

of language'. His main concern is to combat what the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac identified half a century ago as 'the tendency in Christian theology to picture grace as an object' (page 71). Whether many Christians, or anyway Roman Catholics, ever pictured grace as some kind of 'stuff', may well be disputable, however often the claim has been made. In this respect, anyway, Klein picks up and runs with an indisputably Wittgensteinian insight. As Wittgenstein remarked, it will always be difficult to imagine how we learn certain uses of words, 'if one is adjusted only to consider descriptions of physical objects' (*Zettel* §40, corrected). In other words, if we assume that the meaning of a word is always the thing for which it stands, it will be tempting to picture 'some occult object lying beyond the word', as Klein says.

Grace, however, is not any kind of object; it is an act, according to the biblical evidence (Chapter 2). For Thomas Aquinas grace is not a substance but an accident — a way of talking, however, that needs a good deal of elucidation, helped here by quotations from the work of the eminent American Jesuit philosopher W. Norris Clarke (Chapter 3). Interweaving ideas from an older generation of great Jesuit scholars, Pierre Rousselot, Karl Rahner, and Bernard Lonergan, Klein finally identifies the experience of grace as 'the apperception of being addressed by the world' (Chapters 4 and 5).

Whether this conclusion lies in 'Wittgenstein's Thomistic trajectory', in any important sense, seems doubtful. 'Language games', of which Klein makes a great deal, are introduced as 'functional congeries'; language itself is described as 'essentially the creation of fecund dichotomies', in jargon that would have dismayed Wittgenstein. To the extent that we might be inclined to assume that the word 'grace' stands for some 'occult object', anyway, Klein should have disabused us by the end of his discussion. As the names of the four Jesuit thinkers on whom he relies indicate, however, this book makes an intriguing contribution to the tradition of 'Transcendental Thomism', rather than to 'Wittgensteinian Thomism'.

There are some odd slips. Otto Hermann Pesch, cited several times, is not a Lutheran, as his massive book about the theology of grace in Luther and Aquinas shows. Wittgenstein did not publish 'only two books in his lifetime' (page 11): Part 1 of the *Investigations* is as he left it in 1945, but of course it appeared posthumously. Pierre Rousselot, though a priest since 1908, was serving as an ordinary soldier, not a chaplain, when he was killed in action in 1915 (page 122).

FERGUS KERR OP

THE MORAL THEOLOGY OF JOHN PAUL II, by Charles E. Curran. *T&T Clark* (London and New York, 2006), pp. xi+262, £17.99

Notoriously, according to Charles Kingsley, 'Truth, for its own sake, has never been a virtue with the Roman clergy.' It sometimes seems that, according to Charles Curran in his wide-ranging and elusive presentation and appraisal of John Paul II's moral theology, truth is too much a virtue with the late Roman pontiff — at least when it is given precedence over freedom.

Curran writes of John Paul II with little reference to the authority he had as pope, except that he wants to assure us that various papal teachings are not infallible; the pope is viewed as another, though especially prominent and influential, theologian. Curran's book attempts to lay out the theological and ethical presuppositions of the writings of Karol Wojtyła as pope as well as his (more specific) views on intrinsically evil acts, sexual ethics against the background of the complementary natures of men and women and the theology of marriage; also such themes in social ethics as the preferential option for the poor, a revised

just war theory, democracy and religious freedom. Throughout this not inconsiderable undertaking Curran struggles to be fair both where he accepts the pope's views and where he rejects them. Yet a problem with the book is that while Curran identifies difficulties about the overall coherence of John Paul's positions, he seems to repeat in his own person faults similar to those with which he taxes the pope.

Curran is sure that John Paul II has made many substantive changes – often for the better – in Catholic social teaching: as about war, solidarity, the position of women and religious freedom; but he argues that although many of these improvements mark very substantial breaks with the past, the pope in effect conceals that significant reality by misreading earlier Catholic documents, including the Bible itself, especially Genesis. There is some truth in this, insofar as John Paul normally minimizes development and sometimes denies it altogether, seemingly out of a misplaced fear that he will have to admit not merely to developing an earlier thesis but to abandoning an earlier version. The result of this is that the pope and his critic often talk past one another. Yet an obvious corrective would resolve the situation. There is no need to deny that earlier teachings have been expanded; yet a problem arises when earlier ideas and formulations are re-used and developed while historical facts are ignored. There is no need, that is, for the Magisterium to deny that earlier teachings were incomplete; indeed to deny that is a way to make such historical misrepresentation look foolish to those who know the relevant facts.

A good example of the problem is afforded by Ephesians 5.22. John Paul wants to deny that any subordination of the wife is to be taught – but he also wants to attribute such a sense to the original text. Curran has little difficulty in showing the oddness of this. In fact a serious account of the development of doctrine should allow both for substantive *addition* to earlier teachings and for the almost inevitable temptation to see such development, under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, as mere deduction from what has been explicitly recognized (and even stated) in earlier times: an easy slide, perhaps, into temptation this, but unedifying.

According to Curran, John Paul's morality is basically a morality of obedience (pp. 53 et 105), disobedience being the most significant aspect of the sin of Adam and Eve (p. 13). The premises of morality are largely drawn from Scripture – hence Curran's complaint that the pope sometimes emphasizes Scripture excessively at the expense of reason and its consequent, natural law – and conclusions about intrinsically evil and ever-forbidden acts are deduced. We have a 'top-down' morality based on a 'top-down' (Johannine) Christology, where Christ is identified with Truth. Since, for Curran, John Paul 'knows' both the truths of Scripture and the proper deductions from them, offences against his moral scheme are offences of disobedience. And if human freedom (certainly emphasized by John Paul, particularly in a religious context) conflicts with Truth, that 'freedom' must give way. Paul VI (in *Octogesima adveniens*) was mistaken, according to Curran's reading of John Paul, to attempt a more inductive, historically-based approach – though in accordance with normal practice Paul is not contradicted by his successor but read, improperly, in a sense not his own.

Truth, however, can be a tricky concept, and it would appear that Curran takes inadequate account of the distinction between Scriptural texts which seem to teach specific and universal norms, and post-scriptural deductions whose import may be more uncertain. And it appears as though Curran's attitude to a literal reading of Scripture is governed by his own preferences, especially in the area of sexual morality. Thus, despite wishful thinking, Scripture condemns homosexual acts. Curran, however, is not sure that all homosexual acts should be condemned; hence a temptation either to neglect the clear sense of Scripture or to explain it away – or simply ignore it. This entails that the part of Curran's book on sexual

morality is the least impressive, not because John Paul's positions are not at times open to serious questioning, but because Curran's approach is seen to be driven by current fashions rather than investigation of the theological tradition.

Paul VI in *Octogesima adveniens* was on to something important, however incomplete his vision and however open to abuse. As for Curran, though at times he deplores John Paul II's very reasonable contrast between the culture of life and the culture of death, he is also – and more reasonably – inclined to suggest, especially in the social realm, that the pope was too optimistic. Again that brings out a similar problem both with some of John Paul's ideas – which, not least about war, the development of peoples and religious freedom, may often appear naïve – and with Curran's response: an unwillingness to look in more detail, in what Augustine called the 'darkness of social life', at how we arrived at the present stage of theorizing about moral theology. Both John Paul and Curran talk much of the Catholic tradition; neither spell out its historical nature and growth in adequate detail. Clearly in encyclicals such a project would be extremely difficult of achievement, but the problem is starkly revealed by the tendency of much recent papal documentation to cite only texts from the more or less current magisterium. If you do not acknowledge where you come from, it becomes harder to carry conviction that you are leading where you should be followed.

JOHN M. RIST

THE POSSIBILITY OF DISCUSSION: RELATIVISM, TRUTH AND CRITICISM OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS by Hugo Strandberg, *Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Philosophy* (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK and Burlington, VT, USA: *Ashgate Publishing*, 2006), vii-199, Hardback \$89.95 / £45.00.

This is an engaging, interestingly written, mostly well-argued revision of a mature doctoral dissertation in the philosophy of religion, recently submitted at the University of Uppsala. Although the book announces that the primary architect of the structure is Wittgenstein, in fact Strandberg carefully engages with a wide range of philosophers past and present. He does so, however, not as one labouring under submission to weighty authorities, but in his own clear voice with the conviction that 'philosophy is primarily the activity of *thinking for oneself* in a thorough way about certain kinds of question.' (p. 8) Although this can be done on an individual basis, Strandberg stresses both the self-critical and the conversational character of the discipline. In a commendable way, form and content come together in this study as Strandberg actually practices what he preaches: namely, 'the possibility of discussion.'

He thus thinks through several issues so that we might think about them for ourselves, instead of just accepting his ineluctable conclusions. Strandberg's approach means that philosophy is not analogous to science, since 'there cannot be any presupposed methods of determining the correctness of different solutions to the problem.' (pp. 10–1). This indeed opens up the possibility of relativism, or at least insoluble differences, since most philosophical ideas 'are correct in some respects, highlighting some important aspect' of what they seek to understand (p. 11). His open-ended, non-dogmatic understanding of what he is about leads him to directly address the reader: 'In the end, it is you as a reader who must determine whether what you have read has in any way helped you in your thinking about problems you find troublesome.' (p. 10)

The troublesome problem Strandberg sets out to think through in this text is: 'How is fruitful discussion of religious beliefs possible?' This, he maintains, is closely linked to another question: 'How is criticism of religious beliefs possible?' (p. 4). These are not just philosophical but also intensely *practical* problems in our