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Loughlin, Stephen J. *Aquinas' Summa Theologiae. T&T Clark Readers' Guides*. London: T&T Clark International, 2010. Pp. x, 323. \$100. 9780567511416. \$16.95. 9780567550941.

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Reading the *Summa Theologiae* with students is not an easy task. The impersonal and emotionless character of the texts, the prosaic and terse style, the technical jargon borrowed from Aristotelian philosophy, and the interconnection of different doctrines hinder students in appreciating and engaging with this work. Most theology students prefer to read Augustine's *Confessions* to the *Summa*, in the same way as philosophy students would rather choose Plato's dialogues than Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Loughlin's book makes the whole of Aquinas' main work much more accessible to newcomers and helps them to discover for themselves its theological meaning and significance.

The introduction of the book has a short biography, a somewhat hagiographical profile of Aquinas' personality and a list of other works. There is also a discussion of the purpose and of the two structuring principles of the *Summa*, that is, its overall plan and the scholastic question-method. Following Boyle and Torrell, Loughlin finds the historical purpose in the pastoral training of young Dominicans, in particular in view of their ministries of preaching and hearing confession. Next, Loughlin discusses Chenu's *exitus-reditus* scheme as the architectonic principle of the *Summa*. The scheme, first proposed in 1939, soon became very popular for its elegant simplicity and also because it matched well with the dynamic salvation-history approach that began to develop in Catholic theology as a substitute for the static neo-Thomistic view. However, Loughlin adopts an alternative ordering, recently proposed by Rudi te Velde. [1] In Te Velde's view, the three parts of the *Summa* are divided according to the three different agents, God, man, and Christ. The First Part is about God and his work of creation and world government, by which everything returns to God. Because human beings are free, they are led back to God in a special way that cannot be appropriately accounted for in terms of God's creative agency and presence in nature. Human freedom, therefore, necessitates the Second Part on morality. Finally, the intrusion of sin into human freedom requires the Third Part on Christ's saving work.

The introduction concludes with a good characterization of the dialectics of the question-method and with some hermeneutical clues for interpreting the *Summa*, including its biblical roots, the influence of the theological traditions of the East and West, and the influence of philosophical traditions, in particular Aristotelianism. It is Aquinas' incorporation of philosophy within the theological perspective of the supernatural end of human beatitude that Loughlin thinks is the most difficult problem to overcome for a newcomer to the *Summa* (28).

The bulk of the book consists of a presentation of the text of the *Summa Theologiae*. The perspective is not so much historical as systematic, explaining how the separate treatises fit in with larger units of text and finally with the grand theological design of the whole of the *Summa*. The explicit contextualization of individual topics into the overarching theological structure shows how Aquinas meant them to be read within the horizon of the Christian faith. This, I take it, is the author's solution to what he had described as the greatest difficulty students experience when reading the *Summa*: the integration of philosophy into theology. It also helps more experienced readers to recognize and appreciate the unifying and synthesizing power of Aquinas' thought, not in the sense of a totalitarian, top down deductive system, but as an organic theological vision, consisting of interlocking parts, organized in such a way that each contributes to the meaning of the whole and, vice versa, is itself modified by its direct and remote context. In this way, the author presents the *Summa Theologiae* as a methodologically unified enterprise before the modern separation into fundamental, dogmatic, moral, spiritual, pastoral, biblical theology etc., and as an example of the thematic coherence of the *nexus mysteriorum* before the fragmentation into isolated treatises like *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*. The integrative nature of Aquinas' project is probably best illustrated by his holistic anthropology. Loughlin points out very clearly how Aquinas views the human being as a complex whole: not only on the metaphysical level of soul/mind and body (97-101), but also on other levels of human nature: our distinctively human rationality affecting the powers shared with other animals (111, 157-58); the embeddedness of the will and of morality in reason and in emotional and bodily conditions (147-162, 173-174); the political--and not tyrannical--rule of reason over the domain of the senses (108, 168); the interconnectedness of the passions (156) and of all the moral virtues (181); the integrating role of prudence in morality (172, 209-210); and, finally, the harmony of human nature and divine grace, the latter "compenetrating" (197) the former as its perfection (52). The author works this compenetration out by, for example, giving due attention to the key role of the infused moral virtues and--following Pinckaers--the Gifts, Beatitudes, and Fruits of the Spirit in Aquinas' moral theology.

The author finds the right balance between letting the texts speak for themselves and opening them up for twenty-first-century readers. He refrains from engaging into discussions among commentators and from apologetic defenses. References to secondary literature are limited to informative, recent studies by leading Thomists. In this way, Loughlin does not impose a particular interpretation, but gives students the necessary tools to develop their own understanding of the texts.

Of course Loughlin cannot completely avoid taking a stance on particular issues. With two of these I feel less comfortable: the relation between God's activity and human freedom; and the natural desire for the supernatural end. Regarding the first, the author suggests something like *tzimtzum*, God withholding himself to open up space for chance events and free actions of

creatures (60- 61, 83-84). Regarding the second issue, Loughlin seems to adopt De Lubac's view that humans have a natural desire for a supernatural end (116-117, 232-239). This raises the whole Catholic debate between nature and grace, in which De Lubac's position has not been universally accepted, because it allegedly denies the gratuity of grace.

Loughlin writes very clearly, though his style is somewhat marred with German-like sentences that run on for too many lines. He explains technical terms and often prefers--correctly--to use archaic expressions like "habit," "passion" and "concupiscence" to avoid misunderstandings. Sometimes, however, he reverts to the misleading parlance of the commentators. While preferring Te Velde's tripartite scheme of the *Summa*, Loughlin continues to speak of "man's *reditus* to God," suggesting a neo-Platonic emanation model, rather than Aristotelian teleology and-- more important--Christian eschatology. The expression "helping grace" for God's assistance (*auxilium*) in preparing for habitual grace, is also questionable. Aquinas never speaks of *gratia adiuvans* and it has been a matter of dispute whether this divine help belongs already to the supernatural level of grace. [2]

Loughlin covers all major issues of the *Summa*. Topics that are less interesting for present-day students, e.g. the doctrine on angels, he mentions in passing, and he presents other treatises only by way of example. I have more difficulty with the limited number of pages--less than thirty--devoted to the Third Part, Aquinas' Christology and sacramentology. Loughlin's justification that "for undergraduates" its material is "of a more accessible nature" (ix) does not convince me. There are a few minor slips: Aquinas would never say that a miracle is "against nature" (240) or count (natural) evil "a part of creation" (82). And capital sin is not the same as deadly sin (205).

Finally, I would like to point out one more structural principle in the *Summa* that helps us to recognize its internal coherence and movement. Occasionally, Loughlin seems to hint at this principle (94, 113), but does not identify it explicitly. Often, the final question in a treatise seems a bit out of place, but it is in fact the objective of the whole discussion and serves as a hinge and junction for other issues. For example, the discussion of God's beatitude at the end of the treatise on the divine essence (Ia q. 26) indicates that the end of our life, our beatitude, is the participation in God's beatitude. Likewise, the whole treatise on the (immanent) Trinity prepares for the final question about the (economic) missions of the divine persons of the Son and the Spirit in the history of salvation (Ia q. 43), which connects again to grace as the Gift of the Spirit (Second Part) and to the Christology of the Third Part.

Despite these minor criticisms, the book offers an excellent introduction to the *Summa Theologiae* from which more experienced readers can also benefit greatly.

Notes:

1. Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God. The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 11-18.
2. See J. Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action. 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 40-41 (also 168, note 45 and 171, note 52).