

Book Reviews

Rebuilding Catholic Culture: How the Catechism Can Shape Our Common Life by Ryan N. S. Topping (*Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2012*) xxvii + 240 pp.

RYAN TOPPING'S *Rebuilding Catholic Culture: How the Catechism Can Shape Our Common Life* is a call to arms for the Church in the modern world. It encourages the reader to reaffirm the wisdom of Catholic culture as civilization's unique hope. In speaking of "culture," the author has in mind that "excellence in thought and manner which properly accrues to a people." Topping, a scholar of St. Augustine who has thought deeply about the nature and contemporary challenges of liberal education, is Fellow of the Thomas More College of the Liberal Arts (NH). He writes for a Western world where reason has all but evacuated the public forum and religion (insofar as it is tolerated) has degenerated into mere "therapy or critique." Both doctrinal and pastoral in his tack, Topping grounds his argument in the *Catechism's* teachings and outlook, supports it with sociological data and current events, and enriches it with references to art and experience. The black-and-white prints and photographs are not particularly inspiring or apropos; but the author colors his prose with so many incisive and quotable phrases that Fr. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (who wrote the foreword) and Fr. John Saward (on the back cover) have not inappropriately called it "Chestertonian."

The book comprises eight main chapters, each of which treats a basic subject of one of the *Catechism's* four parts: doctrine, sacraments, morals, and prayer. "On Faith" (ch. 1) provides an apology for the ecclesial structure of faith based upon the common-sense need to bring deliberation to an end and, often enough, to trust another's word in order to act. Topping identifies the negative effects of Kantianism, historicism, and postmodernism while describing the positive "internal

and external” conditions that allow faith (*qua* and *quae*) to appreciate the authority of Tradition, Scripture, and Magisterium. “On the Creed” (ch. 2) takes up the faith’s use of reason, specifically arguing that authentic humanism requires classical Christology. Evangelical confidence in humanity demands candor about sin and creedal specificity about the unique, incarnate work of Christ. In company with the *Catechism*, Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* and St. John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio* provide the prophetic programs that best orient the Church’s anthropology for today.

“On Worship” (ch. 3) situates present experience within the movement of liturgical reform that began in the nineteenth century. Besides healthy gains, such as greater education of the laity, Topping observes damaging effects: turning *Sacrosanctum Concilium*’s “*participatio actuosa*” into a call for the laity’s clericalized activism, elevating the priest’s personal individuality over his sacred ministry, and redirecting the end of divine worship to human instruction and exhortation. Catholics must rediscover that their most important and co-redemptive work is their hierarchical worship of the triune God, which is a “work of the people” only insofar as it is a work of the whole Christ—head and members. “On Sacraments” (ch. 4) considers the contemporary, secular challenges to an enchanted view of the world. Topping uncovers the Enlightenment principles that continue to set man against nature and deaden his sense of the sacred. After Kant, mind and morals are divorced. As a result, people live schizophrenically between the worlds of technical functionalism and sensual libertinism. For Topping, building houses of worship that are decidedly beautiful will renew the Catholic presentation of the embodied person’s integrally transcendent vocation. Accordingly, greater attention to the senses and imagination is also owed to sacramental celebration.

Whereas the liturgy has become rationalized, morals have become sentimentalized. “On Virtue” (ch. 5) describes society’s estrangement from the philosophical grammar of its own purported “values,” such as the prerogatives of conscience or justice for all. The author shows how modernity’s authority of the self and confidence in worldly perfection (consider Rousseau) have stifled law’s more universal and ultimate intelligibility. It is no wonder, then, that liberalism sets the stage for totalitarianism. At any rate, the Church’s promise of a happy life, pursued through the asceticism and joy of the virtues, is the answer. Using Dante’s *Commedia* to paint a delightful tableau to envision the road to happiness, Topping continues his noble effort to re-harmonize

intelligent love of the good and the beautiful in “On Law” (ch. 6). Beatitude results from the journey that progressively internalizes God’s law through grace and virtue. And as with his passage through purgatory, man on earth must allow his freedom to be trained with “caresses and blows.”

Properly analogous to the soul, a city lacking in discipline, and even punishment, is a city lacking in order and, with it, the potential to flourish. But the right ordering of society is only practicable when the nature and dignity of its most fundamental cell is recognized. “On the Family” (ch. 7) shows how the faithful family is the best argument against secularism’s nihilistic claims that “married life is imprisoning, babies are burdens, and male-female difference is a cultural fiction.” Although catechesis (in this area and others) needs an aggressive overhaul, Topping, a father of five, testifies that parents themselves must be people of prayer and devotion; they must imbue their children’s imagination and memory with the devotional taste for fasting and feasting. The next chapter focuses more specifically “On Prayer” (ch. 8), also continuing the critique against scientist and historicist optimism. Topping would orient the Christian soul otherwise to hope for God above all other programs and goals. The Church’s members must pray and profess “Thy Kingdom come” with new vigor, furthermore summoning the renewal of consecrated life. When authentically lived, such forms of life testify to the supernatural future of heaven and can manifest its glorious freedom even now.

Undoubtedly, Topping’s diagnosis of modern Catholicism in the West is necessary reading for parish leaders, Catholic high-schoolers and undergraduates, and all who have yet to distinguish between the authentic Second Vatican Council of the Magisterium and the mock simulacrum that secular media and ecclesial dissension have engendered. His concluding exhortation for rebuilding Catholic culture is to end legalized abortion, have more babies, teach children Latin, and build beautiful churches. Overall, his work evinces the wisdom of the *Catechism*’s authors in choosing an intellectual and traditional, rather than situational and revolutionary, approach to the faith. Weaving the voices of, for example, St. Irenaeus, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Dante, Blessed John Henry Newman, and St. John Paul II into one, Topping masterfully answers his own battle cry: “[to] master and muster the resources of [the Church’s] own tradition. [Which is] done not through endless accommodation to contemporary thought, but through renewal and recovery of its own mind.” Such a renewal and recovery

as Topping's articulates the palpably systemic effects that ideas have had in the West for good and for ill, while pointing the way forward. He does so in a way that would explicitly ally "Thomists and masters of the *nouvelle théologie*" with each other.

Assuredly, some readers will bristle at Topping's anti-modern militancy (which nevertheless uses the rather modern category of "culture") and his conservatism, which is suspicious of rights-talk and committed to Christ's social kingship. But there will be difficulty in contesting his evidence and arguments, even as certain positions and statements remain open to deeper probing—for example, that there are three "authorities or sources" of Revelation; that the unique vice of our age is "to substitute images for ideas"; that being a "rigorous, loyal, and proud" Catholic is the most convincing recipe for radiating Christ's love; or that the patristic approach to nature differs from the classical by way of "extension," not "revision." He also invites historians and theorists to consider further, among other things, the multifaceted relationship between images and ideas in the grasp and transmission of supernatural things and to scrutinize the borders between the Church's "own mind" and other philosophies. Above all, however, the question that will linger most after reading such a rousing work, published in 2012, is "And what of Francis?"

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T & T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology, edited by C. C. Pecknold and Tarmo Toom (*New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013*), xvi + 287 pp.

AS THE CHRISTIAN WEST continues to struggle with working out its Augustinian legacy, tools for thinking about that legacy are always in need. As the editors note in their introduction, this volume is meant to be an aid to deepening our understanding of that legacy. The volume offers six chapters on doctrines (Trinity, the human being, Christ, Church, Scripture, and eschatology) that are focused on Augustine himself, followed by six chapters dedicated to how major theologians from the thirteenth (Aquinas and Bonaventure), sixteenth (Luther and Calvin), and twentieth (Lubac and Zizioulas) centuries have received Augustine. Even the chapters focused on Augustine,

however, are generally composed with an eye toward modern theology and the ways in which Augustine is useful in addressing its concerns. A few of the chapters are slightly tarnished by imperfect editing, but Pecknold and Toom have put together an admirable volume, drawing together a wide range of scholars to offer their insights to us. If there is one problem this reader would note, it is that there is no chapter on Augustine's doctrine of grace, one of the richest and most influential aspects of his thought. The Luther and Calvin chapters, of course, talk about the reception of that doctrine, but the absence of a chapter *about* Augustine and grace feels like a loss.

The chapter on Augustine and the Trinity is by Luigi Gioia. Gioia's offering is more or less a distillation of his book, something that is always useful for the scholar whose reading list grows ever longer. His reading of the progress of the truth from polemic to anagogy to mystagogy to theology of revelation to worship as the expression of wisdom is deeply illuminating. The *De Trinitate* as speculative theology and as theological anthropology is situated clearly and appropriately in the context of the questions raised by our sinfulness and our weakness, questions that are answered by the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. The missions are, if anything, even *more* important to theology than are the processions. It is precisely in the sacrifice of Christ that the inner life of the Trinity is revealed to us, for knowing God is only possible through "the full thankful and humble acknowledgement of our total dependence on God" (17).

Michael Hanby's chapter on Augustine and the human being presents a deeply admirable project: to locate a sense in Augustine of relationality as essential to humanity, rendering the human person "analogous to the 'substantive relations' of the Trinitarian personae" (22). He explicitly places himself in the tradition of re-readings of the *De Trinitate* that has included such figures as Lewis Ayres and Rowan Williams. He does this by pointing to the constitutive role of memory in the human person as "by definition a response to something first *given*" (25).

The chapter on Augustine and Christ is written by Ronnie Rombs. Rombs skillfully exegetes the centrality of "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" as a binding together of person and work, soteriology and Christology, the *mediator reconcilians*. But perhaps the more significant move comes in his discussion of the relation between mediation and revelation, where he argues that Augustine provides us with the means for a "fruitful engagement" (38) with

contemporary “symbolic” Christologies found in Rahner, Dulles, and Haight. For, as mediating revealer who mediates and reveals precisely in the flesh, Christ gives sensory expression to what is non-sensory, and thus can be said to be a “symbol” of God, so long as we allow the symbol simultaneously to be that which it signifies.

In Michael Root’s chapter on Augustine and ecclesiology, he hones in on the question of the unity of the Church, and especially with an eye to ecumenical concern. He notes that, in Donatism, we find “a fully non-ecumenical ecclesiology” (57), where the understanding of Church unity is utterly simple. Augustine, on the other hand, develops a layered understanding of Church unity, starting with an external unity found through the sharing of legitimate baptism and moving to an internal unity of charity in the Spirit. This developed sense of unity means that “[t]he problem presented by schism and some forms of heresy is now precisely ecumenical” (60), for genuine connection to the Church (not, as Root notes, communion with or participation in it) is not nullified, as in Donatist thought, but marred by division. Schism is thus ultimately a sin against charity, for charity is always a unitive, not a divisive force. Not only the schismatic, but also the carnal Catholic sins against charity and thus fails to truly participate in the salvific Church and its three levels of unity (in shared sacrament, in visible communion, and in Christ, Spirit, and charity). It is these three levels of unity (tweaked in different ways in different communities) that have given rise to all of modern ecumenical theology.

Tarmo Toom’s chapter on Augustine and Scripture discusses how Augustine came to encounter, reject, and finally return to Scripture in his life, before turning to discussing what Scripture *is* in Augustine’s theology, namely, “a unique case of God’s communication with humankind and, as such . . . a means in the larger context of economy” (77) by which the intelligible God communicates with sense-obsessed humanity through sensible media. As divine speech, Scripture is “holy, truthful, and blameless” (78), as well as a trustworthy guide in salvation. Yet, this message is conveyed through human words, which bring with them a number of attendant problems, such as ambiguity and temporality. Toom notes that these problems arise from the fact that words are *signa*, and the *signum* can only ever approximate the *res*. Scripture is thus to be *used* in the pursuit of God, who alone is to be *enjoyed*. For Augustine, this Scripture was a unified whole (85) that points us to Christ Jesus (83). Toom concludes by noting that, while some of Augustine’s views on Scripture have fallen out of favor, others have

become or are becoming influential: the focus on linguistic signification, the use of Christological analogies, and the continuing spiritual usefulness of Scripture.

The last chapter, on doctrine, is Morwenna Ludlow's chapter on Augustine and the last things. Here, she brings the eschatology of the *City of God* into conversation with twentieth-century suspicions of a future (or a certain future) last day. While she notes that Augustine is less certain than some might take him to be at the end of that book, this reader felt like she ascribed rather too much certainty to him. A helpful recent discussion can be found in Cavadini's essay in James Wetzel's *Augustine's City of God: a Critical Guide*. Nevertheless, her analysis is generally strong, and her choice of conversation partners is illuminating, especially the use of John Milbank and feminist discussions of bodies. With these latter commentators especially, one wishes she would have been able to engage with Sarah Coakley's recent book *God, Sexuality, and the Self*. Since the latter volume was published two weeks after this collection, such a wish was, of course, less a real possibility than a wistful "what might have been."

Frederick Bauerschmidt's chapter on Augustine and Aquinas is more about the rhetorical tropes of "Thomism" and "Augustinianism" as competing modes of thought than it is about Augustine and Aquinas per se. Perhaps the best part of this section is his noting that Ratzinger came to read Thomas "as an heir to the Augustinian project of seeking a knowing adequate to the yearnings of the restless heart" (121), a stance that the reader has known many Thomists to take in private conversation and in conference settings. This dichotomy is more about the subjective versus the objective experience of theology, whereas more recent commentators like Massimo Faggioli have tended to use the tropes to propose an Augustinian world-pessimism and a Thomistic world-optimism. Thankfully, Bauerschmidt points out that these latter tropes are rather less accurate than some might hope. As it turns out, love is the key for both thinkers, not optimism or pessimism.

Joshua Benson's chapter on Augustine and Bonaventure looks at the disputed question of Bonaventure's Augustinianism. After a review of the scholarship on the matter, he turns to a letter in which Bonaventure writes that "our masters of theology have set down little or nothing in their writings that you will not find in the books of Augustine himself" (136). For Bonaventure, Augustine emerges as the "model philosopher for the theologian" (138) whom later thinkers must emulate, rather than simply falling into an "Augustinian" school. He finally concludes

by presenting Bonaventure as an Augustinian, “if that means an attempt to remain faithful to Augustine even in disagreement” (148), rather than simply reproducing what Augustine says. To this reader, that seems like the right kind of Augustinian to be.

The chapter on Augustine and Luther comes to us from Phillip Cary. Cary reduces Luther’s development of Augustinian theology to “a more inward conception of sin and a more outward conception of grace” (151). The former shift is accomplished through a querying of motivations for loving God, which can only be good for Augustine, but can be bad for Luther. The latter shift, of course, is connected to the project of Cary’s trilogy on Augustine, for it arises from sacramentalizing grace. For Cary, Luther becomes Lutheran when he discovers, not the righteousness of God, but the sacramentality of the Gospel, a departure from Augustine’s (for Cary) wholly interior communication of grace.

Anthony Lane’s chapter on Augustine and Calvin discusses the ways in which Calvin uses appeal to the Fathers (and especially to Augustine) as a defense against the ever-potent charge of theological innovation. He notes that this apologetic purpose is the main (but not only) reason behind Calvin’s references to patristic authority. Calvin often finds Augustine’s scriptural exegesis overly subtle and figurative, although on questions of doctrine, Augustine is (though not infallible) authoritative enough that “his judgment was sufficient to counter-balance all the other Fathers” (186). He closes by calling for a clearer examination of the influence that Augustine had on Calvin, both in doctrine and in exegesis.

The chapter on Augustine and Henri de Lubac is co-authored by C. C. Pecknold and Jacob Wood. It looks at the argument about the natural desire for God that began with Lubac’s *Surnaturel* and has re-surfaced in the twenty-first century. But this chapter goes very deep into the discussion and firmly situates Lubac in the tradition of the Augustinian theology that began with Giles of Rome. The authors argue that, against the backdrop of this tradition, Lubac is far less inconsistent than many have taken him to be. The rich and layered discussion of the background to the debate will leave any reader interested in the “natural desire” debate hungry for more and hopeful that the dissertation written by Wood under Pecknold will emerge in book form before too long.

Will Cohen’s chapter on Augustine and Zizioulas gestures towards a certain disparity in Catholic-Orthodox dialogue: while Catholics

generally regard the Greek Fathers of Orthodox thought as valuable sources for thought, Orthodox Christians generally regard Augustine, the Latin Father of Catholic thought, as being the deeply problematic source of the errors of the West. Zizioulas is no exception, but Cohen shows that many of his criticisms of Augustine are based on misunderstandings, especially of the Trinitarian doctrine of Augustine, where Cohen deftly shows Augustine to hold to the same principles that Zizioulas champions “against” Augustine and Western thought. Similarly, Zizioulas’s charge that Augustine is the fountainhead of an inwardly turned Western solipsism, as opposed to a communion-founded identity, is dispelled, with the aid of Phillip Cary, by pointing to the way Plotinus’s inward turn becomes a turn “in and up” in Augustine. NEV

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Dark Passages of the Bible: Engaging Scripture with Benedict XVI and Thomas Aquinas by Matthew J. Ramage (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013*), vii + 303 pp.

FIFTY YEARS AGO, the German Jesuit and exegete Norbert Lohfink bemoaned the rumor that the fathers of the Second Vatican Council were considering removing the cursing psalms from the breviary, asking if such a move “might not be throwing the baby out with the bath water.” His fear was confirmed when Psalms 58, 83 and 109 were omitted from the psalter cycle because of “a certain psychological difficulty.”¹ Despite the specification of the doctrine of inerrancy as pertaining to truth “for the sake of our salvation” in *Dei Verbum* §11, as well as the doctrinal commitment of *Dei Verbum* §12 to the necessity of a holistic reading of the biblical text in the light of Sacred Tradition, this pastoral decision regarding the Divine Office seems to indicate a lack of magisterial confidence that a proper interpretation of these psalms could be readily put into practice among those praying the official prayer of the Church.

¹ A.M. Roguet, trans. Peter Coughlan and Peter Purdue, *The Liturgy of the Hours: The General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours with a Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1971), no. 131.

This gap between conciliar teaching and application has become a hallmark of post-Vatican II biblical interpretation, which has been marked, on the whole, by a radical instability in which the use of modern methods of analysis and the hermeneutic of faith are rarely integrated. Current attempts at interpretation often swing wildly from one to the other, from historical-critical homilies that never seem to reach the point of preaching to strained attempts to domesticate the Bible by reference to one or more controlling concepts that promise to “unlock” it as a perspicuous sourcebook for faith and morals. In this confusion, the really difficult, even demoralizing, passages in the Bible are very often simply overlooked, so much so that Benedict XVI felt it necessary, in his apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, to encourage scholars and pastors to avoid neglecting these “dark passages” and even “to help all the faithful” to understand them “in the light of the mystery of Christ” (§42).

In response to this call, Matthew J. Ramage undertakes an encounter with the “dark passages” of the Bible and does so with candor, depth, and profound attention to the Catholic tradition of reading Sacred Scripture. His work, the published version of his doctoral dissertation, comprises a thorough synthesis of historical-critical exegesis and dogmatic interpretation that greatly respects and draws upon both approaches, bringing them into a fruitful synthesis that he applies, with great benefit, to some of the most unsettling passages of Sacred Scripture.

Ramage introduces his work by expressing his goal: “to elucidate a theology of Scripture” that remains true to Catholic doctrine, but at the same time, contains an “inductive dimension” in which theory is confronted by reality in the historical-critical analysis of “the most difficult texts of Scripture” (3). To this end, he endeavors to wed the perspective of “Method A” exegesis—the patristic and medieval approach that emphasizes the unity and harmony of Sacred Scripture—with the practice of “Method B” exegesis—the unsparing scientific approach of the modern historian that seeks not to unite texts, but to distinguish them as products of unique human authors writing in specific historical and cultural situations. The product of this union is “Method C exegesis,” which Ramage hopes can synthesize such perspectives by relating unique texts through attention to development in light of the Catholic Faith, understood as the mature fruit of this development, never compromising, but carefully nuancing the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. These doctrines serve the Method C exegete not as rigid confines that commit the exegete to obscurantism,

nor as a substitute for encountering the Bible as a historian. Instead, they comprise the *modus vivendi* that enables the Christian exegete to have the courage and confidence to be unsparingly historical, to deal honestly with imperfect and even demoralizing passages as representing not themselves, but as one stage of a movement toward Christ. In the words of Benedict XVI, quoted by Ramage, “For the Church the Old Testament represents, in its totality, an advance towards Christ; only when it attains to him does its real meaning... become clear” (6). That movement *is* their real meaning for the Christian, a meaning that can be known only in the light of faith.

In the spirit of Method C, Ramage goes directly to the text to engage some of the “dark passages” of Scripture. In chapter 1, he considers three themes of central importance to Christian Faith: the nature of God, the nature of good and evil, and the afterlife. In regard to the first theme, Ramage considers many OT passages that mention the Lord as only one of many gods; in regard to the second, many OT passages in which God commands the killing of the innocent and/or tempts and hardens human hearts to their destruction; and in regard to the third, many OT passages that deny the blessedness for the righteous dead and resurrection. Many of these passages are well-known, but their cumulative weight presses the issue inescapably: “How can the Bible be God’s word if it is rife with problems in so many areas?” (49).

Chapter 2 begins Ramage’s extended answer to this question by elaborating on the nature and origins of Method C exegesis and the principles of Catholic biblical interpretation. The idea and phraseology (“Methods A, B, and C”) come from Joseph Ratzinger, and it is he who is held up as primary theoretician and the working model for its actual practice. Ramage begins by explaining the nature of Method A and then notes its shortcomings, such as neglect of the literal sense. These defects are counterbalanced in Method B, but new shortcomings arise there as well, especially the tendency toward reconstructions of sayings and events based on *a priori* philosophical assumptions such as metaphysical naturalism. From a Catholic perspective, each approach is valid but needs the other, with Method B coming first in execution, but with the motive and faith hermeneutic of Method A. It is through the practice of Method B that, with Method A’s principles as rationale and guide, a deeper understanding of the Bible’s dark passages can be achieved.

Ramage recognizes that this approach requires more than papal enthusiasm and commendation in order to be accomplished well; it needs a theology. It is here that he draws upon the thought of

St. Thomas Aquinas to qualify the assertion that there is development in the Bible (chapter 3) and to offer a careful interpretation of the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy (chapter 4). Chapter 3 approaches the matter diachronically, showing that the idea of development is not a discovery of Method B, but one already envisioned by one of the most successful and influential practitioners of Method A. Thomas's distinction between the "substance of the articles of faith" and the "number of the articles of faith" allows Ramage to highlight the integrity of the earliest strata of the biblical corpus as truly revelatory, while allowing for the full flowering of God's self-disclosure in later texts, culminating in Christ. Thomas's doctrine of the divine pedagogy roots this process in God's condescension to humanity that allows for growth in understanding, illuminating the previous distinction. Finally, Thomas's doctrine of the three ages of man (before the Law, under the Law, and the time of grace), marked as it is by progress in knowledge of God, gives a working schema for approaching the various strata of biblical texts to see this development. In this way, Method B provides an opportunity to see in moving color what Aquinas had already perceived but could not see with acuity. His theology provides Ramage with a way to relate biblical unity (the emphasis of Method A) to biblical change (the emphasis of Method B).

Chapter 4 approaches the matter synchronically, exploring Thomas's theory of the divine act of revelation, by which God gave human minds perceptions of divine things, and inspiration, the elevation of the mind that makes the former possible. Ramage is on difficult terrain here, but with the help of numerous commentators (Synave, Benoit, Congar, et al.) he does an admirable job of presenting the complex relationship between the perfect Divine Author and the many imperfect human authors of Sacred Scripture. He adopts Benoit's distinction between "revelation in the broad sense," in which authors are given the ability to perceive natural realities (things and events) from God's perspective, and "revelation in the strict sense," in which authors receive supernatural ideas. This distinction is crucial for Method C because it requires neither a verbalistic conception of inspiration nor a propositional claim-by-claim application of inerrancy. When this insight is combined with the insights of Chapter 3 regarding the divine pedagogy, it becomes clearer how a biblical author could be inspired but, at the same, time limited by his own milieu in his expression of divine truth. Ramage posits a distinction between a formal error (an "error of rationality" *a la* Stephen Wykstra) and a material imperfection

that is the result of some calculus of the author's position in salvation history and his use of reason that makes the imperfection inevitable, even obligatory in some cases (131–146). What Catholics are committed to by their faith is that the biblical authors “wrote precisely what God wanted them to write at their respective points within the divine pedagogy” (146). He concludes by adding an additional dimension not found in St. Thomas, the role of the practical judgment and purposes of the biblical authors, whose purposes were not always doctrinal, but sometimes exhortative, liturgical, narrational, or archival, and so on.

Chapters 5–6 complete the process with an application of these insights to the “dark passages” regarding the nature of God, good and evil (chapter 5), and the afterlife (chapter 6). Ramage is not interested in offering new exegetical insights here, but draws upon the work of well-known biblical scholars, Catholic and Protestant, ancient and modern, to work out on the ground what a Method C approach might look like in regard to these themes. His application of the various Thomistic distinctions explored in chapters 3–4 is impressive for its balance and its respect for both the faith of the ancient exegetes and the acuity of the modern exegetes upon whom he relies. Since it traces a process of development, it is necessary for Ramage to take a summary approach. Because his aim is not to recapitulate the meticulous work of others, but rather to show how they can be brought together fruitfully, his brevity is justifiable. While it would be impossible within the scope of a review to evaluate every claim, in my opinion, Ramage is quite successful overall in showing how a faithfully Catholic exegete can remain one while never compromising his scholarly honesty. The chapter on the afterlife is particularly well-developed and insightful, and both chapters (5 and 6) justify Ramage's confidence that Method C exegesis is eminently practicable, thus demonstrating “the reasonableness of Catholic magisterial teaching on the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture” (274).

Ramage's work is an excellent contribution to a project that is only beginning and was indicated by Ratzinger himself as a work that would take at least a generation to realize. One major benefit is that the work draws together manifold examples from Joseph Ratzinger to show how he interprets the Bible and illumines why he takes modern exegetical methods and their fruits so seriously while never compromising his commitment to the Bible as the word of God. The courage of Ratzinger to carefully work in obedience to conciliar teaching on biblical interpretation has a subtle but powerful lesson for Catholic

scholars and preachers. It is not simply a moral lesson about the virtue of obedience, but a lesson about the very relationship between faith and reason itself. In its use of Ratzinger and Aquinas, but also in Ramage's own careful and responsible conclusions, *Dark Passages* is particularly helpful for revealing Catholic biblical exegesis as one very important function of that relationship. It will be an important resource for all Catholics who wish to bridge the gap into which the cursing Psalms have fallen and out of which the criticisms of the New Atheists resound incessantly. N.V.

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Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, & Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective by Alice M. Ramos (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012*), 256 pp.

OVER THE LAST TWENTY OR SO YEARS, various studies have been published on St. Thomas's doctrine of the transcendental properties of being. Particularly noteworthy among these studies is Jan Aertsen's *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996). In the introduction to her book, Alice Ramos notes that, according to Aertsen's analysis, Thomas's doctrine of the transcendentals brings together both theological and anthropological considerations, as well as pointing to the connection between the transcendentals and morality. Ramos is concerned not only with these connections made by Aertsen, but more specifically with the intensification, as it were, of truth, goodness, and beauty effected by the human person as he contributes to the perfection of the universe and, thus, to the return of all things to their Source, namely God. Her appreciation of the intimate connection between Thomas's metaphysics, anthropology, and ethics enables her to pursue this theme and ably and insightfully to show forth the dynamic nature of Thomas's conception of truth, goodness, and beauty. And yet, given the debate about whether beauty is, properly speaking, a transcendental property of being, and given that Aertsen has argued that it is not, one wonders why this issue is not addressed by the author.

The book is not a systematic treatise, but rather a collection of essays that approach truth, goodness, and beauty from various perspectives. These essays are, nevertheless, organized into three sections: Part I,

“Truth, Measure, and Virtue”; Part II, “Beauty, Order, and Teleology: The Perfection of Man and the Universe”; and Part III, “Goodness and Beauty: Human Reason and the True Good.” The array of influences and dialogue partners is truly impressive: Joseph de Finance, Oliva Blanchette, Servais Pinckaers, Johnathan Lear, Alasdair MacIntyre, Martin Heidegger, John Rist, Kant, Nietzsche, Foucault, and John Paul II, to name a few. Ramos’s work demonstrates the perennial significance of St. Thomas’s thought—and for that we are in her debt.

Chapter 1 emphasizes the relationship between mind, the universe, and the divinity in Aristotle’s metaphysics. It interprets Aristotle as positing that man has a desire for the supernatural, arguing for the identity of the contemplative life with the happy life. The intelligibility of the world and the fact that God is the author of the world in all its intelligibility mean that true understanding of the world contributes to the divinization of man (17). (Perhaps one might add the qualification, “in a certain respect” to account for the existence of men who extract knowledge from nature for immoral purposes). The second section of this essay engages the *Summa contra gentiles* and shows, among other things, that, for Thomas, the first truth, which is God, is the good of human intelligence that man naturally desires as his natural end.

Chapter 2 brings out the moral implications of human life in the ontological space between God as Origin and End of all that exists. Relevant here is the Neoplatonist principle according to which an effect seeks to assimilate itself to its cause. In the return of men to the Origin and End, Ramos discerns the operation of two measures—namely, reason and law—although one might see these as constituting a single measure, since for Thomas, law is an *opus rationis*. Intrinsic to the dynamics of assimilation to God that is this return is virtue, which, in ordering man’s life in accordance with reason, orders him to the good—that is to say, to his end.

A more theological and personalist tenor marks the final essay of Part I. Only faith in Christ can bring reason to the fulfilment of its desire for truth. The truth that Christ reveals to us, however, Ramos writes, requires “more than a theoretical understanding, for the truth that is the Person of Christ wants to enter into a relationship with each human being and for this the human person needs to entrust himself, to give himself, to Christ and to those to whom is given the authority to interpret his message of truth” (50). This entrustment and concomitant assimilation to divine Truth require a certain asceticism in which virtues such as *studiositas*, humility, and magnanimity are cultivated.

The first essay of Part II presents us with the idea that virtue, in ordering man to his final end, contributes to the final form of the universe, to “its final beauty” (93). The virtue of justice, in which the use of right reason principally appears, comes to the forefront towards the end of the essay. Justice and truth are intimately related, as Thomas argues: “Since the will is the rational appetite, when the rectitude of the reason which is called truth is imprinted on the will on account of its [accord with] the reason, this imprint retains the name of truth; and hence it is that justice ... sometimes goes by the name of truth” (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 58, a. 4, *sed contra*; hereafter, *ST*).

The idea of divine Providence makes an important appearance in this chapter, since it is by divine Providence that the rational creature participates in the Eternal Reason “whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end” (*ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 2). It reappears in the next chapter (5), where Ramos treats the problem of evil. Here she argues that, “through the suffering of others, God makes us participants in a special way of his providence, so as to provide for others, help them, love them, and so cause goodness, as God himself does” (106). Indeed, suffering brings benefits to the one who must endure it: it furnishes the conditions in which he can recognize the ephemeral nature of goods such as health, riches, physical beauty, and honor and recognize that God alone can answer the human desire for happiness. And, as we are told in chapter 6 (which deals with the experience of vulnerability and shame), this “crucified God certainly inverts our ordinary conceptions of the beautiful and challenges our way of seeing the world” (118). Experience of the cross purifies and transforms our construal of what is truly beautiful. This point would, however, merit further development.

Chapter 7 turns once again to truth and, in particular, to one vice and one virtue (vainglory and magnanimity) that, respectively, undermine and facilitate its attainment. While the former enslaves the mind in its pursuit of extrinsic and superficial goods, the latter liberates the mind so that it can seek what is truly honorable and good. The one who genuinely seeks the good according to the nature of reason becomes more virtuous and more like God, as chapter 8 emphasizes. He grows in beauty and posits acts that are endowed with beauty—bearing in mind that Thomas attributes beauty to an act of reason (*ST* II-II, q. 180, a. 2, ad 3). This beauty, however, is not possible without grace: “For since the lustre of grace springs from the shedding of Divine light, this lustre cannot be brought back, except God sheds His light anew” (*ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 7).

Beauty, along with goodness, furnishes the focus of the first essay of Part III. The influence of Jacques Maritain is evident in the definition of beauty as “that which pleases on being seen” (150). While this definition in no way distorts what Thomas writes, what he actually says is that “beautiful things are those which please when seen” (*ST I*, q. 5, a. 4, ad. 1). The idea is that beauty is a function of intellect and will together, albeit an experience that engages the human person in his psychosomatic reality. The following assertion, therefore, does not tally with a Thomistic understanding: “A beautiful object that is grasped by the senses gives pleasure to the sense appetite” (150). Ramos’s own correct understanding of the influence of the internal senses and the passions on the judgment of the intellect in chapter 10 (200) is of relevance in formulating a Thomistic account of aesthetic experience.

While one will readily agree with the idea that “the ability to appreciate sensible beauty predisposes one to appreciate intelligible beauty” (150–151), the idea that it predisposes one “to admire, for example, the beauty that radiates from moral activity” (151) would require more argumentative support than Ramos provides. The theme of moral beauty is continued in chapter 10, which lingers on the notion of *honestas*, which is the same as virtue. This essay also contains an excellent treatment of temperance and beauty. In brief, the idea is that, “given the harmony, proportion, and clarity that characterize the temperate life . . . beauty is, in a special or excellent way, ascribed to temperance” (197).

The final essay deals with the themes of art, truth, and morality, engaging with Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Oscar Wilde as it does so. Amongst other things, the author rightly concludes that “the arts are far from being morally neutral and indifferent to truth” (225). At their best, they serve the cause of the true and the good. Yet, this Thomistic view seems to be undermined by Ramos’s recourse to the Kantian idea that we take interest in particular artworks for their own sake and not in any purpose they may serve, an idea that is at odds with the teleology that is intrinsic to a Thomistic aesthetic. Thus, the Sistine Chapel, to use Ramos’s example, serves to give glory to God, and the experience of its beauty is arguably enhanced for anyone who appreciates this fact.

In the final words of this book, Ramos suggests that “reflection on the beautiful . . . may indeed be a privileged route to both the truth and the good, and education in the beautiful may well pave the way for a reshaping of our culture and world and for human happiness” (233). While I would certainly agree with the crucial role that a sense

of beauty plays in cultivating an appreciation of the true and the good, it nevertheless remains that truth and goodness are more basic than beauty—according to Thomas’s view, after all, beauty is a function of truth and the good or, more precisely, “beautiful things are those which when seen give pleasure [pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent]” (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 5, ad 1). This view would also provide support for Ramos’s many excellent reflections, both philosophical and theological, concerning the crucial role that the life of virtue plays in cultivating a sense of beauty. N.V

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Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI, edited by John C. Cavadini (*Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012*), 328 pp.

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS from a conference by the same name at the University of Notre Dame in 2012, *Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI* is precisely that: an appreciative, critical, and in no way slavish engagement with Ratzinger/Benedict’s long career as a theologian. The book is not intended to be an introduction to Benedict’s thought, as several serviceable options for such a text are already available (e.g., those by Aidan Nichols and Tracey Rowland). Rather, it is truly a *Festschrift*, though of higher quality than often found in that genre. Written and published while Benedict was *feliciter regnans*, the importance of this volume is only increased now that he has resigned from the office of bishop of Rome and his theological and papal career can be assessed as a whole. It is a celebration and interpretation of the latest instance, in what has been a rather rare occurrence, of a theologian-pope.

In addition to summarizing the articles, John Cavadini’s editorial introduction offers a hermeneutical lens through which to interpret the collection as a whole. The theme is “God is Love,” taken as both a particular characteristic of Benedict’s theological project, exemplified in *Deus Caritas Est*, and an encapsulation of the Christian faith. In exploring the reality of a God characterized as love and manifested decisively in the Incarnation, the authors acknowledge themselves “to be following the footsteps, most proximately, of Pope Benedict XVI” (1). The book looks in two directions, with some authors more focused on one than the other: *at* Benedict and his vast corpus, and *with*

Benedict, or perhaps better, through Benedictine eyes at various issues concerning the Christian faith. In both cases, all authors acknowledge that they are in large part favorably disposed to, if not entirely in agreement with, Benedict as a theologian.

Of the articles that more nearly look *at* Benedict, the first and longest piece in the collection, by Cyril O'Regan, provides the most panoramic vision of Benedict's thought. It seeks not only to identify recurrent themes that link his six decades of writing, but also to find a place for Benedict within history. Because one's friends are a sure way to learn about one's priorities, Benedict's place is found among his friends. In Benedict's case, not only are his contemporary friends, especially de Lubac and von Balthasar, illuminating for getting to the heart of his concerns, but more historical "friendships" can also be telling. His primary theological friends are Augustine and John Henry Newman. For O'Regan, Benedict is Augustinian in both a conscious reliance upon the bishop of Hippo and, even more substantively, in his repetition of predominantly Augustinian themes and emphases. If anything confirms O'Regan's Augustinian ascription, as well as the Newmanian connection, it is the simple fact that Augustine and Newman (and we could add Bonaventure) are frequently cited by the other authors in the collection. There seems to be an implicit consensus among the authors, made explicit by O'Regan, that Benedict's legacy belongs on an axis that includes Augustine and Newman, on the basis of a variety of common characteristics, but preeminently for a shared eschatological sensibility and a strong emphasis on the corporate prayer life of the Church.

In a volume on Benedict's theology, we thus find what anyone would hope and expect to find: faith and reason, liturgy, ecclesiology, and biblical interpretation. These have all been constant preoccupations for Benedict and, thus, ought to have received attention. Yet, just because these issues *had* to be discussed does not mean that these essays are in any way perfunctory or redundant. For example, though Francesca Aran Murphy's essay on ecclesiology outlines the major points, such as eucharistic ecclesiology, she also emphasizes themes that are typically forgotten when looking at Benedict's ecclesiology, such as the place of martyrdom and "Ratzinger's continuous practice of keeping Protestant interlocutors within earshot" (216).

In addition to the expected themes, there are also some genuine surprises: Benedict on Buddhism (Robert Gimello), on the economy (Simona Beretta), and on international reconciliation (Daniel Philpott).

These would not typically be considered as particularly Benedictine themes, but the authors convincingly use Benedict's thought as a catalyst. For instance, though Benedict very rarely wrote about Buddhism, and when he did it was never with any great sophistication, Gimello proposes Benedict's theology as a model for respecting the genuine otherness of non-Christian religions. How he does this is even more surprising: it is the much-maligned *Dominus Iesus* that becomes the true respecifier of otherness, rather than facile treatments that tend to assume, for example, that Buddhist *karuṇā* ("compassion") is the same thing as Christian *agape* (136). These essays that go beyond Benedict by using his initial insights or methods to address a pertinent question, are prime examples of thinking *with* Benedict and demonstrate the particular fecundity of Benedict's thought.

Two main topics recur throughout the essays: liturgy and the connection between faith and reason. As Benedict himself noted, the themes of cult and truth are actually two sides of the same coin: "the freedom of truth belongs not merely accidentally but essentially in the context of worship, of cult. Where the latter no longer exists, the former ceases as well," (*The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 41). The primacy of liturgy in Benedict's thought needs no justification, and his recent decision to have the volume on liturgy appear first in his *Opera Omnia* only confirms the obvious. Kimberly Hope Belcher takes up the Eucharist specifically in her clear essay on the tension between meal and sacrifice in Eucharistic theology and the potential development of Benedict's thought on the issue. Even here, Belcher sees the implications as extending far beyond sacramental theology. The Eucharistic question is fundamentally a question about the relation between God and the world and about how to navigate the relationship between God's utter gratuity and human freedom. The ability of humans to also offer themselves to God in the Eucharist, which is a necessary element to understand the sacrifice of the Mass, relates analogously to our next subject, faith and reason. Supernatural gifts, whether sacraments or the theological virtue of faith, do not destroy human cooperation or human reason, but rather raise and elevate these beyond their natural faculties.

The majority of authors make at least some mention of the faith and reason question, and it could well be read as the red thread that weaves throughout the book. Gary Anderson's essay, a serious engagement with Benedict's biblical hermeneutics, ends with what he sees as "the overall aim" of the *Jesus of Nazareth* series: "Faith without reason is weak and prone to collapse; reason untempered by faith fails

to come to terms with the questions most dear to the human heart” (251). Thus, even when considering biblical interpretation, this perennial question is lingering for Benedict. The question is broached most directly in the essays by Philpott, Peter Casarella and Edward Oakes. Casarella approaches the issue by analyzing the question of the proper relation between human culture and religion. As he neatly summarizes, for Benedict, “when one tries to extract all religion from the culture (or vice versa), one is left with a cadaver” (67). Oakes’ essay is focused on the question of relativism in the modern era. Sidestepping the simplistic notion that Benedict rejects any and all forms of relativism (he in fact advocates for some forms of political relativism as a remedy to totalitarianism), Oakes reminds us of Benedict’s belief that “there is a salubrious kind of relativism and a toxic form” (95). A particularly toxic form is one that assumes, in the words of Rousseau, that religion is “une affaire de géographie” and not potentially universally valid.

Like all recent papal encyclicals, the volume ends with Mary. Matthew Levering’s essay traces the main texts and themes of Benedict’s Mariology, showing in particular the essential place of typology in establishing the biblical foundations of Marian doctrines. As many of the other authors have done, Levering also shows how, for Benedict, each particular doctrine—in this case, those relating to Mary—is joined to and exemplifies the whole of Christian revelation: “In Mary, Christ has already accomplished the fullness of redemption in a merely human person, as he will do for the whole Church at the end of time” (291). It is perhaps no accident, then, that not only this volume but also Benedict’s career as pope ends with a Marian theme. It seems appropriate to interpret Benedict’s resignation as an act of Marian docility, to say simply “*ecce ancilla domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*” (Luke 1:38).

All books have their limitations, but limitations are less pernicious when recognized and self-imposed. This book is consciously *not* attempting to provide a “neutral” critique of Benedict’s theology or career as prefect and pope. It is self-consciously sympathetic with Benedict, perhaps even most fully in those few moments when the authors critique him. In other words, many other books are needed than simply this one to take into account Benedict’s theology. Yet, this book fills an important role in that it demonstrates that, for many contemporary thinkers, Benedict’s thought is as stimulating as it is ecclesially grounded. Or rather, from the perspective of the authors, Benedict is stimulating *because* he is ecclesially grounded. Lawrence Cunningham’s historically instructive essay on *Introduction to Christianity* says it clearly: “It has always seemed to me that Ratzinger understood his vocation

as a theologian not as a disinterested but learned purveyor of facts but rather as someone who was a pilgrim of faith inviting others to join that journey” (144). The authors in the collection evidently see themselves as those invited by Benedict to join him on that journey of an engaged and genuinely Christian attestation to the faith. N·V

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Aquinas and the Cry of Rachel: Thomistic Reflections on the Problem of Evil by John F. X. Knasas (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013*), xvi + 304 pp.

PROFESSOR JOHN F. X. KNASAS (University of St. Thomas, Houston), known as an “existential Thomist” for his emphasis on Aquinas’s metaphysics of being, has taken on one of the most hotly debated topics in philosophy of religion: the problem of evil. In *Aquinas and the Cry of Rachel: Thomistic Reflections on the Problem of Evil*, Knasas does not shy away from addressing the “hard cases.” Along the way, he considers an impressive array of alternative positions, which makes sense since one of Knasas’s aims is to argue that there are several philosophically viable answers to how God and evil can coexist. Knasas also unfolds an innovative, metaphysically grounded philosophical psychology that helps explain why our *prima facie* intuitions about certain instantiations of being, their inherent preciousness, and evil are often incorrect, or at least philosophically unprovable. Finally, Knasas has clearly done his textual homework; in the course of the monograph, he probes myriad texts from Thomas on evil, most of which he translated by himself (often with additional references to other translations and related debates). There is a fluidity between Knasas’s interpretive and constructive projects that might present an obstacle to some interested readers. Even so, Knasas’s work is valuable well beyond the Thomistic discussion, due to its treatment of so many key alternative accounts, as well as the challenges he poses to them.

Chapter 1 sets up the work via a discussion of Jacques Maritain’s insistence that human persons are irreplaceable “wholes” unto themselves. Although this sentiment is widespread and plays an important role in the literature on evil, Knasas argues over the course of the book that the truth of this idea can only be known theologically (viz., via

special revelation). In a purely *philosophical* context, even a theistic one, we can at most verify that human beings are “principal parts” of the universe. For Knasas, this means that other parts of the universe are generally, but not exclusively, oriented toward the good of such higher parts and that human beings have special obligations to each other on account of their status. Philosophy cannot prove, however, that human persons are ends in themselves whose individual flourishing God can never override for the sake of another individual, the species, or the universe more broadly.

As Knasas moves into his initial exposition of Aquinas on the metaphysics of being, human psychology, and evil in chapters 2–4, he draws on the psychology of three paradigmatic reactions to evil noted in chapter 1: Rachel’s inconsolable cry for her dead children (Matt 2:16); the retreat of the survivors to small, earthly joys in Albert Camus’s *The Plague*; and the insistence on fatherly love in Anthony Flew’s “Theology and Falsification.” Knasas holds that these responses to evil, while certainly understandable psychologically, are limited in their ability to raise philosophical doubts about the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good creator God. “[T]he problem of evil,” Knasas says, “is generated by an inappropriate aggrandizement of persons and other things” (16).

Knasas’s philosophical psychology draws on the metaphysics of being so prominent in this and his other works. The crux is this: Human persons are not just beings—potential forms endowed with existence. They are also “intellectors of being,” which renders them special “epiphanies” of being, and thus also of the good. In virtue of their ability to appreciate existence itself, the whole of created being, and its Source, human beings have a privileged status before God and moral obligations to their fellow intellectors.

At the same time, Knasas argues, human persons are not philosophically quite as important as is often assumed, and the process of discerning being can play tricks on the human mind. Mentally taking in existents that lie at spatial, temporal, or conceptual extremes—a vast ocean view, a single atom, a fast-fading flower, a powerful nation, or a vulnerable fawn—requires such a large backdrop of being or such a removal of everything else from the backdrop of being that these existents very often incorrectly acquire a preciousness out of proportion to their actual importance, as if they were as valuable as being itself. Even though tiny children or heroic soldiers are indeed, *qua* human beings, heightened epiphanies of being in the universe, they can take

on a value in one's mind out of proportion with what philosophy can definitively tell us about the worth of an individual human person.

In fact, on Knasas's understanding of Aquinas, it is the limited "being" itself in things that endows them with their worth (since being and goodness are interchangeable transcendental attributes). We can understandably get too wrapped up in certain instantiations of being such that we lose proper perspective, even to the point of regarding them as gods, and the loss of them as irretrievably devastating. Knasas argues that despair at the death of one's child is psychologically understandable, but ultimately, this desolation belies an incorrect fixation on (and narrowing of vision to) one lost epiphany of being, one instance of God's creative goodness, to the exclusion of all the other genuine goods around us—especially the other human "epiphanies of being" that merit our care and appreciation. Philosophically, one cannot *know* (contra several recent accounts) that each human being has been granted a unique status such that any unmerited suffering on their part can be justified only by outweighing benefits accruing to that individual, although one may philosophically entertain such a possibility. The truth that each person has been granted the status of an irreplaceable child of God is a matter of Christian good news. Thus, the problem of unresolved, individual human suffering *and its solution* come along together in revealed *theological* context.

Over the course of the book, Knasas classifies the kinds of evil as follows. First of all, there can be no "best possible" creation; God's limitless perfections could always be reflected in more or greater ways. Now, in the chosen creation, certain parts of creation instantiate *contingent* goodness by relying on cycles of generation and corruption. By nature, then, the corruptible order will have "natural evils" of the lower being taken up into the higher. God intends these evils *per accidens* (not *per se*) because of the goods they make possible. (Here Knasas marshals a variety of texts to argue against interpreters of Thomas who consider natural corruption simply an instance of divine "permission." He also distinguishes himself from those who label all non-moral evils as undifferentiatedly "natural.") Of greater concern are *quandoque* evils, the "occasional" outcomes of conflicting lines of causality in a material order in which the higher is damaged by the lower (e.g., human beings killed by lions or plagues). For Knasas's Aquinas, God does not intend *quandoque* evils, but permits them for the sake of other antecedent or consequent goods. Whereas some theorists stress the import of only antecedent *or* consequent goods in their solutions to the problem

of evil, Knasas argues that there are several philosophically coherent responses, none of which can be fully adjudicated on philosophical grounds alone. As with the question of creation's eternity or beginning in time, only revelation can make a final ruling.

Turning now to human beings in particular, Knasas argues that there are multiple valid philosophical responses to the question of why we suffer and die. First, eventual corruption is natural to human beings as material creatures. God's initial preservation of humanity from death was (on Aquinas's view) a supernatural grace and not something naturally due to us, given the type of creatures we are. Second, *quandoque* evils increase greatly when human ignorance and moral weakness interact with the passions and the contingent, material order. Third, God can intend *per accidens*, not just permit, the evil of punishment towards the good of justice. And fourth, although our fellow human beings owe us the special respect due to "intellectors of being" (the basis for Knasas's ethics), God does not owe us preservation from the potential moral evil of others. As the free will discussion later explains (in chapter 7), God has valid reason to permit, though in no way intend, the sin of morally evil acts, even while endowing these acts—like all others—with their being. (Like most if not all discussions of God's causal role in morally evil acts, Knasas's explanation of Aquinas here leaves some things mysterious.) In all these cases, stoic resignation is one among several valid philosophical responses in the face of human suffering and death from natural corruption, *quandoque* evil, punishment, or the moral trespasses of others.

The Christian narrative of human creation, fall, and redemption is also a philosophically entertainable possibility: God intended all human beings for a greater, supernatural fulfillment of their nascent desire to know the Creator, who is already known faintly as the source of created being. Human beings were first graced (according to Thomas) with supernatural protection from the vicissitudes of their passions, ignorance, material bodies, and contingent surroundings. The Fall provides a theodicy. The Gospel tells us God still has good plans for each and all.

In chapters 5–8, while continuing to develop his own position, Knasas helpfully describes many contrasting interpretations of Thomas and contemporary non-Thomistic viewpoints on the problem of evil. In the course of the monograph, Knasas analyzes most of the top contenders (or paradigmatic representatives thereof), treating both personalist and cosmological theodicies. In the process, he orients read-

ers to central passages both in Aquinas's texts and in recent literature to further assess the points at hand, or even (for the uninitiated) to know which points are most debated, both normatively and—in regards to Thomas's texts—interpretively. The critiques are thought-provoking, and the comprehensive mapping of the philosophical terrain is itself very valuable. Knasas saves Brian Davies's and Eleonore Stump's tomes for last, as the strongest of recent, broadly Thomistic alternatives to his own position.

Throughout the book, Knasas carefully distinguishes between the theologically informed (viz., what we can only know with certainty by revelation) and the strictly philosophical. He rightly discerns that a lack of sensitivity to this distinction often causes confusion in the "problem of evil" literature. Still, there are times when it seems almost impossible for one to do more than assert which data drawn from the actual, supernaturally infused creation belong in which category. Knasas believes that God justifiably could have created a cosmos that included human beings without having a supernatural origin and destiny planned for them. Even granting that claim, we cannot know which of the most horrific extremes of moral evil in our world would have come about under such a configuration. In a "simply natural order" of that kind, perhaps God would have more strongly limited his permissions to moral evil.

Were Knasas arguing that *some* amount of each kind of evil (moral evil, punishment, *quandoque* evils, and natural corruption) can be reconciled with salvationist and non-salvationist accounts alike, I think his point could be easily well-taken by many. But, by the examples he uses, one sees that his actual assertion is stronger: The worst evils of our actual world are all justifiable on several philosophical accounts, including accounts that make no promises regarding a positive resolution for individual human victims. He argues that God (loving us "as principal parts of creation," but not "as children") could have chosen to accept the risk of great, unresolved trespasses against innocent persons, and that God could have been perfectly happy creating humanity (an intrinsically fragile species also endowed with a conscious awareness of the harms that come its way) with nothing more than the opportunity for a few of the species' individuals to come arduously to temporary happiness through knowledge. If this is true, there is still more work to be done to make the point convincing. Further, it will still strike many theists and atheists alike as mistaken because they have an unshakeable inkling (commensurate with the truth of the *actual* order) that, when

faced with examples like those from *The Brothers Karamazov*, there must be more to the full theodicean story than this. And, of course, Knasas agrees—in theological context.

Here are two other concerns: First, Knasas seems to emphasize exclusively “intellection of being” as what gives human beings their special ontological and moral status. It would have been helpful to hear more about the relation of this status to potential versus actual intellectual abilities (although presumably he would consider all human beings special in virtue of their species membership). It seems, moreover, that there is something beyond a psychological illusion that makes harms to the very young or vulnerable among us particularly grievous. Second, the heavy use of the conceptual-linguistic framework of the *ratio entis* and the primacy of *esse* is perhaps unnecessary at times; it will make for a steep learning curve for some readers, although they could still profit from the book in other ways.

Aquinas and the Cry of Rachel is a valuable work that covers ground and makes distinctions not seen elsewhere in the literature. It also forces readers to rethink certain major assumptions on the topic of evil that they might otherwise continue to consider unquestionable. The author inspires renewed humility about one’s possible place in the universe, were it not for the divine economy that God has gratuitously chosen to put in place. Knasas has a strong command of a vast array of relevant texts from Aquinas and is clearly committed to engagement with a broad spectrum of viewpoints. The result is a thought-provoking work that has much to offer to Problem of Evil theorists and Thomas interpreters alike.

N&V

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