

Book Reviews

The Virtues, or the Examined Life by Romanus Cessario, OP (*New York: Continuum, 2002*), vii + 202 pp.

THIS BOOK is part of a multilingual theology-textbook series known as the “Handbooks of Catholic Theology.” The AMATECA Foundation (*L’Associazione manuali di Teologia Cattolica*) sponsors this series, which includes approximately twenty-two volumes in ten different languages, and now, via *Continuum* offers five theology texts on various subjects to the English-speaking world. The series points to the theologies of Balthasar and De Lubac as “roots . . . guaranteeing the identity of the individual volumes.”

The volume under review here, as the title suggests, is dedicated to moral theology. Unique to this present volume among others within the “virtue renewal” is its explicit theological commitment. Those intrigued by the revival of virtue theory among both Catholic and Protestant theologians and philosophers—but unhappy with the way the “revivalists” have disembodied Thomas’s virtue-theory from its theological backdrop—will find a friend in Fr. Cessario. From beginning to end, this volume remains methodologically committed to the work of theology. This is not to say that Cessario does his moral theology in a vacuum devoid of nature or of a philosophical foundation; on the contrary, he affirms the value of “authentic human knowledge” (5) within the context of the Christian faith. But, consistent with both the data of revelation and the theological tradition of the Church, Cessario presents a morality of virtue in harmony with its theological fonts and cognizant of man’s eternal destiny. Hence, Cessario unabashedly affirms the uniqueness of the Christian moral life—as Christian. Fr. Cessario explains that:

This means that without an effective union with Christ, no human person can in practice achieve the perfection of the moral life that conduces to beatific fellowship with the Trinity. . . . In other terms, only the person who embraces a life of Christian virtue lives fully according to the norm of moral truth that Christ, the “image of the invisible

God,” communicates to the world, and so in Christ achieves the perfection of his or her human nature. (4)

Consequently, for Cessario, the life of virtue within the Christian framework is “virtuous” precisely because it is a life directed toward the perfection, completion, and fulfillment of human nature, which through grace culminates in the beatific vision in heaven. This commitment to offer a true “theology” of virtue enables Cessario to present a moral theology that does not sacrifice the overall unified nature of *sacra doctrina*. Similar to the *secunda pars* of Thomas’s *Summa theologiae*, no explicit “Treatise on Christ” can be found within this book. Yet, also analogous to the *Summa*, and unfortunately not frequently pointed out, nearly everything about the Christian moral life found in this book can be traced back to Christ. The infusion of grace, the possibility of the Gifts of the Holy Spirits, the Beatitudes, and so on, are all intimately connected with the life of virtue and depend explicitly on the saving value of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Thus this work dedicated to moral theology, as a part of *sacra doctrina*, can only be appreciated within the panoply of the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and the ecclesial (*communio*) nature of Christian existence. As Cessario succinctly intimates, “Christian faith determines ethical issues. And so the virtues of the Christian life are among those visible realities that find their fullness in Christ” (4).

Consistent with his theological commitments and Thomistic understanding of virtue, Cessario structures this work around seven chapters, dedicating one chapter to each of the three theological and four cardinal virtues. Refreshingly aware of St. Thomas’s own “theo-logical” ordering of the *Summa theologiae*, Cessario discusses the three theological virtues first, and presents the four cardinal virtues in the final four chapters. Moreover, when applicable, each chapter includes a discussion of the Gift of the Holy Spirit that corresponds to the virtue under discussion.

When Cessario passes from his discussion of the theological virtues to the cardinal virtues, he doesn’t check his faith or theology at the door, as if descending from the supernatural to the natural. Even though, “Christian theology today does not take much account of the distinction between the infused and the acquired virtue,” (101) the distinction forms an integral part of Cessario’s overall treatment. Affirming the preeminence of the theological virtues in the Christian moral life, Cessario further notes that: “[T]he Christian believer requires other human virtues in order to lead a good life” (99). Hence, for Cessario even the cardinal virtues (and their potential parts), in light of the infusion of grace, play a part in the specifically Christian character of Gospel morality.

For example, relative to the difference in perspective caused by distinguishing between infused and acquired virtues, and the specifically Christian character of the infused virtues, Cessario explains in reference to temperance:

Like the virtue of fortitude, Christian temperance serves the needs of the Church. As a gift that observes the norm of grace, infused temperance may observe a different rule or measure with respect to food; this happens in fasting and abstinence or even with regard to sexual abstinence, as is the case with consecrated chastity and celibacy. (194)

Concurrent with this book's uniquely and integrally theological presentation of virtue, Cessario is able to unite (or reunite) the oft and unfortunately separated subjects of Christian morality and the spiritual life. Throughout *The Virtues, or the Examined Life* a conscious effort is made to tease out the spiritual implications of Christian virtue. To offer two specific examples, closing out the chapter on faith is a fine reflection on "Our Lady and the Recollected Life"; moreover, the final pages of the book contain a section dedicated to "Infused Temperance and Christian Humility."

Also of special interest is the way in which Cessario discusses the problem of the nature-grace relationship from within his treatment of theological charity as the "form" of all the other virtues. The light of revelation requires us to affirm that even if certain people were able to acquire all of the "natural moral virtues," natural virtue as "natural" cannot unite a person with the ultimate Good, viz., God (72). "The Christian life," Cessario affirms, "animated by theological charity, provides the only way for the human person to reach the full perfection of human existence and to avoid the disintegrating effects of original sin" (74–75).

Those already familiar with the author's diverse bibliography of theological works—one that spans deeply into both dogma and morals—can expect yet another manifestation of Fr. Cessario's acute grasp of St. Thomas's theology. Beyond the Thomistic panorama, this book also draws heavily from the insights of many other saints, fathers, and doctors of the Church besides St. Thomas, including his much-neglected renaissance commentators. Cessario also proves conversant with contemporary issues and authors, especially Von Balthasar's "Nine Theses" and important texts of the Magisterium.

This work is readable, but not superficially so. The sacrifice necessary to traverse its pages is far outweighed by the breadth of insight contained within them. *The Virtues, or the Examined Life* is worthy of commendation

for its fidelity to Thomas, its eclectic sourcing, and contemporary relevance. But, more than anything else, this book is noteworthy because it offers a full-blown virtue-theory written completely from within the Christian economy of salvation and the “universal call to holiness.” Because of this rare accomplishment, the book stands as a true response to Vatican II’s call for a renewal of moral theology. N.V.

Roger W. Nutt
Aquinas College
Nashville, Tennessee

The Church in a Postliberal Age by George A. Lindbeck, edited by James J. Buckley (London: SCM Press, 2002; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), xviii + 300 pp.

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, George Lindbeck (b. 1923) crossed borders—both in the geographical and theological sense. He spent seventeen years in Asia and more than five years in Europe. He started out specializing in medieval philosophy and became—after having been a Lutheran observer at Vatican II—a key interpreter of contemporary Catholicism for Protestants. Yale University was his academic home for half a century. His education and teaching at Yale and even more his manifold activities in national and international ecumenism inspired him to denounce a split between doctrine and church practice, theology and Christian discipleship, ecumenical advances and confessional identity. Lindbeck’s corpus reflects his geographical and theological globe-trotting: It consists chiefly of numerous articles that were mostly written on specific occasions and can only be fully appreciated when read in the context of their respective historical and theological settings and the author’s life. Although the Yale scholar’s writings exhibit to a great extent similar themes and arguments, they pose a special challenge to the reader who seeks to assess them systematically and as a unified whole. This might be the underlying reason why Lindbeck’s thought is nearly exclusively associated with his celebrated and controversial book *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (1984).

Considered against this background, James J. Buckley’s effort to make some of Lindbeck’s more important articles accessible to readers who might be familiar only with *The Nature of Doctrine* deserves special acknowledgment. Buckley, a Catholic theologian at Loyola College in Maryland, has collected fourteen of his former teacher’s writings, which span a period of several decades and cover a range of theological specialities. In addition to providing a splendid overview and evaluation of

Lindbeck's work and its reception (VII–XVIII), the volume also offers brief but very helpful introductions to each of the essays as a means of situating them in their wider theological context and the overall trajectory of Lindbeck's career.

According to Buckley, the hermeneutical vantage point that holds these quite disparate writings together is that they form and articulate a "radical tradition." This view is not arbitrary, for the volume in question appeared in a series titled "Radical Traditions—Theology in a Postcritical Key," edited by Lindbeck's students Stanley Hauerwas and Peter Ochs. The definition of "radical traditions" employed by Hauerwas and Ochs fits perfectly with the aims of Lindbeck's postliberal project over the years, namely, to retrieve Christian resources—long ignored in modernity's reduction of theological reasoning—in a wholly renewed way and thereby to lay a new foundation for the future theology and ecclesial life that is utterly scripture-based, ecumenical, unapologetic, and attuned to contemporary social and political practice. Within such a conception, Buckley locates Lindbeck's thought within a triangular pattern consisting of three elements: "Evangelical," "Catholic," and "Postliberal." These categories also structure the three sections of the book. Well aware that articles in one section may be marked by the other two categories, Buckley argues convincingly that "'evangelical, catholic and postliberal' while not a comprehensive characterization of Lindbeck's theology, is useful for understanding some of the debates over it, including the way some critics only focus on one or two of its strands." In sync with Lindbeck's spirit, the editor holds out an additional challenge to the reader: "But more important than understanding this theology's radical traditions is participating in them" (xvi).

Having chosen this approach for a collection of Lindbeck's essays, Buckley certainly does justice to the aim and scope of the series "Radical Traditions." Yet one could also argue that a more genealogical approach would more clearly document the core of Lindbeck's thought and its development from the 1950s to the present. On the one hand, it would have been more apparent to the reader that Lindbeck mirrors in his early writings much more the theological mainstream and *zeitgeist* of his time than in his later writings; and that he only later gave the church a postliberal spin in reaction to what he perceived to be unwarranted developments in and outside of Christianity. On the other hand, such a chronological approach might have run the danger of being more concerned with Lindbeck's own development than with prospective theology and the kinds of methodological issues that have been central to Lindbeck's scholarship.

In addition, the selection of articles itself can be questioned. The volume begins with a personal account from 1990 in which Lindbeck characterizes his life and work. It is followed by "Reminiscences of Vatican II," a moving conference given in 1993 and published previously only in pamphlet form. The Catholic reader might be particularly interested to learn from the former observer at the Council that, in his view, *aggiornamento* took precedence over *ressourcement* because the bishops opted for something that they themselves did not know how to put into effect. In the category "Evangelical" we find an essay on the congruity of Martin Luther and the rabbinic mind, one on the seminal problem of justification by faith and two pieces on theology in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. The "Catholic" section is opened by "Ecumenism and the Future of Belief" (1968), which can also be read as a precursor of the postliberal agenda that would only be made explicit as a distinctive research program in the 1980s. "Hesychastic Prayer" testifies within the sphere of spiritual practices to Lindbeck's overall desire to study religious traditions in their particularity. "Infallibility" (1972) takes up a specific theme in ecclesiology while avoiding a one-sided endorsement or refutation of the dogma of papal infallibility, whereas "The Church" (1988) elucidates the foundation of Linbeckian ecclesiology that would achieve by the 1980s a formulation in terms of "Israelology." "Towards a Postliberal Theology," which appears as the sixth chapter of *The Nature of Doctrine*, highlights the third section ("Postliberal") and is followed by the English text of the foreword to the German edition of that book (1994). In this latter piece, which had previously been accessible only in the German translation, Lindbeck comments on the ten years of heated discussion about his postliberal manifesto and informs the reader about his original intentions. "Scripture, Consensus and Community" delineates the biblical hermeneutic of the postliberal school and is based on a lecture given in 1988 at a gathering of scholars that included Joseph Ratzinger, Avery Dulles, and Raymond Brown. The last essay, "The Gospel's Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability" (1997), provides one of the most up-to-date articulations of the postliberal challenge.

This reviewer submits that the still-unpublished English version of "Theologische Methode und Wissenschaftstheorie," which appeared in *Theologische Revue* 74 (1978): 265–80 and lays open Lindbeck's methodological creed like no other essay by the author, would also have been opportune. Another critical piece might have been the still-unpublished manuscript on the rule theory of doctrine, namely, the 1987 Princeton lecture, "Doctrine in Christianity: A Comparison with Judaism." And maybe there is not enough emphasis given in this volume that Lindbeck's

ecclesiological vision emerges out of a postcritical approach to Scripture. But we have to keep in mind that Buckley's principal aim is to introduce Lindbeck to a wider audience, and not to be of service to a limited group of postliberal scholars. As indicated at the beginning of this review, the difficulty in arriving at such a collection is owing to the nature of Lindbeck's oeuvre. Were ten proponents of postliberalism invited to come up with their own list of Lindbeck's key writings, no doubt they would all be different. While not exhaustive of Lindbeck's rich proposals for contemporary Christian theology, the present volume serves as a useful reference for those who wish to pursue a deeper understanding of the postliberal program. The bibliography that appears at the end of each chapter provides especially useful direction for engaging specific areas in Lindbeck's thought.

In reading through the essays of this book, it became clear once more to this reviewer that a unified ecclesiological framework cannot be distilled from Lindbeck's publications. The principal benefit of engaging the Yale theologian and noted ecumenist lies in his intriguing proposals for theological inquiry that set the church on a promising track in a post-modern and post-Christian world. The fact that Lindbeck does not offer us a series of volumes of a "systematic" theology need not imply a short-coming. Indeed, for the European observer it is particularly striking how much Lindbeck has—both as a theological teacher and as a writer—stimulated his peers in the academy and the broader church across generations and confessional boundaries. This collection of essays is essential reading and a useful reference for all those who participate in the discussion about postliberal theology or who consider George Lindbeck a model theologian and churchman. It exhibits Lindbeck's contribution in a comprehensive way and aptly serves as a precursor of and a hermeneutical framework for the magisterial book *The Nature of Doctrine*. **N.V**

Bernhard A. Eckerstorfer, OSB
Benedictine Abbey
Kremsmünster, Austria

Sharing the Inheritance: Identity and Moral Life in Colossians by Allan R. Bevere (*Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003*), x + 294 pp.

OF LATE there have been a spate of dissertations and monographs on Colossians and/or Ephesians that have shed some fresh light on these documents, and this monograph is one such document. The published form of this work is a revision of a dissertation done under J. D. G. Dunn at the University of Durham in the 1990s. Like most such dissertations,

it has its pluses and minuses, and it also very much reflects the orientation of Bevere's mentor when it comes to matters such as the so-called new perspective on Paul and the basic character of Colossians. For example, Bevere uses as his operating hypothesis that Colossians is written by Paul and Timothy, or perhaps Timothy on behalf of Paul, and in any case is a late Pauline document. Also following Dunn, he accepts the proposition that the letter to some degree is written as an apologetic in response to the propaganda of the synagogue that was affecting some of the Colossian converts. Surprisingly, since this conclusion makes Colossians an act of persuasion, Bevere completely ignores the rhetorical analysis of the document. It is a significant lacuna, in a dissertation that otherwise has some helpful argumentation, but then Dunn also spends very little time on the issue of rhetoric in his own work on Colossians.

The burden of Bevere's argument can be summed up as follows. First and foremost, the target against which Paul is arguing, particularly when he is dealing with the Colossian philosophy in Colossians 2, is a Jewish one. This argument is made over against the suggestions of T. Martin that Paul is opposing some sort of pagan philosophy, in particular a Cynic and/or Stoic one (see his volume in this same Sheffield series, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as a Response to a Cynic Critique*), or the arguments of C. Arnold that some kind of folk religion that entailed a magic tainted syncretistic philosophy is involved (see his *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae*). In my judgment Bevere's arguments against these proposals and in favor of the uniformly Jewish character both of what Paul is affirming and what he is opposing are quite convincing. But in some of the particulars of his argument there are difficulties.

For example, Bevere simply asserts, without detailed argument, that the much-controverted phrase *stoicheia tou kosmou* can refer to elementary beings in Paul's letters. He seems to think there is evidence for such a meaning at this juncture in time, but in fact there is not. There is no lexical evidence that this phrase refers to beings until well after New Testament times. The only two meanings for which there is clear evidence before or during New Testament times is that this phrase can refer to the elements of the universe, or the elementary principles that govern the universe (or at least the human sphere). Furthermore, *stoicheia* is never a term Paul uses when he gives a list of powers and principalities (see, e.g., Col 2:15). Paul is likely referring to elementary teachings when he uses this phrase, and he never uses this phrase when he is talking about angels.

There is the further problem with Bevere's case that while he rightly draws on parallels with Galatians to show the Jewishness of what Paul is

opposing, he does not seem to see that the case would be far more compelling if he recognized that not only are the “opponents” in Galatia Judaizing Jewish Christians, but this is also the case in Colossae. There is simply no direct evidence at all in Colossians that Paul is opposing the synagogue or some of its leaders in Colossians. Not only is there no reference to the synagogue in Colossians, there is no reference to Judaism *per se*. If Paul were arguing against non-Christian Jews then Colossians 2:19a would be a singularly ineffective argument. Paul says there that “they” (the so-called opponents) have lost connection with the Head (i.e., Christ). One cannot lose connection with Christ if one has never had it in the first place. Colossians appears rather to be very much an in-house argument. The lack of direct reference to Judaism in Colossians is why it was possible for Martin or Arnold to make the cases they are making.

If one were to take Colossians 2:8–23 out of Colossians one would not know that this was a problem-solving letter at all. There is the further factor that the author or authors of this document do not know this audience firsthand. They have simply heard of the faith of Colossians (Col 2:4). This does not mean that Colossians is some sort of general broadside including general parenthesis, a sort of shooting in the dark, but it does mean that the authors have signaled they are at some remove from what is going on in Colossae.

Bevere, following Dunn, also makes much of the references to the so-called Jewish badges of identity. Paul is simply opposing the nationalistic features of Judaism that make it a distinct ethnic group. Paul is arguing for unity and he takes a minimalist approach in opposing that in Judaism, which undermines unity in Christ. But surely the most important of the badges, if we must call them that, that which most sets Judaism apart from Greco-Roman religions, is its monotheism. It is precisely the oneness of God that comes up for elaborate discussion in Colossians 1–2, in particular the Christological redefinition of monotheism. In Christ the fullness of deity dwells.

So as it turns out, Paul is arguing not only against Gentile Christians getting themselves circumcised and keeping the Law, as well as against various Jewish mystical practices (worshipping with the angelic host aided and abetted by ascetical practices), he is also arguing for a Christological redefinition of monotheism that makes obedience to the Mosaic Law no longer an obligation even for Jewish Christians. In other words, what is assumed in Colossians is what is argued at length in the earlier letter in Galatians. No Christian is obligated to keep the Mosaic Law, though Jewish ones may do so as a blessed option. They are under a different covenant, expected to keep the Law of Christ, which has some overlap

with and some differences from the Mosaic Law. One can be the Jew to the Jew and the Gentile to the Gentile as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9 of himself, precisely because neither orientation is obligatory when it comes to matters of “badges of identity.”

One problem with Dunn’s take on the new perspective on Paul is that it fails to plumb the depths of Paul’s critique of the Mosaic Law. It is quite true to say that early Judaism was a religion that involved covenantal nomism in regard to the issue of “staying in,” but it also required a commitment to the Law at the juncture of getting in whether one was becoming an observant Jew at the coming of age or one was a non-Jewish proselyte. The phrase “works of the Law” is not a code phrase for simply taking up the badges of identity, as is quite clear from 4QMMT where the text speaks of such things as merely “some of the works of the Law” (see my critique in *Grace in Galatia* and the recent study edited by D. Carson and others on righteousness in early Judaism). This is not to deny at all that early Judaism was also a religion of grace, but Paul is not simply opposing imposing the badges on Gentiles when he critiques “works of the Law.”

Bevere has, however, made a very good case for the unity of the theology and ethics in Colossians, indeed the unity of the entire letter, as well as its thoroughly Jewish character. While he admits that the household codes in Colossians 3–4 do not seem to be directly tied to the argument against the Colossian philosophy, he is able to show how even this section of the letter is not some sort of general broadside without particular relevance to the rest of the letter’s discussion. M. Dibelius’s older thesis about the general character of such paraenesis is successfully countered and laid to rest.

It is the hallmark of a good dissertation that it moves the discussion of a particular matter along, closing off some options, and opening up others that seem more fruitful. Bevere has certainly done this and has done so in an effective manner showing the unity and the Jewishness of the case Paul is making for theological and ethical unity in Colossae. This is a dissertation that was certainly well worth publication and a careful reading. **N-V**

Ben Witherington, III
Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, Kentucky

Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, Sixth Edition, edited by Etienne Gilson, translated by Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer (*Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002*), 454 pp.

DR. GILSON PUBLISHED the first edition of his *Le Thomisme* in 1919. The second edition appeared in 1922, the third in 1927, the fourth in 1942, the fifth in 1944, and the sixth in 1965. The third edition was translated into English by Edward Bullough, and the fifth by Father Shook. This translation of the sixth edition was begun by Fr. Shook but was left incomplete because of his failing health. Fr. Maurer, a student of Dr. Gilson, and later his colleague, began again at the beginning and brought the translation to completion, calling himself the “editor and continuator” of the work of Fr. Shook. This edition, he says, “while remaining substantially the same as the fifth edition, . . . offers the reader significant new clarifications of Gilson’s views on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. In many ways it is his last word on the subject.”

The publication includes (1) an appendix on Gilson’s revised interpretation of Boethius’s notion of *esse*; (2) an appendix on the life of St. Thomas; and (3) an appendix with a modern chronology of selected works of Thomas Aquinas, dealing with more recent studies on his writings and their improved editions. There is also a bibliography of the primary sources cited in the book, especially the works of St. Thomas, and indices of names and subjects.

A review of this large book cannot deal adequately with individual areas of Aquinas’s philosophy, such as the existence and nature of God, creation, the human person, intellect and will, or morality. Instead, it will consider what Gilson says (1) in his introduction, (2) in connection with Aquinas’s central philosophical doctrine, and (3) in his summing-up.

Gilson points out that St. Thomas Aquinas was a philosopher, but a philosopher in the service of a theologian. “What characterizes Thomas and gives him a special place in this general movement [using philosophy in theology] is precisely the intellectual effort he made to introduce this human learning into theology without destroying its [theology’s] unity.” For Aquinas, the revealed is what is knowable to us only by revelation; the revealable is what reason can know on its own and what is drawn into theology because it is necessary for salvation, revelation diffusing itself, as it were, by human reasoning.

Aquinas unified theology as a study of what is necessary or useful to salvation. His philosophy, which is part of the revealable, was “exalted, as it were, by being assumed into theology. . . . In becoming something revealable, philosophy does not give up in any way its essential rationality,

but it raises the use of rationality to its own ultimate perfection." In Aquinas, faith and reason are not isolated from one another, nor are they confused with one another. "For, if faith enlivens his reason, this reason, supported and enriched by this faith, always carries out purely rational operations and draws conclusions based solely on the evidence of first principles to all human minds."

Moreover, "we must state that there is room for rational argument even when it is a question of truths inaccessible to reason; and also for theological intervention in areas apparently reserved for pure reason."

Some philosophers think that combining theology so closely with philosophy is bound to result in faith somehow filling in for philosophy. But Aquinas's philosophy "is not philosophy because it is Christian; but he knows that the truer his philosophy will be the more Christian it will be, and the more Christian it will be the truer it will be. This is why he is equally open to Augustine and Aristotle. Rather than passively following the traditional path of Augustinism, he formulates a new theory of knowledge, changes the bases on which proofs of God's existence rest, submits the notion of creation to a new critique, and establishes or completely reorganizes the structure of traditional morality. Rather than passively following the philosophy of Aristotle, he everywhere breaks free from its limitations and transforms it by infusing into it a new meaning. The whole secret of Thomism lies in this immense effort to reconstruct philosophy on a plane where its agreement in fact with theology may appear to be the necessary consequence of the demands of reason itself, rather than the accidental result of some simple desire for conciliation."

The Thomistic revolt in philosophy came about because Aquinas achieved what a number of predecessors had glimpsed but were not able to adequately express: Reality has essences but beyond essence is existence. Existence is not simply a fact; it is an act, an actuality positing things outside of nothingness. It is "an act and not a state," "the peak of reality," the "act of acts," "at the heart or, if you prefer, at the very root of reality," "the very core of being," "that primitive energy from which arise both every knowing subject and every known object." "It is therefore the principle of the principles of reality. Absolutely first, it precedes even the good, for a being is good only if it is a being; and it is a being only in virtue of the *ipsum esse* that allows us to say of it: It *is*." "We cannot see existence, yet we know it is there, and we can at least affirm it by an act of judgment as the hidden ground of what we can see and of what we try to define." "The action of a being is only the unfolding in time of the primal act of existing that makes it be."

All knowledge requires concepts but they do not constitute knowledge of reality. Existence is “an act transcending any concept.” “It is impossible to reach the act of existing by an intellectual intuition that would grasp it directly by itself. . . . A pure *est* is unthinkable; but an *id quod est* can be thought.” “What characterizes Thomistic ontology . . . is not so much the distinction between essence and existence as the primacy of the act of existing, not over and above it, but within in.” “It is the act of existing in each being that is most inward, deepest, and metaphysically primary.”

Since the intellect is more at home with essences, for most philosophers it may never arrive at the notion of existence as the act of essences, and, even it has once done so, it may soon forget what it has discovered. “In a philosophy in which the act of existing can be conceived only in and through an essence, but in which every essence points to an act of existing, concrete riches are practically inexhaustible. But reason dislikes what is inconceivable, and because this is true of existence, philosophy does all it can to avoid it. It is inevitable that this natural tendency of reason should affect our interpretation of Thomism. Even those who vigorously deny this tendency know very well that they will succumb to it. We must know it at least as a temptation inviting us to err. A Thomism remaining on the level of concepts will exhaust itself by making one inventory after another of the concepts it has inherited. Raised to the level of judgment, Thomism will again make contact with the very heart of the reality it elucidates. It will become fruitful and creative again.” “The question is whether we will try to take [essences] alive or if our philosophy will be only a herbarium of dead essences. An essence is dead when the residue it leaves is deposited in the mind as a concept, without preserving its contact with its act of existing.”

Aquinas’s philosophy is highly unified. It gives a complete explanation of the universe from the point of view of human reason, an explanation entirely derived from various aspects of one central notion, the notion of being. “It would be difficult to find in the works of Thomas Aquinas a single concrete problem whose solution does not ultimately depend on this principle.”

Our knowledge begins with physical things. Their perfection is proportionate to their being; their existence is limited by their essence. They are in a constant state of becoming. Their essence does not fully realize its definition. Because they lack something, they cannot explain themselves. To explain them we have to posit a being that is what it is totally, “removed from becoming and situated entirely outside it.” “All

things hide some mystery; all things are veils which hide God.” “To prove the existence of God is, in the last analysis, to ascend by reason from any finite act of existing to the pure Act of Existence that causes it.”

Unknowable in himself, God is knowable only by analogy. All creatures participate in God, according to their nature. God is transcendent, not confused with creatures. Nor do creatures add anything to God. They are images, imitations, of God. And they imitate him primarily by existing. “Instead of having an intuition of the divine essence, we have only a vast number of concepts that, taken together, are a confused sort of imitation of what would have been a true notion of the divine being. When all that we have been able to say about such a subject is put together, the result is a collection of negations and analogies and nothing more.” “Reason here [concerning God] knows very little, yet the little it knows surpasses in dignity and value any other kind of certitude.”

Gilson gives the highest praise to Aquinas’s genius: “It would be hard to imagine something more perfectly and lovingly devised than his demonstrations fashioned from clearly defined ideas, presented in perfectly precise statements, and placed in a carefully balanced order.” And Gilson is also grateful concerning where this genius leads: “If we grant that a philosophy is not to be defined by the elements it borrows but by the spirit that quickens it, we shall see in this doctrine neither Platonism nor Aristotelianism but, above all, Christianity. It intended to express in the language of reason the total destiny of the Christian man; but, while constantly reminding him on earth he must travel paths of exile where there is no light and no horizon, it never ceased to guide his steps toward the height from which can be seen, far off in the mist, the borders of the Promised Land.”

N V

Leonard A. Kennedy, CSB
St. Michael’s College
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada

A Thomistic Tapestry: Essays in Memory of Étienne Gilson edited by Peter A. Redpath (*Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003*), xx + 243 pp.

THE PRESENT VOLUME, the first in the series of Gilson Studies, contains eleven essays that in various ways recall and honor the work of Étienne Gilson (1884–1978). Gilson was a philosopher and historian of philosophy who had a tremendous impact on North American Catholic philosophy during the second half of the twentieth century, especially through his many years at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies at

the University of Toronto. I had the privilege of hearing Gilson deliver a lecture during my own days as a student of philosophy at Toronto in the late sixties, but I had earlier benefitted from the Gilson's eminence as a philosopher and historian of philosophy through my teachers at St. Louis University, many of whom studied under Gilson during the heyday of the Pontifical Institute, although I myself avoided—much to my present regret—any contact with things medieval while pursuing my degree at Toronto. A volume, such as the present one, honoring Gilson is long overdue and highly valuable for the many ways in which it portrays the impact of Gilson in the last century and indicates his continuing relevance, even for today.

The essays are diverse in their subjects, lengths, and appeal, as is bound to be the case with any collection of essays. They are complemented by brief biographies of the contributors; a group of photographs of Gilson and others; and indices of works and professional appearances, of authors, editors, and translators, and of names and subjects. The volume also contains a foreword by Curtis Hancock, the president of the Gilson Society, and an introduction by Peter Redpath.

Jorge J. E. Gracia's "The Enlightening Gloss: Gilson and the History of Philosophy" describes Gilson's method in the history of philosophy as glossing a text in a way that enlightens. Gracia illustrates this method by the treatment Gilson gave to Abelard's teaching on universals in his *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*; contrasts Gilson's method with that of others; and suggests some limitations on his procedure.

In "The Practical Nature of Moral Philosophy," Richard Geraghty discusses a problem about the practical nature of moral philosophy according to St. Thomas. After surveying the views of the Thomistic commentators and of Jacques Maritain, Geraghty presents his own solution and points out how it contributes to an understanding of John Paul II's call for a new evangelization.

Peter Redpath pays tribute in his article, "Philosophy's Non-Systematic Nature," to the great men who taught philosophy at the Pontifical Institute. Among these he singles out Armand Maurer, to whom the volume is quite appropriately dedicated, and he focuses on Maurer's article, "The Unity of a Science: St. Thomas and the Nominalists," which he praises as "a devastating attack on the metaphysical foundations of modern philosophy" (30).

In "The Beauty of Wisdom: A Tribute to Armand A. Maurer," Robert Delfino deals with Maurer's book *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation*, which he describes in some detail and cites as a tribute to Father Maurer, who was a colleague of Gilson at the Pontifical Institute. In his Introduction, Peter Redpath claims that Maurer is one of the most brilliant

exponents of Gilson's historiographical method. Delfino stresses Maurer's identification of beauty with being and of happiness with a life beautifully lived. He also contrasts Maurer's epistemology of beauty with the views of Umberto Eco.

Desmond J. Fitzgerald's essay, "Étienne Gilson and the San Francisco Conference," is a fascinating historical piece on the presence and role of Gilson at the 1945 conference that drafted the United Nations' Charter. In fact Fitzgerald provides some very interesting biographical details about Gilson before and during the war and about his arrival in Toronto after the conference.

In "Maritain's Reply to Gilson's Rejection of Critical Realism," Raymond Dennehy examines Jacques Maritain's critical realism and Gilson's criticism of any such form of realism. He ultimately suggests that there may be little actual difference between the two views. The last three sections of the article trace Maritain's philosophical development with regard to the possibility of objective knowledge, his defense of conceptual knowledge, and his battle against the so-called irrationalists. In conclusion, Dennehy suggests that the epistemological battles that Maritain waged may very well explain his disagreement with Gilson over whether realism needed the defense of a critique.

The eighth article by Francesca Murphy, "Gilson and Maritain: Battle over the Beautiful," recounts the differences between Maritain and Gilson on the topics of art and the beautiful from the early twentieth century and their reactions to Bergson and modernism on to their major works on aesthetics toward the middle of the century. Murphy ties these differences, which at times led to a bitter conflict between the two great Thomists of the last century, to other differences in their philosophical and religious lives and at times to simple misunderstandings.

By far the longest essay is Richard Fafara's "Gilson and Gouhier: Approaches to Malebranche," which explores and contrasts the approaches of Gilson and Henri Gouhier to the study of the great occasionalist of the seventeenth century. Gouhier, like Gilson, was one of the great historians of philosophy in the last century and a man who, though a student and friend of Gilson, differed from him on the way to study the history of philosophy. The article presents the views of the two on Christian philosophy and on the philosophy in the history of philosophy, especially with respect to Père Malebranche's views. The work of Gilson and Gouhier marks "a fascinating chapter in French intellectual history" (148), and, as Fafara notes, the study of one leads to and complements that of the other.

James Maroosis's article, "Poinsett, Pierce, and Pegis: Knowing as a Way of Being," takes its start from a seminar on intentionality that Anton Pegis

taught at the University of Toronto, which led the author to discover the similarity between the views of Pierce and John of St. Thomas on intentionality and semiotics.

In the final essay in the volume, "Possessed of Both a Reason and a Revelation," James V. Schall turns to Gilson's *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* and to his *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*. He points out the relevance, especially today after the attack of September 11th, of the Averroistic separation of reason and revelation, which he suggests still plays an important role in Islamic thought, as opposed to the views of St. Thomas, who saw reason and faith, not as opposed, but complementary.

All told, the essays make up a splendid tribute to Étienne Gilson and to Armand Maurer and, indeed, to the entire faculty of the Pontifical Institute, whose members contributed greatly to the character of North American Catholic philosophy in the second half of the last century. The first volume in the Gilson Series makes an excellent beginning, and since Gilson's legacy is too rich for a single volume to exhaust, we can look forward to future volumes in the series, which will retrieve for readers of the twenty-first century other facets of Gilson's thought. **N V**

Roland J. Teske, SJ
Marquette University
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Boethius by John Marenbon (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003*), 272 pp.

JOHN MARENBON'S fine introduction to Boethius provides a brief overview of most of Boethius's extant works and goes a long way toward orienting the novice to many of the current trends in Boethius scholarship. In addition to the well-known *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius's corpus, as we have it, includes commentaries on Porphyry's introduction to Aristotle's logical works (*Isagoge*), on Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, and on Cicero's *Topics*; treatises on discovering definitions (*De Divisione liber*) and on hypothetical and categorical syllogisms; books on music and arithmetic (a free translation of an earlier neo-Platonic work); and five theological treatises (a brief catechetical summary of salvation history titled *On the Catholic Faith*; a defense of Chalcedon; two works on the Trinity; and the *De hebdomadibus*, in which he explains how things are good in themselves because they are derived from God). Marenbon's book focuses on some of the more important arguments in the logical works, treatises, and tractates. Of particular interest are his subtle handling of Boethius's commentary on Porphyry's three most difficult questions concerning genera and species, and the central role Marenbon grants to

On the Catholic Faith in the theological tractates. Only in the past century has this text been accepted by the scholarly community as genuinely Boethian, and its importance for Boethius's theological method has not been measured. The largest and most argumentative portion of the book concerns the *Consolation*.

Boethius includes a short biographical chapter, two chapters on the logical works, one on the theological tractates, three on the *Consolation*, and a concluding chapter on Boethius's influence in the Middle Ages.

Each chapter includes a description of the works and some interpretive paragraphs that locate Boethius within his neo-Platonic context while acknowledging the unique contributions of the Latin master. A drawback of Marenbon's early chapters is that he treats each category of writing in isolation and does not attempt to incorporate Boethius's various writings into a unified vision. This tendency to treat texts and arguments discretely is turned into a thesis in the final chapters in which Marenbon, who does not think the *Consolation* does console, argues that Boethius presented Lady Philosophy as an inconsistent character for the sake of exposing the limits of philosophy in dealing with the problem of suffering. Lest it appear that the thesis determines the analysis, several further issues ought to be addressed: the unity of Boethius's thought, the integrity of Lady Philosophy's arguments, and the role of the poetry in the genre of *Consolation*.

In the biographical chapter, Marenbon locates Boethius within the neo-Platonic commentary tradition. The practitioners of this tradition regarded it as their duty, as formulated by Simplicius, to reconcile the texts of Plato and Aristotle at the level of thought and not of mere words. In practice this often meant resolving *aporia* in Aristotle's texts that either were ambiguous in themselves or else seemed to conflict with the teachings of Plato. The resolution preserved the unity of understanding and the integrity of being. Marenbon's tendency to read Boethius's texts in isolation and to settle for apparent contradictions and inconsistencies is in tension with Boethius's project and method of philosophizing. This makes suspicious his claim to have discovered in the *Consolation* deliberate inconsistencies.

One instance of such isolation is Marenbon's interpretation of Boethius's understanding of the status of universals in the logical works and in the *De hebdomadibus*. Marenbon affirms that Boethius read Aristotle's *Categories* as a treatment of things that signify insofar as they signify. What signify are words, so the categories are not the genera of beings. What words signify are conceptions and neither things nor the eternal forms of things. The meanings of words are determined by what the

mind derives from the things under consideration. Thus both authors exploited an understanding of an ordered relationship among words, intellect—things. For Boethius, as for Porphyry, the mediating role of the intellect was what accounted for equivocation and ambiguity, and, at least as far as Boethius was concerned, for the knowledge of contingents. Boethius attributed to Porphyry the insight that a simple proposition is one that can mean only one thing. The task of logic is the elimination of equivocation. Boethius analyzed ambiguity not only in conceptual terms but also as existential impositions. That is, the *Categories* show us that *est* is predicated analogically. When we say “He is a man,” “He is a brown,” and “He is a father,” the senses of “is” are distinct. Each of the predicates is posited as inhering in a distinct manner. Further, all are distinct from the necessity posited in “He is God.” Since, no common conception is implied, thus there is no genus for these *est*’s. As Marenbon notes, Boethius rejected, or at least, never had recourse to the neo-Platonic conception of three distinct universals: as separated, as immanent and as abstracted. Boethius could not have made serious use of this schema because he rejected a concept of being that could range over an ordered series. Being conceived as necessary (self-subsistent), as substantial (relatively self-subsistent), and as accidental (dependent) would be such an ordered series.

It is in order to eliminate ambiguity that Boethius took up the discussion of the necessity, contingency, and time-quality of predications in Book 9 of the commentary on Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*. Among the arguments we find in that section is that some predicates refer to contingent beings and some to eternal and necessary beings. As Marenbon rightly emphasizes on pages 39 to 40, for Boethius predications of contingent realities are true only if they contain a sense of the contingency of things. True predications are, of course, expressions of knowledge. Boethius’s realism, therefore, is founded not on the results of abstraction as Marenbon argues (30–31) but on the mode in which the concepts abstracted are posited in reality. If we take this principle into account, then it is perhaps easier to see that in the *De hebdomadibus*, Boethius was not articulating a difference between a thing and an immanent universal (Marenbon, 89), but rather between a thing and its act of being on the basis of which one posits contingent or necessary existence. An immanent universal is a particular, substantial form, and was already an element in Boethius’s logical works. An act of existence is a *forma essendi*, “form of being,” which can only be form in an analogous sense. Boethius consistently held that *ens*, “being,” is not a genus and cannot be a true form. Therefore, all things are good in being derived from or

having as one of their principles an act of existence that is dependent on God and not on themselves. To be so dependent is not a predicate like substance and is not made explicit in the *Categories*.

What is the integrity of Lady Philosophy's arguments? Marenbon's three chapters on the *Consolation* are ordered to his thesis that Boethius deliberately introduced incoherencies into Lady Philosophy's arguments in order to exploit the gap between philosophy and theology. He is inclined to treat as six distinct and conflicting arguments the discussions of happiness in terms of a complex view (II–III.8) and in terms of a monolithic view (III.9–12); the treatment of Providence in terms of final causality (IV.1–4) and in terms of the efficient causality of the divine Craftsman (IV.5–6); and the resolution of the problem of Providence conceived as "causal determinacy" (V.1–2) and as prescience (V.3–6), both of which seem to destroy free will. The commentator affirms that the two arguments in Book III are "at odds," and that in Book IV Boethius "suddenly changes direction" (117). In fact, the picture of God as divine planner who prepares a response ahead of time to human vice and virtue is "in stark contrast to that presented by III.9–IV.4" (119). I will argue that there is more unity to the text that Marenbon is willing to discover or to grant.

Marenbon believes that the problem of the relationship between Providence and free will only emerges with the treatment of Providence as causal: "So long as divine government was explained solely in terms of final causality, there was no tension between acknowledging it and maintaining free will" (121). However, this easy concord was not apparent to Proclus who conceived of Providence almost exclusively in terms of final and paradigmatic causality. He found that the free pursuit of a natural end required defense. Boethius himself acknowledged that while there was something true in the Stoic account of non-necessitate yet natural motion of the will toward the good, the Stoics had not really preserved freedom. For Boethius, the natural motion of the will is free, in one sense, because its necessary pursuit of the good is check and governed by reason. Marenbon quotes a characteristic line: ". . . For desire for the good is there naturally within the minds of men, but wayward error leads away to false goods" (105). The complex view of happiness sorts out false and from true goods. This first approximation of the essence of human freedom is articulated in the face of the final causality of the good. All along the line Lady Philosophy had conceived of Providence as causal, even in terms of a divine Charioteer who governs the cosmos by the reigns of love.

An additional element of human freedom is identified in the context of the recognition that the one true good, God, is the same for all. Where

the complex view treats the parts of happiness, the monolithic view treats the whole. The will desires the good determined by reason, yet the will is clearly not satisfied with just any good proffered. Marenbon points out that Lady Philosophy argues that the will is satisfied not with means but only with the end for the sake of which the means are chosen (105–6). This one end moves all things including the will. The will is, in fact, only satisfied with the whole of the good, the one end of all of creation. The moral agent who is not an inveterate liar may still be aware when he or she is “rationalizing.” The will either resists rationalizations or else moves the mind to find them. The difference is not simply in the knowledge of one and the ignorance of another, nor is it in the end itself. The difference is in the moral character of the agent. Boethius seems here to have drawn on St. Augustine’s distinction between will and power. The power to achieve what the will desires is the virtues of the will. Thus, the will is freed by virtue and constrained by vice.

The difference then between Boethius’s presentations of the problem of Providence and free will in Book V is not one of causality. Marenbon considers that Lady Philosophy first distinguished between events caused by Providence—the unfolding of the chain of events within the natural order—and free events subject only to the human will. On this interpretation, all non-human events are causally determined, but human events are free. However, consistent with the treatment of the same problem in the commentaries on *On Interpretation*, Boethius distinguished among necessary, contingent, and free events. All three types are governed in unique ways by the order determined by Providence. Boethius rejected the idea that Providence causes all things discretely after the image of some divine puppet master, yet the divine mind is responsible for the ordered whole within which events occur that are the effects of necessary, contingent, and free causes. Contingent beings are caused, and though there is no necessity to their being, they depend on God for their existence (*esse*). Likewise free will is a quality of a contingent being that moves itself toward its natural end.

What is the function of the poems? The following are some suggestions for further consideration. Marenbon treats the poems as largely decorative. Even when the content of a poem supplies some unique image or idea, it does not advance the argument. It does not appear to me, however, that argumentation is the purpose of the poems. Among the likely sources for Boethius’s *Consolation* are neo-Platonic protreptic, Stoic consolations, and Augustine’s *Confessions*. In the case of the first, authors ascribed a positive role to music and poetry in preparing the heart of disciples for rigorous philosophic discourse. In the case of the second, at

least Cicero wrote that he put his hand to practicing this Greek style of discourse, mingling prose and verse. Augustine repeated many times that his own pride and disordered desire was a cause of his mistaken ideas about God. In his case the most effective poems for healing his soul of its pride were the Psalms. In all of these cases there is a recognition that the intellect does not operate in isolation from competing desires. There are things that cannot be understood, arguments that cannot be grasped until the heart is freed from its attachments to search for the truth. Perhaps, a full estimate of the extent to which the *Consolation* is in fact consoling, will have to await a clearer analysis of poetry and argument, desire and knowledge. Perhaps Boethius had in mind a clear sense of the type of person for whom Lady Philosophy's arguments would be acceptable. The Prisoner is not yet that person at the beginning of the work, but he does become so as he takes over the discourse.

This newest book naturally invites comparison with the Henry Chadwick's comprehensive treatment of the same subject matter, *Boethius: Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* (1981), also published by Oxford University Press. Marenbon's work should prove to be a helpful supplement to Chadwick's more encyclopedic work for two reasons. First, it will be more accessible to the beginner and even perhaps to inspire interest through his provocative thesis concerning the relationship of philosophy and theology in the *Consolation*. Second, Marenbon includes or at least references a good deal of scholarship written since 1981, and his text is rich with insights from many sources. The final chapter is a helpful reminder of the vast and deep influence Boethius had on the medieval world. The publication of Marenbon's text witnesses to the profound effect Lady Philosophy has had on the framework and terms of perennial debates in the western world concerning philosophy, theology, God, contingency, human freedom, vice, virtue, and the solicitude of Providence. N V

Paul J. LaChance
St. Anselm's College
Manchester, New Hampshire

The Beauty of the Infinite. The Aesthetics of Christian Truth by David Bentley Hart (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003*), 448 pp.

DESPITE THE RELATIVE youth of its author, *The Beauty of the Infinite* merits consideration as one of the most ambitious and theologically insightful contributions to the field in the past decade. David Hart's fluid prose, sweeping grasp of theology and continental philosophy, and creativity enables him to ferry the reader from eastern patristic theology

to French postmodernism, from Greek Attic tragedy to Nietzsche and Heidegger. His work deserves a careful reading by all serious students of theology, especially those interested in how theology should relate and respond to questions raised by postmodern thinkers.

Hart begins the book asking whether a peaceful Christian rhetoric is still possible. The Christian worldview narrates a creation *ex nihilo* poured out as gift, a grace never owed but given freely, the peaceful witness of Jesus, a sacrifice on Golgotha that ends all sacrifice, and an eschatology that seeks to reconcile all of creation. This question is so essential for Hart because he sees rhetoric not as an optional addendum to a prior Christian metaphysics, but instead as part of the very essence of Christianity. The Christian evangel *is* rhetoric.

Hart outlines how postmodern (neo-Nietzschean) philosophy challenges the foundation of Christian rhetoric. He writes, "A certain current within contemporary philosophy, however, asserts that violence is—simply enough—inescapable." Through Nietzsche there has arisen "a profound prejudice . . . to the effect that every discourse is reducible to a strategy of power, and every rhetorical transaction to an instance of an original violence. From this vantage a rhetoric of peace is, by definition, duplicity" (2). Although largely critical of the violent underpinning of dialectic, Hart poses a choice between two starkly contrasted narratives: "one that find the grammar of violence [. . .] hidden within the syntax of every rhetoric, and another that claims that within history a way of reconciliation has been opened up that leads beyond, and ultimately overcomes, all violence" (2). *In nuce*, the book recounts the challenge posed by Nietzsche and the response Christianity should offer. For Hart, Christianity's rhetoric cannot abandon the aesthetic because God is beauty, and the beautiful is convertible with the good, the true, and being.

One may ask how original a work has been produced. By combining a return to a theological aesthetics with a massive attack on all variants of agonistic ontology, Hart coalesces the visions of Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Milbank. He admits this debt—really, he is too creative a thinker to be shy about borrowing. While not quite as polemical as Milbank, Hart wields his theological thresher adeptly. His critiques of Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, and Deleuze are impressive, but the section in the first part worth recounting is the devastating blow dealt to Levinas, whose Catholic admirers are many (even the pope, allegedly). Hart's reading of Levinas is not a cheap gloss on a particular text; instead, he shows a facility with Levinas's *opera*. This facility is important to remember because the force of Hart's critique is so heavy (he describes Levinas's philosophy on page 75 as "the banal tortured into counterfeit profundity,

the obviously false propounded as irresistibly true, other forms of thought caricatured and condemned with a vehemence frequently vicious, and a fulminant tone of mystical authority assumed wherever principled argument proves impossible"). For Hart, Levinas is a Gnostic: The Other never appears; the face is invisible. Because of his ethical (and Kantian) puritanism, the resulting ethic remains "devoid of the affectivity of love or natural benevolence" (81). However benign Levinas's intentions, the results of his ethical project are so perverted—Hart refers to such an ethic as "a grim sickness so profound that it often appears merely to convert some private melancholy into a resentful malice toward all being" (86)—that the good outlined by Levinas is only a *privatio mali* (83).

Hart's hermeneutical creativity allows him to realign the philosophical constellation: "Even the outrageous juxtaposition of Deleuze and Levinas—absolute antinomian affirmation of the world and infinite ethical flight from it—proves perfectly logical: pagans and Gnostics both assume the iron law of fate to operate here below and violence to be pandemic in the sensible order" (91). In a similar fashion, Hart connects Attic tragedy to the highest achievements of Greek philosophy, unveils Nietzsche's project as imbued with a Cartesian self, and unites Bultmann's theological project with the liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century that sought to reach the far bank of Lessing's ditch.

Up to now this review has focused on the negative power of Hart's book, but his work extends far beyond a negation of the postmodern project. The second (and by far largest—covering about 260 of the 445 pages) part of the book, a *dogmatica minora*, tells the Christian story by "addressing the creed in four discrete moments: Trinity, creation, salvation, and eschaton" (153). Hart's hero, and the subject the dissertation from which the current work was born, is Gregory of Nyssa. In his section on Trinity, Hart declares that Nyssa's theology centered on the question of how "God is at once transcendent, no being among beings, but also infinitely rich in being's splendors, outstripping creation in his concrete and determinate fullness" (188). In one word, Nyssa's theology refracts the Pauline theme of *epektasis* (Phil 3:13). Following (and surpassing) Ekkehard Mühlenberg, Hart asserts that Nyssa does not understand divine infinity (*aperion*) as another example of the *via negativa*, but as positive infinity, and consequently concludes that Nyssa is the first real Christian thinker of difference.

An essential part of Hart's argument comes in his understanding of analogy. Only through an *analogia entis* can Christianity avoid a Gnostic flight from or a nihilistic embrace of the world. The importance of analogy explains why theology must answer postmodern thought—in this

instance Heidegger's critique of onto-theology—because otherwise theologians will borrow too uncritically from these spoiled spoils. Hart takes issue with the most formidable attempt, by Jean-Luc Marion, to divorce the Christian God from being and defends Erich Przywara against Barth's famous critique (although, it must be said, a bit more exposition should have followed given the importance of the debate and the people in it—Hart does not address Barth's *analogia fidei* or Jüngel's interesting plea for a *major similitudo* in reaction to the famous decree of the Fourth Lateran Council that proved so central for Przywara). Here Catholics will owe Hart a special thanks: Many blush in the face of Barth and assume he got the better of his Catholic interlocutor, but Hart, an Eastern Orthodox theologian, offers a compelling explanation of how the *analogia entis* protects theology from Hegelian dialectic: "The rejection of the analogy [of being], far from preserving God's transcendence, actually serves only to objectify God idolatrously as a sublime absence or contradiction: one is left with a duality that inevitably makes of God and creation a dialectical opposition, thus subordinating God to being after all" (242), and turns Barth's famous "invention of the anti-Christ" remark on its head.

The previous sampling of Hart's contribution to theological and philosophical debates leaves the reader with much to ponder. His exposition of classical Christianity through the texts of Bonaventure, Maximus, Augustine, and the Capadocians (among others) should encourage readers to return to the center of the theological tradition. His argument is more fugal than linear; he explains that there is "no systematic or deductive sequence" to his dogmatic treatise. Instead he provides an argument that "proceeds by steps but will also occasionally double back to reassert a theme with a new resonance" (154). The less single-minded reader may occasionally feel that the answer can be anticipated and want to skip ahead, but the abundance of wit, subtlety, and brilliance—his discourse on Bach (282–84), the brilliant summary of analytic philosophy (314), his labeling Henry Ford a Nietzschean deity (435 fn), and so on—reward the reader for keeping a steady hand on the wheel.

There is much else to say about the book. From an ecumenical standpoint, Catholics should be encouraged by Hart's sympathetic reading of both Augustine's treatment of the Trinity and Anselm's theory of atonement, and should not underestimate the significance of this reading considering the author's ecclesial location. Recently the German Lutheran theologian Oswald Bayer called for a "poetic theology." Similar to Bayer, Hart likens God's creation to a work of poetry in language that makes Christianity attractive through a majestic vision and almost hortatory tone. Indeed, perhaps the greatest favor Hart has done academic

theology is to help theologians “see the form” as Balthasar has called for. Although traditional Christian apologetics (e.g., C. S. Lewis) may have seen its day, recent European fundamental theology (Pottmeyer, Metz, and Guido Vergauwen) has called for a “practical apologetics.” Hart’s “aesthetic apologetics” can perhaps open a new flank in this region of theology.

There are a few problems with the book. Although Hart offers many biblical citations, he never buttresses his argument with contributions from recent biblical scholarship. This would have made his critique of Girard on biblical sacrifice more convincing. The philologically challenged—that is, most American readers—will probably find aggravating Hart’s failure to translate French and German secondary literature in the body of the text. His critique of Heidegger is harsh but does not mention the sad state of theology Heidegger faced when he was a young seminarian, and surely helped to convince him to abandon the metaphysics taught in the Catholic seminary he attended.

Despite the obvious comparison to Balthasar’s *Glory of the Lord* or Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory*, the type of book Hart’s resembles most closely is Jüngel’s *God as Mystery of the World*. This is high praise (although perhaps not for Hart since he is critical of Jüngel at several points). Like Jüngel, Hart takes a serious question seriously, and proceeds in the style of a continental thinker by mining the recent and less recent texts of western theology and philosophy for insights. Jüngel says in the first preface that “Contemporary theologians write too quickly and too much, but think too little.” Hart’s book comes seven years after the completion of his dissertation. While many academics of Hart’s stature are into their second or third book at such a juncture, the theological community can thank Hart for his patience. N V

Grant Kaplan

Loyola University of New Orleans
New Orleans, Louisiana

Discovering Aquinas: An Introduction to His Life, Work and Influence by Aidan Nichols, OP (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002*), 214 pp.

IT COULD BE ARGUED that no greater contributor to the work of retrieving the Catholic theological heritage, both new and old, inhabits the English-speaking world than the Dominican Aidan Nichols. His mastery of historical context, both in method and in working knowledge, as well as his formidable theological intellect find a compelling combination in several scholarly “introductions” to theological greats such as Yves Congar, Joseph Ratzinger, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. No less important

to his stature is Nichols's characteristically English capacity to render compelling analogies and explanations that illuminate rather than repeat or obscure key ideas. As a specimen, one need look no further than *The Shape of Catholic Theology*, which stands out as the most lucid primer in theological method to be encountered in contemporary writing.

In the present work, Nichols reveals himself to be just as helpful an interpreter and explainer of Thomas Aquinas as he is of lesser theologians. This is a time period in which both gifted newcomers (Dauphinais and Levering) as well as an undisputed master (J.-P. Torrell) have issued introductions to Thomas's thought. Nichols's volume adds one more strain to the symphony of appreciation for Thomas and the consequent inspired creativity that may ultimately require characterization as the most significant trend in Catholic theology since the *Nouvelle Theologie* of the 1950s.

Always sensitive to historical context, Nichols begins his work by first situating himself as a Thomistic interpreter buoyed by two vital currents in twentieth-century Catholic thought: English sensitivity for Thomas's "powerfully incarnational idiom," and the more "metaphysically and dogmatically meaty" French Dominican approach (viii–ix). This signals Nichols's willingness to rely on other sources, which is one of the great merits of the work. Rather than succumb to either of the twin dangers of total originality or solo virtuosity, Nichols is willing to be aided, even guided, by the insights of other Thomas scholars. He presents their insights *in toto*, and wherever possible, without revision. Yet far from subtracting from the quality of *Discovering Aquinas*, this serves to ground its assertions and makes Nichols's own insights stand out more clearly.

The book is divided into three parts. "Part One: The Man" consists of only one chapter, which traces Thomas's life and career. "Part Two: The Doctrine," the longest section of the work, offers seven chapters focused on the highlights of Thomas's teaching in the key areas of Christian belief. "Part Three: The Aftermath," which forms a diptych with Part One, offers a single chapter summarizing what Nichols calls "the posthumous St. Thomas" (129). Finally, "Part Four: The Tools" is a re-examination of some key areas from Part Two from the perspective of theological method.

Chapter 1, "Thomas in His Time," is Nichols at his very best. He does not tarry on disputed points; rather, he focuses on uncovering how the events of Thomas's life (including his vocation, circumstances, and difficulties) deeply influenced his prodigious literary career and his theological conclusions. Most significant in this chapter is Nichols's compelling argument that Thomas's *exitus-reditus* principle of "theological intelligibility" (6) is the recurring theme of his entire career. In the process, he makes a strong (albeit indirect) rebuttal of Chenu's premise that this "principle of

organization” is primarily a neo-Platonic, rather than biblical, architectonic, although he does not investigate the possibility that the shape of Thomas’s theology may involve other, equally important biblical influences (cf. A. Hayen, *Saint Thomas d’Aquin et la vie de l’église*, 81–85).

As noted above, this chapter has a companion in Chapter 9, “Thomas in History,” in which Nichols manages to summarize the ebb and flow of Thomistic thought since the time of his passing. Most notable in this latter chapter is Nichols’s insight into the last 100 years, with both its “dark days” as well as the “promise of dawn” (139)—“a new Thomistic renaissance” occupied by scholars who have been won by the “intellectual, moral and spiritual coherence” of Thomas’s theology (142). Observing this chapter out of its turn is certainly justified—it could easily stand alone with Chapter 1 as the best available brief introduction to the historical Aquinas and his far-reaching influence on Catholic theology.

“Part Two: The Doctrine” begins with Nichols tackling the issue of the *de facto* activity of God in revealing himself to humanity (Chapter Two, “Revelation”). Thomas’s focus on revelation as an “intellectual event” is deftly explained in its “analogy” with “variegated natural experience,” and its ability to cover God’s diverse methods of revealing himself (21–23). Most noteworthy here is an explanation of the development of Thomas’s theology of the senses of Scripture and its culmination in a theory of the literal sense that even includes the spiritual sense, an important detail that Nichols derives from M. D. Jordan (32–33, fn. 18) and one that is a helpful *prolegomena* to a fruitful encounter with Thomas’s exegetical corpus.

Chapter 3, “God and Creation,” covers well-charted ground in recent Thomistic research. Yet Nichols offers a less familiar starting point: Thomas’s doctrine of man’s knowledge of God as found in the *Summa contra Gentiles*. The interplay Nichols detects between “anabatic,” natural approaches to God and knowledge given katabatically in revelation lays an informative foundation for considering how natural knowledge of God and creation is made foundational by Thomas to investigating what God has revealed (40). This approach enables Nichols to access the profundity of Thomas’s metaphysics (40–44) and his natural theology (45–57) in a way that does not separate them from one another nor from their all-important context, which is theology.

Chapter 4, “The Trinity,” finds Nichols once again exercising his greatest strength—historical analysis. Tracing the progress of both eastern and western theologies of the Trinity before Thomas, he uses the sticking points of the Greek approach as a helpful contrast to their resolution, found potentially in Augustine and actually in the “strongly personalist

cast” of Thomas’s approach (67). The insights of this chapter are powerfully completed in Chapter 5, where Nichols explores Thomas’s insights into the Trinitarian structure of God’s creative activity and the pinnacle of that creation, the “*imago Trinitatis*,” man—whose imagehood is completed by a growing similitude to Christ through grace.

Chapter 6, which concerns Thomas’s famous angelology, says as much about Thomas’s teaching by the place Nichols gives the chapter as the same does in its contents. By serving as an interlude between the chapters on God and his creative work on the one hand, and those to come on his salvific work on the other, this pivotal interlude draws the reader’s attention to the open roof on Thomas’s theology, revealing it as one hospitable to vast realms of God’s creativity largely inaccessible to human knowing. It also offers an fitting segue into Thomas’s theology of sin and redemption in the fall of the angels, a tragic foreshadowing of the fall of man and a central illustration of the pivotal principle of creaturely reality as Thomas sees it—that “self-existence in joy is only possible through divine grace and that deformity that comes from the theological virtues” (90).

Chapters 7 and 8 trace the *reditus creaturae rationalis in Deum* in the order that its components are considered in the *Summa*, first in regard to its actualization through the power of grace and the fructification of grace in virtues both natural and theological (Chapter 7), and then in the cause (Christ), the total dynamic (Church), and the instrumental causes (sacraments) of this *reditus* (Chapter 8). Nichols sounds off on some areas of dispute—the relationship of nature to grace; the critique of Thomas’s moral teleology offered by the Grisez school (to which he makes a justified and enlightening response vis-à-vis Benedict Ashley)—and bypasses others. While in these two chapters he is at his most summary and least original in treatment, he continues to exercise his aptitude for lucid summary and expression, offering a great deal of intellectual traction to the beginner.

Moving ahead to Part Four, Nichols returns to familiar Thomistic terrain from a new and complementary perspective—that of theological methodology. Indeed, these two chapters can be understood as an extended response to the question, “What, if any, continuing value does Aquinas’s approach to theology have for those who endeavor to advance the process of theological speculation?” In Chapter 10, “Thomas and the Practice of Philosophy,” Nichols attempts to justify his claim that “Catholic appeal to a *philosophia perennis* can hardly bypass Thomas, its classic exponent *par excellence*” (148); this he does by sounding off on some of Thomas’s major philosophical insights in metaphysics and anthropology. While largely successful, the brevity of the chapter sets the

author (and reader) at a breathless pace that rushes past much of the depth and potential of the subject matter. In fact, Nichols attempts to catalog Thomas's philosophy in one chapter, a feat he can only manage to accomplish in seven chapters for Thomas's theology!

Chapter 11, "Thomas and the Idea of Theology," approaches a much more manageable subject in a much more penetrating way. Nichols does a commendable job of coupling his observation of Thomas's scarce references to his method with an illuminating observation of Thomas's actual practice. This largely consists of reflection on the first question of the *Summa*. However, the bookends of the chapter are easily the most fascinating and insightful, for it is in them that we encounter facets of Thomas's approach that are both least like mainstream theological speculation and also most relevant to it. The first, a section on the modes of theological discourse as found in the prologue of the *Scriptum super Sententiis* (168–70), reveals (through Nichols's analysis of one such mode, "argumentative discourse") the ease by which Thomas passes from the Bible to the "wider context" of "divine revelation as passed on in the Church" (169). The second, a section on "Thomas as mystical theologian" (176–77), reveals how effortlessly Thomas's discourse travels between the two poles of theological speculation and mystical intuition, the latter "an existential and mystical depth to theology" in which God draws the rational appetite "into an apprehension of the Trinity" (177).

As noted earlier, *Discovering Aquinas* is one new entry in an ever-growing list of introductory works to St. Thomas Aquinas, each with its own merits and limitations. Yet what makes Nichols's work unique is that it does not simply introduce the reader to Aquinas, but to the whole world of Thomistic scholarship, its recent lights, and its historical pitfalls, its conversations and the dialogue partners who have contributed most recently to those conversations. Thomas surrounded himself with a great cloud of theological guides, both biblical and extra-biblical, in his own pursuit of theological insight. In a similar way, Nichols does the beginner an inestimable favor by providing readers with guides to Thomas, and to this *bonum* he adds another: his own service as an important guide to the topography of contemporary Thomistic scholarship. N·V

Christopher T. Baglow
Our Lady of Holy Cross College
New Orleans, Louisiana