

Book Reviews

Christ's Descent into Hell: John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger, and Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Theology of Holy Saturday by Lyra Pitstick (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016*), xiv + 135 pp.

LYRA PITSTICK, otherwise known as Alyssa L. Pitstick, the author of the provocative *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell*, the fruit of her doctoral dissertation at the Angelicum, has produced another, slimmer volume critical of Balthasar's project as she sees it. The book opens with a quick review of Balthasar's theology of the descent, followed by two chapters on Joseph Ratzinger's own comments on the descent and on Balthasar's theology, one covering his statements prior to his pontifical elevation and one addressing those subsequent. The following chapter concerns the statements of John Paul II on the descent, which she contrasts with both Ratzinger and Balthasar, but mostly Balthasar. Next, she runs through the remarks of Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, a former student of Ratzinger and undersecretary at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith commissioned by Pope John Paul with the drafting of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Although Schönborn is a theologian in his own right, she touches on him only insofar as his *Introduction to the Catechism*, together with Ratzinger, is sometimes invoked in defense of Balthasar's orthodoxy with regard to the descent. Finally, she consolidates and elaborates her own comments on the respective positions of Balthasar, Ratzinger, and John Paul in two chapters entitled "The Crux of the Problem" and "The Crux, Continued," the latter of which directly addresses an issue oftentimes brought to the fore by Balthasarians: the praise lavished upon Balthasar by both Pope John Paul II and then-Cardinal Ratzinger in the wake of his untimely death (i.e., just days prior to his awaited honorary elevation to the cardinalate). These seven chapters are bookended by a very brief intro-

duction in which she laments that the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* declined to publish criticisms she offered of an article there published by the late Fr. Edward T. Oakes, S.J., in which he defends Balthasar's doctrine of the descent against her earlier critique in *Light in Darkness*, and a conclusion that simply recaps the whole, as well as a number of appendices containing short magisterial documents, and lastly, a short supplementary text she wrote in response to an invitation from a student magazine at Gonzaga University.

On the whole, the book is to be commended for its valiant work in both surveying the various occasions on which Ratzinger and John Paul address Christ's descent into hell and dealing with the misbegotten attempts of some to canonize Balthasar's thought on the basis of a few accolades from the two Pontiffs, who themselves tower above so many notable Catholic thinkers in the modern era. Although somewhat repetitive, her thoughts on the differences between these three theologians echo thoughts I have harbored on the matter for quite some time, albeit with a few key divergences. The ambition of such an undertaking is laudable, but—and this may not offend the casual reader—her recourse to secondary literature is minimal. I cannot help but think that she may have benefitted from consulting major works sympathetic to Balthasar's project by authors such as Nicholas J. Healy, David C. Schindler, Rodney A. Howsare, Cyril O'Regan, Gerard F. O'Hanlon, S.J., Aidan Nichols, O.P., and John Saward, author of the curt but illuminating book of reflections on Balthasar's triduum theology, *The Mysteries of March*. Her only interlocutor seems to be Edward Oakes, an esteemed Balthasarian indeed, but without much in the way of direct engagement.

In any case, the primary downfall of the work is a lack of theological nuance, particularly with regard to the constitution of sacred tradition and the composition of what one might call a "charitable" interpretation of Balthasar. As one can turn to patristic and medieval sources with an eye to affirming one's own position, a fault of which Balthasar sometimes may be guilty (at least, according to such renowned patristic scholars as Brian Daley, S.J.), or with a more judicious eye, the obverse is also true: one might look at Balthasar's controversial theology of the descent through the narrow lens of his *Mysterium Paschale*, "a quickly written [essay]," in his words,¹ or the German series *Mysterium Salutis*, or engage the whole of his

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologik*, vol. 2, *Wahrheit Gottes* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985), 315n1.

work, looking for points of development and emphasizing potential places of convergence with “the tradition,” where room for clarification in search of conformity to orthodox doctrine might be found. Of course, when one’s understanding of doctrinal orthodoxy is correspondingly restrictive, the presupposition is that tradition is monolithic, and so is verbal signification. The fact is that Balthasar’s theological writings are shot through with mystical language, metaphorical predication, a dialectical-dialogical conception of analogous discourse, and even rhetorical excess. Pitstick’s reasoning, by contrast, is simply linear, block by block, literal predication after literal predication. Some would argue that Pitstick’s approach is therefore more properly theological than Balthasar’s, while others will insist on the intrinsically mystical character of theological discourse. Perhaps there is a middle ground. But alas, there is no discussion of these matters in her work, and I suspect that any such discussion would be equally un-nuanced—one need not be a Hegelian to object to lack of nuance, after all!

Most disappointing is the missed opportunity to discern where Balthasar and Ratzinger may converge so as to draw forth a theology of the descent that is, yes, different from the Tridentine one, but not in complete contradiction to it. In other words, John Paul’s Wednesday Catechesis on Christ’s descent into hell may be reconciled, at least, with Ratzinger’s quasi-Balthasarian theology of Holy Saturday. Pitstick is right to note that Ratzinger explicitly states his reluctance throughout his theological career to agree with Balthasar’s reflections on the descent wholesale (11), despite their close friendship and collaboration. But she treats Ratzinger as though he were a novice theologian only gradually coming to the realization that “the tradition” contains a theology opposed to Balthasar’s. Ratzinger does tend to leave Holy Saturday as a mystery of silence somehow huddled between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, but he also acknowledges that the sufferings of Christ culminate with the event of death itself and that his being dead is also commemorated on Saturday before the celebration of his glorious resurrection is inaugurated on the vigil. Pitstick is fixated on the “historical” descent without considering its essentially trans-historical significance. For Ratzinger and for Balthasar, time is not so much a linear reality that traverses earth, Sheol (or the realm of the dead), and purgatory as it is for Pitstick. Jesus did not report anything that happened between the *time* of his death and the *time* of his resurrection, nor is there any historical

record of Christ's descent into hell, only a theological *image* in 1 Peter 3:19—a word used consistently by both Ratzinger and Balthasar in reference to the descent and contested by Pitstick on the grounds of realism, a veritable red herring, given the fact that even the Catholic epistles sometimes utilize parabolic language. Hence, there is no definitive doctrine on the descent (as Paul Griffiths has shown), and speculations may abound as to what “happened” in Christ's soul during his “time” in the netherworld.

In line with what I have already written on the matter, it might be argued that, in the very moment of death, an event whose characteristic “moment” is supremely existential, Christ experienced the relative infinity of a timeless abandonment that exceeds even the hell of human hopelessness without actually being deprived of the life of charity. In fact, his suffering is proportionate to the measure of *caritas* in his soul. What is memorialized on Holy Saturday is precisely this *caritas* that has “undergirded and undercut” (*unterfassung*) the hellish misery due to sin, having become “accursed for us” (Gal 3:13), in order to redeem mankind from its deepest, darkest hours. At the same time, it may be affirmed with John Paul that, *after* this “moment” of solidarity with the dead in the traumatic event that is death itself, the soul of Christ enjoyed perfect vision of the Father with whom he never lost objective communion, which would soon overflow into his corporeal reality in the at once historical and trans-historical event of resurrection.

Concerning interpretation of Balthasar himself, one example of Pitstick's literalism appears on the very first page of the first chapter, where she insists that distinguishing between sin and sinner for Balthasar means giving entitative qualities to sin itself, which Balthasar merely does not want to undermine as a non-reality (with some who interpret Augustine wrongly). True, Balthasar's theology of sin is not very robust—it would benefit greatly from Jacques Maritain's (and company's) rendition of Aquinas's account of the origin of moral evil. But there is no indication whatsoever that Balthasar thinks, as Pitstick later claims, in accord with her analyses again in *Light in Darkness*, that the divine Word suspends its union with the dead human nature of Christ to become hypostatically united to sin itself in the hell of the damned (see especially 3–4), a ridiculous notion based on a literalistic reading of just a few passages in which the mystic Adrienne von Speyr is quoted. Every literate theologian knows that the mystical language even of canonized saints and doctors of the Church can be

read on occasion as heretical, if one really tries hard to be the inquisitor. Of course, there are other straightforward orthodox readings of the same language—that is precisely the point. N&V

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Ethical Sex: Sexual Choices and Their Nature and Meaning by Anthony McCarthy (*South Bend, IN: Fidelity Press, 2016*), 326 pp.

A DOMINANT CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDE toward the human body might be said to be totalitarian in nature. This attitude not only embraces the physical members of the human body but extends its reach even to the natural inclinations. It treats human bodily reality “as a raw datum” that is “devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design” (John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* §48). According to this view, the human body is external to the human person and, as such, simply furnishes the material condition for the exercise of free choice. The anthropology in question is dualistic in that it divorces human personhood from human embodiment. Reason is thus left free to manipulate the bodily conditions of human being, all too often in ways contrary to the indications inscribed within those very conditions themselves.

The recent significant trend in Western countries to legislate for homosexual “marriage”—or even, in the case of Ireland, to enshrine this “right” within the constitution—renders even more important the intellectual engagement with the inclination to the procreation and education of offspring, as St. Thomas puts it (*Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 94, a. 2), that is to say, the intellectual engagement in sexual ethics. One reason for a rational defense of Catholic sexual ethics is precisely the fact that recent developments are the political expression of a dualistic anthropology and are, as such, as I have intimated, totalitarian in character.

Anthony McCarthy’s book, which offers such a defense, engages with a wide array of authors philosophical, theological, and literary. Included in this array are figures such as Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, John Paul II, Aurel Kolnai, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Josef Pieper, Roger Scruton, Janet Smith, Bernard Williams, William Shakespeare, Robert Sokolowski, Michel Foucault, and Peter Singer, to mention just a selection. Manifold

arguments are adduced in support of what ultimately constitutes a Catholic sexual ethic, and countervailing arguments are rebutted in analytic style.

The first chapter of the book offers a sustained critique of the contention on the part of New Natural Law theorists that contraception is contra-life. The author then proceeds in the next chapter to look at natural law, functions, and teleology. Arguments are adduced in defense of teleology and of the idea that any particular organism has a function. This chapter proceeds to sustain the intimate link between the functioning proper to human beings and human flourishing. In this regard, the author remains alert to the demands that attend the hylomorphic structure of human being, albeit with an exception noted below. The importance of embodiment and teleology carry over into McCarthy's discussion of marriage and meaning. The notions of embodiment and teleology ground the objective reality of the conjugal act. Indeed, for McCarthy, "it is marriage which is that standard with respect to which sexual activity is judged to be good or not" (107). I would have to disagree with this formulation, however. Heterosexual marriage, rather, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for sexual activity to be good, a point the author would no doubt accept.

Teleological considerations flow over into the discussion of sexual desire. In this regard, McCarthy offers some useful reflections concerning pornography and fantasy. Thus, for example, with regard to the latter, he observes that "the moral demands of the real world are not being adequately met when an effect is deliberately produced which properly belongs to a different cause" (160). Teleological considerations also enter into the final chapter on love, virtue, and vice, as also does the notion of embodiment. McCarthy builds on Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II's observation that the human body in itself is not shameful and that neither are sensual reactions and sensuality in general. Thus, writes McCarthy, "it cannot be objectifying simply to appreciate or be aroused by the bodily features of (in particular) one's spouse, which surely constitute the valuable sexual attributes of an inherently valuable person in a marital unit geared towards the couple's social and biological fulfilment" (187). Again, the *telos* of the sexual act, it is argued, is essentially marital. While all lack of respect or objectification is anti-teleological in nature, this is particularly so in the case of sexual activity that is not properly ordered within a marital context.

The foregoing brief delineation of the structure and content of McCarthy's book shows forth what is valuable in his work, which is his appreciation of the notions of embodiment and teleology in formulating an adequate sexual ethic. Many creative arguments are marshalled with a view to defending a Catholic position. In elaborating these arguments, the author, as already intimated, engages an impressive range of figures from the domains of philosophy, theology, and literature.

There are however some negative criticisms to be leveled at the author's laudable efforts. Thus, one gets the sense at times that the author is not as familiar with the thought of St. Thomas as one would wish a Catholic philosopher engaged in sexual ethics to be. Perhaps this lack is a downside of the wide range of thinkers with whom he dialogues. Thus, in referencing *ST* II-II, qq. 23–27, McCarthy writes: "For Aquinas, all kinds of love are grounded in the will (including desire), which provides the initial framework for seeing different forms of love as integrated" (171). Prescinding from the confused nature of this formulation (is it "all kinds of love" or "the will" that includes "desire"?), it is simply wrong to state that Thomas thinks that all kinds of love are grounded in the will. The confines of this review do not allow an adumbration of Thomas's teaching concerning love. The following quotation, however, demonstrates that, for Thomas, the notion of love extends well beyond the human will: "Now to love God above all things is natural to man and to every nature, not only rational but irrational, and even to inanimate nature according to the manner of love which can belong to each creature" (*ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 3).¹

A little further on, McCarthy asserts: "For Aquinas the approval expressed in the statement 'it's good that you exist' is an expression of will" (172). No doubt Thomas would agree with this idea, but I know of nowhere where he actually formulates it explicitly.

Another point pertains to the natural inclinations, concerning which the author arguably departs from the logical demands of a thoroughgoing hylomorphism. Thus he writes that "a reproductive organ has a 'pre-rational' inclination towards its proper object (its function)" (91), in spite of his general insistence on the psychosomatic unity of the human person. (Admittedly, there are scholars of St. Thomas's thought who espouse this view.) Elsewhere, he

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 2 (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1948).

repeats this idea in a more general form: “While we might see certain ‘instincts’ as ‘drives’ towards the good, they are pre-rational” (259n3). However, the hylomorphic structure of the human person, in my view, entails that the inclinations that man shares with other creatures are subsumed into the reality of the rational soul—the form of human being—and thus can never be simply pre-rational in his case. While the natural inclinations are not the result of deliberate choice, they do nevertheless seem to pertain to what Thomas means by simple willing (*simplex voluntas*).

One final observation: this book is written by a philosopher. Its deliberations begin in earnest with a discussion of “thick” and “thin” concepts, a distinction gleaned from analytic philosophical analysis. The first thinker quoted in this regard is Bernard Williams, an analytic philosopher. Given the sharp distinction between philosophy and theology that is the hallmark of much contemporary philosophy—lamentable and all as it is—it would seem that, as a matter of strategy, it would have been more effective for the author to keep a distance from quoting Catholic Church teaching. At any rate, as John Paul II points out in *Fides et Ratio*, a harmony obtains between faith and reason so that right reason naturally coheres with what the faith teaches us. A chance to evangelize contemporary culture has perhaps been lost precisely by the author’s explicit recourse to faith. This would be a pity, since his obvious philosophically ecumenical spirit deserves to be reciprocated. N·V

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Priestly Celibacy: Theological Foundations by Gary Selin (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016*), 210 pp.

PRIESTLY CELIBACY IS one of the more intriguing topics in Western Culture for a number of reasons, the largest being our preoccupation with ideas about and experiences of our human sexual power. A culture so obsessed with sexual activity becomes equally obsessed with those who choose to abstain from it. This cultural stance gives rise to a cynical curiosity about celibates, one that asks repeatedly, “how could you possibly live such a life?” and in the end says, “I don’t believe you are living such a life; no one could.” Selin’s book may not heal such cynicism, but it will anoint the intellect with a balm, making such cynicism difficult even to contemplate. Celibacy *is* livable—but

in a supernatural way. Specifically, celibacy is livable for normal men who have first become stunned by the depth and beauty of Christ and have heard him ask one question: “May I live my spousal mysteries over again in your body for the sake of the Church?” Hence, the normal is taken up into the supernatural.

When I was a teenager, I used to think men became priests, and hence celibate, because they “couldn’t get girls to like them,” because they thought, “I cannot get married; I might as well become a priest.” This was the “plan B” theory of celibacy. Were there men who chose celibate priesthood as “plan B”? Probably there were—and still are. But in light of Selin’s work, we see clearly how such a choice is not the gift that is being offered to priests. The gift that a priest is receiving and the choice he is making in response is a positive one, not a negative one. The gift is a man’s choice to allow Christ to live his spousal mystery over again in his body, as Blessed Dom Marmion once said so beautifully. The celibate priest receives a gift. It is the gift of participation in Christ’s own availability to serve the needs of his Bride, the Church. The priest is taken up into the spousal mysteries of Christ, his relationship to the Church, and his own carrying into the present a foretaste of heavenly freedom. With the celibate priest, Christ shares his own singular heart, thus effecting a living configuration between priest and Christ, a dynamic self-giving of priest toward the Church, and a prophetic sign for the baptized to contemplate as it hints at the single-heartedness of all in heaven.

Selin’s work could usher in a new day in seminary curriculum on priestly life and identity. Building upon the classic studies of celibacy by Cochini, Heid, and now John Paul II, along with the Second Vatican Council and Paul VI, Selin unveils an image of celibacy that carries profound theological depth and surprising personal and spiritual promise. In under two hundred pages, the author explores the theological history of celibacy, placing its vibrancy within close proximity to the mystery of Christ’s self-donation to his Church. For Selin, following *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), celibacy exists as a supernatural good within a Christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological context. Viewing it from within such a context is the good news for seminary studies, as this book gives the reader a clear and engaging intellectual grasp of the nature of this disciplined charismatic life. Selin acknowledges the institutional benefits of priestly celibacy for the Church, but what comes to the fore most in his research is the personal motivation for such a life. This emphasis upon a mature personal motive for entering the celibate priesthood reveals

more clearly the true divine intent behind such a call: personal happiness in the service of the Church. Celibacy is not superior to marriage in some moral way (i.e., “universal call to holiness”), but it remains a gifted theological life offered to those who can “accept it” (Matt 19:12). Selin reviews the anti-corporeal corruptions of some views of celibacy, articulates the meaning of “ritual purity,” and describes how celibacy is the priest’s own embrace of purity of heart. This purity of heart is a gift from God and is effected in practice through the priest’s charitable presence in ministry.

The book also traces the history of clerical continence as it paved the way for celibacy becoming the priestly norm in the Latin Church, secured by the teachings of the Council of Trent. Rather paradoxically, as celibacy becomes the presbyteral *norm*, there blooms a deeper theological grasp of its gifted nature, rather than it simply being a disciplinary imposition. As the theological history unfolds (papal teaching, Max Thurian, Odo Casel, Cardinal Alfons Maria Stickler, etc.), Selin does an effective job of helping the reader notice the ever-growing clarity in the Church’s mind that celibacy is a man’s share in Christ’s own embrace of loving availability to the Father and the Church. And further, due to the rich historical and theological research on celibacy, the Church comes to grasp that celibacy secures a deeper freedom in priests so they can abide in “close identification with Christ.” What Selin gives to seminarians and their formators is a context within which to explore the gift of celibacy as an opening to both intellectual and affective union with Christ.

Selin recognizes that celibacy is neither part of the essence of priesthood nor necessary for its functioning, but rather a way of embodying priesthood that yields rich veins of spiritual ore benefiting both priest and Christ’s Bride, the Church. Priestly celibacy is a share in Christ’s own radical availability to serve the needs of the Bride, and consequently, the priest becomes oriented to Christ as to a font from which he receives the grace to live such radical availability himself. This availability benefits the Church as it receives the ministrations it desires from a man who is possessed by the singular heart of Christ in his own love of the Bride. Finally, the celibate priest carries to his people, in his own body, a sign of the relative value of all that is on earth. In his priestly celibacy, he prophetically points to the fulfillment of all human desire; fulfillment ultimately reached in God alone. The celibate presents to the married layman a true revelation that, after death, the believer is no longer taken up into sacramental marriage, but into its origin: the marriage between

Christ and his Church. Though it is a rich analogy, the nuptial image for priestly celibacy is not sufficient to express the mystery of priestly self-sacrifice, so Selin also explores the meaning of priesthood under the rubrics of Head–Body distinction, Friend of the Bridegroom, Spiritual Father, and Good Shepherd.

The book unfolds in four chapters, tracing the development of priestly celibacy, its place in magisterial teaching, its intellectual and spiritual renewal when understood in its Christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological meanings, and its relationship to the Eucharist, on which I will make one further note. In light of the eschatological truths present in both priestly celibacy (Christ's own way of being among us and his Bridegroom status in Heaven) and the Eucharist (the anticipation of heaven and the wedding feast of the Lamb), the priestly identity is less ambiguously grasped in the celibate state than in the married priesthood. In the celibate state, the priest clearly is configured to the Christ, who is for the one Bride, the Church. As Benedict XVI noted in *Sacramentum Caritatis*: "The choice of celibacy has first and foremost a nuptial meaning; it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for the His Bride" (§24). This truth is most clearly expressed as the celibate priest is taken up into the Eucharistic sacrifice as one who is configured to Christ's own self donation to the Bride. It is this donation that fuels the pastoral charity that is a priest's own way of being.

This book is a positive, inspiring, and scholarly feast with which the seminarian and priest can study and pray. It contributes a dynamic and fascinating theological understanding of priestly celibacy as it focuses us upon celibacy's hope: to share in Christ's own holy way of living and serving. N&V

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Did the Saviour See the Father? Christ, Salvation, and the Vision of God by Simon Francis Gaine, O.P. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), viii + 221pp.

AT THE OUTSET of the first chapter, Simon Francis Gaine asks: "Was the Word made flesh blessed from the very first moment of the incarnation with the vision of the essence of the triune God in his human mind?" (3). In particular, did Christ possess the beatific vision

before his resurrection, Ascension, and glorification? These are the theological questions Gaine seeks to answer in this book. The traditional answer to this related set of questions is, of course, yes, but contemporary Catholic theology is far from a consensus on this issue. In fact, if one could pick out a majority consensus about the theological teaching of Christ's beatific vision from conception, it would certainly be negative, at which Gaine somewhat playfully hints in his first chapter title, "No one thinks that anymore!" In that chapter, Gaine tells the story of how the theological teaching of Christ's beatific vision from conception transitioned from a state of nearly universal adherence among Catholic theologians to a minority position during the second half of the twentieth century. After the Second Vatican Council and the near-total "collapse" of Thomism's influence, most theologians have argued that the teaching that Christ saw the Father throughout his earthly sojourn has deleterious consequences for the integrity of Christ's human nature, among plenty of other putative problems (4). Anyone familiar with recent literature on this dogmatic question knows just how varied these criticisms are and the diversity of the problems critics identify in the teaching. The criticisms generally coalesce around the concern to foreground the similarities of Christ to us in his humanity, rather than obscuring them, as they think the traditional teaching does. To address these criticisms and "ask whether there might be a form in which the Thomist view was still viable," Gaine first thought of writing this book over a decade before its publication (12). He thought a work clarifying traditional Thomistic teaching was necessary because there seemed to be no explicit support for it in the most recent magisterium. However, in 2006, Benedict XVI approved the "notification" against two of the works of Jon Sobrino for treating Christ too much like a mere prophet with exemplary human faith. According to the notification, Sobrino had overlooked the significance of Christ's extraordinary knowledge of the Father. Thus claiming magisterial support for his argument, Gaine furnishes an account of how Scripture and Tradition render Christ's human knowledge, suggesting that modern criticisms of Christ's beatific vision fall short of their mark.

After sketching the state of modern Catholic theology on Christ's beatific vision in chapter 1, Gaine responds to the most prevalent argument against the doctrine from its supposed absence in the Bible. First, Gaine reminds us that one of the motivations for Karl Rahner's dogmatic inference of Christ's immediate self-consciousness was essentially to remove the question of Christ's human knowledge from the guild of historical-critical scholars who had called the traditional

teaching into question. The result was that Scripture became regarded as of little relevance to this theological issue. So, Gaine sets out to define “how far the Bible’s witness is relevant to this debate among Catholic theologians” (15). Given Scripture’s position as an essential source of theology, Gaine argues that modern theologians should not set Scripture in opposition to dogmatic theology, as Rahner may have done (18). Rather, the divine inspiration of Scripture should lead us to conclude that whatever Scripture presents tells us “the honest truth about Jesus” (18). Gaine then sketches biblical teaching on the beatific vision in general, noting the theme of sight as it relates to God’s presence, and the key here is the biblical intuition that seeing God this side of heaven is impossible aside from grace. Then Gaine provides an exegesis of key texts like 1 John 3:2 and 1 Corinthians 13:10–12, arguing that both texts have the Father as the object of the beatific vision that takes place by grace in the eschaton (31–32). Having established the character of the beatific vision generally, Gaine examines the Gospels for their presentation of Christ’s knowledge of the Father, which he argues is essential to grasping Christ’s teaching ministry: “Human teaching presupposes knowledge in the human mind of the teacher. Were it otherwise, Christ’s human mind would in some important respect be redundant” (39). Gaine observes that, if we did not postulate extraordinary knowledge in Christ’s human mind, then the “whole picture” of Christ the revealer “would lose all plausibility,” even if Christ’s beatific vision is not explicitly taught in Scripture (40).

Chapter 3 responds to the objection that the traditional teaching is not present in the Church Fathers. This is a very important objection, since it is a principle of Catholic theology that the interpretation of the Scriptures must not contradict the Fathers (43). It is also significant because the Fathers do not discuss the question of Christ’s human knowledge much. First, Gaine responds to Thomas Weinandy’s “Nestorian criticism” that the beatific vision is inapposite to the Son, since the saints alone hold the beatific vision (the vision of God), and not God. Gaine thinks a better way to formulate the classical position is to say that the beatific vision pertains to “one with a created mind,” not to one who is merely “not God” (44). Furthermore, Gaine observes, there is no evidence that Nestorian or Antiochene theologians held to the beatific vision in Christ’s person. In fact, Theodoret of Cyrus seems to have taught that the man Jesus did not possess extraordinary knowledge. Second, Gaine treats the differences of opinion about the beatific vision itself among the Fathers.

And finally, he turns to a reference in Augustine's *Contra Maximinum* and to Fulgentius's reply to Thrasamund to suggest there are patristic arguments for extraordinary knowledge in Christ's human mind (55 and 68–69).

Having established that scriptural and patristic data contain inchoate information about Christ's human knowledge, in chapter 4, Gaine rebuts the charge that the traditional teaching is poor speculative theology. In many ways, this chapter functions as the core of the book, since it lays out the scriptural data of Christ's ministry in chapter 2 and uses the theology of Thomas Aquinas to explain how the beatific vision renders intelligible the requirements for Christ's human nature to fulfill the role as teacher. The argument draws upon two principles of Aquinas's theology. First, drawing on Aquinas's Trinitarian theology, Gaine argues that, since the divine persons are coextensive with the divine essence, all three divine persons remain the object of the beatific vision (82). Since the divine persons are known relative to the others (e.g., the Father is known as the Father of the Son), it is possible to distinguish the persons from one another and to have a particular divine person as the focus of the beatific vision, according to context. Second, in Aquinas's theology, the beatific vision is an intellectual act of perceiving the divine essence that is constitutive of the proper end of human happiness. This act is made possible by the divine essence itself, and is thus an act of grace. This act of grace never violates natural reason: the beatific vision is always knowledge received according to the mode of the receiver (84). From these two observations, the incarnate Son, who possesses a created human mind, is thus able to see the Father intimately according to that mode of receiving. Moreover, since the Son is the Word who proceeds by way of knowledge from the Father, it is proper to think of the Son receiving divine knowledge in his created mind as it participates in that knowledge. Gaine insightfully argues that, whenever the Gospel of John focuses on Christ's knowledge, it also focuses on the Father for that reason: the Son receives extraordinary divine knowledge in a filial way (see esp. John 8:14 and 55 [86]). He receives this knowledge by grace appropriated to the Holy Spirit (91–94).

Gaine's interpretation of Aquinas and his position come into fuller view as the book's cumulative argument progresses. He concurs with Maritain and Lonergan that Christ needs finite concepts by which to translate the inexpressible beatific vision, but he differs from them regarding those concepts' origin. Lonergan argued the communicable concepts came from Christ's acquired knowledge based on his senses.

Maritain supposed that they came from his infused knowledge and that the beatific vision was contained in a supra-consciousness that rendered it available to Christ's human consciousness. However, Gaine believes Christ gets these finite, communicable concepts from the beatific vision itself, since Aquinas believed the blessed could draw intelligible *species* from the vision.

With the beginning of chapter 5 also comes the beginning of the book's second part. The first four chapters build a cumulative case that much is found in Scripture and Tradition to support the traditional teaching. Part 2 addresses various claims that "there is much that is found in Scripture and Tradition that necessarily excludes this vision for theology" (14). Chapter 5 addresses the claim that Jesus is portrayed in Scripture as having faith. According to this line of critique, faith is necessarily excluded from the beatific vision, since faith is commensurate to that of a human sojourner while the beatific vision applies to one who has arrived at the end of the sojourn. Here Gaine interrogates the Bible's use of the term πίστις, especially the phrase πίστις χριστοῦ, the interpretation of which is hotly contested among exegetes. Gaine notes that the verb πίστευω never has Christ as its subject (109). Furthermore, the patristic witness nearly unanimously evinces favor toward the objective genitive rendering of πίστις χριστοῦ: "faith in Christ" (110). He also argues that faith and vision of God are necessarily incompatible in Scripture (115–20). He engages the "third way" proposals of "Christic light" by Torrell, Galot's use of "infused knowledge" by way of mystical experience, and Weinandy's "hypostatic vision" and suggests that all three maintain Christ's indirect knowledge of the divine essence. The problem with positing indirect knowledge in Christ, for Gaine, is that, in all three cases, it assumes the distinction between the limitedness of faith and the fullness of the beatific vision. Either Jesus's knowledge is just that, or it is not. When he teaches authoritatively about the Father in John's Gospel, it is clear that either he sees with fullness those things that the Father reveals or he accepts that knowledge without seeing it on faith, "on divine authority" (119). The point is that indirect knowledge cannot do the conceptual work it is employed to do if the distinction between faith and vision is assumed. While Scripture neither proclaims Christ's beatific vision nor attributes faith to him, Gaine thinks the weight of evidence strongly tends toward Christ's beatific vision, rather than his imperfection of faith.

Chapter 6 asks how Christ's normal human cognition relates to his supernatural knowledge gained from the beatific vision. Critics like

Gerald O'Collins claim the two are incompatible. Gaine investigates the biblical witness again, asking what sort of identifiers might pick out "natural human knowledge" in Christ. It is well-known that texts like Luke 2:52 and Mark 13:32 identify human growth and ignorance, respectively. Then Gaine observes that Aquinas and modern critics are united on teaching that Christ acquired human knowledge (135). Rather than following Aquinas in teaching the total perfection of Christ's acquired knowledge by adulthood, Gaine suggests that Christ's acquired knowledge can be understood as perfect "relative to the needs of the particular moment," and is thus not infinite or exhaustive (136). Such a proposal builds consensus with critics. Gaine then challenges the putative mutual exclusivity of beatific knowledge and natural knowledge common among contemporary critics. He argues that the vision of divine transcendence given in beatific knowledge should never be confused with ordinary human knowledge, since the former proceeds by way of the divine essence while the latter is fitted for "translation" of unutterable beatific knowledge by ordinary human concepts and language (151). Thus, Gaine sees Aquinas's teaching of Christ's infused knowledge as superfluous to the perfection of his mind, since Christ's human nature is always perfect relative to the needs of the moment. It must be noted that Gaine does not reject infused knowledge in Christ altogether.

Chapter 7 challenges the claim that Christ's beatific vision renders the volitional freedom constitutive of human nature inoperable. Here Gaine invokes the theological principle that grace perfects nature, and thus the beatific vision perfects or enhances human freedom (161). Rather than being unbefitting to his earthly task of salvation, Christ's beatific vision enables him to inhabit the heavenly freedom necessary to accomplish our salvation (176–77). In the vision of God, Christ sees all those for whom he will die and loves them all by the same act. He knows and loves them by the same act of knowing and loving God, establishing supreme charity in him out of which he acts most freely (177).

Chapter 8 concludes the book with "what is often perceived as the most powerful argument" against the traditional teaching: the joy of the beatific vision excludes suffering and the negative passions entailed by suffering (179–80). Drawing on Scripture, Gaine establishes that Christ experienced human passions like joy, anger, and sorrow, and following Aquinas, he suggests these passions were "co-assumed" for our salvation (186). Gaine also follows Aquinas in distinguishing between Christ's higher reason, which experiences

intellectual joy in the vision of God, from the lower reason, which can experience pain and sorrow (189). For Aquinas, these two orders of knowledge do not “compete for space,” since they “have very different objects, and they can perfectly well co-exist, the former in the intellectual and the latter in the sensory appetite” (189). The problem that arises here is just how Christ’s intellectual joy could redound into the appetitive powers of his lower reason in the midst of suffering, as would be fitting in Aquinas’s philosophical anthropology (190). Aquinas allows for general instances where intellectual joy may not redound into the lower reason, but Christ would be an exception to the general rule that the beatific vision always redounds into the sensory appetite (197). Following Aquinas’s impulse, Gaine suggests that, because of Christ’s vision of the divine essence and all that pertained to his earthly mission therein, his great charity impels him to suffer on behalf of others. Far from being exclusive of his intellectual joy in the beatific vision, the immense suffering is taken up by the Son precisely because of that ecstatic vision of the Father.

One of the best attributes of Gaine’s book is the way he manages to integrate and respond to nearly all the major recent criticisms of Christ’s beatific vision while maintaining a logical unity throughout the entirety of the book. Each chapter lays the conceptual groundwork for the one to follow, laying out the substance of the theological desiderata in a way that anticipates a response to other current objections to the doctrine in following chapters. Gaine also helpfully repeats core claims from previous chapters as he develops the next one, assisting the reader in following his cumulative argument. While Gaine’s arguments against modern critics are cogent and persuasive, it remains to be seen whether critics will find them so.

For those inclined toward the traditional view, as is this reviewer, the book is eminently convincing. Through subtle exegetical rigor and conversation with contemporary theologians and biblical scholars, Gaine’s argument in support of Christ’s beatific vision is philosophically erudite, drawing on the best recent research into Aquinas’s theology and his characteristic subtle distinctions. One of the strongest parts of the book is Gaine’s engagement with Scripture. While there is no explicit “proof text” for Christ’s beatific vision in Scripture, Gaine is right to suggest that the evidence of his extraordinary knowledge of the Father and his teaching ministry demand explanation by way of some theological theory. While exegetes and theologians may quibble over the details, Gaine’s claim that the beatific vision explains the inner logic of the Gospel accounts, rather than obscuring it, is one

that will surely generate much beneficial discussion in contemporary Christology. His reading of Aquinas as an inheritor of the patristic and scriptural legacy is lucid and throws new light on contemporary questions about Christ's human knowledge. N.V

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Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons by Adam Ployd (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015*), vii + 225 pp.

ADAM PLOYD, a United Methodist deacon, teaches Church History and Historical Theology at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. The book under review is his first monograph, a revised version of his dissertation written under the direction of Lewis Ayres and Anthony Briggman at Emory University. Though the influence of Ayres, as well as that of Michel René Barnes, is felt on nearly every page, both Ployd's source material and his thesis are unique. From the outset, he asks his readers to view Augustine not only as a "polemical or occasional theologian" but also (and primarily) as a preacher (1). Ployd is the first to treat the forty-one sermons Augustine preached between the winter of 406 and the summer of 407, drawn from the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (119–33), *Tractatis in Iohannis Evangelium* (1–16), and *Tractatus in Iohannis Epistulam* (1–10), as a complete series, "a long discourse that Augustine conducts with his audience" (2). This discourse develops an understanding of the "church" (here, I follow Ployd's "intentionally vague" usage; see 4n6) that is intimately connected with Augustine's Trinitarian theology, and in particular, his "pro-Nicene" reading of Scripture. Ployd argues: "Augustine uses pro-Nicene principles and exegesis to construct his anti-Donatist vision of the church and in doing so he describes how the church shares in the life of the Trinity through the Son's giving of the Spirit to his own body" (3).

Ployd explores this thesis in four argumentatively compressed chapters, beginning with what he calls Augustine's "moral epistemology" in chapter 1. This term of art, deployed throughout the book, describes Augustine's insistence that knowledge and love are mutually informing, such that "we advance in knowledge of God through the reformation of our desire" (19). Ployd argues that, for Augustine, we maximally come to know and to love the God revealed in Jesus

Christ as members of the church. Augustine's preaching is singularly directed toward the cultivation of this "moral epistemology," which Augustine theoretically explored with characteristic conceptual rigor in his *De Trinitate*, composed only a few years before the sermon series under consideration (beginning ca. 401–405). Ployd shows how Augustine's "intellectual" approach to Philippians 2:6–7 relates to his "moral" approach to Matthew 5:8. In order to interpret Scripture appropriately, the exegete must understand that the designation of Christ as appearing "in the form of a slave" does not negate his remaining "in the form of God." One becomes capable of closing the epistemological gap between the incarnate and the eternal Christ through moral purity cultivated in faith (see Matt 5:8). In turning to the sermon series, Ployd shows how the church becomes, for Augustine, both a vehicle of access to the faithful love that enables one "to bridge the epistemological gap" between the material and the spiritual (32) and an object for theological reflection that requires humility, "the primary disposition of the Christian life" (54).

In chapter 2, Ployd explores the Christological dimension of the church, and in particular, how Augustine construes our incorporation into the one grammatical subject of Christ in his homiletic exegesis. To this end, Ployd explores the nature of "prosopological exegesis as the best way to understand how Augustine speaks of our unity with Christ in these sermons" (57). Though *persona* occurs only once in the *Enarrationes* under consideration, Ployd rightly argues that "prosopology" is crucial for Augustine's *Enarrationes* as a whole and that Augustine's use of it elsewhere justifies his consideration of it as "the guiding motif" of the psalms of ascent (64). Here, Augustine consistently interprets the voice of the psalmist as the voice of Christ, and by extension, of the church: "Many Christians joined as one to each other by being united with and into the one Christ" (65–66). Incorporation in the church means becoming part of Christ's body, which enables our ascent to the triune God. Ployd reads Augustine's appeal to crucial texts such as John 3:13, Colossians 3:1–4, and Acts 4:9 against the Latin pro-Nicene background established by Ambrose of Milan, among others. Augustine is unique, however, in drawing an explicit connection to "the significance of our union with the body of Christ," in which both humility and love "accompany and equip" our contemplation of the triune God (85–86, 99).

In chapter 3, Ployd moves from Christology to Pneumatology, arguing that the unity of the body of Christ is founded on the love of the Holy Spirit. Ployd argues that Augustine's "developing theol-

ogy of the Holy Spirit” connects “the eternal identity of the Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and Son to the redemptive work of the Spirit in establishing the church’s unity through that same love” (100). Ployd begins with an interpretation of Augustine’s sermon on Psalm 121, wherein Augustine reflects on the nature of the love that affects our ascent to the heavenly Jerusalem. He focuses on the soteriological implication of the love given by the Spirit as the “vehicle for our ascent,” not as isolated individuals, but in the communion of the ecclesial body (104). He then turns to the pro-Nicene context of Augustine’s appeal to Acts 4:32a (“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul”). Both Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose drew on this passage to affirm the consubstantial unity of the Father and the Son against the Arians. Ployd argues that Augustine adopts their anti-Arian usage but extends it “by adding love as the constitutive agent of unity” (111). Augustine, therefore, casts the Donatist refusal of ecclesial unity as fundamentally a failure of love, “a love that Augustine identifies as the gift of the Holy Spirit that Christ gives to his body, the church” (116). Finally, Ployd argues that Augustine drew on a similar pro-Nicene reading of Romans 5:5 (“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”) to advance an understanding of the “*proprium* of the Spirit” as the “charity of God” that enables the Church to share in God’s Trinitarian life (124, 127).

While the theme of the “common and inseparable operations” of the triune God consistently appears throughout the book, chapter 4 addresses this central pro-Nicene doctrine in the context of Augustine’s theology of baptism. After addressing the “traditional sacramental theology” of Cyprian of Carthage and the Donatists, Ployd argues that Augustine conceptually shifts the locus of baptismal *potestas* away from the authority and purity of the bishop administering the sacrament to the “unity of nature and power that obtains in the three divine persons of the Trinity,” and particularly to Christ as the primary agent imparting the grace of the Holy Spirit through the minister (146). Ployd argues that Augustine appropriates “pro-Nicene power theologies” (traced by Barnes) and “brings this understanding of divine *potestas* to the traditional North African theology of baptismal *potestas*” (155, 165). In Augustine’s view, Ployd argues, the validity of baptism is rooted in the agency and power of Christ, “the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33), not in the condition of the earthly church and her ministers. Ployd goes on to argue (against J. Patout Burns) that, for Augustine, “the unity of the church

is the consequence of baptism, rather than simply a prerequisite for it" (169; see note 62). Ployd holds that Augustine's central image deployed to this point is that of the dove, in connection both to the Spirit (John 1:33) and to the church (Song 6:8). The Spirit-dove imparts a "moral simplicity" that enables those who suffer baptism to both long for and enjoy the "ecclesial unity that is a result of effective baptism" in the dove-church (181). Augustine thus presents the sacrament of baptism as the common operation of the triune God, who establishes the unity of the church.

Ployd's conclusion attempts to connect the meaning and significance of Augustine's "trinitarian ecclesiology" to martyrdom, another flashpoint in North African ecclesiological disputes. Ployd's structural analysis of Augustine's eleventh homily on the Gospel of John in light of Paul's reading of Hagar and Ishmael in Galatians 4 is suggestive, but it ultimately requires a deeper reading across a wider range of texts to be finally convincing. Ployd seems to preempt this criticism in his final remarks by noting how the book as a whole leaves "many questions unanswered or only partially explored," most notably "how exactly the church shares in the life of the Trinity" (195). There are others, however. Ployd's understandable insistence on the significance of Trinitarian theologies as a driving force behind Augustine's ecclesiology precludes a significant engagement with Augustine's North African predecessors, the only significant treatment of which appears (far too fleetingly) in chapter 4. Balancing the speculative inheritance of Augustine's Gallic and Italian sources with the more practical concerns that occupied North African theology would have yielded a more complete treatment of the ecclesiology present in the sermon series. Ployd does a fine job of drawing the reader into Augustine's delight in the interplay of key Scriptural texts in the sermons, but Ployd's predilection for technical interpretive phrases like "moral epistemology" often obscures the elegant simplicity of Augustine's own rhetorical achievement in the sermon series and the effect of Augustine's rhetoric on his original audience. These phrases almost inevitably slip toward a jargon that obscures rather than illuminates his primary source. Finally, though Ployd does attend to certain images in the sermon series, notably in his treatment of Augustine's play with the figure of the dove, he fails to capture how Augustine's treatment of the words of Scripture as a kind of lexical mosaic present an array of images for the relationship between the Trinity and the Church drawn from the ordinary life of his audience. In particular, Augustine consistently appealed throughout the sermon

series to nuptial images that figure the triune God as the Lover of his Bride, the church, and the Donatists as an unfaithful spouse seeking figurative divorce and remarriage (see, e.g., *En. Ps.* 127.8; 127.10–12; *Io. ev. tr.* 8.3–5; 9.2, 9.10, 9.13; *Ep. Io.* 1.2; 2.2, 2.11; 3.7).

In spite of these criticisms, Ployd's book is to be recommended for its creative integration of contemporary readings of Augustine's Trinitarian theology with his treatment of the nature of the Church in this unique sermon series. Its chief merit lies in the avenues it stakes out for future research into the development of Augustine's ecclesiology and the role of his practice as a preacher in configuring the minds and hearts of his audience to the love of the triune God offered in and through the Church. N V

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