

Book Reviews

Atonement: Soundings in Biblical, Trinitarian, and Spiritual Theology
by Margaret M. Turek (*San Francisco: Ignatius, 2022*), 266 pp.

Atonement is a daunting topic for modern theologians, who are too often hampered by conflicting “models” of atonement, an antipathy toward the idea of human sinfulness, a distaste for what the Cross says about the Father, and a suspicion of Anselm and the theme of vicarious atonement. Some recent work, such as Khaled Anatolios’s *Deification Through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation*, has begun to move contemporary discourse past its dead ends.

We can now add Margaret Turek’s magnificent book *Atonement*, which reasserts the Christian patrimony concerning Christ’s salvific action on the Cross. Like Anatolios, Turek believes that a coherent testimony (rather than divergent models) can be gleaned from the Church’s scriptural witness. Turek centers that testimony around God the Father’s “patrogenetic” action in his incarnate Son by the power of the Spirit. Her book, therefore, strives to return the topic of atonement to its Trinitarian grounds, using four guides: John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Norbert Hoffmann.

Beginning with the Hebrew Scriptures, we learn that atonement engages both God’s gracious plan and human freedom. Turek isolates three factors: God’s sovereign initiative, his “passionate” involvement, and man’s willing collaboration. The first is revealed in God’s freely choosing Israel, not because of any merits of her own, but simply out of his love (Deut 7:6–8). The covenant with Israel originates with God, as does its restoration from the damage due to sin and infidelity. This divine, loving action is “patrogenetic”: The Father arouses covenantal love in his human partners. Israel is called to image God through a love that mirrors divine love.

Second, God’s love entails his “passionate” involvement with his covenant partner. Here Turek is careful to walk what elsewhere Balthasar has called

the “knife’s edge” between process theology and a sub-Judeo-Christian deity. Using the Church Fathers and the International Theological Commission’s 1981 document *Theology, Christology, Anthropology*, she clarifies that God is neither passible nor mutable. God is not dependent upon anything that has power over him, including suffering, nor is he subject to change. Yet God is also, as Benedict XVI put it in *Deus Caritas Est*, “a lover with all the passion of a true love.” This “passion” is not contrary to his impassibility but flows from it, because God is so ontologically transcendent that he can freely choose to be involved with his creation without being changed. “God’s compassionate responsiveness to suffering is a voluntary modality of the infinite *actio* of his *caritas* (251n13).¹

Third, the Father’s patrogenetic action evokes a response from man. As Anselm understood, atonement that provides forgiveness without any change in the sinner is not atonement at all. Redemptive change occurs, the Old Testament tells us, through contrition of a particular kind, reflecting a particular quality of sin. Turek argues that Israel’s sin is primarily a rupture of the covenant relationship, a rupture seen most clearly in the primordial sin of idolatry. The central effect of sin is distance from God. Israel forsakes God (Hos 1:2, 9), and he forsakes Israel in turn, which the latter experiences as God’s “hiding his face”: “Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them” (Deut 31:17). God’s self-concealment is meant to evoke contrition. Especially after the loss of the First Temple, Israel began to understand that the return to God occurs not as a result of burnt offerings but through an inner change. “With contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received; as though it were burnt offerings of rams and bulls, or tens of thousands of fat lambs” (Dan 3:39).

One of Turek’s more original points (albeit derived most clearly from Hoffmann) is to contend that this atonement on the side of the sinner occurs

¹ John Paul II presents this idea in *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986) §39, which Turek quotes at length on her 36: “The concept of God as the necessarily most perfect being certainly excludes from God any pain deriving from deficiencies; but in the ‘depths of God’ there is a Father’s love that, faced with man’s sin, in the language of the Bible reacts so deeply. . . . The Sacred Book speaks to us of a Father who feels compassion for man, as though sharing his pain. In a word, this inscrutable and indescribable fatherly ‘pain’ will bring about above all the wonderful economy of redemptive love in Jesus Christ, . . . in whose humanity the ‘suffering’ of God is concretized.” Here John Paul II presents many of the points Turek emphasizes. God’s “pain,” as a paternal compassion for man, is concretized in Christ’s humanity, but it does not come into being only in Christ’s humanity. Rather, in a divine and transcendent way, God’s compassion for man originates “in the ‘depths of God’”—in particular, in the Father, who is the origin within the Trinity.

through “bearing sin as *distance from God*,” thereby “transform[ing it] into a mode of *nearness to God*” (62). In so doing, sin is “borne away” (55). In other words, God’s passionate involvement means that he grieves over the distance caused by sin. The sinner does not initially grieve, but through the suffering that results from his alienation from God, he may regret his sin and taste something of God’s “pain” over sin. When this happens, distance becomes the means of reunification. Sin is “cleansed” or “annihilated . . . by transforming sin into its opposite: nearness to God in the filial love-suffering of distance from God” (59–60).

What if the sinner is not repentant and prefers to remain far from God? The post-exilic history of Israel produces figures whose travail atones for the stiff-necked people. The prophet, the Suffering Servant, and the martyr are all those upon whom the Lord “place[s] the guilt of the house of Israel” (Ezek 4:4). They bear God’s “wrath,” which is, Turek argues, “paternal love in the form of self-concealment” (116). God “hides his face” from his chosen one, and the latter suffers this distance from God for the sake of unrepentant Israel.

This chapter heavily privileges the exilic and post-exilic account of atonement, in which the people are either without the temple or else remain far from it.² Indeed, most of the Hebrew literature on atonement is not from the Torah; further, Turek does not omit the role of the temple sin-offerings. Nevertheless, a greater exploration of how the two are integrated in Scripture would strengthen her case.

The lengthy chapter on the Hebrew Scriptures prepares the ground for what God does in Christ’s atoning action on the Cross. The newness of the New Testament is not found so much in the *pattern* of atonement, but instead: in *what* is atoned, namely, sin as a rejection of adopted filiation; in the *goal* of atonement, namely, “participation in the Son’s personal relation to the Father within the Trinity” (100); and in the *One who atones*, namely, God himself as man.

Sin takes on new contours, because the revelation of the Trinity shows that there are positive and negative forms of “op-position” in and to God.

² Most Jews remained outside Judea after the exile; as few as forty-three thousand returned to the land (Oded Lipschits, “Persian-Period Judah: A New Perspective,” in *Texts, Contents, and Readings in Postexilic Literature*, ed. Louis Jonker [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 187–211). Malka A. Simkovich notes that the post-exilic Judeans were divided on the necessity of returning to the Second Temple to make sin-offerings, and a new sense of the importance of internal *teshuva* or repentance developed (“The Emotions of Atonement in Early Judaism,” *Jewish-Christian Word and World Group*, June 12, 2023).

The persons of the Trinity exist as opposed relations of origin, in which each person's stance "against" (*opponere*) the others is a completely positive distinction. The Son is "not" the Father, and precisely because of this relational distinction, the Son can be the Father's Image. This positive "not" is extended to creatures: Man is "not" God, and this positive metaphysical distinction becomes the possibility for man to be God's image in the visible world. Sin deforms this "positive op-position" into a negative opposition of man against God, as man insists on his autonomy by rejecting rather than imaging God. Thus, the *goal* of atonement is found in bearing this sin away through filial obedience, opening up Trinitarian life to the redeemed creature as an adopted child in the Son. The *One who atones* is the Son, who, as Image of the Father, perfectly images the Father's loving self-gift and enables men to be lesser images of God by grace.

The process of atonement seen in the Hebrew Scriptures reaches a new potency and depth through the incarnate Son's perfect and infinite filial love that bears sin away on the Cross. Turek explores the controversial claim by Balthasar and Ratzinger (and, to a less clear extent, by John Paul II) that Jesus's cry of abandonment on the Cross is a fully subjective experience of the sinner's distance from God. The Hebrew Scriptures showed that atonement means undergoing the sin-caused distance from God in repentance and filial love-suffering. On the Cross, Jesus fully experiences this distance without in any way participating in the sin that caused this distance.³ Further, "it is not a question of punishment," Balthasar and Turek argue, because the primary action is that of love accepting the consequences of sin (116). Through love, Jesus "tak[es] upon himself all the tribulations, not just of Israel but of all those in this world who suffer from God's concealment. . . . He must go through, suffer through, the whole of it, in order to transform it" (Ratzinger as quoted on 120–21).

Christ's work on the Cross is, Turek asserts, patrogenetic and decidedly not a rupture between the Father and the Son, and still less the result of a sadistic paternal deity. "The Father who dwells in me does his works" (John 14:10). Turek exegetes as following: "Nothing in the [Son's] mission is beyond the reach of the Father's action, for in this respect, he *is* the Father's action, inasmuch as he acts always by and with and for the Father. . . . Therefore, what Jesus experiences as God-forsakenness is the opposite of what in reality is taking place" (127–28), namely, the intimacy

³ Joshua R. Brotherton gives a lengthier defense of this reading of Jesus's cry of abandonment in Ratzinger and Balthasar; see *One of the Trinity Has Suffered: Balthasar's Theology of Divine Suffering in Dialogue*, Renewal within Tradition (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic Press, 2020).

of the Father and the Son now opened up to sinners. The Cross reveals the Father's loving "willingness to endure sin-wrought distance from his beloved as a modality of his generative power" (136).

This chapter should convince readers that Balthasar's controversial take on the cry of abandonment is shared by Benedict XVI and, with some qualifications, by John Paul II. It will most likely not convince those who oppose it in principle, but it might disabuse them of some misconceptions. Turek does not take a position on a related question, Jesus's Beatific Vision; on this point, John Paul II and arguably the late Balthasar give space for a subjective feeling of abandonment alongside the beatific vision in Christ's soul.⁴

The last chapter is the most innovative contribution to the theology of atonement: how we participate in it spiritually. While Christ died for all, it is not the case that everyone automatically accepts redemption. Turek's spiritual theology of atonement argues for the collaboration of human persons in Christ's atoning work. The "wondrous exchange" of Christ with humanity is not a simple substitution, as though "Christ *displaced* us. Rather it is an *emplacement* of us, a re-establishment of us as sons, or children, of God" (158). We are called to participate in Christ's mission, to be sent as he was sent by the Father (John 20:21).

Here the Holy Spirit emerges most fully, as the Spirit of sonship (Gal 4:6). "Our yes to sonship in Christ—made effective by the Spirit—is a yes to co-atonement in Christ" (165). Turek reads the universal call to holiness in the light of such co-atonement, "the vicarious bearing of the guilt of all" (Balthasar as quoted on 172). The Church is the body in which this co-atonement is carried out, especially within the liturgy, which accepts our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). The martyrs enact this in a paradigmatic way, but Turek also focuses on two modern saints, Thérèse of Lisieux and Teresa of Calcutta.

For the eighteen months before her death, Thérèse felt the absence of God that was the state of "poor unbelievers" (quoted on 182). Mother Teresa likewise felt "nothing but emptiness and darkness" (quoted on 183) for decades. Turek interprets these strange events as "a filial love-suffering undergone 'in Christ' and 'for others'" (184). Indeed, it is difficult to interpret them any

⁴ Turek quotes John Paul II's general audience of November 30, 1988, §§4–6: "In the areas bordering on the sensitive sphere, . . . Jesus' human soul is reduced to a wasteland, and he no longer feels the presence of the Father, but undergoes the tragic experience of the most complete desolation"; John Paul II holds that this "wasteland" is compatible with Christ's retaining the beatific vision "at the summit of his human spirit" (all quoted on 123). See also John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris* (1984), §18 (quoted on 124–25).

other way. Mary's faith provides a model for Christians on this score, at least according to the Mariology of John Paul II and Balthasar; Mary's "kenosis" of faith is her co-experiencing her Son's abandonment on the Cross, for the sake of sinners.

Turek closes this rich chapter with a lengthy section on almsgiving, which acquires atoning meaning especially in the post-exilic era. Jesus models voluntary poverty in his very being (2 Cor 8:9). For Christians, almsgiving is a concrete act of filial kenosis, entrusting all to the Father. After a brief conclusion, she provides two appendices, one absolving Balthasar of the charge of presumption and universalism, and the other exploring the patristic sources for the "impassible passion" of God.

Atonement is written lucidly, with an eye to seminarians as its audience (Turek teaches at St. Patrick's Seminary). Yet the work's simplicity of style conceals its profundity. The synthetic work she does is quite difficult, especially since her magisterial sources (Benedict XVI and John Paul II) did not write treatises on atonement, while Balthasar treats the subject in multiple places. The most important feature of the book is beyond the academic, however, and is found in its deeply prayerful quality, peaking in the final, third chapter on atonement as a Christian spirituality. If *Atonement* achieves a wide readership, it will do much to elevate theological discourse. I highly recommend it. N·V

Angela Franks

Catholic University of America
Washington, DC

Reading Job with St. Thomas Aquinas edited by Matthew Levering, Piotr Roszak, and Jörgen Vijgen (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020*), vi + 414 pp.

The present volume comprises thirteen studies of Thomas Aquinas's *Expositio Super Job* that treat both its method of scriptural interpretation and its mode of theological argumentation. The majority of this volume's studies focus on the latter by comparing *Super Job* with Thomas's other writings, especially the *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) and *Summa theologiae* (ST). Though some of these essays overlap with one another, which is perhaps to be expected in a volume like this, each one provides a unique argument for how the commentary is to be understood in the broader scope of Thomas's thought. Taken

together, these studies not only provide the reader with an introduction to the text of *Super Iob* but also help to identify different points of emphasis and possible tensions between the commentary and Thomas's other writings. Thus, this volume will prove useful to the *bona fide* Thomist and the student of St. Thomas alike.

John Boyle ("St. Thomas, Job, and the University Master") examines Aquinas's *Super Iob* through the framework of Job as a teacher who leads his pupils to grow in wisdom about God and humankind. The mechanism through which Thomas understands Job to be undertaking this teaching, moreover, is that of the medieval *disputatio*. Boyle shows that, within this framework, Aquinas sees Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar as holding erroneous positions—such as Elihu as an inexperienced youth who inappropriately takes on the role of determination—and Job as holding a true position, though one he expresses carelessly such that his friends take scandal and are unable to learn from him. In the course of the disputation, Job proceeds from a limited measure of truth to the perfection of wisdom.

In his contribution, Jörgen Vijgen ("Job, Aquinas, and the Philosopher") analyzes the manner in which Aquinas draws on Aristotle throughout his *Super Iob* to explicate subjects such as divine providence, the passions of sorrow and anger, cosmology, and anthropology. Vijgen concludes that, in the course of his commentary, "Aquinas *introduces into the scriptural text* genuine philosophical arguments, derived extensively from his preferred philosopher" (67, *italics mine*). This concluding claim could be construed as an admission that Thomas engages in *eisegesis*, at least to some degree, in the commentary.

Matthew Levering ("The Gospel of John in Aquinas's *Literal Exposition on Job*") catalogues the eleven citations of the Gospel of John that are found in Aquinas's *Super Iob*. He presents them as proof that Thomas regards the Scripture as a unified whole that serves as the source of all *sacra doctrina*, arguing that Thomas only draws on the Gospel of John in the commentary when he thinks it illuminates the text of the book of Job.

Serge Thomas Bonino's essay ("The Incomprehensible Wisdom of God in the *Expositio super Iob*") explores the interplay in Aquinas's *Super Iob* between divine incomprehensibility and the ability to penetrate the mystery of God through infused and acquired wisdom. He positions Aquinas's *Super Iob* within the wider schema of Thomas's thought, which is structured by "the metaphysical schema of participation" (97)—God is subsistent Wisdom, and human beings can participate in said wisdom in a partial way through acquired and infused wisdom. Bonino traces out precisely where this concept of participation is reflected in the commentary, as well as its

inherent limitations (since the revealed reality of God is transcendent in relation to human intelligence, full participation is impossible). According to Bonino, Aquinas's Job demonstrates that the infusion of wisdom "takes away nothing from the incomprehensibility of God and his designs" (119), but prompts the believer to seek understanding of the faith while his spirit is afflicted and purified.

Rudi te Velde ("Divine Providence and Man's Place in the Order of the Good") investigates the relationship between *SCG* III and *Super Iob*, noting that Job is not cited in *SCG* III, despite the fact that they were composed at the same time. Velde sketches out Thomas's presentation of providence in *SCG* III, including the distinction between God's universal providence and his special providence for rational creatures. Velde then describes how the latter concept is operative in Thomas's interpretation of Job, especially in his treatment of Job 7.

In his comparative analysis of providence in *SCG* and *Super Iob*, Guy Mansini ("Revelation and Divine Speech") examines Aquinas's mode of argumentation. Whereas in *SCG* the universal scope of God's providence is proven by way of demonstrative argumentation, in *Super Iob* Aquinas employs probable arguments in order to illuminate how providence works. Mansini explains that, for Aquinas, it is God's speeches at the end of the book that provide the necessary revelation to understand "the particular "how" of providence, whereby in a fallen world suffering leads to the good, to God, to the possession of God" (159).

Harm Goris ("Sin and Human Suffering in Aquinas's *Commentary on Job*") relies on Thomas's systematic analysis of sin found in the *ST* to interpret what he writes about sin in *Super Iob*. In particular, Goris treats Thomas's arguments for Job's innocence that are based on the scriptural depiction of Job; the general concept of sin that is operative in *Super Iob* and the different types of sin that can be distinguished therein; the causal factors of sin that are referenced in *Super Iob*; and finally, Thomas's treatment of the relationship between sin and human suffering. In the course of this essay, Goris successfully illumines that which is distinctive about Aquinas's treatment of sin in *Super Iob*, particularly that it provides a "more concrete, holistic, and realistic image" of how sin affects the lives of ordinary people (183).

John Knasas ("Suffering and the 'Thomistic Philosopher': A Line of Thought Instigated by the Job Commentary") approaches Aquinas's *Super Iob* as a "Thomistic philosopher" and argues that, philosophically speaking, it does not present a single comprehensive account of human suffering and evil. Knasas engages in an extended analysis of both the *SCG* and the *ST* to demonstrate that, in Thomas's teachings on divine providence, he employs

philosophically probable arguments (as opposed to demonstratively certain arguments). In particular, Knasas argues that, although the incorruptibility of the human soul is presented by Thomas as a demonstrable philosophical truth, the soul's continued disembodied existence after death and its reunion with the body in the resurrection are asserted only with probable arguments. In other words, Thomas has recourse to theological truths for these teachings, which are illustrated in the figure of Job.

Joseph Wawrykow ("Human Suffering and Merit") treats Aquinas's teaching on merit found in *Super Iob*. He proceeds in two main sections: first, he analyzes Aquinas's account of merit in his other writings, with a particular focus on *ST* I-II, q. 114; and second, he compares this teaching on merit with that of *Super Iob*. Wawrykow observes that, in general, Thomas's treatment of merit is terser in the commentary than in his teaching elsewhere, and it is focused specifically on the issue of how to understand human suffering in relation to divine providence. Wawrykow convincingly argues that, for Aquinas, Job can be said to merit eternal life by maintaining theological hope in the face of affliction, and that Job is rightly understood as congruously meriting grace for his friends in Job 42.

Daria Spezzano ("The Hope and Fear of Blessed Job") investigates how Aquinas describes the roles of hope in God and fear of the Lord in Job's discourses, which he delivers first according to his passions, then according to his reason, and finally under the guidance of divine inspiration. In this discussion, she gives particular attention to the belief in the resurrection that Aquinas attributes to Job and the way that this provides the foundation of hope and filial fear in Job's life. Spezzano concludes that some of Aquinas's insights in *Super Iob* likely provided a foundation for his treatment of hope and fear in his later writings. In addition, Spezzano helpfully observes that Job's hope and fear are "performative," in the sense that they transform his experience of adversity not only by guiding him between despair and presumption, but also by becoming an occasion for God's consoling grace.

Brian Mullady ("Moral Principles in Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on Job*") provides a descriptive survey of three moral themes in Aquinas's commentary: "the place and nature of the passions in moral freedom; the ultimate end of human life; and the nature and punishment of sin" (316). In regard to the first of these themes, Mullady explains that, for Aquinas, Job resembles Christ in that he provides an example of a wise man whose experience of the passion of sorrow is governed by reason. The second of these themes is illumined by Aquinas's interpretation of Job's speeches (esp. in 19:25–27): in addition to God, grace and resurrection can also be said to be a part of the ultimate end of human life. Finally, the third theme is

displayed by God's chastisement of Job for his reckless manner of speech in communicating truth, which had given scandal to others.

In his thematic analysis of friendship in *Super Iob*, Anthony Flood ("Friendship in the *Literal Exposition on Job*") first articulates Thomas's general account of friendship by drawing on his other writings, before then treating the nature and place of friendship—both between human persons and between a human person and God—in *Super Iob*. In regard to human friendship, Flood focuses on two important themes in Aquinas's thought: patience between friends and the delight that a person derives from the presence of a friend. In his treatment of Aquinas's presentation of divine friendship in the commentary, Flood gives particular attention to how Aquinas largely limits himself to the framework of the Old Law and appeals to "the more general notion of participation in God's glory to establish the basis for divine friendship" (358).

Brian Kromholtz ("The Spirit of the Letter: St Thomas's Interpretation of Scripture in His Reading of Job's Eschatology") seeks to elucidate Thomas's unified theological approach to interpreting the book of Job: Thomas sees Job as a real person who hoped in the resurrection and final judgment and, from there, interprets the book as a unified, coherent account of God's providential care for humanity. In his analysis of the commentary, Kromholtz offers helpful insights into Thomas's methodological approach: first, Thomas consciously engages in literal interpretation, meaning that he sees himself as offering an interpretation to which "the text lends itself directly, without necessary dependence on other particular texts of Scripture" (367); and second, he follows the text closely while consistently relying on resources accessible to observation and natural human reason. Regarding the book of Job, Aquinas articulates probable, reasonable arguments that there is a final judgment and resurrection, but ultimately recognizes that any certitude regarding these truths depends on revelation. Kromholtz thus provides a cogent argument for how Thomas's approach in interpreting Job exemplifies a unity of truth—both truth that is arrived at by reason and truth that is received through faith. N.V.

A. Jordan Schmidt, O.P.

Dominican House of Studies
Washington, DC

A History of Catholic Theological Ethics by James F. Keenan, S.J. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2022), xi + 434 pp.

Until recently, those studying Catholic moral theology in the English-speaking world found historical works that traced only certain periods or movements of Catholic moral theology. Such works as John Mahony's *the Making of Moral Theology*, Servais Pinckaers's *Sources of Christian Ethics*, John Gallagher's *Time Past, Time Future*, James Keenan's *History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Andrew Kim's *An Introduction to Catholic Ethics since Vatican II*, and Charles Curran's *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States* all offer selective historical or thematic overviews of moral theology which are helpful within their scope but lack, by their nature, a substantial overview of the ongoing developments in the sources and methodologies of Catholic moral theology throughout the last several millennia. In Keenan's newest book, one finds for the first time in English a wide-ranging review of the history of Catholic moral theology that aspires to chart both significant figures and methods that have shaped and continue to shape the discipline today.

Keenan's history begins with the New Testament writings of Paul, the Synoptic Gospels, and the Gospel of John. According to Keenan, the New Testament Scriptures provide the "fundamental background" for all Catholic moral teaching as they center their reflection on the Christ event, his message, and how to witness to the message of Christ (2). In chapter 2, "Mercy: the Social Formation of the Early Church (Up to 500 CE)," Keenan considers the social dimension of discipleship in the early Church, challenges that arise with notions of apostasy and sin, and concludes with a section on Augustine's impact regarding ethics. With chapter 3, called "Pathways to Holiness: The Fourth to the Sixteenth Century," Keenan delves into various factors impacting holiness including the confession of sins, the discovery of the self, the development of the Church's sexual teaching, and the impact of Erasmus and St. Ignatius of Loyola. Chapter 4, "From the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century: The Medieval Scholastic Foundations of Modern Moral Theology," centers on key figures and their contributions to morality including Abelard, Heloise, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham. In this chapter, Keenan describes the ever-increasing scientific development and systematization of theology from its sources amidst a robust atmosphere of debate.

In chapter 5, "Pathways to Modernity I: Casuistry," Keenan offers a brief history of casuistry in the sixteenth century that includes the framing of moral theology around the Ten Commandments and the debates

surrounding the nature of authority and doubt as found in probabilism. In chapter 6, "Pathways to Modernity II: Confraternities and the School of Salamanca," Keenan surveys the sixteenth century further, examining the impact of confraternities involving the laity in offering a pathway to holiness with service to the local communities, along with the highly influential School of Salamanca and its impact through Vitoria and de las Casas on the rights of the indigenous people of the Americas and on the development of international law. The impact of Alphonsus Liguori on the development of a prudence-centered, pastorally oriented moral theology that avoided the rigorism and probabilism of his time is highlighted by Keenan in chapter 7, "Reforming Moral Theology: From the Eighteenth Century to the Second Vatican Council." Additionally in this chapter, he summarizes the impact of the suppression of the Society of Jesus, the influence of the moral manuals and their limitations, the new efforts of European moral theologians that led to the reforms of moral theology in the mid-twentieth century, especially at Vatican II, and finally *Humanae Vitae* (1968) and its aftermath, which includes the triumph of moral dissent. Having mapped out the history of moral theology, Keenan uses chapter 8, "Moral Agency for a Global Theological Ethics," to reflect on moral theology in the present age, and he does so in two parts. In the first, he focuses on the changing nature of the field of moral theology in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, which is driven by a movement toward lay theologians, including women, and the focus on the local and particular. In the second part of the book, Keenan draws on the recognition of suffering as a way to consider the particularizing of moral theology in recent years throughout different regions in the world.

This ambitious history outlined and described by Keenan deserves careful scrutiny both for its method and its details. To start, Keenan calls this work a history of Catholic theological ethics and not Catholic moral theology, though he uses the terms interchangeably at times. The question surrounding the naming of the discipline is especially thought-provoking, since Keenan titled his previous historical work *History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century* only twelve years ago. Keenan's reasoning is not directly explained in this work, though one can piece together an argument. First, the rise of the discipline of moral theology in the post-Tridentine era and its subsequent division into fundamental moral theology and special moral theology created a segregation of the field of moral theology that endured into the 1970s. Second, beginning in the 1960s onwards, the field of moral theology became increasingly revolutionized through the growing numbers of laity involved in the discipline. Keenan calls this the most significant

change in the field. This change led to a radical shift of the discipline away from a magisterium-led single-mindedness of the seminary to an academic environment that enabled a more dynamic and creative investigation of the discipline. Third, coupled with this change in the make-up of the discipline, there is this profound move toward a more historically minded understanding of the world and theology that gives significant weight to human experience, along with a view to social and relational dynamics. With these considerations in mind, Keenan rightly observes a discipline at work today involving morality, and even more broadly theology in the Catholic tradition, that is very different from what occurred just seventy-five years earlier. As Keenan notes, there is less study today on the ends of marriage and use of one's sexual organs and more on the nature of human relationality. And yet, not everyone doing work in Catholic theology would ascribe to some of the methodology inherent in the Catholic theological ethics movement, nor is it so easy to characterize magisterial teaching today as decidedly in the Catholic theological ethics fold. For example, Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* teaches an understanding of sin and the disharmony it creates among God, human beings, and creation that is rooted in traditional Catholic moral teaching. And Pope Francis' repeated use of nature is embedded in a traditional Catholic understanding of creation and God as creator. These magisterial teachings are directly drawn from matters typically considered in fundamental moral theology.

A second consideration in Keenan's work that deserves scrutiny is his chapter on Scripture. Keenan accurately observes the call from the Council fathers of Vatican II for a moral theology that is imbued with Sacred Scripture. Thus, it is quite surprising to find that Keenan's work does not include any consideration of the Old Testament in the Scripture chapter, since the Old Testament serves as both a tradition and a frequent source of quotations for the New Testament writers. One only finds Keenan describing the taking over of the Ten Commandments from Judaism as the only reference to the Old Testament in this opening chapter. Next, while recognizing the daunting task it is to provide an overview of key New Testament texts/themes regarding morality in the vein of something like Hays's *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, one should be struck by the truncated treatment Keenan offers of the moral teaching of the New Testament. To give but one example, following the Synoptic Gospels, Keenan defines sin as "the failure to bother to love" and describes this as "a very biblical definition of sin" (22). Given the language surrounding sin in the New Testament, which directly draws upon Second Temple Judaism, this definition is very far from accurate or satisfactory when one understands the complexity

regarding the development of the language regarding sin in Judaism and into early Christianity, especially sin as debt in the New Testament period. The work of Gary Anderson, for example, is central to telling this history and development.

The third consideration in Keenan's work that merits examination is his narration of the sexual teaching of the Catholic Church in the New Testament and early Church period. From his chapter on the New Testament, Keenan does not include any reference to any text involving marriage, virginity, adultery, or sexual vice. From this vantage point, the New Testament offers no explicit texts that speak to human sexuality. However, when Keenan reviews the early Church period in chapter 2, he states that "for the most part, the teachings [on sexuality] reflect the concerns of celibate men who, while pursuing an integrated life of discipleship, . . . found sexual desires to be obstacles rather than aids in the pursuit of that perfection," and soon thereafter in this chapter, he provides a quick review of biblical texts on sexuality (57). One should wonder why this material did not appear in the earlier chapter on the New Testament. In addition, what Keenan describes regarding sexual ethics in Scripture includes a very short paragraph on Jewish attitudes regarding sex and women viewed as property, an acknowledgement of Jesus's promotion of the love commandment with his sexual ethic focused on "an ethics of interiority that privileged the singleness of heart of the disciple," and Paul's recommendation of celibacy while marriage is a remedy for those with unruly sexual desires (58–59). In the end, one is left with the idea that Catholic sexual morality consists of no serious foundation in Scripture and is simply the foisting of the concerns of celibate men who struggle with sexual desire onto lay women and men who are unable to pursue a life of discipleship in the context of a monastery.

A fourth minor concern of Keenan's text deserves a brief mention. It is a disappointment to find that parts of chapters 7 and 8 of this text are at times paraphrases or rephrases and occasionally a word-for-word copy of Keenan's previous work *History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century*, without any mention of this being the case.

There are many other questions and concerns that could be raised in this work, such as whether Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius of Loyola uphold Keenan's understanding of the "primacy of conscience" or Keenan's one-sided criticism of the manualist tradition or his omitting of significant twentieth-century figures that do not fit his historical narrative of theological ethics, like Pinckaers. Students in moral theology today would benefit tremendously from a detailed historical overview of the sources and developments in Catholic moral theology in order to avoid the sometimes outdated

or even pejorative judgments of earlier historical periods in the Catholic Church, as in the case of the uses of terms “manualist” and “Jansenist.” And some of the best material in this work of Keenan’s includes the early modern period of the confraternities and the School of Salamanca and Keenan’s astute understanding of the current global ethics movements which he has helped lead and shape. Unfortunately, this comprehensive historical overview of moral theology by Keenan raises more questions and concerns than addressing the lacunae in the studies of the history of moral theology today.

N·V

James W. Stroud

Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology
Hales Corners, Wisconsin

The Irreducibility of the Human Person: A Catholic Synthesis by Mark K. Spencer (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022*), 454 pp.

What has a metaphysic drawing deeply from the Catholic philosophical tradition to say about what we most fundamentally are? In *The Irreducibility of the Human Person: A Catholic Synthesis*, Mark K. Spencer gives about as comprehensive an answer as the philosopher has on offer in the literature today. No single review will do it justice. Still, in what follows, I offer a brief map of the project and spotlight what I take to be some of the book’s centrally important contributions to a Catholic metaphysic of the human person. I conclude with some general remarks.

Already at the start of this book, in Spencer’s introduction, we find a significant contribution to Catholic philosophy and its future prospects. Here Spencer offers a roadmap not only for this book project, but for general future collaboration between alternative philosophical methodologies in Catholic philosophy today. Methodological approaches are usefully divided into a *first-person* approach, phenomenology, a *third-person* or “objective-principles” approach, especially Thomistic metaphysics broadly considered, and between them a *perspectival* approach characteristic of hermeneutics and postmodern metanarrative analyses. Spencer shows us how the first two perspectives offer philosophical benefits by considering their object from mirroring perspectives (subjectivity and objectivity), while the third approach acknowledges our non-neutral stance toward the world, since we think always already within a culture and tradition (see 1–6

and 14–19, respectively). Bypassing much of the polemics between these schools, Spencer offers a promising direction for synthesis between them which, drawing on Hans Urs von Balthasar, he calls the “aesthetic method.” Aesthetic method paints a portrait of the human person by refusing to limit exploration to any one method or perspective, and thus promises to approach the human person in its holistic fullness.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part, Spencer introduces many major themes found in the Catholic metaphysical tradition aiding our exploration of our irreducibility. He takes as guide the Thomistic metaphysic of being, which both unfolds into a powers ontology and also introduces us to metaphysical principles such as substance, accident, act, potency, essence, and existence. However, metaphysics for Spencer is an ongoing (perhaps endless) project of awe-struck wondering—*theoria*, or contemplation—at the beauty and hidden structure of fundamental reality (18–19). In this regard, a fundamental methodological principle for Spencer is that whatever can be directly perceived, whatever is immediately given to the metaphysician, must irreducibly be something in itself (12). And so, throughout this first part, Spencer moves beyond a mere rehearsal of the Thomistic metaphysic, looking also to insights gained from the Franciscan intellectual tradition (especially John Duns Scotus and Bonaventure), as well as the Catholic phenomenological tradition (especially Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Jean-Luc Marion), to expand the metaphysician’s horizon of the real.

Each chapter in the first part offers an exposition of traditional metaphysical themes guided by an eye toward the nature of the human person, while at the same time synthesizing themes from the alternative philosophical approaches mentioned above. Spencer’s aim is to find and route out reductionistic tendencies not just in contemporary philosophy at large, but even within the Catholic tradition which wants to uphold the irreducibility of the human person but sometimes inadvertently fails to do so. To take two examples, in chapter 1, drawing on the phenomenological tradition (here Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein, and Michel Henry), Spencer shows how the act–potency and form–matter distinctions in the Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysic also find an analogous home in the phenomenological distinction between, on the one hand, intentional acts of consciousness, either act or form, and on the other, the content of those conscious acts, either potency or matter (49). As a result, we come to see that the experience of pure subjectivity has, initially counterintuitively, a rightful place in a realist metaphysic of the human person (we objectively have the formality of subjectivity), and to exclude it is reductionistic.

In chapter 5, Spencer draws on the realist phenomenologist, Dietrich

von Hildebrand, in proposing an expansion of our spiritual powers to include not only intellect and will, but “the heart” or *spiritual affectivity* (218–19). Spencer is careful to show in just what ways phenomenological principles such as Hildebrand’s spiritual affectivity are assimilable to a Scholastic metaphysic of the human person and in what ways they call for an expansion of that metaphysic. With careful exposition, Spencer avoids the objection sometimes offered by traditional metaphysicians that recent so-called philosophical discoveries in alternative philosophical traditions are merely repackaged insights first discovered by the Scholastics. For Spencer, to avoid a reductionistic account of what we are, we must draw from and synthesize multiple philosophical traditions and so maximize the ways we are irreducible.

The second part of the book is devoted to an application of the findings of the first part. Having considered many traditional metaphysical themes and their fruitful syntheses with alternative approaches, Spencer now moves to contribute a completed picture of the human person as a unique beauty most clearly expressed liturgically, that is, with all aspects of our personhood engaged. In liturgical acts, as Spencer observes, we are engaged spiritually, affectively, relationally; manifest our being-toward-divinization; and even are engaged physically in the Eucharistic (385). Liturgical acts manifest the interpersonal drama of a movement toward the full expression of our status as *imagines Dei*, a movement toward union with God. It is fitting, therefore, that the aesthetic method culminate in a metaphysic of each person as a beauty, overflowing categorization and reduction, in their own right.

On that note, A particular fruit of the aesthetic method which this book applies is witnessed toward the end of the first part and into the second. Here Spencer combines philosophical methodologies, expanding the metaphysic to include deeper layers through which being manifests. Following Stein, Spencer acknowledges a distinction between *intelligible unity*, being with an intelligible internal structure of formalities, and *existential unity*, being as real existence in an act–potency structure (209–10). Following the realist phenomenologist Joseph Seifert, Spencer proposes to include a third layer, that of *axiological unity*, or being as objective value (210). Finally, drawing from the Eastern concept of God’s self-manifesting *energeiai* (energies) found in the theologian Gregory Palamas, Spencer shows how a fourth layer of being—holistic self-manifesting being—irreducible to the three previous layers belongs in our metaphysic (257). This fourfold partition aids us in moving toward a more complete portrait of the unique beauty, best expressed liturgically, that each one of us is.

In all, the book has much to commend it. The reader is introduced to

many important debates within the Catholic philosophical tradition, and more importantly, is treated to creative and promising solutions to these debates. It is unlikely that entrenched positions either within intramural debates or concerning the larger divisions of philosophical methodology will be fully convinced by Spencer's proposals. However, he is clear that this is not the aim of the book. Its aim is to showcase aesthetic method in overcoming reductionisms in thinking the human person. And in that, I think it succeeds. If it has a shortcoming, it is in being too short. The references alone suggest a shelf full of books on this same theme of an aesthetic approach to the full portrait of the irreducible human person. All the same, this just proves good news for philosophers looking for new avenues of contribution to the Catholic *philosophia perennis*.

N.V

Joshua Taccolini

Saint Louis University
Saint Louis, MO