

in his self-gift – takes priority over created grace – grace as the enhancement of our human faculties. She has little difficulty in showing that de la Taille's ontology of divine action ('created actuation by Uncreated Act') – her next topic – fits splendidly with not only his theology of grace but also his Christology and indeed his doctrine of the Eucharist, for like St Cyril, by whose writings de la Taille was strongly influenced, Holy Communion is meant to entail our transformation by the Logos through his life-giving flesh: flesh which, in the hypostatic union, became his and which, through feasting on the Victim of the sacrifice, becomes ours. Her last three chapters describe de la Taille's interventions in the contemporary dispute over the modes of contemplative prayer, where notions of the 'cruciform purification of desire' drawn from the earlier sections of the book become newly pertinent, as they do likewise in her account of his theology of baptism, with which she concludes.

In the present church situation, the greatest merit of this book is undoubtedly its recovery of a full-blooded doctrine of Eucharistic sacrifice as not only 'latreutic' (a sacrifice of adoration), but also 'propitiatory' (a sacrifice expressive of sorrow and regret for all human rejection of the charity of God). Pointing out how de la Taille's strong preference for the language of Eucharistic oblation rather than immolation was guided by his wider theology of the God-world relation as mediated by Jesus Christ (destruction, *simply as such*, is never pleasing to the God thus revealed), she seeks to tread a path between the heterodox elimination of 'sacrifice' (in favour of 'gift'), in much modern Eucharistic theology – this, she rightly notes, is often the result of the influence of the contemporary philosopher of religion René Girard – and a simple return to the post-Tridentine rhetoric of immolation which she associates with enthusiasts for the older Latin Liturgy.

Though one of the testimonies printed by the publisher on the dust-jacket of this book speaks of its author's 'liturgical grounding', it is surprising that no mention whatsoever is made of the debilitating effect, for an 'oblationist' sensibility, of the liturgical revision introduced into the Western Catholic Church in the 1960s and '70s. Eucharistic celebration *versus populum* speaks primarily if not exclusively of a God who, in the Eucharistic elements, makes over to us the gift of his Son. It is only when people and priest are facing in the same direction as oblation is made to Another who is beyond them both, that the Mass appears as the sacrifice of the God-man to his Father to which sacrifice, by the indwelling Spirit in the Church, the faithful are conjoined. Good doctrinal catechesis can allay this difficulty. But only architectural change can remedy it.

AIDAN NICHOLS OP

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE EARLY CHURCH by Anthony Meredith SJ,
T & T Clark, Continuum, London, 2012, pp.173, £ 14.99, pbk

This book is a distillation of much thought, emanating from many years of teaching Patristics at Campion Hall, University of Oxford and Heythrop College, University of London. Fr Meredith has embarked upon charting afresh the marsh territory of a problem almost as old as christianity itself namely 'Can philosophy be Christian?' or, in Meredith's own wording: 'Faith and philosophy: Alliance or hostility?' The possibility of Christian philosophy was fiercely debated in the 1920s and the 1930s especially in France where it was categorically rejected by a leading intellectual historian such as Émile Bréhier and vigorously defended by Étienne Gilson who opened his Gifford Lectures on *The Spirit of Medieval*

Philosophy with two chapters devoted respectively to the problem and notion of Christian Philosophy. The debate was greatly enriched by the contribution of the Catholic personalist philosopher Maurice Nédoncelle and his essay, *Existe-t-il une philosophie chrétienne* (Paris, 1960) which made a case for a christian philosophy relying notably on Maurice Blondel's thought whereby a valid christian philosophy depends on its tendency to recognise preliminarily, and indeed appeal to, a supernature in separation from the theology of revelation. More recently (i.e. in 1998) Pope John Paul II addressed, more sharply, this vexing question in his encyclical *Fides et ratio* whereby John Paul II highlights the Patristic (in this particular case – the Augustinian) character of the matter at hand by going beyond a mere defence of the concept of christian philosophy. John Paul II maintains together with St Augustine, (*De Trinitate* 7,12 and 15,2), having taken into account all relevant major trends in modern thought, that no philosophy can be complete without faith.

Set against this background, Meredith's neutral, ostensibly descriptive title may be regarded now as a bold statement. The very existence of christian philosophy is thus to be reaffirmed here – even if it is being by no means taken for granted. Meredith acknowledges his indebtedness to both St Augustine and Pope John Paul II, and shrewdly defines the purpose of his present book along the lines drawn by them as: 'less to justify the actual fact of philosophic influence than to illustrate the truth of the claim that in fact the church has been influenced by philosophy, and that this did not begin once the church felt confident enough to express itself in language not specifically biblical, but from its earliest records, above all the letters of St Paul' (p. 7).

In accordance with this rationale, the book consists of four chapters, with an introduction and an epilogue. In his Introduction Meredith manages in fact to produce a concise, yet extensive, mapping of the intellectual and religious landscapes of Greco-Roman antiquity (with an emphasis on areas in which the two do not necessarily overlap). The chapter is a thread of sections dedicated to different subjects yet, thanks to Meredith's careful handling of his material, these sections never become disjointed. Amongst the headings of each section the reader can find topics such as Greek Philosophy, Greek Religion, Stoicism, Roman Religion or Later Platonic Philosophy. Meredith, presumably due to his ample academic pedagogical experience, believes that no job is too small for he does not refrain from including a section which he simply calls 'The Poets', dedicated to Homer and the fifth-century BC Greek tragedians and their ever relevant legacy of questioning moral issues and human faith. Classical Greek philosophy is represented by 'The Presocratics' and their successors Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Porphyry alongside themes such as 'Stoicism' and 'Later Platonic Philosophy'. Rome is represented by 'Roman Religion and Mystery Cults'. There are also sections such as 'God of Old Testament versus God of New Testament', 'Jewish Worship versus Greek Idolatry' and, 'Jewish Morality versus Jewish Ritualism' – amongst others. These sections are compact yet carry their weight unflinchingly and re-create from a bird's eye view much of the intellectual and religious mosaic of archaic and classical antiquity before the coming of Christ.

In the next chapter, 'Saint Paul, the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists of the Second Century', Meredith focuses on the close relationship which, according to his interpretation, christian thought had maintained with the Hellenistic intellectual world in the broadest sense of this term of which philosophy was but one particularly influential field. Meredith associated St Paul's view of philosophy with his skills of a 'professional rhetorician capable of using arguments drawn from philosophy without committing himself to any one system' (p. 41). Meredith goes on to show very astutely how St Paul's famous scorn of secular thought in the first two chapters of his *First Epistle To The Corinthians* was taken out of context and became popular 'above all with those who wish to sterilize

the Gospel of alien influences' (p. 44). Meredith juxtaposes St Paul's rhetorical *tour de force* in *1st Corinthians* with the Apostle's proof of the existence of God in *Romans* (1, 19–21) whereby St Paul's argumentation, as Meredith indicates, is borrowed from the Stoics.

Armed with a watchful eye on a common scholarly propensity to homogenise views and attitudes towards the question of christian philosophy in the early church, Meredith invites his reader to a journey along the Patristic age and beyond. Notable legs of the journey are Alexandrian Judaism and Hellenism that together left the christian Church with the legacy of Philo. Other Alexandrian ports of call are the contributions of Clement and Origen. The Latin West is explored as well, and here the towering figures are of course Tertullian and St Augustine. An important bonus is Meredith's fourth chapter, 'The Influence of Philosophy on the Language and Thought of the Council', which makes it its business to outline the ways in which philosophy was at work during the stormy period of doctrinal controversies from the Council of Nicaea (325) to the Council of Chalcedon (451). The book concludes with an appendix that, like the preceding chapters, treats with brevity, lucidity and with a debonair elegance St Thomas Aquinas's distinction between theology and philosophy which – as Meredith does not neglect to mention – was made about the same time that St Bonaventure wrote his fairly Platonic *The Ascent of the Mind to God*.

In conclusion, this is a very useful tool for Patristics, philosophy and church history students and is likely to become a standard book in those fields.

CYRIL CHILSON

THOMISM IN JOHN OWEN by Christopher Cleveland, *Ashgate, Farnham, 2013, pp. xi + 173, £50, hbk*

Typically the work of St. Thomas Aquinas has been regarded as a paradigmatic example of Catholic orthodoxy. As a result, one would not expect it to have influenced any Reformation theology. Christopher Cleveland, however, contends that it did, so in *Thomism in John Owen*, Cleveland documents the extent to which the reformation theologian John Owen (1616–1683) drew on elements of Thomas's work in his own theological project.

Cleveland divides the book into six chapters. In the first chapter Cleveland introduces the work, setting Owen's thought in its scholarly context. Cleveland also distinguishes four ways in which he thinks Aquinas's work influenced Owen: 'direct quotation' (p.3), 'the use of a Thomistic theological concept, with identical or similar terminology to Thomas or Thomist authors' (*ibid.*), 'the use of similar but not identical principles' (*ibid.*), and 'times at which Owen and Thomas merely coincide in their thoughts' (*ibid.*). Cleveland identifies three areas to which such influence can be traced: Aquinas's 'concept of God as pure act of being' (p.4), 'the concept of infused habits of grace' (*ibid.*), and 'the Thomistic understanding of the hypostatic union' (*ibid.*).

The four chapters that follow then discuss how Cleveland thinks Aquinas's work in these areas influenced Owen. Hence the second chapter examines the use Owen made of St. Thomas's concept of God as pure act of being. It shows Owen using this idea to argue the divine will cannot change, for divine premotion, and for perseverance through grace. Chapters three and four discuss the role of infused habits in Owen's theology. Chapter three introduces the account of habits found in Aristotle and Aquinas and then goes on to show how Owen employed infused habits in his account of regeneration. Chapter four extends the analysis