

The closing chapter provides a summary of Aquinas's 'big picture' on God and evil, a picture that depends on both philosophical and theological arguments. Not surprisingly, Davies agrees with Aquinas in his basic options and overall solutions: '(i)f Aquinas is right, then the problem of evil is not a serious problem at all but rather the result of a confused way of thinking about God' (p. 128). And against Moltmann's theology of a 'suffering God' he shows how Aquinas's theology is more successful in guarding the intimate involvement of God in the suffering of the world.

This book will be of great interest not only to students approaching him for the first time but to seasoned readers of Aquinas. As it presents Aquinas's big picture on evil, goodness, and God, it also clarifies how a person can engage simultaneously in the related disciplines of philosophy and theology.

VIVIAN BOLAND OP

**GOD AND THE ATLANTIC: AMERICA, EUROPE, AND THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE**  
by Thomas Albert Howard, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 256, £25, hbk*

When Europe looks across the Atlantic to America it is not uncommon for a sense of bewilderment to arise, often at political decisions and policy choices like healthcare provision and the Iraq war. Indeed, a quick glance at politics today will also surprise the onlooker by the different attitudes these distant cousins have towards religion: while President Obama quoted Psalm 46 at the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 9/11, European politicians went to great lengths to avoid affirming the Christian heritage of Europe in the much-debated 2004 European Union Constitution. Howard's book *God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide* suggests that such European reactions ranging from bewilderment to hostile anti-Americanism can be made sense of by developing a fuller picture of the *historical* roots of this transatlantic gap – a gap that is largely rooted in different conceptions of the place of religion in society.

Howard, a history professor in the United States, argues that the historical study of Europe's views of America has too often been viewed through the lens of Alexis de Tocqueville's positive evaluation of America's separation of church and state. This has resulted in a neglect of two very important 'master narratives' which have greatly conditioned the 'transatlantic gap' and buttressed the historically prevalent anti-American sentiment: those of the establishmentarian-reactionary Right and of the secularist-progressive Left. He spends the second chapter tracing out three different strands of the Right's traditionalist critique coming from British Anglicans, Continental-Romantic critics, and the Catholic Church. All three criticised different consequences of America's voluntarist approach to religion and absence of an established Church. For the Anglican it was a concern for sectarianism, social chaos and lack of social cement, whilst the Germans and Romantics emphasised the need for the state to mould the culture, community, and spirituality of its people, and also included an element of wariness towards America's rugged economic individualism. For the Catholic Church, America's voluntarism and espousal of religious freedom were seen as a consequence of indifferentism and was criticised in papal encyclicals such as *Testem Benevolentiae* and *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. Howard walks the reader through different thinkers of these strands, while situating the ideas within various domestic and international political dynamics occurring at the time.

In the next chapter, we are brought to the second 'master narrative', which weaves through different Leftist lines of thought about the place of religion in

society. Whilst for the Right the criticism lodged against America was that the disestablishment of religion and its voluntaristic nature would lead to sectarianism, a lack of social and cultural glue, and indifference, the Left saw the vitality of religion as a sign of America's backwardness. What all branches of the Left had in common was their view of history as a stadial progression, with the French Revolution as *the* event of modernity ushering in the liberation from religion and the eventual secularisation of society. Howard explores the theories of the French 'sociologists' such as Condorcet and Saint-Simon who appealed to a universal post-Christian culture, the absence of merging throne and altar, and who were sceptical of the Protestant factions in America. The analysis then moves to discuss the Hegelian and Marxist view of religion in America, followed by the French republicans and anti-clericalists. The latter, as promoters of the French Jules Ferry Laws and 1905 law on *laïcité*, lamented the presence of religion in American schools and viewed religion as a stumbling block to progress. Indeed, Howard notes that the Left's belief in secularisation as evidence of progress – and the absence of it in America – led to much ridicule and derision of the United States, rather than a re-examination of the secularist thesis itself.

Not only does Howard trace out the developments in these strands of thought in Europe, but he also aims to make another important contribution to the historical study of the 'transatlantic gap'. He looks past de Tocqueville's analysis to the insights of two European 'middle-men' – Philip Schaff and Jacques Maritain – who were transatlantic personalities with a more balanced view of religion in America resulting from their extended stays in the country. One chapter is dedicated to the thought of Philip Schaff, a Swiss-German Protestant church historian from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After initial scepticism towards the American experiment, Schaff later argued that America's separation of church and state and its embrace of voluntarism had an important role in the historical development of real Christian unity, as embraced by a 'free people' rather than from state coercion. America had historical promise, and much to teach its European parents.

The second mediator of the transatlantic divide, in what was my favourite chapter, was Jacques Maritain – a well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Thomist philosopher. Like Schaff, Maritain passed many years of his life in the United States, though less out of choice than necessity, avoiding the horrors of World War II which were breaking out during the 1940s. Howard traces how Maritain's lectures and writings served to deconstruct and counter European caricatures of America. Maritain's more nuanced view of religion in America emerged from his work *Integral Humanism*, his deepening Thomist tendency to search for the 'lurking positive', and an increasing appreciation for the different type of democracy present in the United States compared to continental Europe. Maritain believed religious freedom, properly understood and distinguished from 'indifferentism', was important for human flourishing, and his arguments were even influential in Vatican II reforms.

The final chapter brings all Howard's research together and provides a useful analogy for why Europe and America have had difficulty understanding each other. While Europeans viewed the relationship between Christianity and the state in dialectical terms, for America the connection resembled a double helix – two elements moving together through time, each affecting the other. We are also brought up to date with current developments, most notably the rising trend of Americans promoting European secularism, along with more Europeans realising the limits of secularism at home. The implications of this are important, though beyond the historical scope of the book, and only time will tell how they bare themselves out in the future.

On the whole, Howard has made an insightful historical contribution to the topic of the transatlantic divide by highlighting the role of religious differences in

American-European relations. Indeed, his book reminds us how our context provides the lens through which we view developments occurring elsewhere. America did not have a feudal history, entrenched aristocracy, or strong clerical tradition. It was the *presence* of these in Europe which made American developments difficult to understand, easy to criticise and even ridicule. One can therefore grasp more easily how much a break with history America's founding principles were, and consequently appreciate the contributions of transatlantic personalities to bridging the ensuing disconnect and misunderstanding.

This book is written in a very engaging manner, and can appeal to almost any reader. Howard's style and use of primary sources also makes the reading amusing, even leading to a good chuckle. The book allows us to enter into the mindset of the time, and perhaps even helps us realise the sources of our own hidden biases in the book's very pages!

SUSAN DIVALD

**STARTING WITH KIERKEGAARD** by Patrick Sheil, *Continuum*, 2010, pp. xi + 172, £12.99, pbk

**KIERKEGAARD AND THE CATHOLIC TRADITION** by Jack Mulder Jr., *Indiana University Press*, 2010, pp. xvi + 283, \$ 24.95, pbk

**KIERKEGAARD ON SIN AND SALVATION** by W. Glenn Kirkconnell, *Continuum*, 2010, pp. 181, £65, hbk

I approached these three books knowing very little about Søren Kierkegaard other than that the Dane was famous for being gloomy and the father of existentialism. I was also aware that his writings were attracting more and more attention from theologians, writers on spirituality, psychologists and psychotherapists. I have since learned that, like Marx, Kierkegaard was in reaction to Hegelianism, considering Hegel to be preoccupied with knowledge, with all forms of human activity having their place as 'moments' in the self-knowledge of the absolute spirit. Just as Marx wished to change the world and not just understand it, so Kierkegaard also wished that individuals would cease being mere spectators, take their lives into their own hands, and shape their future by their decisions and actions. Where Hegel focused on mere knowledge, Kierkegaard's area of investigation was the human area of freedom and responsibility, the existential area of decision and action, the level of human consciousness at which we make fateful choices and commitments. Kierkegaard was preoccupied with the individual and the self and his analyses of the self or human subjectivity are detailed, refined and highly intricate. They are also 'challenging' to the reader in the existential sense of that word.

For fairly obvious reasons I began the task of reviewing these three works by opening Patrick Sheil's *Starting with Kierkegaard*. I soon found this to be a mistaken approach, however, for the simple reason that, like many books designed for those starting out on a subject, in seeking to be both short and comprehensive it was rather too packed and condensed. Kierkegaard is a highly discursive author whose thinking takes many twists and turns; he employs an idiosyncratic vocabulary and he made things even more complicated by writing some books using a range of pseudonyms and writing others under his own name – the so-called 'signed works'. I needed a slightly looser and less compact treatment of some of his key ideas if I were ever to get a handle on him. This brought me to Jack Mulder's book which is a good starting point for Catholic readers since it is to a large extent a comparison of some of Kierkegaard's key theological concerns