

## Reviews

**THOMAS D'AQUIN: COMMENTAIRE DE L'ÉPÎTRE AUX ROMAINS, SUIVI DE LETTRE À BERNARD AYGLIER, ABBÉ DU MONT-CASSIN** translated and edited by Jean-Éric Stroobant de Saint-Éloy OSB, *Editions du Cerf*, Paris, 1999, €65.10, pp. 651;

**THOMAS D'AQUIN: COMMENTAIRE DE LA PREMIÈRE ÉPÎTRE AUX CORINTHIENS, COMPLÉTÉ PAR PIERRE DE TARENTEISE, POSTILLE SUR LA PREMIÈRE ÉPÎTRE AUX CORINTHIENS**, translated and edited by Jean-Éric Stroobant de Saint-Éloy OSB, *Editions du Cerf*, Paris, 2002, €93.50, pp. xl + 640;

**THOMAS D'AQUIN: COMMENTAIRE DE LA DEUXIÈME ÉPÎTRE AUX CORINTHIENS** translated and edited by Jean-Éric Stroobant de Saint-Éloy OSB, *Editions du Cerf*, Paris, 2005, €64, pp. xlviii + 371

St Thomas's reputation as an exegete has probably never stood higher than it does today. He is of course a *theological* exegete, but so 'close' is his reading of the scriptural text that many of his more detailed enquiries, notably on the implications of syntax, can still serve modern historical-critical scholars — despite the fact that he is working from a Latin translation of the (Hebrew or) Greek originals. The Commentaries on the Letter to the Romans and Paul's two Letters to the Corinthians, recently presented by Editions du Cerf with ample notes, invaluable tables, and, for the commentaries on the Corinthian correspondence, magisterial introductions, are a case in point. (The apparatus is especially helpful on the complex issue of the Glosses.) Like Thomas's early education, this Francophone version exemplifies the service of Benedictinism to the Thomasian enterprise. Credit for the lion's share of the work belongs to Dom Jean-Eric Stroobant de Saint-Eloy, a monk of Notre-Dame des Prés, in the Avesnois, by the Belgian border. While the Romans commentary follows the semi-critical Marietti edition, the two volumes on the Letters to the Church at Corinth constitute what might be called a 'critical (French) translation' which, with the support of distinguished members of the Leonine Commission, anticipates a future fully critical Latin text. In all three books Dom Jean-Eric has been ably seconded by Professor Jean Borella, whose renewal of Christian cosmology is becoming more widely known in the English-speaking world. Borella contributes his philosophical and theological expertise wherever Thomas's commentary seems to call for some wider conceptual explanation or elaboration. He also provides useful cross-referencing to other writings by Aquinas himself.

Certainly the theological mind is thoroughly engaged. What we can always expect from St Thomas is a view of the whole that does justice to the parts. Such respectful systematising is a rare gift in post-Victorian exegesis, and we can benefit from it. For Thomas, St Paul is above all a doctor of grace: all the Letters (which for the thirteenth century interpreter include Hebrews) turn on the master-theme of the *grace of Christ*. The 'general prologue' found at the opening of the Romans commentary proposes that the Letter to the Church of the Hebrews considers that grace as manifested in the Head himself, Jesus Christ; the Letters to the Gentile communities the same grace as discovered in Christ's mystical Body,

the Church; the 'letters to dignitaries' (the Pastorals and Philemon) that self-same grace yet again but now as found in some pre-eminent members of the Church-Body. More widely, the grace of Christ may be viewed in itself (and this is the task of the Letter to the Romans, and the ground of its primacy in Thomas's eyes), or again in the sacramental economy of grace — for which see First Corinthians on the sacraments (Baptism, Marriage, and the Eucharist); Second Corinthians on the ministers of those sacraments in the apostolic fellowship, and Galatians for Paul's insistence on the 'abrogation of superfluous sacraments' — above all, circumcision — vis-à-vis those who 'wished to add the former sacraments to the new'. Next, the grace of Christ may and should be treated in its most palpable effect, which is the unity it produces in the Church. For this see Ephesians on the foundations of the ecclesial unity; Philippians on that unity's affirmation and progress, Colossians for its defence against errors and the Letters to the Church at Thessalonica for its conservation in present or future persecutions (in the First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians respectively). As for those 'dignitaries of the Church', Paul — as Thomas understands him — instructs the spiritual *pezzi grossi* on the foundation, construction and governance of the grace-borne ecclesial unity in First Timothy, on the need for firmness where persecutors threaten it in Second Timothy, and on its safeguarding against heretics in the Letter to Titus. Lastly, Paul has a special message for the temporal counterparts of these 'spiritual lords' in writing to Philemon. This is surely an admirable way to treat the interrelation of the distinctive contents of these ancient Christian texts, even if one were simply to consider them neighbouring documents in the Canon rather than, in their entirety, the work of a single mind and heart.

But Romans enjoys a special dignity because it goes to the heart of it all. For the *ordo doctrinae* it must fall first. In the first eight chapters, on Thomas's analysis, the apostle considers the necessity and power of the grace of Christ; in the chapters that follow, whether that grace is given by the 'sole election of God' or 'the merits of antecedent works'. If we sense here a certain narrowing of theme which looks ahead to Reformation problematics and even the controversy *de auxiliis*, the spacious manner in which Thomas recreates the spiritual world of Romans gives us pause. In any case, the very Gospel of grace is at stake here, since, in words of Père Berceville in the preface, for Aquinas 'human nature does not avoid evil and attain the perfect beatitude in which alone its deep desire finds rest except through letting itself be carried by sanctifying grace'. The *conjunctio* of God and man, revealed in the Gospel, is realised by means of the (hypostatic) union of the two in Christ, through our adoption as sons through the gift of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying grace, and the fruition of these (union plus adoption) in the beatifying vision of eternal life. Thus elegantly does Thomas calibrate a selection of the chief themes of his own mature theological doctrine with the concerns of the first century writer. Reading through the commentary, readers will find many places where, moved surely by the charism of Paul's own inspiration, Thomas speaks more eloquently on these themes than in his better known works.

The same is not less true of the commentary on the Letters to the Corinthians with its remarkable integration of ecclesiology and moral teaching for which the *Summa theologiae*, say, does little explicitly to prepare us. This is Thomas the author of an 'ecclesial morals' (to utilise a phrase of Père Pinckaers, cited in the notes) where the 'same charity which builds up the moral life [also] constructs and animates the ecclesial Body, with the aid of the charisms'. Unfortunately, so far as First Corinthians is concerned, the full text of Thomas's Commentary did not survive. For 7:10b to 10:33 the editor adopts, therefore, the ingenious solution of inserting the relevant portions of the *Postilla* of Peter of Tarantaise, later Pope Innocent V, whose own theological work is the common offspring of Thomas and St Bonaventure.

Dom Jean-Eric tells me he has now completed work on the Commentary on Galatians, for which Père Torrell will provide the chief introduction, while establishing a working text for the Commentary on Ephesians proceeds apace. Once again English-speakers realise how indebted they are to the world of Francophone Thomasian scholarship, with its profound sense of the belonging of these medieval biblical aids — and Thomas's writing generally — to the cordial, prayerful, intellectual project of *la vie théologique*.

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**CHRISTIAN SYMBOL AND RITUAL: AN INTRODUCTION by Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy, OUP, Oxford, 2005, £26.99, pp. 189 hbk.**

In this comparatively short work, Cooke and Macy have set themselves the rather large task of introducing the uninitiated to the nature and practice of Christian rituals throughout the past two millennia. With over 130 years of Catholic life and experience between them (p. viii) they doubtless felt well equipped to the task. Whilst they provide a helpful introduction to many elements of Christian ritual, they do not, understandably, succeed in explaining everything.

It is clear from the outset that this is a book written by teachers. Their preface sets this out explicitly, as it also makes clear their aim in writing the book. Having realised that the modern student cannot be assumed to have any background or basic knowledge of the nature or purpose of Christian rituals, they set out to explain them, and also to introduce the reader to Christian ritual in general (p. viii). The explanatory approach is also evident in the first words of the introduction (p. 3), which ask the reader how they approached this (or any other) book for the first time, and points out that we all have rituals with which we approach new books. This is a book designed for those wanting (as far as reading a book allows) to interact with a teacher.

The introduction, which discusses symbolism as the root of ritual, is a helpful one, explaining the nature and purpose of ritual and symbol, and the contextual, cultural and historical limitations of most symbols. Cooke and Macy are also right to point out that rituals train us to see the world in a certain way. Although it is never explicitly stated, diverse influences lie under the surface of this theory, such as a modified, less extreme form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (that language shapes our perception of culture). Given the introductory nature of the work, this is understandable, although the occasional footnote explaining sources for ideas and pointing to further reading, would greatly enhance the book as a whole.

One of the main points they appear to want to make is that modern usage of the term *sacrament* is too narrow and constricted in usage. They argue that the first Christians did not think in terms of a set number of sacraments, whether two or seven or any other number. Rather a *sacramentum* (or *mysterion*) referred to any thing or action or person that mediated the presence of God to humans (p. 39). They prefer the term ritual as being less loaded and less tightly defined, since sacrament 'originally just meant any symbol or ritual that God chose to mediate salvation to humans,' (p. 38), an argument that is not wholly convincing. Having said that, the five elements of a ritual that they identify, and frequently use throughout the book, are quite helpful. They state that every Christian ritual: 1. provides a hermeneutic of experience (i.e. a means through which the Christian community interprets the world); 2. offers the possibility of further maturation and growth in the image of Christ; 3. is empowered by the presence of the risen Christ; 4. is embodied in service; and 5. is a celebration of friendship (pp. 52-53).

The bulk of the book then discusses a number of types of Christian ritual. These are rituals of friendship; rituals of initiation; rituals of prayer, worship and