

LA DOTTRINA DI S. TOMMASO SULL'ORIGINE DEL POTERE E SUL PRETESO DIRITTO DI RESISTENZA, by G. Sanseverino, intr. by F. Di Mieri, *Giannini Editores Napoli*, 1997, xvii + 60 pages.

Thomas Gilby OP contributed greatly to keeping Aquinas on the intellectual map of the English-speaking world. In launching the monumental Blackfriars edition of the *Summa Theologiae* in 1964, he made clear his attachment to the scholasticism of Cajetan and the theologians of Salamanca, the Baroque and the Leonine revival.

Others studying St Thomas have warmed less to his commentators and to Neothomism in general. Today, for many, these writers are neither reliable guides to the thought of Aquinas nor valuable developers of it. Yet, there has just been published in Naples (the city to which Aquinas was assigned at the beginning, middle and end of his Dominican life) the first volume in the series *Philosophia Perennis*. The series will publish significant texts relating to the permanent principles of philosophical thought, with an emphasis on Aquinas's teachings. These principles are based on an intensive openness to being and an awareness of the primacy of truth in knowing and acting. The first volume in the series concerns Sanseverino.

Gaetano Sanseverino (1811–65), a secular priest who taught and wrote in Naples, was an important figure in the revival and development of St Thomas's thought. He should have a secure place in any account of Neoscholasticism. The volume under review reprints Sanseverino's short treatise of 1853 on Aquinas's teaching concerning power and the right to resist public authority. Fernando Di Mieri has written a brief, lucid, and well-documented introduction to it in which he places Sanseverino in his historical and intellectual context. The middle of the 19th century was, of course, a uniquely critical moment for Italy (if that geographical expression be allowed).

Sanseverino wrote in defence of 'Church and Throne' and against their enemies, particularly those he regarded as misusing Thomism. Perhaps not surprisingly, in 1860 he fell foul of the new government and was dismissed from teaching Ethics in the university of Naples. His dismissal contributed to the marginalisation of Neothomism in Southern Italian culture and its limiting concentration in ecclesiastical institutions.

According to Sanseverino, certain contemporary ideas on popular sovereignty, the social contract and tyrannicide could not be grounded in Aquinas. His treatise is in two parts. In the first, Sanseverino begins by placing current debates in a context going back to the Council of Constance (1414–8). It was the French Revolution that restarted the polemics and led to a spate of publications in France and Italy quoting Aquinas in support of the social contract and regicide. Basing himself chiefly on Aquinas's *De Regimine Principum*, or such parts of it as he considered authentic, Sanseverino then gives an exposition of Aquinas's teaching on the natural need for life in society, and the necessity for authority in civil society and its divine origins.

In the second part, Sanseverino turns to the possibility of tyrannicide. His aim is to present a correct and nuanced account of Aquinas, both from texts explicitly on the subject and by deduction from his general principles. Sanseverino, in true Thomist spirit, concludes by stating and refuting three views seemingly showing that Aquinas allowed tyrannicide. On the other hand, he allowed that it may be permissible to depose a tyrannical elected ruler, but not a hereditary one. In essence, 'independent princes' receive their power from God and are judged solely by him.

From the Middle Ages onwards, the writings of Aquinas have been used to support a disparate variety of political and constitutional positions. The polemic in which Sanseverino was engaged is itself proof of this. For his part, Di Mieri does not venture to assess in detail if in his tract Sanseverino proved to be a faithful interpreter of St Thomas. Gilby, who wrote extensively on Aquinas's political and social theories, maintained that St Thomas never defended tyrannicide in so many words. If anything, according to Gilby, Aquinas's later writings seem to harden in favour of existing authority, and against sedition and rebellion.

Di Mieri's intention is to repropose from Sanseverino's tract those aspects of political doctrine that are perennially valid. Basic among these, is the rejection of contractual theories and the favouring of the naturalness of socio-political life in the light of a Christian anthropology. This is the lesson of what Di Mieri calls 'Christian realism'. It recognises the principle of authority and at the same time endeavours to find the principles that will prevent its degeneration into tyranny, without falling into the opposite extreme of anarchy.

It is likely that aspects of Aquinas's theological and philosophical thought will continue to feature in political debates; perhaps over the nature of the evolving European Union. Whatever doubts one may have about the existence or value of a *philosophia perennis*, Sanseverino's tract is further evidence that there definitely is something perennial about the resurgence of Thomist thinking in substantially different later contexts.

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ATHEISM AND THEISM by J. J. C. Smart and J. J. Haldane *Blackwell, Oxford, 1996, pp 224 £45.00 hardback, £12.99 paperback*

This is one of the 'Great Debates in Philosophy' series in which two writers argue for opposing views of a certain issue: the views here are materialist atheism and Thomist Catholicism. It would have been good to report a stronger atheist contribution since good presentations of this are rare. However, as I suspect many atheists would agree, John Haldane does a first class job, and his careful introduction of Thomism to issues in analytic philosophy should win theism some new friends, if not converts.

In philosophical debate about God it is not theists who have the up-