



Reviews

ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING GOD IN SCRIPTURE: THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETATION by William M. Wright IV and Francis Martin, *Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2019, pp. xviii + 253, \$26.99, pbk*

The existence of this book makes me very happy. Partly because it is a very good book, and I shall return shortly to that point, but partly also because it is precisely the kind of book that is so desperately needed and yet which, until a few years ago, I would have despaired of ever seeing written.

The purpose of the book, as the title suggests, is to offer an account and indeed a defence of the traditional belief that in reading the scriptures we are able to have an encounter with God. The first half of the book is devoted to demonstrating that the scriptures themselves make this claim, and thus necessarily the book engages in the encounter between biblical studies and theology which has been so conspicuously lacking, even in Catholic circles, really from the rise of modern biblical studies until well into the present century. I have, I think, written about the tragic divorce between these two disciplines, disciplines that one would have thought were obviously mutually dependent, in previous reviews in this journal and elsewhere. So, I shall not labour the point here. Suffice it to say that to read a book which engages simultaneously in serious biblical exegesis, informed by the latest thinking in historical-critical circles, and in equally serious philosophical theology in the tradition of Aquinas, but again in the most up-to-date mode, is a delightful surprise. This would be so even if the engagement were of only middling quality, and even if there was not much in the way of a synthesis between the results of the two avenues of enquiry. As it is, the work is consistently of the highest quality, and is carefully directed towards a coherent picture of how the Holy Spirit might move in the heart and mind of the believing reader of the sacred scriptures, a picture simultaneously academically rigorous and spiritually edifying.

The book is the work of William M Wright IV, professor of theology at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Wright has credited as his co-author the late Francis Martin, his mentor who taught in the Catholic University of America and the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC, among many other places, but Wright lets slip that Martin's contributions were in the form of preliminary conversations and – to be fair to him – a lifetime of inspiring teaching rather than in any of the actual writing. We must therefore credit Wright himself for the exemplary clarity of this book both in its overall structure and in the supremely readable way in which,

with numerous very helpful illustrations throughout, it takes us through a fascinating, but sometimes complex, set of arguments.

The first half of the book, as I have mentioned, deals with the theology of scripture found within the scriptures themselves, and in particular with the Old and New Testament sources for the concepts: (a) that God acts and is present in the world through his Word; (b) that this Word makes itself known in the inspired speech of particular people, notably the Prophets and the Apostles; (c) that the *written* word of scripture is a vehicle for this same divine presence-in-action; and (d) that all of this is simultaneously confirmed and deepened by the Incarnation, such that the reading of scripture becomes the vehicle for a saving encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Wright argues from the resurrection narratives in St John's Gospel that 'only a personal encounter with the risen Jesus causes faith in him as Lord ... [but] such a personal encounter is not limited to a direct tangible encounter with his glorified humanity as in a resurrection appearance' (p. 92). Rather, precisely through the medium of engagement with the written testimony of the Apostles, throughout the ages Christians have been able to enter into that same life-giving encounter. Citing *Hebrews* 4.12, Wright concludes his presentation of the biblical evidence with the claim, amply supported by the words of scripture themselves, that God is always speaking to his people through their encounter with the Bible, 'work[ing] powerfully within them at the deepest levels of their being' (p. 99).

As a presentation of what we might call a biblical theology of the Bible, the first part of this book could stand alone as a clear, interesting, and insightful introduction to the topic. However, the reader's work is not yet quite half done, and (at least for me, as a biblical scholar and no great expert in philosophical theology) the intellectual work rather less than half done. Wright characterises the second half of the book as a ladder, each argument leading on from the last so that, rather more so than in the first half, one finds oneself engaging in a carefully structured and convincingly proposed single argument. That argument is as follows: to claim that in reading the scriptures we open ourselves to the possibility of an encounter with the mystery at the heart of all being, it is both necessary and sufficient for us to hold the traditional and orthodox view of God as transcendent Creator, who 'neither is part of the creation nor can be thought of as any kind of thing'. The Incarnation, itself comprehensible only within this traditional metaphysical framework, makes possible and illumines the manifold ways in which through the scriptures the Creator communicates himself to humanity and enables us to participate in his divine nature: Wright weaves together Incarnation, the sacramental economy, biblical inspiration, and a hermeneutic that acknowledges but also legitimately transcends the limitations of the historical-critical in a way that is profoundly satisfying and wholly convincing – not just to me, but to anyone who may lack even the barest prior acquaintance with Thomist metaphysics or the history of biblical scholarship.

I find myself deeply impressed by the author's ability to grasp and to communicate the complex interdependence of the many topics needed to offer this very plausible defence of what all Christians believe, that in reading the scriptures we encounter our Creator in a unique way. I also find myself envious of Wright's manifest teaching ability, and of his students. I encourage you to become one yourself in a small way, by reading this most impressive book.

RICHARD J. OUNSWORTH OP

AQUINAS'S ESCHATOLOGICAL ETHICS AND THE VIRTUE OF TEMPERANCE
by Matthew Levering, *University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana,*
2019, pp. xi + 432, £54.00, hbk

The project of this book is an interesting one. The structure of the argument comes from the works of N.T. Wright in which are identified three dimensions of how the Bible speaks of eschatological fulfilment. These three are the renewal of the Temple, the restoration of the people, and the forgiveness of sins with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Levering seeks to map onto these three aspects the exposition of the cardinal virtue of temperance, which Aquinas gives in *Summa theologiae* II-II, qq. 141–170. Specifically, he aligns with the biblical data the various parts of temperance considered by Aquinas: integral parts (without which a virtue cannot be itself), subjective parts (which are specific forms of the virtue), and potential parts (which are virtues accessory to or allied with the main virtue).

The pattern of each chapter is then the following: a short introduction, a consideration of the biblical material relevant to the virtue or part of the virtue being discussed, a summary of Aquinas's presentation, particularly in order to see how he uses the biblical material, and a conclusion. In speaking of the renewal of the Temple, Levering treats of shame (*verecundia*) and honesty (*honestas*), integral parts of temperance. In speaking of the restoration of the people he considers abstinence, fasting, sobriety, and chastity, which are among its subjective parts. Finally, in speaking of the forgiveness of sins and the outpouring of the Spirit he speaks of the potential parts of temperance that are clemency (*clementia*), meekness (*mansuetudo*), humility, and studiousness. There are many references to other philosophers and theologians besides Aquinas, and at certain points one or another of them contributes significantly to the development of the argument, in particular John Webster to the chapter on humility and Paul Griffiths to the chapter on studiousness. But for the most part the primary sources are the Bible, Aquinas, and N.T. Wright.

The title of the book might be a bit misleading, therefore, since it is not a complete presentation of Aquinas's treatment of this virtue, far less a full