

10-1-2007

Book Review: Aquinas's Summa Background, Structure, And Reception

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Recommended Citation

Ream, Todd and Seat, Thomas (2007) "Book Review: Aquinas's Summa Background, Structure, And Reception," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 4 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol24/iss4/9>

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is to be much thinner than Aquinas'. Furthermore, he holds that, according to Scotus, God has no *suppositum* at all and that all of God's attributes are, at most, only formally distinct from each other and from God. It is in this way that Scotus sought to maintain the doctrine of the divine simplicity, while yet allowing that the divine attributes are more than merely conceptually distinct. Cross explains that Scotus felt he had to hold that the divine attributes are more than merely conceptually distinct since holding that they are merely conceptually distinct would make Theology impossible. It should be noted, though, that Scotus' denial of any *suppositum* in which the divine essence exists seems to undercut his own explanation of how the divine essence is common to the three persons of the Trinity, something that Cross discusses at length in chapter 13.

Part II of the book, running from chapter 9 through chapter 18, gives a marvelously detailed discussion of Scotus's complex theory of the Trinity, ranging from his highly original twists on an old argument for the doctrine the God is triune, through his account of what it is to be a divine person, his attempt to make coherent the view that the divine essence is an individual essence which exists, undividedly, in three distinct persons, his account of the personal properties, and his account of how the Son and Holy Spirit are produced in a way that gives due prominence to the real causality of Father and the Son without positing any undue subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father or of the Holy Spirit to both. In this part of the book Cross well supports his claim that Scotus's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity is very rich and offers many insights on how to expound the doctrine in a coherent way that is free from logical contradiction. Nevertheless, I do not think he has shown that Scotus offers a way out of the apparent inconsistency of holding (as Scotus and countless medieval theologians did) that 1) the divine essence is simple and exists, undivided, in the three persons of the Trinity, 2) each person of the Trinity is wholly constituted by the divine essence, and 3) each person of the Trinity is really distinct from every other person of the Trinity.

All in all this is an excellent book. Cross is liberal in providing the reader with well chosen passages from Scotus's works and his discussion of these passages is always illuminating even if, here and there, one might reasonably question certain of his interpretations. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in medieval philosophy, or in natural and philosophical theology.

Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, & Reception, by Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., translated by Benedict M. Guevin, O.S.B. The Catholic University of America Press, 2005. Pp. x + 156. \$17.95 (paper).

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Jean-Pierre Torrell is a Dominican priest and professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Fribourg. Previous scholarly efforts on his part include a biographical study of Thomas Aquinas (*Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, The Catholic University of America Press, 1996)

as well as an exploration of Thomas's spiritual life (*Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2003). Torrell's latest effort, recently translated into English by Benedict M. Guevin, O.S.B., applies the lessons learned in these previous two volumes to an endeavor to introduce the *Summa Theologiae*. In his own words, Torrell's intention is "to present to the reader the *Summa Theologiae*, its author, its content, and its fortunes through the ages" (p. 131). If the weakness of *Aquinas's Summa* is that it does not demonstrate through examples how such forms of understanding might affect one's actual reading of the text, its strength resides in its ability to offer an outline of scholarly engagement with the *Summa Theologiae* across the span of history.

Two general types of works that are currently available in English seek to offer an introduction to the *Summa Theologiae*. The first type introduces readers to the *Summa Theologiae* by confronting them with selections from the text itself. Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt's *Holy Teaching: Introducing the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Brazos Press, 2005) is the most recent of such efforts. Other similar efforts include Paul J. Glenn's *A Tour of the Summa* (Tan Books and Publishers, 1978) and Peter Kreeft's *Summa of the Summa* (Ignatius Press, 1990). The second type would include works which present more in-depth detail in a variety of forms in the place of selections from the text. Edward J. Gratsch's *Aquinas' Summa: An Introduction and Interpretation* (Alba House, 1985) and the recent translation by Ralph McInerny of John of St. Thomas's *Introduction to the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas* (St. Augustine's Press, 2004) are two such examples. Torrell's introduction falls into this latter category. Whereas the strength of the introductions offered by Gratsch and John of St. Thomas are the overviews of the text that they provide, the strength of Torrell's work is the way it combines such an overview, or perhaps even an outline, of the contours of scholarship that exist, both past and present, in relation to the study of the *Summa Theologiae*.

As a result of its ability to summarize such contours of scholarship, one finds a great amount of similarity between Torrell's introduction to the *Summa Theologiae* and the recent introduction to Thomism by Romanus Cessario, O.P. In *A Short History of Thomism* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), Cessario offers not only his own introductory remarks concerning the person and work of Thomas Aquinas but also an outline of past and present forms of scholarship concerning the work of Thomas Aquinas as a whole. Any undertaking to summarize what amounts to approximately 730 years of scholarship is impressive to say the least. However, both authors do so with great detail in what amounts to clear and concise presentations. Studying the works of Thomas Aquinas proves to be a task that can last a lifetime. For individuals seeking to begin such an inquiry, Cessario provides a welcome outline of the study of the works of Thomas Aquinas in general. In contrast, Torrell provides a welcome outline of the study of the *Summa Theologiae* in particular.

Torrell's examination of the history of scholarship concerning the *Summa Theologiae* as well as his own remarks concerning the significance of this text is divided into six chapters. The first three chapters include not only a brief biography of Thomas Aquinas but also an overview of the *Summa Theologiae*. In this particular overview, Torrell spends most of his time

looking at how the structure of this work fits together. Although Thomas died before he could complete the *Summa Theologiae*, Torrell notes that great significance is to be found in it from beginning to end—an attempt to present the idea of beatitude or “life in communion with the living God, a life already begun by grace” (p. 62). As a result, Torrell claims that in the end “Thomas leaves his reader and disciple an example of his unceasing journey in search of the truth” (p. 62). The remaining three chapters of Torrell’s work include not only the literary and the doctrinal context in which the *Summa Theologiae* came into existence in the Middle Ages but also the much welcome outline of the study of this work as such efforts have transpired over time. Torrell helps the reader to see that the unique nature of the *Summa Theologiae* is not vested in its particular structure as a number of “summas” existed in that time both within and beyond theology. In contrast, its unique nature is vested in its ability to capture the sustained interest of scholars for approximately 730 years.

Within this outline of the study of the *Summa Theologiae* by Torrell, the reader finds at least three particular components. First, Torrell seeks to return this text to its original historical context of Scholasticism. Such an effort proves to be essential if the reader is going to understand the development of scholarly engagement concerning this particular work of Thomas Aquinas. According to Torrell, “Master Thomas, like all medieval scholastics, thought and wrote according to the disputed question mode” (p. 67). As a result, understanding the aspirations of such a mode proves essential to understanding the *Summa Theologiae*. However, one must also understand the Christian and non-Christian sources which influenced this work. Among the Christian sources, Torrell notes that “In the first place, Sacred Scripture intimately penetrates Thomas’s work” (p. 72) along with the works of the Church Fathers. Among the non-Christian sources, Torrell notes the influence of Aristotle, Plato and the Neoplatonists, the Stoics, Avicenna, Averroës, and Maimonides. Regardless, Torrell argues that the *Summa Theologiae* was not a mosaic of such works. In contrast, Torrell contends that what the reader sees in this work by *Thomas Aquinas* is “neither Platonism nor Aristotelianism, not Avicennism and even less Averroism, but Christianity” (p. 85).

Second, once the *Summa Theologiae* is understood within the historical context of Scholasticism, Torrell goes on to outline how scholarship concerning this particular work developed over the course of three particular historical periods (1274–1450, 1450–1800, 1800 to Present). Although these periods each possess their own distinct qualities, the reader also gets the impression that to study the *Summa Theologiae* will also prove to be an effort to appreciate the work of other individuals who possessed similar aspirations. For example, one cannot understand the significance of the Neo-Scholastic efforts of Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain apart from the encyclical issued in 1879 by Leo XIII entitled *Aeterni Patris*. This encyclical sought to initiate a restoration of the place of Christian philosophy in light of the work of Thomas Aquinas.

Finally, Torrell’s outline also offers a speculative quality concerning the future of scholarship concerning the *Summa Theologiae*. On one level, Torrell appears to be concerned that the future of such scholarship is not as bright as the recent past. The era of *Aeterni Patris* has come to an end. The

influence of Vatican II brought with it mixed results in terms of the study of the *Summa Theologiae*. On another level, Torrell notes that a recent wave of lay-theologians has taken an interest in the *Summa Theologiae*. Such efforts give Torrell optimism. However, Torrell's speculation concerning the future of scholarship in relation to the *Summa Theologiae* includes few, if any, non-Catholic scholars. According to Janet Martin Soskice, "The past twenty years have seen unprecedented interest in Aquinas's writings from philosophers and theologians outside the seminaries, and many of them are not Catholic."¹

Although Torrell's effort to offer an introduction to the *Summa Theologiae* is significant, one weakness is its lack of any attempt to directly introduce the reader to the text itself. Torrell would obviously not need to go to previously mentioned lengths undertaken by Bauerschmidt, Glenn, or Kreeft. However, perhaps the reader would greatly benefit from a chapter which included not only the full text from the *Summa Theologiae* in relation to a particular question, but also a discussion of how various scholars over the course of time have interpreted Thomas's response to such a question. For example, Torrell might have included Thomas's very first question concerning "Whether, besides philosophical studies, any further teaching is required?"² Torrell could then go on to demonstrate how scholars from the first two centuries after Thomas's death differ in their interpretation of the answer offered to this question and then trace how such differences in interpretation continued to change up to our present day. Such an exercise would not only give the reader an understanding of the structure of disputed questions employed in the *Summa Theologiae* but also how differences in interpretation exist in more than the abstract.

Despite any particular ways Jean-Pierre Torrell may have strengthened Aquinas's *Summa: Background, Structure, & Reception*, this work proves to be quite a success. To say the least, Torrell's command of the history of scholarship concerning the *Summa Theologiae* is impressive. He is able to summarize over seven centuries of such efforts in a manner of remarkable detail while also remaining accessible to one just beginning his or her study of the *Summa Theologiae*. As a result, the references alone make this book worthy of one's attention. However, a more careful read of what Torrell offers will yield to scholars, regardless of their experience with the *Summa Theologiae*, a worthy introduction to the beatific vision which guided the efforts of Thomas Aquinas.

NOTES

1. Janet Martin Soskice, "Naming God: A Study in Faith and Reason" in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith* edited by Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (London, UK: T&T Clark International), p. 242.

2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1948), p. 1.