass, even if we can grind through an ordinary Mass with difficulty. After all, as Macaskill argues,

“the goal of our flourishing is not to become better versions of ourselves, as in classical virtue theory, but to inhabit and embody the moral identity of Christ, to become radically different persons” (157). The Mass or other liturgies exist not just to make us more virtuous but to accomplish a radical transformation.

Macaskill makes a very good point about unity: “Our salvation and our unity are a function of our shared union with Christ, not our agreement on moral or doctrinal issues” (177). However, he uses it as a way to argue for including Christians with radically divergent views on sexual ethics in the Church, which is problematic. He takes the image of the Peter’s vision of the unclean animals (Acts 11), a vision that led to his welcoming gentile Christians, and applies it to how we should think about sexual morality (178). Thus he argues, “The ‘biblical evidence’ is limited and is subject to interpretation; both sides can claim to be ‘biblical’” (179). In Catholic theology, this is not an issue, as we have the magisterium to help guide us, and we can use the whole anthropological vision of Scripture, as that elucidated by John Paul II, to aid in understanding passages.

When commenting upon Paul’s preference for the celibate state, Macaskill uses it to argue against a creation order in the Old Testament: “For those who view marriage as part of the creational order, the affirmation of singleness is a dramatically countercultural move” (181). The Catholic vision, including magisterium and a wider anthropological perspective, makes it clear which Old Testament laws are universal.

Overall, Macaskill has provided a commendable first attempt at situating autism in theology. He accurately defeats the kind of attitude that sees autism as some kind of curse to try to exorcise. He accepts autistic members of the body of Christ for who we are. He sees biblical examples that can apply to us. He grasps many general principles for accommodating autistics that Christian groups can adapt to their situations.

However, his reflections are a first attempt, not a final word. I think we need to continue reflecting on disability in general and autism in specific, as there is much more to draw both from the Bible and from a theological anthropology based on the Bible. For example, how does one adapt spiritual theology to the autistic mind? How can we inculturate catechesis to an autistic mind? Or how can we think of the word alone without non-verbal aspects, given that Jesus is the Logos?

Let me conclude with two points Macaskill himself makes in the conclusion. First, “As we participate in the gospel, we are called to repent of [ascribing value to people based on perceive social capital] and embrace a divine perspective on value, through the Spirit’s renewal of our mind. ‘From now on, we regard no one according to the flesh’ (2 Cor 5:16, my

translation)” (192). Second, we need to avoid the tendency to defend the place of the disabled or the different “in a way that falls back unwittingly into a kind of utilitarianism” (192). Individual autistics are valuable in the Church because we are humans, not primarily or solely on the basis of what we can do. N.V.

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Jesus and the Last Supper by Brant Pitre (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015*) xiv + 590 pp.

“THE PROBLEM OF THE LORD’S SUPPER is the problem of the life of Jesus.” With Schweitzer’s own words, Brant Pitre steps into “the problem” of the Last Supper. Anyone who has waded into the hundred-plus year “Quest(s)” for the historical Jesus quickly understands that of all Gospel traditions, the Last Supper is the quintessential fault line upon which much of the historical-critical ground quakes. Those who have weighed in on the matter read like a who’s who of biblical scholars: from early twentieth century giants, such as like Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultman, and Martin Dibelius; to mid-century thought leaders such as Joachim Jeremias, Raymond Brown, and John Meier; to more recent voices like James Dunn, Dominic Crossan, Bart Ehrman, Dale Allison, and N. T. Wright.

For the most part, the questers have landed squarely on the skeptical side of the fault line. (Although, the deeper one wades into the Quest(s), the more evident it becomes that there is unending bickering among apparently like-minded scholars). The German school of Jesus scholarship, if one can describe it as such, put Jesus at odds with the first-century Judaism from which he emerged from (go figure).

Instead, such approaches insisted that the closest parallels to—and the most significant influences upon—the Gospels lie not with the Jewish Scriptures, nor the Jerusalem Temple, but with the broader Greco-Roman world in which Judaism lived, and moved, and had its being. Today, the Jewishness of Jesus has returned to the forefront, and is “universally recognized,” as Pitre indicates (3). The Hellenism-to-Judaism paradigm shift largely occurred in the wake of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947), and was gradually nudged forward from the likes of E. P. Sanders, Wright, and Evangelical scholars like Craig Evans, and more recently, Michael Bird.

Confessionally, Pitre is Roman Catholic, and although it does not

intrude in the scholarship here, it is worth noting. Put bluntly, one questions where Catholic scholars have been on this issue over the past few decades. Indeed, Pitre's monograph of more than five hundred pages is the first serious foray into this crucial biblical topic in what feels like ages. And its presence is a welcome addition to contemporary Jesus studies.

Pitre's monograph is commended for its clear and unambiguous methodology. Rather than sifting through page after page of exegetical minutiae before one can sort out a scholar's point about the historical plausibility of a Gospel pericope, Pitre is upfront. At the outset of *Jesus and the Last Supper*, he lays out four primary questions: (1) Are the words and deeds of Jesus at the Last Supper historically plausible in a Jewish context? (2) What does the Last Supper reveal about Jesus's self-understanding? (3) How does the Last Supper fit in Jesus's overall eschatological outlook? (4) What does the Last Supper reveal about Jesus's intentions toward the community of the disciples?

These are smart questions, ambitious in scope yet not over-reaching. Such inquiries are sorely needed, and Pitre raises them precisely because of their neglect in contemporary scholarship. Clearly, Pitre is committed to delving into questions about the Last Supper traditions within the framework of Second Temple Judaism. Yet, it is not solely within a Jewish context that the study unfolds. Rather, Pitre anchors the discussion in what he calls the "triple contexts" of ancient Judaism, the life of Jesus (and the historical *ekklesia* he founded), and the matrix of early Christianity.

Without apology, Pitre's method is not dependent upon consensus of the Synoptic problem, resting more tenuously than ever upon the "two source hypothesis" of Markan priority and the enigmatic "Q" source. Instead, he builds upon Sanders's approach, who, in *Jesus and Judaism*, articulated this overlapping, threefold model. Helpfully, the locus of Pitre's own method involve assessing the *plausibility* of the Last Supper traditions across these three horizons (34–52).

Over the remainder of the book, Pitre tackles the aforementioned question. Employing a modified version of Sanders's approach, he breathes new life into the stale state of the contemporary quests for the historical Jesus. Strikingly, Pitre expands Sanders's approach, weighing data in both a "for" and "against" manner, as it concerns historical plausibility. Previously, the approach of most Jesus scholars only worked "in *one direction*—to authenticate evidence" (45). Thus, Pitre's approach is more holistic, and actually more historically rigorous than many earlier "questers."

Another innovation is the introduction of a new vocabulary in historical Jesus research. Jesus studies have tended to operate in one of two directions. On the one hand are those that try to reconstruct the *ipsissima verba*

Jesu (“exact words of Jesus”) which, as Pitre admits, is a daunting task. Even a cursory review of any number of “Synoptic parallels” often reveals slight but very real differences between the evangelists in their presentation of a given pericope. As Pitre puts it, the evangelists “do not seem bent on giving us anything like the exact words of Jesus,” as the Gospels are “not stenographs,” but closer to ancient *bioi*, that is, biographies (46). On the other hand are scholars who employ another approach, which aims at discovering the *ipsissima vox Jesu*, that is, the “exact voice of Jesus.” This too is problematic, and hard to nail down, yet far too many studies sift through endless data, trying to reconstruct the “primitive form” of a Jesus saying. In Pitre’s assessment, this approach over-emphasizes form over the substantial meaning of the words themselves.

Pitre’s approach is somewhat innovative here, a kind of third option, which he deems the *substantia verba Jesus*, that is, *the substance of the words of Jesus*. As he bluntly states, he is “not looking for the *ipsissima anything*” (48). Readers will have to decide for themselves if Pitre’s method yields more or less insight of the historical details of the Last Supper. And yet, by the conclusion of the volume, his approach does seem to expose inconsistencies in the *ipsissima* methods of inquiry. As he points out, even asking the question “of whether ‘Jesus intended to found a church’ smacks of historical anachronism, and in no small part *it has been discarded as a question unsuited to Jesus research and more fitted to systematic theology*” (516, emphasis added).

As a volume, *Jesus and the Last Supper* is comprised of six extensive chapters, many in excess of one hundred pages. Each chapter could nearly stand as an independent essay. Yet, given the careful methodology, and the overall thesis of the book, they are brought together and cohere as a careful, stepwise account of the Last Supper.

Chapter 1 (1–52) lays out “The Problem of the Last Supper” and, as indicated, establishes the author’s methodological approach. In this opening chapter, Pitre also unveils the thesis of the book as a whole, and he is direct about this, too. When all of the data of the Last Supper is carefully assessed, the author suggests that “Jesus saw himself *the new Moses* who would inaugurate the long awaited *new exodus*, set in motion by a *new Passover*, bring back the miracle of the *manna from heaven*, and *gather the twelve tribes* of Israel into the *heavenly and eschatological kingdom of God*—all by means of his sacrificial death and the *prophetic sign* of his death that he performed at *the Last Supper*” (3; emphases added).

Chapter 2 (53–147) immediately delves into the discussion of Jesus as “the New Moses.” In keeping with the “triple contexts” of his Sanders-like method, Pitre examines the relevant data from the standpoint of Second

Temple Judaism, Jesus's own life, and the early church. This chapter, like the whole of the book, is amply annotated, with reams of data supplied from antiquity, as well as pertinent studies in the field of the Gospels and historical Jesus research.

Pitre's handling of the Sinai traditions, especially concerning the "life" that is in the blood—and therefore, to be strictly avoided (see: Lev 17:10–12; Deut 12:15–16)—is rich and engaging. Happily, Pitre again takes up the mysterious *lehem panim* ("bread of the presence") in much more robust detail than he did in his earlier, more popular volume, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (2011). Here, he engages in a close comparison of the Bread of the Presence (Exod 24–25; Lev 24) and the Institution Narratives in the Synoptics and Paul (Matt 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; 1 Cor 11). Near the end of the chapter, Pitre builds upon the work of Jesus scholar Crispin Fletcher-Louis, bringing together his insights on the *lehem panim* with Fletcher-Louis' work on Jesus as priest. Here, Pitre boldly suggests that Jesus's action at the Last Supper is priestly and messianic, and that he was "both instituting and distributing to his disciples *the new bread and new wine of the presence*" (143, emphasis added).

Chapter 3 develops another theme Pitre dealt with in the earlier, shorter monograph, that of the "New Manna" of the New Moses (148–250). Here, Jewish manna traditions are examined, along with the brief Melchizedek texts of the Jewish Scriptures (Gen 14; Ps 110). The crux of the chapter deals with the text(s) of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4), as it pertains to the New Exodus. Here, a fascinating array of ancient texts are introduced, many of which pertain to the forgiveness of debt and the return of Jews to ancestral lands. Over *fifty* pages of the chapter are dedicated to Jesus's Bread of Life Discourse in the Capernaum synagogue. In the end, Pitre concludes from the evidence that "the substance of the Capernaum teaching [*substantia verba Jesu*] in John 6:48–66 is in fact historically plausible as deriving from Jesus during his public ministry in Galilee" (250).

Chapter 4 takes up another puzzle about the Last Supper, that of its "date" (251–373). After explaining the "apparent contradiction" that exists between the Synoptic Gospels and John, Pitre explores four possible solutions: one from the Essene community and its literature; two more that preference either the Synoptics or John; and the one he advocates, that he refers to as the "Passover Hypothesis." Space does not permit a detailed discussion, but Pitre's mastery of the issues, and the pertinent texts, is skillful. His Passover Hypothesis remedies the issue through, in his view, a better grasp of the terminology involved. Even if one does not agree with his conclusion, the essay redefines the way that the issue should have

been—and will be dealt in subsequent scholarship.

Chapters 5 and 6 round out the volume with fresh discussions of issues that have been stalled out: the “New Passover” as it emerges out of Judaism (374–443) and the “Eucharistic Kingdom of God” (444–512). These chapters will likely generate some disagreements among readers. They are also some of the richest and exciting discussions in historical Jesus scholarship in many years. In sum, Pitre’s expansive volume is a tour-de-force treatment of the all-important words of Institution, the Last Supper. His even hand, firm grasp of both primary sources and relevant scholarship, and bold assertions combine to make this a seminal contribution in contemporary Jesus studies. Moreover, Pitre has contributed a salient method—one that will hopefully be advanced by future scholars. This further cements its place as a seminal study of the early twenty-first century, and one not be overlooked. 

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