

DIVINE FAITH by John R.T. Lamont, *Ashgate*, Aldershot, 2004, Pp. 245, £50 hbk.

The product of an Oxford D.Phil. thesis supervised by Professor Richard Swinburne, this book is a rigorously argued and extremely lucid exposition of the Thomist conception of faith. Currently at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, the author pays tribute to his 'mentor' in theology, the late Fr Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard OP. (Full disclosure: he thanks me too for reading the thesis and making 'useful suggestions'.)

It makes sense to believe that God has spoken, and secondly that the Christian message originates in God's speaking (chapter 2). Christian faith, though of course a gift, is reasonable, as patristic theologians (chapter 3) and medieval theologians held (chapter 4). Knowledge is the result of the exercise of intellectual virtue (chapter 5). Testimony can be a source of knowledge (chapter 6). Christ speaks in the teachings of the Catholic Church (chapter 7). Christian faith consists in believing God what God has said, when this is motivated by the love of God above all created things (chapter 8). This is 'substantially' what St Thomas says.

In the end, as John Lamont allows, non-believers cannot properly evaluate the reasonableness of Christian faith, because the evidence is not available to them: the only way to find out whether faith is reasonable is to 'take the venture of believing'. For curious non-believers, and certainly for those of us who do believe, no better account of Christian believing exists, at least in English, which is not only consistent with Aquinas's view, documented as anticipated in the history of the doctrine, but also productively drawing in analytic philosophers (notably C.A.J. Coody, John McDowell and Alvin Plantinga).

One unexpected move is Lamont's appeal to the notions of faith and testimony in the writings ('often prolix and sloppy') of the seventeenth-century Puritan divine John Owen ('Oliver Cromwell's right-hand man in ecclesiastical affairs'). Owen's account of faith, it turns out, displays much the same affinities with Aquinas's view as does that of St John Chrysostom. This account is thus thoroughly 'ecumenical'.

It is offered, however, as an alternative to recent accounts of faith, including by Catholics, which deny its rationality. Pursuing his opposition to the widely held idea that divine revelation does not consist in a set of propositions (see 'The nature of revelation', *New Blackfriars* 72 (1991): 335–345), Lamont inveighs against 'incoherent positions' summarised in a book (1972) by J.H. Walgrave OP, which includes a chapter entitled 'The dangers of conceptual thought'. Walgrave refers to some kind of pre-propositional apprehension of reality, mentioning the work of L. Charlier, Henri de Lubac and M. Köster.

Lamont is not happy with the notion of pre-propositional knowledge. Aquinas is, as is well known, quite clear. The object of our faith is God's truth (*Summa Theologiae* 2.2. 1, 1). However, according to Aquinas's often-cited axiom, 'the way the known exists in the knower corresponds to the way the knower knows'. How we have knowledge of anything is *per modum enuntiabilis*, not by way of some kind of unmediated intuition (as in heaven) but in the form of a proposition (article 2).

Catholic theologians who are suspicious of 'conceptual thought' are surely a little suspect. Those named, and no doubt many others, suffered, so Lamont says, from the prevalence of incoherent philosophies, though he does not identify which. On the other hand, as he says, 'coherent philosophical alternatives were available to Catholics', again not specifying. He is 'inclined to think that the problem of the development of doctrine was the nerve point, pressure upon which caused Roman Catholic theology of faith to collapse into nonsense'.

That sounds right. On the other hand, we need to remember the context. Louis Charlier OP's *Essai sur le problème théologique* (1938) was placed on the Index in 1942, and he was removed from his post as Regent at the Belgian Dominican

studium. Essentially, he sought to bring into the then standard Dominican way of reading Aquinas something of the historical method that was followed at the University of Louvain. The book is largely an expansion of an article published in 1936 by his teacher René Draguet, subsequently one of the greatest Louvain patrologists. The idea was to subject the text of Aquinas to *actualisation*: speculative theology was allegedly cut off from pastoral practice and spirituality. Moreover, speculative theology was allegedly also cut off from the sources of positive theology: revealed data must be given primacy over rational constructs and theology once again embedded in the history of salvation.

A somewhat different story may be found in a book like Henri de Lubac's *Les chemins de Dieu* (1956): while denying that he was challenging them, he in fact carries on a similar campaign against the alleged rationalism in neoThomist seminary textbooks. Quite differently, H. M. Köster, in his best-known book, *Die Magd des Herrn* (1954), was contributing to the flourishing Mariology of the day.

Charlier was reacting against books like *L'Évolution du dogme* (1919) by the eminent Belgian Dominican theologian M.M. Tuyaerts, who believed that the 'solutions' that Aquinas arrives at in major doctrinal matters, reformulated as 'theses' or 'propositions', could easily be declared *de fide*. Against this *Konklusionstheologie*, Charlier sought to highlight that, for Aquinas, there are two different ways of attaining correct judgment, one by use of reason and the other by way of connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge. Aquinas writes also of 'judgment by inclination', 'affective cognition' and 'experiential cognition'. Henri de Lubac emphasized this kind of affective connatural knowledge. In the light of the definition of the dogma of the Assumption, many theologians, including Köster, sought to present Marian doctrine as a development in response to affective and experiential forms of knowledge, implicit in piety and liturgical practice — here again in contrast with propositions arrived at as the conclusion of a chain of inference.

No doubt fears of 'abstract propositions' and suchlike pushed many theologians to extremes in the other direction. No doubt also they were impressed by philosophical trends such as, for example, Heidegger's distinction between *rechnendes Denken* ('calculation') and *andenkendes Denken* ('contemplation'). Recalling the context does not excuse their failures to examine their philosophical presuppositions.

Dr Lamont writes well about tradition. He attacks what he labels 'the magisterial view', 'the view generally held by Roman Catholics', a version of which he cites from 'a Roman Catholic manual of a traditional sort' (Ludwig Ott, 4th edition 1960), to the effect that we must believe with the assent of faith propositions which the Church teaches as dogmas of faith although the Church's teaching is not itself divine speaking. Here we are very much in the theological world which Charlier, de Lubac and others sought to escape: the world of dogmatic facts ('historical facts, which are not revealed, but which are intrinsically connected with revealed truths, for example, the legality of a pope or a general Council'), theological conclusions ('religious truths, which are derived from two premises, of which one is an immediately revealed truth, and the other a truth of natural reason'), and suchlike. Adherents of this view, Lamont says, regarded tradition as oral transmission of unwritten traditions. Increasingly sensitive to the lack of historical evidence for such unwritten traditions, Catholic theologians began, in the nineteenth century, to redefine tradition as the teaching of the magisterium, understood now as the bishops collectively or more often as the papal office. For Lamont, in contrast, we need to take an 'ecclesial view' of tradition: founded on the doctrine of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ and, in the end, accepting (with Aquinas) that all the articles of the Christian faith are implicit in the statement that God exists and has a care for our salvation (Hebrews 11:6).

According to Lamont, current debate about whether Aquinas's understanding of knowledge is internalist or externalist is a waste of time: either interpretation usually assumes that justification can occur in both knowledge and false belief, a possibility quite foreign to Aquinas's thought. However, in an illuminating appendix, it turns out that Aquinas had an externalist view of content: 'the content of propositions is not determined by what the people who think them can understand of them, but by the nature of the realities that the propositions are about'. In effect, according to Lamont, Aquinas would have endorsed Hilary Putnam's famous slogan: '“meanings” just ain't in the head'.

Philosophically as well as theologically of great interest, *Divine Faith* deserves to be widely studied and indeed to be the touchstone in discussion of the topic.

FERGUS KERR OP

NATURE AS REASON: A THOMISTIC THEORY OF THE NATURAL LAW by Jean Porter, *Eerdmans*, Grand Rapids, 2005, pp. 432, £17.99 pbk.

While most things seem to go back to Aristotle, Jean Porter is keen that for once we stop short, and consider Saint Thomas Aquinas's work on natural law not as a Christian interpretation of Aristotle, but rather as a product of mediaeval scholastic thought. *Nature as Reason* builds on Porter's 1999 *Natural and Divine Law*, a study of the scholastic concept of natural law developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This new book develops a constructive theory of the natural law for the modern world, developed through reflective interpretation, taking Aquinas and his contemporaries as conversation partners, with whom to think through central issues. This is not simply a book about Aquinas's relevance today, both because Aquinas is only one of the scholastics with whom Porter engages, and also because Porter doubts that Aquinas would agree with all her conclusions.

Porter suggests that scholastic natural law theory is worth bothering with today because it provides us, subject to some adjustments, with a fundamentally Christian way of doing ethics. This recognises our place as moral agents within God's creation. It is intrinsic to the character of the human soul as made in the image of God that we possess an innate capacity to distinguish good from evil. Humans, like all other creatures, possess the capacity and inclination to fulfil their natures. What Porter's approach expressly does not permit us to do is to extract fundamental principles of natural law simply from observing the natural world, or to produce single right answers from first principles. Ethics allows us to reason through our moral decisions for ourselves, but it does not dictate answers.

The cornerstone of Porter's thesis is her argument for the naturalness of human nature. Natural law, she says, should be understood both in terms of Reason and in terms of Nature. Human nature is itself morally significant, both because we are joined to the rest of a self-realising creation, and also because we are distinct from the rest of creation by virtue of being made in the image of God. This concept of nature requires that species have a real existence beyond the particular creatures that instantiate them. Relying on the work of a number of philosophers of biology, Porter argues that creatures can be seen as falling into an ordered and hierarchical set of natural kinds. When creatures evolve, they seem to do so with a sense of purpose towards the flourishing of their natural kind, which we cannot explain purely in terms of random mutation and selection. Thus, when finches evolve they do so to flourish in their 'finch-ness' and not to become rhesus monkeys or mushrooms. The fact that we may have more difficulty defining 'human-ness'