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**ten Klooster**, Anton: **Thomas Aquinas on the Beatitudes**. Reading Matthew, Disputing Grace and Virtue, Preaching Happiness. – Leuven: Peeters 2018. (IX) 314 S. (Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, 18), kt € 40,00 ISBN: 978-90-429- 3643-0

Anton ten Klooster's revised diss. adds another impressive volume to the growing list of publications by the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht. It is a clear, nuanced, and thoroughly researched examination of Aquinas' mature reflections on the beatitudes in (1) his commentary on the gospel of Matthew, (2) the *Summa theologiae*, and (3) sermons preached contemporaneously during his second Parisian period 1268 to 1272. By following the threefold duties of the *magister in Sacra Pagina*, the structure of the book allows the reader to see how the genres of *lectio*, *disputatio*, and *praedicatio* respectively interpret, understand, and communicate a key scriptural text. This reflexive method drives home the centrality of scripture in Aquinas' theology.

Drawing heavily on Augustine, Aquinas pays special attention to this section of Matthew's gospel because it inaugurates Jesus' teaching and contains "the whole perfection of our life" (68). In fact, ten K. shows how Aquinas treats the beatitudes not as an isolated treatise, but as "the cornerstone of his theology of happiness" (121). As such, the treatment of the beatitudes culminates the discussion that opens the *prima pars* on what happiness is. For Aquinas, the beatitudes provide a more differentiated and concrete guide of the path to, and goal of, happiness. In so doing, they give a fuller account of how, precisely, human freedom cooperates with the divine action that initiates, moves, and completes human longing. Although diverse rewards are listed, they are essentially one: the kingdom. No doubt, the ultimate reward is the eternal happiness of the beatific vision. But since that reward is inchoately felt now, the beatitudes are not so much abrupt eschatological reversals as a differentiated set of moral instructions. In technical terms, they involve the *beatitudo spei* through merit.

For Aquinas, the meritorious acts of the beatitudes are made possible by grace. In demonstrating this point, ten K. summarizes Aquinas' robust pneumatology in this eloquent summary: "where the Spirit begins to reign in the human person, the person's happiness begins to take shape" (166). Ten K. also notes a suggestive shift in Aquinas' terminology – from the Aristotelian term *supra humanum modo* in the earlier scriptural commentary to the *instinctus* or impulse of the Holy Spirit in the *Summa theologiae* – that perhaps stems from a desire to avoid any hint of semi-Pelagianism. The cumulative effect of such observations is to lend support to the position of commentators such as Servais-Théodore Pinckaers and William Mattison, who interpret the *secunda pars* as primarily concerned with infused virtues. But ten K. falls short of a clear endorsement of this position. He notes, but does not address, the need to take a position on the question of whether "the infused virtues

replace, transform or build upon the acquired virtues” (156, note 128). On this issue, see also ten K.’s frank admission of interpretative difficulty when he states, during a discussion of prudence in a homily, that it is “not clear if Aquinas is speaking of infused or acquired virtue [and, more generally, it is] unclear what distinction, if any, between acquired and infused virtues functions in these texts” (227). Similarly tentative forays into a contemporary form of this debate are seen in his claim that non-Christians “might in some respect live the life of the beatitudes” (165). Despite these wise restraints in complex debates, ten K. leaves no doubt that Aquinas embeds moral reflection within *sacra doctrina* and the life of grace.

In many places, ten K. commends Aquinas for providing a clarifying structure to Christian reflection on the moral life. However, when ten K. explores the specific alignments between various key septenaries (such as the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the petitions of the Our Father, and the beatitudes), this confidence disappears. The shifting and often arbitrary nature of these correlations reveals less an intelligible structure and more an associative grammar; and, even then, one that admits many exceptions. Ten K. reluctantly concedes, “Aquinas seems to become less systematic at the end of his career, perhaps because he moves away from the idea that the moral life can be systematized at all” (184, citing Edward O’Connor, the translator for the “Gifts of the Spirit” section of the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa theologiae*). See also pp. 121–122, 188, 199 and 237–238 for further examples of the tentative and variable nature of these alignments.

This concession seems to present quite a soft underbelly to a book advocating Aquinas’ systematic contribution (e. g., 244). But need such a self-defeating admission be made? An alternative approach might have argued that, rather than losing his explanatory edge, Aquinas simply chose a different governing principle by which to order the mass of material on Christian moral life. The *secunda pars* takes Paul’s three theological virtues, not Jesus’ seven beatitudes, as its governing principle. As a result, the latter is made to coalesce around that primary selection; and not everything of the secondary material (the beatitudes) can be made to orbit neatly around this center (the virtues). But that is not an individual theologian choosing to withdraw from systematics. It is an inevitable result of the attempt to impose systematic order upon the incorrigibly plural nature of the biblical witness. Perhaps ten K. states it best when he says there exists an “intricate web of connections” (p. 225) between virtues, beatitudes, gifts and fruits.

Ten K.’s book, then, shows (without quite admitting it) how scripture resists systematization; or, at least, how any one systematic attempt to corral the bible faces inevitable trade-offs as it organizes the unruly webs of scriptural witnesses around a single principle. In fact, the very grammar of the beatitudes – blessed are x, blessed are y – suggests different people with different strengths – and not, as ten K. interprets Aquinas, as a staged path outlining individual perfection. But what if the beatitudes don’t give a template for an individual Christian’s journey, but rather describe the gems dispersed throughout the Christian collective, the church? Does the imposition of an interpretive framework of individual perfection, modeled on ascent, obscure the ecclesial necessity – because of the individual limits – of Christian life? It is the merit of ten K.’s book to raise such questions because of its convincing account of Aquinas’ understanding of a key part of the NT.

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