

Book Reviews

Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought edited by Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., translated by Robert Williams, translation revised by Matthew Levering (*Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009*) 362 pp.

The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters by Lawrence Feingold, second edition (*Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010*) 527 pp.

IN his contribution to *Surnaturel: A Controversy*, Gilbert Narcisse, O.P., writes that without the supernatural, “the theologian loses his object of study and all epistemological capability of attaining it.” And again, “there is no theologian without a theology of the relationship between nature and grace” (295). Just so and after more than sixty years, Henri de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* (1946) has not lost its fascination for Catholic theologians. Two things, at least, have recently contributed to an even greater attention to the topics dealt with in what must strike the theological novice as a collection of excessively abstruse historical essays into some of the dustiest nooks and crannies of the archives of “scholasticism.” The first is the claim of John Milbank and his congeners to the mantle of de Lubac, the claim that Radical Orthodoxy builds on and completes the work of *Surnaturel*. The second is the publication of a Roman dissertation entitled *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters* (2001), the second edition of which has recently appeared from Sapientia Press. In this volume, Lawrence Feingold both meets the issues on the historical ground of de Lubac’s predilection, but finds his interpretation of St. Thomas untenable, and also concludes that de Lubac’s own construction of the relation of the natural and supernatural orders is incoherent. This is provocative, since for many contemporary theologians, whether heirs of Karl Rahner or of Hans Urs von Balthasar, many of the conclusions of *Surnaturel* both historical and theological, are as it were “settled law.” We might as well mention here too the conclusion of

Fergus Kerr's recent study of de Lubac that "it is hard to believe that he did not plan his books in order to destroy neoscholastic theology." So, minds are once again focused where they were more than sixty years ago.

Minds need not be focused in exactly the same way, however. Is there some historically trustworthy and theologically irenic way to enter into the issues raised by the interpretation and *Wirkungsgeschichte* of *Surnaturel*? Yes. In 2001, the *Revue Thomiste* published the papers of a symposium, "The Supernatural: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought," edited by Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P. The first book before us is the English translation of this volume. In his introduction, Bonino says that while there can be no demand of nature for the supernatural, neither can nature be thought to be in a condition of simple non-repugnance to grace. There is a "congenital openness of the mind to the supernatural." And this sense of things is part of the legacy of de Lubac, part of his enduring achievement, along with which Bonino counts making us pay closer attention to texts and the history of doctrines, re-embedding St. Thomas in the tradition of the Fathers, and a bestowal of the primacy to theology over philosophy in the articulation of Christian wisdom. These things are "henceforth irreversible acquisitions" (viii). Moreover, about half of the contributors indicate in one way or another their satisfaction with de Lubac's interpretation of the natural desire to see God. This is not a volume written from a single point of view.

De Lubac's *Surnaturel* provokes interest from several directions, and the collection before us accordingly provides an entry into the entire nest of related questions in four chief ways. Some are interested in the history of theology, contemporary or medieval or Baroque. Some are interested in locating the guidance of St. Thomas in determining the *res*, the matter itself. All interests are served by the book before us. Part One takes us to the year of grace 1946 and is devoted to de Lubac himself and the production and immediate reception of *Surnaturel*. Part Two examines "Nature and the Supernatural in Thomas Aquinas." Part Three takes up nature and the supernatural in post-Thomist scholasticism. Part Four, finally, listens for reverberations of *Surnaturel* in contemporary theology.

In Part One, Etienne Fouilloux, emeritus professor of history at Lyons, describes for us the place of de Lubac in French Catholic culture and theology in 1946. He was already well known as the author of *Catholicisme* (1938) and the *Le Drame de l'humanisme athée* (1944). And he was recognized as raising questions about contemporary scholastic theology in such works as *Corpus Mysticum* (1944). Furthermore, he had attained a certain moral authority by his personal conduct during the War as a leader of the "spiritual resistance" and by his rebuke of anti-Semitism

and Pétainism. He was editor of *Recherches de science religieuse* and had been elected a delegate to the General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1946. It is important especially for Americans to try to be aware of the variously fractured state of French Catholicism after the War and to recognize de Lubac's place in it. Fouilloux contributes enormously in short compass to our appreciation of the flammable materials surrounding de Lubac, ready to be touched off by any stray spark. Georges Chantraine, S.J., the friend to whom de Lubac left his literary remains, editor of the *oeuvres complètes*, and his biographer, follows Fouilloux's setting of the scene with a *précis* of *Surnaturel*. He gives us in short form de Lubac's reading of the Fathers, his construal of post-Thomist scholasticism's production of the "hypothesis" and then "system" of "pure nature," and his charge that it reduces nature's appetite for grace to an obediential potency.

It next falls to Henri Donneaud, O.P., to detail the various receptions of *Surnaturel* by the traditional Thomists Charles Boyer, S.J., Rosaire Gagnebet, O.P., and Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, O.P. He alerts us to the necessity to distinguish "natural desire" taken as an ontological, structural appetite built in to the nature, on the one hand, and on the other, taken as a conscious, elicited desire fully directed to the vision of God only under the guidance of grace. Part One finishes with an essay by René Mougél on de Lubac's relation to Jacques Maritain apropos of the sin of the angels. What is missing in this part, as Bonino notes in the introduction, is a comparable article on de Lubac's relation to Etienne Gilson.

Bonino remarks in the introduction that de Lubac's exegesis of St. Thomas has, not surprisingly, been surpassed. The essays in Part Two give evidence of this claim.

Michel Bastit opens the section by asking whether Thomism is an Aristotelian system. The importance of this question stems from the fact that, granted the Platonic, and Neoplatonic, resources available to St. Thomas, it matters a great deal whether and at what points he makes Platonism to frame Aristotle or rather to be framed by him. Bastit observes that St. Thomas preserves the Aristotelian diversity of being. He supplements the Platonic formal hierarchy with Aristotelian substance. And he asserts the real distinction of *esse* and essence within a composition of principles that preserves the unity of beings. The upshot is that Aristotle enables St. Thomas to escape Neoplatonic pantheism, and Aristotelian "consistency of nature and specificity of each being" provide "the guarantee that Redemption has a subject," and that grace will be gratuitous (101). The relevance for an appreciation of *Surnaturel* is understated but clear. If one inserts Aristotelian nature into a Plotinian emanationism,

then the natural desire for God will be structural, ontological, for therein natures lose their consistency and so distinction. If, on the contrary, participation is framed by Aristotle, there can be no such natural desire as de Lubac understands it. Furthermore, Cajetan is, as it were, rehabilitated as a reader of St. Thomas one must reckon with.

Jean-Miguel Garrigues renders a similarly understated verdict on de Lubac's strictures on characterizing nature as in obediential potency to the supernatural. He does this by asking about the "natural grace" of Christ, the grace that follows upon the origin of Christ's humanity in its assumption, and discussing the potency of this nature for the grace of union. It is an obediential potency, according to St. Thomas. This does not, however, mean that the fitness of human nature so to be assumed is denied or ignored. Rather, the fitness for union derives from the nature itself as rational, as capable of vision. Thus the potency of human nature in general to grace and glory is obediential, and still, it is fitting that it be so endowed.

Serge-Thomas Bonino, in his own contribution to the volume, investigates St. Thomas's theory of limbo, which most approaches the idea of "pure nature" and which de Lubac mostly skips. St. Thomas entertains the position common to the thirteenth century that such souls' knowledge of the supernatural call to the vision of God need not induce suffering under the condition of their virtuous resignation. But he prefers to argue for their complete ignorance of such an end on the ground that the knowledge of it is impossible apart from revelation. Though St. Thomas does not speak of "beatitude" for such souls, and it remains that *de facto* they are suffering a penalty for original sin, there is here the limning of a "natural end" of man, and any innate ordering to or proportion unto vision is denied. Vision is not connatural to human nature.

In what many readers will find to be one of the more valuable contributions, J.-P. Torrell, O.P., sorts out St. Thomas's view of the state of original justice and the state of corruption. Contrary to Peter Lombard, St. Thomas holds that man was created in grace in view of his supernatural end. Even so and precisely in order to come to a just appreciation of grace, he takes up the task of contrasting what man could do in virtue of original grace (Adam's first state), what he could do in virtue of uncorrupted nature but without grace (the never realized state of "integrity"), and what ungraced nature can do now, after corruption by sin (our actual condition prior to justification). Within this project, the concept of "integral nature" occupies the same strategic position as that of *pura naturalia*. St. Thomas's synthesis of the Areopagite and St. Augustine on the effects of original sin is very clearly and helpfully presented.

For many, Part Two will be the most important: it provides as it were by triangulation a judgment as to de Lubac's exegesis and interpretation of Thomas. The studies clearly if in a muted voice raise questions about the adequacy of de Lubac's handling of nature, obediential potency, and "pure nature" in St. Thomas.

Part Three contains three studies, the first of which, by Lawrence Renault, addresses a part of the post-Thomist history of the theology of the supernatural omitted by de Lubac, the part played by William of Ockham, who denied there could be an innate desire for a supernatural end, and much before Cajetan taught the strict proportion between an end and access to an end. Jacob Schmutz contributes an essay on the metaphysical path of late scholasticism to the separation of the natural and supernatural orders that de Lubac alleges occurs in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholasticism. This metaphysical path more and more conceives of created causality as something independent of God. While St. Thomas and the thirteenth century leave us with the view according to which the causality of second causes is itself wholly created, this inheritance of Neoplatonism is progressively transmuted into a view where the creature adds something to the divine causality, and we end with the thesis espoused by Molina according to which God and the creature are partial causes of one and the same effect. "Influence," which in the thirteenth century was another name for procession from the First Cause, ends up by naming the divine causality as the condition of the mere maintenance in being of the second cause. The last contribution to this part of the volume is a study of the natural desire to see God as treated by the Salmanticenses. It begins with a very clear delimitation of the distinction of natural appetite or natural, innate desire, and elicited conscious desire that those just entering the discussion will find helpful, although the author's clarity unfortunately diminishes when he presents the difference between the elicited desire to see God, which is the desire to know what the First Cause is, and the elicited desire to attain to this knowledge as one's beatitude.

Part Four brings us to "the question of the supernatural today." Georges Cottier, O.P., seeks to re-introduce the notion of a natural mysticism, a mysticism of the ego engaged in a radical experience of itself, and its being prior to any act, prior to any unfolding of the soul into its powers, and this in contrast to contemporary efforts to make of all mysticism a supernatural one, in which the Christian revelation resounds and the grace of Christ is operative. The rehabilitation of a natural mysticism, concomitant with a recognition of naturally available truths in other religions will make us less liable to confound Christianity with other religions. This same issue is

taken up also by Gilbert Narcisse, O.P., who examines the impact of de Lubac on contemporary theology. He points to four areas where contemporary positions, though they do not follow directly from the theses of the *Surnaturel*, nevertheless are fostered by them. One of these is the issue already visited by Cottier, the move from the unique mediation of Christ to the recognition of many non-Christian (or cryptically Christian) mediations of revelation and grace. The others are the transition from rationalist apologetics to a fundamental theology conceived to be addressed to men already touched by grace, the transition from theology *sub ratione Dei* to theology *sub ratione Trinitatis* (Balthasar), and the shift from Thomistic metaphysics to philosophical pluralism. Narcisse closes with the observation of the role of metaphysics in the ability to keep a firm hold on the gratuity of grace.

In a last essay, Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, O.P., correlates the nature-grace extrinsicism which de Lubac laments with modern ecclesiology. St. Robert Bellarmine's distinction between the soul and body of the Church, according to which one could belong to one and not the other, survives into the twentieth century, where the Church as visible and natural society remains in principle something that can be separable from the Church as communion in grace and charity. La Soujeole follows Cardinal Journet in seeking a more adequate conception of the unity of the Church, and finds help in identifying the visibility of the New Law not only in the means of grace, but in the effects of grace in the visible community of charity. This provides a broader basis on which to re-think not only the question of unity, but that of membership, as well.

This is an altogether fine collection of essays. I mentioned that about half the contributors express sympathy with de Lubac's interpretation of the natural desire to see God. That no essay directly addresses this issue in St. Thomas or in itself is a disappointment, but also a sign of the enormity of the question.

The large volume by Lawrence Feingold is the demonstration of this enormity. This second edition is a friendlier version of the original dissertation in that the extensive Latin quotations have been translated, the exposition at some few points streamlined, and at others made more pointed. There are many reasons to read this book. First, there is the importance of the *res*, of a correct understanding of the natural desire to see God, for both theological anthropology and apologetics. Second, we want also to know what St. Thomas taught about this. Third, we want also to know whether the subsequent scholastic reception of St. Thomas preserved or deformed his teaching. Fourth, we want to know the adequacy of de Lubac's reception of both St. Thomas and his scholastic heirs, the better to sort out our

own very messy theological inheritance. This last interest is connected to questions about the nature and practice of Catholic theology, about which Feingold says: “a global vilification of an entire period of over four centuries in the history of Catholic theology cannot fail to be seriously detrimental to the cause of theology and the life of the Church, because it introduces a violent rupture rather than organic growth” (440). On all four counts, Feingold’s book must, I think, be counted indispensable. Moreover, the orderliness and clarity of his exposition give us a model of how to write, and the charity of his discussion a model of how to conduct ourselves. He also alerts us to an important pastoral dimension of the proceedings: “one of the great pastoral problems of our time is that so many people . . . take heaven for granted as something somehow due simply to natural goodness” (443).

What is in this book? A first chapter introduces us to *ST* I–II, q. 3, a. 8, where St. Thomas says that, once we know from the things that have been made that God their cause exists, we naturally desire to know the essence of that cause. It follows from this, St. Thomas concludes, that man’s perfect happiness, wherein every desire is perfectly satisfied, consists in the vision of God. Four questions structure the ensuing reception of this argument. First, does this conscious “elicited” desire to know God manifest the existence of another and more basic desire, an unconscious but “innate” desire to know God, which would amount to positing a constitutive ordination in man unto the vision of God? Second, is the natural desire to see God absolute or conditional? That is, is it like a settled intention for an end known to be attainable, or is it like a wish that things could be so, in the absence of seeing how they could be so? Third, is the argument whose grand conclusion is that our happiness consists in the vision of God demonstrative or an indication of fittingness? Fourth, does the desire to see God show the impossibility of there being a state of “pure nature” for human beings? The questions fit together as follows. If the desire is innate, then it is absolute. If the desire is absolute, and supposing it is an object of certain natural knowledge, the argument constitutes a philosophical demonstration that our ultimate end is the vision of God. Last, if the desire is absolute, its fulfillment is owed, something due to man, and it is impossible that God could have established and left man *puris in naturalibus* to pursue an end and a happiness other than the vision of God.

In chapter 2, Feingold lays the groundwork for understanding both St. Thomas’s position and the entire subsequent history of the question by sorting out St. Thomas’s analysis of appetite and desire, so providing the systematic context in which a natural desire to see God is asserted. Every

nature, every power of every nature, has a natural appetite unto its proportionate end. This is a constitutive inclination which makes the nature or power be what it is; it is what is later called innate desire. A constitutive inclination, it is always "on," and so is to be distinguished from elicited appetite, the appetite or desire that follows upon knowledge in those creatures with a cognoscitive capacity. Elicited desire in man follows the intellect's cognition of some good. It is conscious, and it absolutely depends on entertaining consciously the good in question. Natural appetite, the constitutive appetite that specifies a nature or power, is evidently something always and necessarily in force; it is not facultative. It is a mistake, however, to think that elicited appetite is by contrast always free. Deliberated acts of will bearing on how to attain to some known good are certainly free; they are what we call "choices." But prior to them there are naturally elicited acts of will for goods, natural in the sense that, once the good is presented to appetitive power, the power must incline to them in act. For men, these are such things as life, virtue, society, and knowledge. And there can be natural specifications of these general inclinations. A natural specification of the inclination to knowledge following on the natural knowledge of God's existence is the desire to know God's essence.

When St. Thomas speaks of a natural desire for the vision of God, does he mean an innate desire or a naturally occurring elicited act of inclination toward the good of knowing the first cause or both? The canvass of texts Feingold makes in chapter 3 shows us that the most natural way to take St. Thomas is that he is asserting the existence of an elicited desire, naturally evoked upon the knowledge of God's existence, and a desire that is conditional, for it comes with the realization that the knowledge of the essence of God is not within the compass of our cognoscitive power to attain to on its own. Even so, questions remain. Is the natural desire to see God the same as desiring supernatural happiness? But in that case, how can it not be what is otherwise described as the act of the theological virtue of hope? And then, how can grace not be required to incline us to the supernatural end of glory? St. Thomas does not leave this matter with all the clarity his readers would desire in every text. The subsequent history is the series of triangulations and calculations, as it were, by which the Thomist tradition puts text to text and finds its way to what must be the answer.

The role of John Duns Scotus in this history is the first order of business after the canvass of St. Thomas's texts. For Scotus, the potency to see God is natural, not obediential, and the desire to see God is innate. For St. Thomas, the desire seems to be something naturally knowable, naturally available to us according as we come to the knowledge of the exis-

tence of the First Cause, and then, want to know its essence. But Scotus holds that the natural desire cannot be known apart from revelation, which informs us of the *de facto* end of man, the vision of God. This has the consequence that the natural desire for the vision of God is emptied of any apologetic value in manifesting the truth of Catholic doctrine.

The history Feingold shows us subsequent to Scotus is the history of a long argument within the parameters set by St. Thomas and Scotus, the story as Feingold tells it of a steady contemplation of the reality of the supernatural order and an increasingly happy and integrated articulation of this reality as bestowed in Christ.

Denis the Carthusian begins the dialectic in the mid-fifteenth century. He sees that the first order of business is to oppose Scotus. There can be no natural desire for the vision of God if natural desire means innate desire, a *pondus naturae* that operates even prior to knowledge, for such innate desire cannot extend beyond the proportion of nature. The potency to supernatural happiness and vision is obediential and not natural. This draws the difference between Scotus and St. Thomas very successfully. But then, Denis does not know how to handle the texts of St. Thomas that do assert a natural desire to see God. Supposing this natural desire is what Scotus means by natural desire, Denis aptly raises two fundamental questions: First, how can such a natural desire to see God be compatible with the supernatural and gratuitous character of actually seeing God, if a natural desire cannot be in vain? And second, how can there be an argument from a datum of nature—natural desire for vision—showing something that we otherwise treat as a mystery known only by revelation?

There follows a long chronicle of the efforts to sort out these issues. Cardinal Cajetan again shows that there can be no Scotist innate inclination to the vision of God. Such would make us not merely *capax Dei*, able to share the divine nature (2 Pt 1:4), but already and in virtue of our created being sharers in that nature. By nature, we have a natural desire for an end proper and proportionate to that nature. And knowing God as God knows himself is obviously a perfection not proportionate to man. What inclines us to God supernaturally possessed, what orders us to such possession, is not nature but grace and the theological virtues. Feingold at this point reviews the many texts of St. Thomas that establish this and so Cajetan's faithfulness to his master. There is as well an exhaustive review of the objections to Cajetan put forward by Gilson, Jorge Laporta, and de Lubac. That the potency to vision be obediential, not natural, is required if the gratuity of the supernatural order is to be maintained. For St. Thomas, a natural potency for some perfection is always and necessarily and with no exceptions allied with a natural active potency that can produce the fulfillment in question. That

there is no human capacity to realize on our own the vision of God is of course implied in the necessity of grace to attain such an end. However, not all obediential potency is the same. There is the potency of any created thing to obey the God who can make sons of Abraham out of stones. And there is the potency of man to become a son of God. In the former case, the potency is generic; in the latter, we are dealing with a specific obediential potency, in which the subject of the potency does not pass away (as do the stones), but in which it is perfected along the lines of its own nature, precisely as one who knows and loves. Here again Feingold reviews the texts of St. Thomas one by one and in detail in order to demonstrate to the reader the accuracy of Cajetan's reading of St. Thomas. It is this notion, that of a *specific* obediential potency, that entails that grace perfects nature and that renders the charge of "extrinsicism" against Cajetan and Suárez false.

When it comes to making sense of *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8, and parallels, however, the great commentator stumbles. Such argument is not in the philosophical but in the theological order, Cajetan hazards. We are to understand that St. Thomas is arguing from supernatural effects to their supernatural cause. Or we must distinguish knowing God as cause and knowing him unrestrictedly in his essence.

A successful march on what we must understand St. Thomas's assertion of a natural desire to see God to entail begins with Sylvester of Ferrara, who establishes in the first place that St. Thomas is speaking of an elicited desire, once the existence of the First Cause is known, and who in the second place points out that it is a naturally and necessarily elicited desire: it cannot be that we do not desire to know what God is once we know that he is. Sylvester also brings to prominence the distinction between wanting to see God, and wanting the vision of God to be our happiness. The first is spontaneous and natural; the second is a desire moved by grace.

Denis, Cajetan, and Sylvester read St. Thomas as opposed to each other; Soto and Toletus do not, and they make St. Thomas affirm a natural desire to see God as Scotus understands it. This chapter is not some function of scrupulosity in treating the record, but shows us a possibility within the dialectic of positions, a possibility that will be refused by the very next generation of de Soto's students, a possibility that Suárez, the omnivore, will be aware of in the final construction of an adequate reading of St. Thomas, and a possibility that will be resurrected in the twentieth century by Jorge Laporta and Henri de Lubac.

Collectively, Bartolomé de Medina, Domingo Báñez, and Francisco Suárez construct the position that Feingold labels the "consensus," the consensus of some three hundred years. The desire to see God is an elicited

desire; it is a conditional, an imperfect desire; and it provides an argument for the fittingness of our call to a supernatural end, but not a demonstration of the possibility of the call and still less of its actuality. With this, the way to read all of St. Thomas's texts together has been reached. As well, one of the major but little-emphasized implications of St. Thomas's position is expressed in detail, and that is the necessary existence of a connatural final end for man, and the consequent realization that, with no injustice, man could have been let to exist in a state of "pure nature." Feingold notes the extent to which the possibility of "pure nature" is defined by magisterial teaching after Jansenism.

Enter de Lubac. Feingold is careful to inform us that he understands himself to be dealing very narrowly with de Lubac's theological anthropology, and with nothing else in his theological production. He distinguishes himself explicitly from John Milbank. Milbank takes the entire production of de Lubac as a systematic whole, the key to which is *Supernatural*. Feingold does not.

De Lubac is one with Jansenius in denying the possibility for us of a state of pure nature. He does this not by asserting that grace and glory are due to prelapsarian Adam, but by holding that finality to vision is already a part of the natural constitution of man. Fundamental to de Lubac's position is the thesis that a supernatural finality is "imprinted" on our nature, for only so is "extrinsicism" avoided, wherein grace when given would be imposed on a human being already and erroneously conceived as self-sufficient, with a merely obediential potency to grace. Second, this intrinsic finality, already given with the nature and defining the nature, is itself a "natural desire" for the vision of God; in the later language it is an "innate" desire for vision, something prior to any elicited and conscious desire to see God, which elicited desire is only a manifestation of what is alone ontologically and theologically interesting, the innate desire, the *pondus naturae* whose resting place is vision. Third, since the desire for vision is innate, and a natural desire is determined to one end alone, there can be no other end for man; his only end is vision. De Lubac embraces the position of Scotus that the potency for vision is natural, but he is more radical, for while Scotus thought a purely natural beatitude possible for us, de Lubac holds that, absent the vision of God, we are in misery. The fact that our only end is vision entails, fourth, the impossibility that man with the nature he now has could exist in a state of "pure nature." Since it follows from the natural, innate desire that our actual end is in fact vision, and the application of the axiom that no natural desire can be in vain is to be applied simply and without qualification, it must be, fifth, that the natural desire itself cannot be known apart from revelation. Were

it otherwise, then from the natural desire naturally known, we would come to know what Catholic tradition insists can only be known by revelation, namely, that our actual end consists in the vision of God. Sixth and last, this intrinsic finality unto vision ought not be conceived as an actual "ordering" of man unto vision, and so it does not in any way imply that grace and glory are due to man, a *debitum naturae*. It is grace and the theological virtues, not the natural desire, that "orders" man to a strictly and completely gratuitous supernatural end.

It is with this last point that things start to come unraveled. What could an intrinsic finality of nature toward an end possibly be that does not "order" the nature toward the end? The distinction de Lubac needs at this point is not given in St. Thomas, for whom our nature is connaturally ordered toward a connatural end, and for whom it is sanctifying grace and the theological virtues that give us an intrinsic finality toward a supernatural end, and actually order us toward that end. If the nature is not intrinsically ordered by nature toward vision, and if being actually so ordered is a gratuitous gift, then it follows also that a state of pure nature is perfectly possible, and in fact, it is actually entertained when St. Thomas writes of limbo, in the beginning as at the end of his career.

Theologically, the problem de Lubac's position faces is the gratuity of grace. He tries to preserve gratuity by distinguishing nature taken abstractly (not ordered to vision) and taken concretely (ordered to vision), but as Feingold shows, it is difficult to maintain this as a real distinction. This proposal, moreover, points to the underlying philosophical problem of de Lubac's position which is indeed the integrity of nature. A created nature, precisely in its real distinction from the divine nature, must have a finality unto another end than that of the divine nature. It cannot have a supernatural finality inscribed in it except on pain of ceasing to be a created nature with a proportionate end. And a created nature with no proportionate end is no nature.

De Lubac is sometimes represented as maintaining the "openness" of human spirit to grace, as we have seen above (Bonino). But on Feingold's showing, he does far more. He makes the link between nature and grace so tight as to destroy the gratuity of grace. The problem can be expressed by asking whether the intrinsic finality de Lubac postulates is itself natural or supernatural. It is natural, contained within the nature, else how does it provide the solution to the problem of extrinsicism? But if it is a finality toward something supernatural, how can it not also itself be something supernatural? "Openness" is rather maintained, for Feingold, by asserting a specific obediential potency: "potency" asserts a possibility really verified in this subject, "obediential" says that the realization of the possibility will

be directly by God's agency alone; and "specific" asserts that the realization of the potency does not do away with the subject or change its nature; no, the nature is preserved, and created spirit remains created spirit in realizing by the grace of God a supernatural end. It is Feingold's exposition and defense and deployment of this notion of a specific obediential potency that is one of the greatest services of his study.

It is deployed not only to maintain gratuity, but also, in tandem with the natural desire itself, to demonstrate the fittingness of our being called to vision. The desire shows, says Feingold, man's transcendence: it projects him to a desideratum absolutely exceeding—transcending—his natural capacity for perfection, and in this way declares the excellence of human nature. And to say the potency for the realization of this desire is specifically obediential declares that its actualization will be the actualization and supernaturalization of precisely this created nature, human nature, maintaining its integrity, completing it and super-completing it in the direction of its own highest aspiration, the possession of the truth of things, and indeed, the Truth of things. The consensus view whose construction Feingold shows us does not give us a nature "closed in on itself." The natural desire, conditional though it be, is conscious, and it connects us with what is above us precisely insofar as we are humans, and so, consciously, something that de Lubac's interpretation evidently does not do. It is misleading to characterize this understanding as making the desire a "mere" velleity, as if so to call it were to make it something unimportant, trivial, of no great theological moment.

Feingold's exposition is especially strong where he points out that the two ends of man, connatural and supernatural, as envisaged by the Thomist tradition are not alternatives. Pure nature may be hypothetical, but our connatural end remains our really and truly existing connatural end, which is to know God from the things that have been made. That we are also assigned a supernatural end does not do away with this. Rather, the supernatural end fulfills our capacity for natural happiness, and overfills it, but in the same line already projected by our connatural end, the knowledge of God. The assertion of two ends does not render us closed to grace, and the fulfillment of the natural desire for a natural happiness does not give us parallel universes, or layers. Part of the answer to the charge of extrinsicism is precisely to insist that it is *nature* that comes to rest in the *supernatural* end.

Beyond the historical question, beyond the important matters of how to understand "nature" and obediential potency etc. already touched on, Feingold's study is significant for thinking through yet again the crucial issues de Lubac himself thought to address.

First, it is important in answering the question, to whom do we think we are speaking when we take up the work of evangelization? Are we speaking to already secret Christians? Are we speaking to people already necessarily interiorly moved in some way by the supernatural order? For both de Lubac and Rahner, though on different accounts, the answer is Yes. Or are we speaking to pagans, and perhaps to people in a condition worse than paganism (as Peter Wüst would have it), but in any event people “separated from Christ, . . . strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12)? On the other hand, for de Lubac and Scotus, to declare that we naturally desire God is to say something known only by revelation. It is part of the content of faith, not a preamble. But if the desire is naturally elicited upon entertaining the idea of God, it can in principle play a role in addressing the gospel to every man, and no matter what his moral condition.

Second, why are we faced with the daunting task of the evangelization of peoples who have abandoned the gospel? De Lubac promoted his version of the natural desire in part because he thought it was the antidote to the view—Cajetan’s and Suárez’s—that led to the cultural triumph of the Enlightenment and the de-Christianization of Europe. But if there was in the consensus view no such a divorce between nature and grace as de Lubac alleged, and if, in fact, this view that de Lubac scorned is true, and if we do not suppose that the truth about nature and grace led to the demise of Christian Europe, and if we set aside crude secularization hypotheses about the incompatibility of electric lights and angels, then still, de Lubac’s question remains: what did lead to its demise? We can once again round up the usual suspects. Politically, there were the “wars of religion,” that is, there was the rise of the absolutist state (D. B. Hart), which robbed the Church of her public authority, and which had an interest, carried out by its ideological apologists, in suppressing the very idea of nature (Pierre Manent). Philosophically, there was, first, rationalism, and the introduction of rationalism into the analysis of the act of faith in England (William Chillingworth), and the erection of reason as the tribunal of what can count as the content of faith in Germany (Kant); second, there was skepticism, so fixing the limits of what reason can know that positivism rules our relation to the world, and relativism our relation to human ends and moral action. Was theology then blameless? No. Although there was always something odd and disproportionate in blaming the rise of atheism and secularism—the cultural suicide of Europe—on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century elaboration of the possibility of “pure nature” by certain Jesuit and Dominican schoolmen, it is not so odd to blame the same schoolmen if

it is true that they contributed to the construction of the idols of the authority of conscience and absolute freedom of indifference that were later to be worshiped by the Enlightenment without benefit of clergy (see John Lamont in the April 2009 issue of *The Thomist*).

Sapientia Press has rendered a quite signal service in making these two volumes available to a wider audience. N V

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World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age
by C. Kevin Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 310 pp.

RECENT years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the task of theological interpretation of Scripture, the results of which have been mixed. More often than not, biblical scholars struggle to break out of the strictures of our discipline, making the leap from the ancient text to the contemporary situation awkwardly and uncertainly. The contributions of theologians to the various new theological commentary series, on the other hand, often ride roughshod over the ancient text. In *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age*, C. Kevin Rowe bridges the seemingly unbridgeable divide, showing how the book of Acts speaks to the first-century Christian situation and in so doing can address contemporary issues, as well. Rowe argues against two common interpretations of Acts. Based on the constant reminders of Paul's innocence, one standard reading sees Acts as an apology for the early Christian movement, suggesting that Christianity posed no threat to the Roman Empire. More recently, some interpreters have argued that, on the contrary, Acts is an anti-imperial text that challenges the claims of Caesar. Against both of these readings, Rowe suggests that the key to understanding the message of Acts lies in holding together the dialectical tension between the gospel's challenge to pagan culture and the rejection of political insurrection.

After an introductory chapter laying out the basic premises of the study, the argument unfolds in three chapters, followed by a conclusion that brings together Rowe's reading of Acts with contemporary political and theological questions. The second chapter shows how the announcement of the gospel disrupts various aspects of Roman society. The early Christian proclamation of a God who demands exclusive worship inevitably challenged not only religious convictions but also the social, political, and economic realities of the empire. This clash of cultures lies at the heart of four episodes in Acts that are representative of the character of the book as

a whole. The first story, the confusion of Paul and Barnabas for Zeus and Hermes in Acts 14, demonstrates the distinctiveness of the Christian message. In contrast to the common pagan practice of identifying gods of different names as different manifestations of the same god, Paul and Barnabas pose a sharp distinction between the God revealed in Jesus Christ and the various pagan gods, thus challenging the whole pagan sacrificial system. The scandal of this message is made evident by the reaction of the people, who drag Paul out of the city and stone him. Episodes in Philippi, Athens, and Ephesus reveal a similar pattern. The exorcism of the woman with a spirit of prophecy (Acts 16) threatens not only the religious practices of the Philippians but also a source of income. Despite superficial similarities to the pagan practice of substituting different names for the same gods, the Areopagus speech (Acts 17) calls for an abandonment of idolatry. Insofar as worship was bound up with political life, Paul poses not only a religious threat but also a political one. The conversion of a large crowd in Ephesus and the subsequent burning of magical books (Acts 19) put the city in an uproar. Again, the challenge is not simply “religious,” but rather comprehensive, affecting economics and civic life as much as religion. Based on this evidence, one might be tempted to side with the proponents of an anti-imperial reading of Acts, but this is not the whole story.

Alongside these periodic disruptions of Roman society, Luke also describes a series of trials before Roman officials, each of which ends in Paul’s acquittal. Scholars have often read these trials as Luke’s defense of the Church, and they have gone on to infer that, for Luke, the Church and the Roman Empire could peacefully coexist. In his third chapter Rowe offers a more nuanced reading of the text that holds together both these passages and those that are more amenable to an anti-imperial reading. It is true, he notes, that at every one of Paul’s trials the Roman officials acquit him of the charges. Despite the efforts of Paul’s opponents to paint him as an insurrectionist, the Romans recognize that the early Christian movement was not interested in sedition—even the claim that Jesus is “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36) does not for Luke entail the establishment of a worldly empire in competition with Rome. Those who have argued that Luke offers a pro-Roman picture of the empire ignore an important element of Luke’s story, however. Though the Romans acknowledged Jesus’ innocence, he nevertheless ended up on the cross. Given Jesus’ fate, Paul’s acquittals are tinged with uncertainty.

The fourth chapter seeks to account for the tension revealed by the preceding argument. Rowe attributes the complexity of the Church’s position vis-à-vis the empire to three interrelated practices of the early Christians: confession of Jesus as Lord, universal mission, and the forma-

tion of Christian communities. Though Acts consistently portrays the early Church as innocent of the charge of insurrection, this does not mean that this confession of Jesus was totally innocuous. In designating Jesus “Lord of all,” Luke implicitly undercuts imperial claims to universal sovereignty. Yet this is not a challenge to Caesar’s political power. On the contrary, Rowe argues, it is Caesar’s claim to the title “Lord of all” that challenges the universal sovereignty of the God of Israel exercised through Jesus Christ. This confession leads naturally to the Christian impulse to universal mission, because Jesus’ lordship is closely tied to salvation (cf. Acts 4:12). The desire for the salvation of all drives Jesus’ disciples to spread the message throughout the entire world, and this mission entails the formation of Christian communities. The gospel is not simply a matter of the heart, but rather something that calls forth social embodiment. When taken together and read in their proper light, these three practices account for the tension in Luke’s story. The new way of life that Luke offers operates on fundamentally different terms than Greco-Roman culture and thus accounts for the clash with Roman civilization. At the same time, because it operates on these different terms, this way of life does not entail a bid for earthly power over against Caesar. Rather, Luke’s message is a “light for revelation to the gentiles” (Luke 2:32); its purpose, to call the gentiles out of darkness into the light of the gospel.

Rowe’s final chapter bears the provocative title “The Apocalypse of Acts and the Life of Truth,” and it takes steps toward applying the argument of the preceding three chapters to a contemporary setting. Acts, Rowe argues, sets forth a way of knowing that is not simply a matter of ratiocination, but rather is an embodied epistemology springing forth from the concrete practices of the early Christians. These practices inherently make universal claims that are unappealing to moderns whose purported allegiance is to tolerance above all else, and so Rowe closes the book with a discussion of the implications of Acts for political theology and the question of truth. He begins by addressing the common assertion that polytheism, because it can include a number of gods from different cultures, was inherently tolerant. Despite the surface plausibility of such a claim, a closer look at Roman history reveals numerous instances of imperial intolerance toward certain religious groups, including but not limited to the Druids and the Christians. Perhaps more importantly, tolerance does not stand alone, but rather necessarily entails distinctions between what will and will not be tolerated. Thus, polytheism “defines a *particular kind* of tolerance—the kind that places a missionizing Christianity outside its limits” (167, emphasis in original). Rowe goes on to criticize the bifurcation of politics and theology. Like tolerance, politics is

not practiced in a vacuum, but rather has a theological—one might say more neutrally, a metaphysical—basis. One of the fears perpetuated by the modern narrative of the so-called “Wars of Religion” is that religious certitude breeds violence and bloodshed. Bringing together the various strands of his argument, Rowe offers a dialectical assessment of the relation of Acts to tolerance and bloodshed. On the one hand, he notes, “in a crucial way, the vision of Acts is profoundly intolerant” (170). The confession of Jesus as Lord of all by necessity demands the conversion of all. On the other hand, the narrative of Acts eschews the use of force to spread the gospel. For Luke, witness rather than coercion is the manner of the gospel’s encounter with the world.

Rowe has offered us a masterful reading of Acts, as well as an erudite example of how to bring together historically sensitive readings of the New Testament with contemporary theological questions. As comfortable interacting with philosophers such as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre as he is offering close readings of the Greek text of Acts, Rowe makes a compelling case for the unity of faith and life, the central theme of his book. One of his most refreshing contributions is the correction he offers to standard anti-imperial readings of the New Testament. It has become a commonplace in certain circles to assert that in proclaiming Jesus as Lord the early Christians were challenging the claims of Caesar. Rowe suggests that this is to put things backwards, at least as far as Luke is concerned. Jesus does not challenge Caesar’s claim to lordship; on the contrary, from Luke’s perspective Caesar’s claim to lordship challenges the more fundamental lordship of the God of Israel exercised through Jesus Christ. The distinction, though subtle, is an important one.

World Upside Down also raises several questions. As already noted, the designation of Acts as an “apocalypse” is a provocative one, and one that calls for more justification. Though I am sympathetic with the sense in which Rowe seems to be using the term, a more detailed engagement with those who deny the apocalyptic character of Acts would have been apropos, given the common scholarly bifurcation of salvation history (a common characterization of Luke’s thought) and apocalyptic. A more difficult question concerns how one might fruitfully apply the vision of Acts to a cultural setting in which to some extent Christians occupy the place of Caesar. The issue is no doubt thorny and complex, but it would have been helpful to see this work, which addresses questions of contemporary significance, grapple with one of the most difficult and relevant issues for Christians today. Finally, Rowe’s suggestion in the last few pages that to deny the worldview of Acts is to distort the text’s meaning, though true to Acts, raises the perennial question of whether an unbe-

liever can understand a believer's text. Is conversion a necessary prerequisite to reading Acts rightly, such that one who contests the vision of Acts (to use Rowe's language) will inevitably misread the text? Given his penchant for dialectic, one might expect Rowe to offer the traditional answer *Sic et non*, but I suspect he would find such an answer ultimately unsatisfying. At any rate, it is one of the pressing questions the work raises, and one that would have benefited from a fuller discussion.

That the work raises such questions is a testament to Rowe's learning and theological acumen. *World Upside Down* exemplifies a responsible and sophisticated approach to the often nebulous field of theological interpretation, and for that we are in his debt. May it turn the world of New Testament scholarship upside down and call us back to the unity of faith and life fundamental to the gospel. N V

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Commentary on the Gospel of John, by Thomas Aquinas, translated by Fabian Larcher, O.P., and James A. Weisheipl, O.P., with introduction and notes by Daniel Keating and Matthew Levering, 3 vols. (*Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010*).

THE present revival of interest in Aquinas's biblical interpretation can be attributed to at least two factors. One is that scholars have placed a greater emphasis on the interrelation between the *Summa theologiae* and Aquinas's scriptural interpretation. Aquinas's interpretation of Scripture deeply informs his judgments contained in the *Summa*, and the *Summa* in turn serves our reading of Scripture by its ability to arrange the *sacra doctrina* found in Scripture into an ordered wisdom that helps illuminate (rather than obscure) the contents of Scripture. Another factor is that historical-critical methods of exegesis have proven insufficient by themselves for engaging the realities taught in Scripture. This has led to an increased openness for resourcing pre-critical exegetical methods of interpreting Scripture. When scholars turn to the exegetical past, they find Aquinas a valuable and largely unexplored resource for contributing to a renewed engagement with Scripture. These factors (among others) have so profoundly contributed to a renewed focus on Aquinas's biblical interpretation that Adian Nichols, O.P., recently observed, "St. Thomas's reputation as an exegete has probably never stood higher than it does today."

It is in this fertile setting that a new English translation of Aquinas's commentary on the Gospel of John is welcomed. Aquinas's commentary

work on John is special. Scholars have recognized that within Aquinas's commentary corpus, certain commentaries are particularly excellent, and one of these is his commentary on John. The new English edition from The Catholic University of America Press's Thomas Aquinas in Translation series is not the first English edition of Aquinas's *Super Ioannem*, but the new edition contributes significantly to the former, thanks to the efforts of Daniel Keating and Matthew Levering. The foundation for the English translation remains the same—that from Fabian Larcher, O.P., and James Weisheipl, O.P.—but the new edition corrects previous translation mistakes, adds a section of Aquinas's commentary entirely left out of the former translation, and includes a prologue attributed to St. Jerome with a commentary by Aquinas that helps illuminate Aquinas's "overall estimation of the Gospel of John." One of most valuable aspects of this new edition, however, is the inclusion of footnotes throughout the commentary that reference Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, patristic sources, and various councils, heresies, and lesser-known figures alluded to by Aquinas. These notes enable the reader to get a sense of the scriptural roots of Aquinas's *Summa* and helps properly situate Aquinas's commentary within the Church's tradition of theological reflection.

Keating and Levering introduce the commentary with some helpful insights into Aquinas's interpretive method. They address, first, the relationship between the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture. In Aquinas's commentary on John, the literal sense takes precedent, with some chapters lacking a single spiritual interpretation. But spiritual interpretations (i.e. the "mystical sense") do occur, and Levering and Keating offer some guidance in understanding Aquinas's turn to the mystical sense by providing a case study of Aquinas's mystical interpretation that occurs with Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." Since Jesus clearly has no problems in other locations with people touching his post-resurrected body (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:39), there must be, according to Aquinas, a meaning in addition to the literal sense that the Holy Spirit is seeking to teach. It is this realization that leads Aquinas to explore the mystical sense of this passage. Keating and Levering then address another striking element of Aquinas's commentary on John, and really of almost all of his commentaries: the number of "parallel" biblical texts cited by Aquinas from both the Old and the New Testaments. For Keating and Levering, this practice demonstrates Aquinas's belief that "the realities of faith are present and active throughout history, preparing for and/or fulfilling the work of deification in Christ through the Holy Spirit" (xvii). Levering and Keating conclude their introduction by addressing the various sources that contribute to

Aquinas's interpretation of John. The sources include patristic commentary, especially Origen, Augustine, and Chrysostom, with Augustine having first place among the three; heretics, especially Arius, and heterodox figures, such as Apollinarius, Nestorius, and Eutyches; Aristotle, who appears explicitly in only nine of the twenty-one chapters, although the influence of his thinking can be found throughout; and the *Glossa Ordinaria*, which is clearly present but scarce, with Aquinas's *Quaestiones disputatae* having much more influence than the *Glossa*.

The contributions contained in the new English edition of Aquinas's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* will surely assist in stoking interest in Aquinas's biblical interpretation. One can only hope that commentaries from pre-modern exegetical luminaries like Aquinas continue to find their way into the modern classroom and onto the shelves of the modern preacher.

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