

Book Reviews

Augustine's Early Theology of Image: A Study in the Development of Pro-Nicene Theology by Gerald P. Boersma (*Oxford: Oxford University Press*, 2016), xiv + 318 pp.

IN GRAHAM GREENE'S *The Power and the Glory*, the protagonist perseveres in his faith despite his many failings because of one "convincing mystery—that we were made in God's image." "He would sit in the confessional," Greene writes, "and hear the complicated dirty little ingenuities which God's image had thought out." The whisky priest could not help but see God in the policeman, the maniac, and the sinner in flagrante delicto.

The average Christian takes for granted that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, but as Gerald P. Boersma illustrates in his new monograph *Augustine's Early Theology of Image*, this teaching was anything but self-explanatory. Early Latin pro-Nicene theologians were eager to defend the doctrine that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, and to do so they interpreted the Scriptural references to "image" as signifying total equality. According to this tack, when Paul states that Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), the Apostle is affirming the equality of Father and Son sharing one divine substance. But this equation of image and equality, which defends the Son's divinity, also makes it difficult to affirm man's humanity, for asserting that man is or has the *imago Dei* becomes tantamount to claiming that he is equal to God. At best, humans are only made *in* or *toward* (*ad secundum*) the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26) but are not themselves an image of the divine. Further complicating this anthropology is the question of whether this image in which man is made is an image of God, of Christ, or of the entire Trinity and to what degree, if any, the human body bears the divine image.

To show how pro-Nicene Latin theology navigated these waters, Boersma carefully and sympathetically traces the development of image theology in the writings of Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, and Marius Victorinus. His perceptive explication of these authors often challenges commonly held readings, like the assumption that Ambrose's rhetoric of "fleeing the body" implies a rejection of the corporeal. And his explanation of Marius Victorinus's philosophy is the best of its kind that I have read.

But Boersma's real quest—and the subject of the second half of the book—is to explore image theology in the early writings of Augustine of Hippo. Even prior to his priestly ordination, Boersma maintains, Augustine had developed a theology of image that overcame the shortcomings of his predecessors. Specifically, Boersma contends that through a resourceful application of Platonic participatory ontology, Augustine was able to affirm that two images participating in the same original were not necessarily equal and that the Second Person of the Trinity and humanity are therefore both authentic images of God albeit in different ways. Further, although the *imago Dei* remains firmly fixed in the higher rational faculties of the human soul, the body may be said to participate in the divine image insofar as it reflects or bears witness to it. (This participation is particularly evident when the body is well governed by the soul in leading a virtuous and faithful life.) Boersma even argues that although Augustine was not operating out of an Aristotelian theory of hylomorphism, he was nonetheless able to avoid dualistic thinking and to affirm, in a way that other Church Fathers were not, the “integrated nature of the body-soul composite” (223).

In addition to a nuanced examination of Plotinus, Boersma's study of Augustine's early thought focuses on the four Cassiciacum dialogues (particularly the *Contra academicos* and *Soliloquia*), the *Diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* and *De quantitate animae*, and the *De vera religione*. The study concludes with an epilogue in which Boersma traces a significant continuity between Augustine's early theology and the *De Trinitate* regarding the *imago Dei*.

Given my own work on the Cassiciacum dialogues, I was particularly interested in and impressed with Boersma's analyses of these often-neglected texts. I note here only a few minor quibbles.

To reconstruct Augustine's early image theology, Boersma turns to a passage regarding image and falsehood in *Soliloquies* 2 and to an allusion to the god Proteus as an “image of the truth” in *Contra academicos* 3.5.11 through 3.6.13, but he also contends that the former presents an incorrect and “negative evaluation of image” (189) that is corrected by the latter, which is an earlier work. The tension between the two passages could, I believe, be more fruitfully resolved by bringing to bear an insight that Boersma presents later in the book, namely, that for Augustine issues of falsity reside on the level of judgment rather than understanding; things are not false *in se* but only insofar as a mind fails to judge them as images of something else (see 236–37, 264). Augustine does not want the readers of his *Soliloquies* thinking that images *qua* images are deceptive, and his intention is clear when one attends to the dialogue's ironic and dialectical

dimensions. *Soliloquia* 2.16.10 through 2.7.13 occupies a provisional place in the narrative's unfolding meaning. The main speaker here is Augustine's wily and often misleading interlocutor Reason (*Ratio*), who here uses his examples of false images to prove two contradictory conclusions, that *likeness* is the mother of falsity (2.6.10) and that *unlikeness* is the mother of falsity (2.7.13). When the discussion resumes after a brief interlude, both of these conclusions are scrapped for a new option about the false that is free of the language of image and likeness (2.9.16). Fortunately, Reason's and Augustine's final consensus about falsity does not nullify their earlier musings in 2.6.10 through 2.7.13 (thereby keeping Boersma's overall thesis intact), but his argument would have been stronger if he had made the consistency of Augustine's underlying theology clearer.

Another potential danger in *Augustine's Early Theology of Image* is the tendency to "over-Christify" the Cassiciacum dialogues. Three examples of this tendency will suffice.

First, Boersma contends that the myth of Proteus, in which one must hold on to the sea god and not be deterred by the terrifying shapes that he takes before he discloses his secrets, is used by Augustine at Cassiciacum as "a philosophical representation of the person of Christ" (177). Part of Boersma's reasoning is that there is an implicit analogy between the two natures of Christ as truth (his divinity) and truth-like (his humanity). Yet the discussions involving Proteus in the *Contra academicos* concern the mind's ability to move from the sensible to the intelligible. To borrow the language of Bernard Lonergan, Augustine uses the myth of Proteus to illustrate the nature of intellectual conversion rather than that of a religious conversion which includes recognition of God incarnate—and understandably so, for Proteus makes a poor Christ. As a sort of numinous aquatic leprechaun, the old man of the sea needs to be approached with suspicion and aggression; his many appearances are designed not to lead us closer to him, but farther away. Christ, on the other hand, took flesh not to conceal but to reveal; his bodily appearance is not a deception but an invitation to respond with love and trust. Certainly, a "Platonic" understanding of Proteus can pave the way for a better understanding of the Incarnation. But it is one thing to say that the metaphysical and cognitional structures that enable the mind to ascend from the sensible to the intelligible are the same basic structures that enable the believer to acknowledge God in the flesh; it is another to say that the former, as expressed in myth, is a personification of the latter. I therefore think that it is safer to conclude that Proteus "poetically attests to the possibility of the Incarnation" (181) and that Augustine uses the myth as "a metaphor for participatory Platonism" (180), as Boersma himself does, than to claim

as well that the myth is deliberately a “veiled reference to the incarnate Christ” (178; see 166).

Second, Boersma’s use of “philosophy” is ambivalent, for he seems to suggest that for Augustine “the face of philosophy” is the person of Jesus Christ (176). Yet Boersma also cites Robert O’Connell’s observation that Philosophy is graphically described as a woman with breasts, a bosom, and a lap (175, fn 25). Lady Philosophy may be an enormously helpful handmaid, but she cannot lead us to the true Teacher on her own—and she is not the Teacher’s face. It may be helpful to recall that in *Contra academicos* 3.19.42 Augustine defines “utterly true” philosophy as a harmonious blend of Plato and Aristotle, not of Plato and Scripture, and that while Augustine admonishes Romanianus to “philosophize” as a propaedeutic to religious assent, he never uses the noun “philosophy” in any of his writings to signify Christian thought, content, or practice.

Third, Boersma states that Augustine’s incarnational theology “ultimately overcomes” Academic skepticism (188; see also 185), but such a formulation implies that Augustine’s earlier philosophical attempts to vanquish the Academics were unsuccessful and that only a faith in Christ could rescue him from skepticism. Such an account does not agree with the testimony of Augustine, who is satisfied that his own conclusions, which are based on a critical study of the inconsistencies in Academic teaching, are sufficient for accepting the proposition that man is capable of discovering the truth (2.20.43). It is only then that Augustine essentially says, “Besides, *if* I’m wrong and reason can’t refute skepticism by itself, there is always the authority of Christ, from which I will never depart” (see 2.20.43).

In all of these “over-Christifications” Boersma is locating himself in a vein of scholarship seeking to correct the Harnack-O’Connell hypothesis that Augustine was more of a neo-Platonist than a Christian when he converted in AD 386, and while I share Boersma’s conviction that he is on the winning side of this debate, one must be on guard against over-corrections. The Cassiciacum dialogues may be thoroughly infused with an orthodox Christian sensibility, but they also respect philosophical questions and issues on their own terms, at least provisionally.

Finally, Boersma portrays Augustine as holding that the Academics “went astray” in their reception of Plato by “severing the image from the form” (184). Yet beginning in 2.13.30 Augustine devotes almost half of book 3 of *Contra academicos* to persuading Alypius (and the reader) that the Academics never went astray in their reception of Plato but were keeping Plato’s deepest insights hidden from the unworthy Stoics through a series of deceptive public stances that only made them look like skeptics.

Indeed, as Blake Dutton notes in his *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, the reestablishment of Platonic philosophy in the glorious figure of Plotinus is due, according to Augustine, to the “unrivalled success” (26) of the person of Jesus Christ, who enables both the few and the many to return to the intelligible world without the hassle of philosophical bickering (2.19.42). It is arguably here that the doctrine of the Incarnation has its greatest impact on Augustine’s early thought. Perhaps Proteus is a better personification of Carneades or Cicero than of Jesus Christ.

None of these reservations, however, diminish Gerald Boersma’s remarkable achievement, the many virtues of which I have not attempted to list. *Augustine’s Early Theology of Image* is an excellent study on a fascinating theological topic. I recommend it to scholars interested in Patristics, Trinitarian theology, or theological anthropology, and to anyone who, like Greene’s whisky priest, cannot and does not want to escape a convincing mystery. 

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Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary*
by Brian Davies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), xxviii + 485 pp.

BRIAN DAVIES’S *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* comes two years after the publication of his delightfully (some would say quixotically) ambitious *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary*. Like the first, this second book “aims to be introductory, if also comprehensive, and it does not presume that its reader is already familiar with medieval thinking” (xvii). But while both volumes run close to five hundred pages, the much shorter length of the *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] allows Davies a little more breathing room, and the result is a smooth and thoughtful overview of the entire text immensely useful for nonspecialists and worth consulting for specialists.

After a brief discussion of Aquinas’s life and writings, Davies rejects the view that the SCG was written to aid missionaries, Dominican or otherwise, and instead claims (with the help of the opening chapters of the SCG) that Aquinas has provided “an extended essay in natural theology” in books I–III and then offers “defenses of the articles of faith” in book IV. “And that,” he concludes, “is all that we can confidently refer to

when it comes to the question ‘Why did Aquinas write the SCG?’” (15). (But why the need to remark in a footnote that Aquinas “does refer to Islam” in these sections, offering “a brief tirade against Mohammed,” even though this “little anti-Islamic outburst” is hardly evidence of a missionary purpose? [397])

Of the remaining seventeen chapters, eight address God’s existence, nature, and creative power, six address creatures and their relation to God’s providential plan, and the final three address the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the sacraments and salvation. Each chapter follows the same plan: a section of the *SCG* is explained, with copious quotations and sometimes exhaustive (and exhausting) lists of arguments with lots of examples to make Aquinas’s claims both clear and attractive. Each expository section is then followed by Davies’s own evaluation of the text. These are the most interesting and readable sections (and worth perusing for a specialist working on the topic at hand), and they make many references to contemporary challenges one might offer to Aquinas, as well as arguments in defense of, and occasionally critical of, Aquinas’s views.

Davies is most comfortable, and confident, in the eight chapters on God. These make up more than one third of his text (though treating about one fifth of the *SCG*), and an entire chapter is spent on *SCG* I, chapter 13 (arguments for God’s existence). Davies is certain that Aquinas’s arguments for God’s existence are not obvious failures, but stops short of calling them successful demonstrations. “My view is that [whether or not they are successful demonstrations] is not an easy question to answer since some of the arguments contain stages that are difficult to understand” (45). Like most defenders of Aquinas, he constructs an example of a causal chain with two types of causes. If my hand holds a stack of books, then each book keeps the book above it from falling to the ground. But my hand is a cause of a different sort, something “whose causal power runs through the chain in such a way as to make the members of the chain do what they do or be what they are” (52). But does Davies think the arguments work? As he often does throughout the commentary, he ends only by quoting from another Aquinas scholar, in this case Edward Feser’s defense of this type of argument, and then concludes: “I take it that Feser is suggesting that something that actually exists, but does not have to exist, is potentially nonexistent, and that its sheer existence depends on it being actualized by what cannot not-exist” (55).

The remaining chapters on God focus on the divine attributes, which flow (as they do in the parallel questions in the *Summa theologiae*) from the conception of God as an uncaused cause. At the end of his discussion of God’s creative power, Davies comments on the assertion that if some-

thing can be then God can make it be: "I find this assertion convincing if Aquinas is right in what he says in the SCG concerning God as a first cause who makes things to exist as one who does not *have* being but *is* being and is the cause of there being anything that does not have to exist because of what it is" (150). This is a nice reminder of Davies's general approach to the chapters on God: given the possibility of analogical language, if God is an uncaused cause, then he is simple, and therefore good, omniscient, omnipotent, and so on.

The next six chapters on creatures and their relation to God's providence take up about the same number of pages as the chapters on God but cover three fifths of the *SCG*. Here the discussion is less focused, running through chapters on the contingency of creation, intellectual creatures (where he takes a stand on the disembodied soul: "For Aquinas, . . . if my soul and body are separated, then I cease to exist since what I am is a human being, and a human being is a composite of soul and body" [180]), agency, the end of all things, and providence.

There are many interesting discussions in the commentaries at the end of these chapters, but two of the most striking address our ultimate happiness and traditional sexual morality. Davies offers some pointed criticism of Aquinas's insistence in the *SCG* that our "every desire is fulfilled" in the beatific vision: "Though one might well see the force of the SCG 3's denial that ultimate human happiness can lie in honors, glory, riches, and so on, one might reasonably feel that an account of ultimate human happiness that presents it as only a matter of seeing God intellectually, only a matter of understanding, cannot really be taking full account of the word 'human' in the phrase 'ultimate human happiness'" (243). As usual, Davies does not follow up with a developed view, preferring simply to raise possible problems for further inquiry (his final paragraph on the subject ends, for example, with three long sentences, each of which is a rhetorical question).

After developing Aquinas's arguments in favor of the traditional connection between sexual activity and procreation, Davies argues that there are strong reasons to think that Aquinas has not offered good philosophical arguments against nonreproductive sex (of various sorts, though he is particularly interested in homosexual sexual activity). As usual, he ends by raising questions rather than answering them, though he refers the interested reader to Jean Porter's *Natural and Divine Law* and Gareth Moore's *A Question of Truth*, both of which are highly critical of Aquinas's views on sexual morality; for a defense of the traditional view, he recommends (in the same footnote) two and a half pages of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*: §§2351–59 (443). (The interested reader of this review

would do well to try Alexander Pruss's *One Body* and David O'Connor's *Plato's Bedroom* after finishing those two and a half pages.)

The final three chapters, covering *SCG* IV (about one fourth of the *SCG* and one fourth of Davie's commentary) address the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the sacraments and salvation. Here Davies is most interested in the philosophical arguments that Aquinas makes use of, even though he is treating doctrines of faith. At the conclusion of his presentation of Aquinas on the Trinity, for example, he says: "At the end of the day, Aquinas thinks of the doctrine of the Trinity as a mystery, revealed by God, as something that we can try to reflect on only so as to make some kind of feeble sense of it. In *SCG* 4, 2–26 he argues that we can make sense enough of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity so as to declare that it is taught in the Bible and so as to refute the idea that the doctrine is incoherent or nonsensical or unthinkable. But this is pretty much all he does in the *SCG*" (325). He concludes his presentation and discussion of Aquinas on the Incarnation in a similar fashion: "Aquinas takes the Incarnation to be beyond what human reasoning can fathom. . . . You might think that *SCG* 4, 27–49 tries to describe God in clear ways; but you would be wrong to do so. In these chapters, Aquinas defends certain traditional formulae as cohering with Scripture and as not being inconsistent" (351). The final chapter on the sacraments and salvation remains, again, focused on philosophical problems. On the Eucharist, for example, Davies quotes Herbert McCabe: "Aristotle could have made no sense of the notion of transubstantiation. It is not a term that can be accommodated within the concepts of Aristotelian philosophy; it represents the breakdown of these concepts in the face of a mystery" (371).

This commentary (like its predecessor) is the obvious fruit of many years of reflection, and it is written with a relaxed thoughtfulness that would be the envy of any commentary writer. His footnotes are filled with references to most of the major recent works on Aquinas's thought, and his reflections at the end of each chapter are both excellent introductions for nonspecialists and useful presentations of one scholar's considered perspective on the lay of the land (though he almost always avoids decisive critical judgments; Davies's noncommittal stance is the most maddening—bordering on the counterproductive—aspect of the entire commentary). Davies's own interests are clearly shaped by modern religious skepticism, both within the academy and without, and his examples exhibit a fondness for the analytic style of his fellow Catholic Oxbridge philosophers who also fought tirelessly against that skepticism. (Herbert McCabe is Davies's primary inspiration, with more references and quotations than any other author besides Aquinas and Aristotle—Augustine ties with Peter Geach

for fourth.) And every page is clearly written to help his reader see, over and over, that there is something of immense value in St. Thomas Aquinas, and we ignore him at our own intellectual peril. I am happy to say that anyone who reads through *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* will find it very hard not to agree. N.V

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The Pope and the Professor: Pius IX, Ignaz von Döllinger, and the Quandary of the Modern Age by Thomas Albert Howard (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2017*), xvii + 339 pp.

FOR MANY OF US, there is no “quandary of the modern age.” We are at home with our liberal presumptions. They have afforded many millions of us with a new form of fraternity (the nation-state) founded on structures of liberty and equality our peasant ancestors could never have imagined. As a result of this familiarity, we find it difficult to imagine a time when the presumption of liberty, equality, and fraternity as ends in themselves did not exist. Thomas Albert Howard’s new book on Pope Pius IX, Ignaz von Döllinger, ultramontanism, and historicism is a sophisticated antidote to this incapacity in our modern imagination. Seeking to bring us into some of the central tensions of nineteenth-century European Church–state relations, Howard expertly guides us through a charitable engagement with people, ideas, and movements we can scarcely countenance. This is an impressive accomplishment, and I commend this book to both Catholic and Protestant scholars desiring a wider historical perspective on our current contexts in Europe and the United States.

As a historical narrative, the book is straightforward and a pleasure to read. The first chapter sets the stage for the nineteenth century by treating the French Revolution as a kind of “trauma” suffered by the European Church, and by the papacy in particular. Howard presents ultramontanism as a response to this trauma. In providing this context, Howard provides us with something sorely needed from our post–Vatican II perspective: a nuanced vision of the Catholic Church and its theological, social, and political motives in the nineteenth century. This vision is necessary for the clarification of our perspective for several reasons, not least of which is the ease with which we assume the American and French revolutions created a world that was providentially ordained and, so, inevitable. Howard thus guards us against the “enormous condescension of posterity.”

That we would even be sensitive to such condescension is due in part to the influence of minds like Döllinger's. So, Howard's second chapter is an introduction to and retrieval of the life, training, and work of one of the most universally respected scholars in nineteenth-century Christendom (such as it was). Howard's portrait of Döllinger is painstaking, fascinating, inspiring, troubling, tragic, and intimidating all at once. Readers will be surprised that Döllinger has not received more critical attention in anglophone scholarship. But readers will also discern some of the reasons for Döllinger's obscurity. He is after all, despite his impressive learning and reputation, yet one more German scholar convinced of the purgative utility of historical inquiry and its necessity in the face of the (supposed) excesses of neo-Scholastic thought. Readers of this journal will be especially interested in Döllinger's story as it pertains to the story of Thomism in the decades prior to Vatican II. In my estimation, it would be inappropriate to label Döllinger a modernist or a proto-modernist. But for those of us versed in that controversy, Döllinger's life, training, and work will simultaneously corroborate and challenge our perspectives.

In the third chapter, Howard provides us with a history of the First Vatican Council, told through the lens provided by the plentiful correspondence between Döllinger and Lord Acton. This is the crisis point of the book, for it places Döllinger's careful historical researches into the history of the papacy's temporal power in contradistinction to the ultramontanism fueling the infallibilists' position at the Council. All of the ugliness and sorrow of the Church's ordeal in the nineteenth century is on full display here: Pius IX's plight in the midst of *kulturkampf* after *kulturkampf*, especially with Italy, France, and Germany; "Roman" theology versus "German" theology; the Vatican and runaway national churches; and not least, the excommunication of Döllinger himself, who can appear to be vindicated at the Second Vatican Council some decades later. Those Catholic and Protestant scholars who desire a clearer vision of the complex preludes to Vatican II would do well to visit this chapter carefully in light of Howard's hope that we will read this history with "empathetic retrospection."

The final chapter details Döllinger's contributions to the beginnings of the ecumenical movement in the nineteenth century and to the formation of the schismatic Old Catholic Church in Germany. Those familiar with Howard's scholarship will recognize in this chapter a special interest of the author. Howard's interest here is also a signal contribution to research into the nineteenth century, for Howard makes an incisive case against two prominent theses about the era: one, that the nineteenth century is the story of a burgeoning and unstoppable secularism; and the other, that the century is the story of a lamentable and retrograde confessionism. In

opposition to both of these hypotheses, Howard carefully demonstrates how Döllinger's time was "neither preponderantly secular nor preponderantly confessional, but churning religious and undeniably complex" (224).

The book succeeds admirably in enabling the reader to appreciate an alien context with sympathy and insight. Where some specialists may want more astute readings of various social, political, philosophical, and theological controversies, Howard shows himself to be a circumspect historian willing to stick to his narrative and point specialists to the reality of the events. The bibliography is a trove. And though the writing is sometimes contrived, for this reviewer at least, Howard's effort is a welcome addition to the increasingly sensitive and fascinating historical, philosophical, and theological research being done into the Church's history between the French Revolution and the Second Vatican Council. 

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Ethics as a Work of Charity: Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue by David Decosimo (*Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014*), xiii + 272 pp.

ETHICS AS A WORK OF CHARITY: Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue is a careful and nuanced reading of Thomas Aquinas on the surprisingly complex matter of the way the habits of virtues can be said to inhere in those who are non-Christians. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that as Thomas teaches, on the one hand, man is fallen and without grace is incapable of completing thoroughly good works (see *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 109, a. 8). On the other hand, however, it seems evident that there are those outside of Christian grace who do good. Decosimo engages with this challenge precisely in terms of the Augustinian and Aristotelian influences in Aquinas's writing. A strong reading of Augustine seems to indicate that there is no real virtue in the pagans, but a semblance only. Whereas Aristotle, a pagan himself, has such an influence on Aquinas and seems to have a penetrating grasp of the nature of virtue, it seems odd to deny that there is an authentic sense of virtue in him or others like him.

Decosimo commendably transcends the false dichotomy of the Aristotelian and Augustinian influence in Aquinas and often repeats and argues for the position that Aquinas is Augustinian by being an Aristotelian and Aristotelian by being Augustinian. This is highlighted by Decosimo

when he notes that Aquinas is “unswervingly loyal to Augustine: First in his unbending, anti-Pelagian insistence that the supernatural end is, essentially, beyond the power of human nature to attain” (167). However, in our friendship with God it is fundamentally the Aristotelian account of friendship which informs Aquinas’s understanding, since it is Aristotle’s position that a friend is another self. Consequently, since the Christian is friends with God, when God works, the work is also ours. In this way, according to Decosimo, by remaining a strict Augustinian, Aquinas embraces Aristotle, and vice-versa (167).

The driving hermeneutic of Decosimo’s reading is that of charity. That is to say, when reading Aquinas, Decosimo always understands Aquinas to be striving for the most charitable reading of any other author with whom he is engaging. According to Decosimo, “Thomas regards it a kind of failure if he cannot find the truth in the claims of Aristotle, Maimonides, and the like even when those claims seem contrary to Christian truth” (257). In this light, Decosimo rightly notes where Aquinas gently and discreetly corrects Augustine and goes beyond Aristotle. Thus, for example, when Augustine defines virtue as “a good quality of the soul” Thomas notes that “it would be more suitable if for *quality* we substitute *habit*” (ST I-II, q. 55, a. 4). Further, there is no ambiguity with Aquinas that infused virtue, something about which Aristotle could have had no conception, is more perfectly virtue, even as it is understood in Aristotelian terms.

While there is much to be commended in Decosimo’s account of pagan virtue, and in his approach to Thomas, still he seems to overstate his position. According to Decosimo, “In all this, we have begun to see both that and why moral virtues—human moral virtues—are virtues simply (*virtutes simpliciter*)” (115). The problem with such a claim is that it contradicts what Thomas says elsewhere:

It is therefore clear from what has been said that only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply: since they direct man well to the ultimate end. But the other virtues, those, namely, that are acquired, are virtues in a restricted sense, but not simply: for they direct man well in respect of the last end in some particular genus of action, but not in respect of the last end simply. (ST I-II, q. 65, a. 2, corp.)

In light of this clear declaration of St. Thomas, it becomes necessary for Decosimo to show how he can maintain his position. He is of course not unaware of this text and addresses the objection thus:

As the preceding chapter showed, Thomas repeatedly characterizes acquired virtues as virtues perfect, simple, and true. Here, however, they are imperfect. Given the relative, contextual character of Thomas's perfection language, this is unsurprising. Acquired virtues are and are not perfect and unqualified: perfect insofar as they attain virtues' perfect *ratio*, the *ratio* of the species he elsewhere declares perfect, simple, true; imperfect insofar as their species falls short of another. (140)

Looking back to his argument in the previous chapter, we see that Decosimo's position turns on his reading of Aquinas in his commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Decosimo quotes this passage: "But divine virtue is more noble than human virtue, which we call virtue simply" ("Sed virtus divina est honorabilior virtute humana quam simpliciter virtutem nominamus"). It seems that Decosimo fails to recognize that while it is true that, with respect to divine virtue, human virtue is called virtue simply speaking, here Aquinas is not distinguishing between infused and acquired virtues. It would be wrong, then, when speaking of acquired virtue, or pagan virtue, to think that such are virtues simply speaking. The distinction between acquired and infused is contained under the more generic expression, human virtue. Consequently, while it is true that relative to "divine virtue" acquired virtue falls on the side of virtue simply speaking, still as Aquinas notes in the text above, it is only infused virtue that is virtue simply speaking.

This being said, the arguments that Decosimo gives for pagan virtue being "perfect, unified, and true" are largely sound. Following Thomas, one should hold that acquired virtue can be perfect within a certain genus. So also, acquired virtues are rightly considered to be unified in prudence, and are certainly true virtues. The difficulty is whether all of these accounts of acquired virtue can belong to any pagan. That is to say, granted that human nature is ordered to act in accord with the acquired virtues by nature, it is not clear that any person without grace can possess the acquired virtues in their fullness.

Decosimo manifests his familiarity with Aquinas's texts and rightly takes up *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 8. There Aquinas makes it clear that it is impossible that man be without mortal sin for a long time without grace:

So, too, before man's reason, wherein is mortal sin, is restored by justifying grace, he can avoid each mortal sin, and for a time, since it is not necessary that he should be always actually sinning. But it cannot be that he remains for a long time without mortal sin. Hence

Gregory says (*Super Ezech. Hom. xi*) that “a sin not at once taken away by repentance, by its weight drags us down to other sins”: and this because, as the lower appetite ought to be subject to the reason, so should the reason be subject to God, and should place in Him the end of its will.

Decosimo’s reply to this challenge to his position, however, is wanting. He says, “Thomas would suggest, I think, that Scripture calls the believer to live in a God-trusting tension of dual affirmation” (251). The idea being that we affirm both the corruption that comes from sin, and also the possibility of acquired virtue existing in pagans without grace. It is difficult, on the one hand, to deny this. On the other hand, it seems to miss the point. While it is true that Christians should affirm goodness wherever we find it and be slow to judge another’s actions negatively, in *sacra doctrina* we are addressing theological matters as they can be known scientifically. The idea that we should attempt to affirm something which seems speculatively impossible is strange. And it is precisely this speculative difficulty that Decosimo avoids answering.

It is here that we strike at a rather overarching question about *Ethics as a Work of Charity*. It is difficult to precisely pin down to what kind of audience Decosimo is attempting to address in this work. The first two chapters, “Thomas and His Outsides” and “God, Good, and the Desire of All Things,” begin with surprisingly fundamental and even rudimentary accounts of Thomas’s work. However, he quickly goes into far more complex and sophisticated accounts of habit and virtue. The work seems to attempt to be simultaneously for the beginner and the proficient. Then, when he turns away from the speculative consideration and says that we ought to simply accept the pagan as virtuous, without adequately addressing the very real speculative difficulties, it seems that his work is no longer attempting to properly be *sacra doctrina*.

This difficulty and the other objections aside, Decosimo’s work is an important contribution to Thomistic scholarship. His insistence that Aquinas is an Augustinian by being an Aristotelian, and vice-versa, seems true and important to observe when reading Aquinas’s writings. There is clearly an attempt by Aquinas to find the truth of the matter on any question he pursues and he accordingly brings to bear different authorities all for this intention. Augustine and Aristotle, however, are certainly preeminent in their influence. Decosimo’s insistence that the question of whether or not pagan virtue is real virtue not be decided on the basis of whether Aquinas is more Augustinian or more Aristotelian is exactly right, as far as this reader is concerned. What is more, it is clear that Decosimo has given a

close reading of the pertinent texts, and all those who desire to understand Thomas better on the question of pagan virtue would benefit from carefully considering this reading, even if at last they do not agree.

In the end, it seems that the common account that according to Aquinas virtues belong to pagans as disconnected and more easily lost is correct. While Decosimo makes a noble attempt to elevate pagan virtue it finally falls short because of the devastating effects of fallen human nature and the necessity of grace. For fallen man, following Aquinas, not only do we need grace to attain our supernatural end, but we need grace also for attaining merely our natural end. Decosimo is correct in arguing that pagan virtue is real, and that it is important that Christians do not dismiss the goodness they find in pagans out of hand. Pagan virtue, however, is still necessarily disconnected and vitiated by the fact that man cannot long avoid mortal sin by his own power. It seems, then, we must still side with those Decosimo labels “hyper-Augustinians.” Namely, we must insist that there is only a semblance of virtue in the pagan.

Consequently, it seems that this work would have benefited from a close consideration of the relationship between acquired virtue and infused virtue in the believer. This is a question that is left unaddressed—although Decosimo has addressed it in a more recent article. When Aquinas is treating of acquired virtues, he is not simply speaking of what can happen outside of grace. Rather, Aquinas is speaking of what is *according to nature*. The question of grace and fallen nature are not addressed explicitly in this level of abstraction. N.V

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Five Proofs of the Existence of God: Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz by Edward Feser (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 330pp.

NOTWITHSTANDING KARL BARTH’S famous “Nein!” against the possibility of natural theology in his debates with Emil Brunner, investigations into the possibility of arguments for the existence of God based on natural reason have not been absent in contemporary philosophy and theology. In fact, the traditional conviction that God’s existence is demonstrable by unaided human reason (demonstration here understood according to the Scholastic sense, “that the conclusion that God exists follows with necessity or deductive validity from premises that

are certain, where the certainty of the premises can in turn be shown via metaphysical analysis" [306]) is not difficult to come by. This is in large part thanks to contemporary philosophers such as Edward Feser, whose works in Thomistic philosophy have made the Angelic Doctor's philosophical views more accessible to a popular and non-Thomist audience. His most recent book, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, is no exception.

For a lucid and intelligible explication of the oft-misunderstood *quinque viae* to God's existence, one need look no further than Feser's introductory work, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (or, for those who are more polemically disposed, one can hardly do better than Feser's *The Last Superstition*). *Five Proofs* offers something new insofar as it does not focus strictly on the thought of Aquinas. According to Feser, the book answers to "a need for an exposition and defense of certain important arguments for God's existence that Aquinas himself does not discuss and which have also received insufficient attention in recent work in natural theology" (10). To be sure, Thomas's argument based on motion (taken from Aristotle) and his argument based on the essence–existence distinction make an appearance; nevertheless, it is clear that one need not restrict oneself to the high Scholasticism of the thirteenth century in order to find good and demonstrative arguments for God's existence. Indeed, one need not restrict oneself even to Christian thinkers or to the Christian era.

The book has seven chapters. Each of the first five works through a distinct argument for the existence of God. The proofs are presented in chronological order. Beginning with the Aristotelian proof, Feser proceeds to treat the neo-Platonic proof, the Augustinian proof, the Thomistic proof, and finally the rationalist (or Leibnizian) proof. Chapter 6, the lengthiest chapter of the book, is a treatment of the divine nature and God's relationship to the world. Here, Feser discusses in detail the divine attributes as well as the question of God's acting in and with secondary causal agents. The last chapter closes with responses to "common objections" to natural theology.

Each chapter on a given proof is divided into two stages. In the first stage, Feser begins with a description (first mover, incomposite being, necessary being, etc.) and argues for the existence of a thing that corresponds to that description. In the second stage, he shows how that a thing must also have various attributes that are typically ascribed to God (simplicity, unity, goodness, intelligence, omnipotence, etc.). He then concludes to the existence of God. These two stages are presented first informally, as he says, "as if in a more discursive and leisurely way" (11), and then in a more formal manner, where the argument is spelled out step by step according to numbered propositions.

While each of Feser's arguments for God's existence are discrete, nevertheless, they converge as they rise toward their conclusion. Thus, the proofs should not be viewed as compartmentalized and unrelated. Each argument, in its second stage, borrows from previous proofs. For example, once Feser has argued for God as *actus purus* in his Aristotelian proof, all the attributes that follow from God being *actus purus* are alluded to in the subsequent proofs as a sort of shorthand.

This integral approach is related to Feser's division of each proof into two stages. The first stage, distinct in each chapter, converges with the other proofs in entering the second stage, pertaining to the attributes of God. Insofar as all the arguments are attempting to prove the existence of the same God, this is not surprising. It is the second stage of this twofold division that constitutes the most helpful contribution of Feser's work. Contrasting Feser's two-stage manner of proceeding with Thomas's famous *quinque viae* in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3, highlights the former's advantages.

The *quinque viae*, which are not to be taken as stand-alone arguments for God's existence, are frequently maligned on the basis that Aquinas moves far too quickly from the demonstrated existence, say, of the First Mover to the conclusion: "and this all understand to be God." According to critics, these arguments may show that Aristotle's First Mover exists; but it is in no way clear that this First Mover is identical to the God confessed in the Creed, the God who took on flesh. Such a criticism, while poor insofar as it overlooks the importance of reading the *quinque viae* within the broader context of the *prima pars*, is in some ways understandable. It is hard for someone only looking to the *quinque viae* (extracted from its context) to see that the same arguments leading to God's existence are later appealed to in discussing the divine attributes.

In *Five Proofs*, Feser highlights the close relation between the various arguments for God's existence and the divine attributes. It becomes clear that the being whose existence is demonstrated (the first stage) is, precisely on account of the nature of the demonstration, the same being to whom the attributes traditionally to God belong (the second stage). Thus, Feser not only argues that there is a being that matches the description of the First Mover, but also that this being must, precisely in order to be First Mover, also be immutable, good, simple, omniscient, and so on. As a result, the relationship between the being whose existence is proven (i.e., God) and the attributes that are traditionally predicated of God (simplicity, immutability, goodness, intelligence, perfection, and so on) is shown more quickly and directly.

The second stage of each of Feser's arguments warrants his sixth chap-

ter on the divine attributes and God's relationship to the world. Here, he deals with the divine attributes directly. After spelling out background principles (the principle of proportionate causality, *agere sequitur esse*, and the analogy of being), Feser discusses each of the divine attributes on the basis of these principles and how they relate to the being whose existence has been demonstrated as purely actual actualizer, absolutely simple cause, divine intellect, subsistent existence itself, and absolutely necessary being. This chapter solidifies what has been discussed in previous chapters by showing not only that it is necessary that God exist but also that, on account of his existence and the sort of being that he is, certain things can and must be said about him.

Insofar as natural theology falls under the purview of both theology and philosophy, this book is a good primer for budding philosophers and theologians on how natural theology is done. Philosophers will want to relate the existence of God to the question of being, and theologians (particularly Christian theologians) will want to see how this being is understood with respect to Holy Scripture. But insofar as truth is one and insofar as God is one, Feser's work will greatly benefit both kinds of thinkers. NV

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James, First, Second, and Third John by Kelly Anderson and Daniel Keating (*Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017*), xii + 284 pp.

THIS RECENT VOLUME from the reputable Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture series joins the expanding ranks of its library of New Testament commentaries. It is coauthored by two faculty of Sacred Heart Major Seminary (Detroit, MI), Kelly Anderson and Daniel Keating. Anderson covers the Epistle of James, while Keating takes up First, Second, and Third John. This volume completes the series's treatment of the Catholic epistles, as Keating contributed a previous volume concerning First and Second Peter and Jude.

In keeping with the series format, Anderson's introduction to James manages to be highly informative and well-developed, even for its concision. In just over ten pages, she deals uniformly with the contextual issues pertinent to the epistle's proper interpretation. The discussion of the authorship of the epistle is substantiated by biblical and Patristic data. Anderson discusses a number of possible candidates, including: James

son of Zebedee, brother of St. John the Evangelist—that is, James “the Greater”—and James son of Alphaeus, James “the Lesser.”

Yet, she quickly dispenses with the two other James’s in favor of the unknown “brother” of the Lord. Due to his martyrdom in AD 44, Anderson rightly sets aside James the Greater, given his early death and that much of the epistle’s context appears to take place several decades thereafter (2–3). Although St. Jerome identified James the Lesser as author, Anderson persuasively shows that this is too unlikely, despite such an authoritative backing. With the field cleared away, Anderson hones in on a relative of Jesus (the “brother” of the Lord). In a rather compact way, she paints a vivid portrait of “James the Just,” who was a witness to the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor 15:7), who became the bishop and “pillar” of the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9). As she explains, the prayerful James the Just was “put to death in AD 62 under the high priest Ananus II, a Sadducee, whom Josephus describes as arrogant in his judgments” (5).

In a similarly rich way, Anderson then moves through other contextual matters, such as the epistle’s audience: “James addresses his letter to the ‘twelve tribes in the dispersion’ (1:1). ‘Twelve tribes’ seems to indicate those Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah and were dispersed or scattered away from Palestine, the promised land” (5). After a discussion of the major theological themes of the epistle, Anderson’s introduction, like others in the series, wraps up in a pastoral way, with remarks about “the timeliness of James” (10–11). Here, she brings together the two horizons of biblical exegesis—the ancient and the contemporary, noting that James’s emphasis on believers’ growing in “spiritual maturity” remains a perennial challenge in the Church today.

In the one hundred or so pages that follow, Anderson turns to the text itself. While such length is not excessive when compared with other contemporary commentaries, it is more than adequate. In fact, given that the English translation of James is just over twenty-five hundred words (or about five written pages), each of the epistle’s five chapters are dealt with adequately and with appropriate attention to each paragraph.

One of the key strengths of the entire Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture series is its literary equilibrium—that is, presenting just enough but not too much in the way of technical data. One senses a great deal of thought and masterful editing throughout this volume, in order to inform but not unduly overwhelm the average Catholic adult reader. Anderson (and Keating) judiciously balance that which is brought forward and that which may reasonably remain in the background. This is no small feat, as many contemporary commentaries fail in precisely this way, overwhelming the reader and rendering themselves unusable except for technical use or as

a reference work. Anderson's skill is evident in providing at once a highly competent and highly readable commentary on this under-appreciated book of the New Testament.

A few examples from her treatment of James 2 illustrate this balance. First, one of the overarching themes of the epistle is the necessity of "works," and specifically, the notion that "faith" (*pistis*) without "works" (*erga*) is dead (Jas 2:17). As she explains, simply confessing "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (Jas 2:1) is in fact "pointless if one does not do the merciful deeds that he commands in his royal law of love (2:8). If faith in Jesus does not bring us to conform to his way of life, then it is useless" (56–57).

While Anderson's streamlined exegesis is straightforward and compact, her analysis of chapter 2 is accompanied by no less than three "Biblical Background" sidebar discussions that add flesh to the frame. The first is a word study of "faith" (43); a second compares James and Paul and their approach to the Law of Moses (51); and a third answers the question "is James Responding to Paul?" (63). In addition to such features, there are numerous "Living Tradition" sidebars throughout, which introduce the reader to voices and texts that evoke ecclesial wisdom, including: one from *Lumen Gentium* on "listening" (34); another from *Veritas Splendor* concerning "Freedom and the Law" (38); and an excerpt from a letter of St. Augustine on "love of neighbor" (52). In these and other ways, Anderson keeps the theological substance of the biblical text at the forefront, whilst not neglecting to help the reader dig deeper into the Tradition. The result is a rich blend of academically sound interpretation and spiritual depth.

Throughout the swift-moving commentary, Anderson alerts the reader to connections between James and other books of the canon. As James takes the concern about "boasting" in chapter 4, she explains that it is *appropriate* when it glorifies the Lord: "Then the Blessed Mother was miraculously with child, she magnified and glorified God for the work that he had done for her (Luke 1:46–47). . . . Saint Paul boasts only in the cross (Gal 6:14) and instructs those who boast to boast in the Lord (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17)" (93–94).

Anderson closes the commentary dealing with its final two verses (Jas 5:19–20), in which the author reiterates his reason for writing: "the salvation of his readers and of those who have wandered from the truth." She fittingly concludes: "Like Christ before him as a bishop and defender of the truth, James the Just seeks to save his flock and cover a multitude of sins, continuing the saving activity of his Master (1:1). There is no greater work" (121).

The commentary then turns to First, Second, and Third John, with

Keating analyzing the three epistles that are part of the larger Johannine corpus. Following a brief “General Introduction” to the epistles (123–24), each letter is taken up in turn. As with Anderson’s commentary (12–13), each book is accompanied by a structural outline of the text that follows each respective introduction to the three epistles (134–35, 244, 260).

Among modern biblical critics, the question of Johannine authorship—of all five New Testament books—remains a debated issue. Here, Keating lays out the pertinent questions with care, demonstrating a depth of knowledge and prudent instincts. His discussion of this issue is primarily developed in his introduction to First John, and is not repeated as he moves through much the shorter introductions of Second and Third John (the latter being the shortest “book” in the New Testament). He writes, “Given the striking similarities in style and language, it is very likely that they [all three epistles] come from the same author” (124). Going further, he explains that because there are convincing parallels in both the “style and language” of First John and the Fourth Gospel, “the question about the authorship of 1 John is closely tied” to the Gospel (126). Like Raymond E. Brown and other Johannine scholars, Keating identifies the author of the Fourth Gospel with the figure known as “the beloved disciple” (John 13:23; 19:26).

Yet, given the complexity of contextual questions involved, he refrains from concluding that they are *one and the same person*: “Whether or not this beloved disciple is John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, is a further question that we cannot answer with certainty” (127). Thus, we are dealing with three New Testament books in which there are questions as to their human authorship. Indeed Keating (like Anderson) is patient and prudent, and does not prematurely assert that which remains unclear at present to satisfy the anxious reader. Yet, such is not entirely necessary, as a hallmark that sets this commentary series apart from others is that it proceeds from a hermeneutic of faith, rather than one of suspicion (see Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, §§33, 39, 45). Both commentators are to be commended for dealing carefully and judiciously with such questions, reflecting their academic rigor and Catholic sensibilities.

As with Anderson’s balanced approach, Keating presents concise commentary on the text of each letter that lacks neither depth nor theological insight. Astute readers of the Johannine corpus will note that the so-called “antichrist” does not appear once in Revelation. All such occurrences are located in the Johannine epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). In a “biblical background” sidebar discussion, Keating provides the biblical background to this figure in a refreshingly clear and uncluttered way.

Among the highlights of Keating’s treatment of all three epistles are

“reflection and application” sections, in which he, like Anderson, brings the two horizons of biblical interpretation together in a fresh, practical, and theologically sound manner. Additionally, his use of secondary sources runs the length of sacred Tradition—one finds ample citations from St. Augustine on “the centrality of love” (210), St. Maximus the Confessor on “the deification of the Christian” (182), and Pope Francis, beckoning believers to hear the cries of the poor in *Evangelii Gaudium* (194). As with Anderson’s commentary, Keating’s inclusions enrich the presentation and deepen the reader’s understanding of the Johannine epistles.

In addition to such source material, Keating himself deals with theological questions admirably, such as in his extended sidebar “What Does It Mean to Love One Another?” (214–15) and the so-called “Johannine Comma” of 1 John 5:7-8 (230). Although Second and Third John are admittedly brief, his analysis is quite thorough, running nearly thirty-five pages in length, and with as much care as his analysis of First John.

In sum, *James, First, Second, and Third John* is another commendable volume in a series that continues to support both academic study and pastoral application of the books of the New Testament in a manner that is highly accessible, and that reverberates with academic insight and ecclesial wisdom. 

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