Recent Thomistica IV

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Why are there so many excellent books about the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas being written in English these days? Many assume a good deal of knowledge of Thomas's work, and may thus be held to appeal only to specialists, as may perhaps have been the case with the books reviewed last time (*New Blackfriars* November 2004: 628-641). Others are clearly introductory, seeking a new readership. Nevertheless, it is puzzling: a glance at course options and recommended bibliographies for university degrees in theology, across the English-speaking world, does not suggest that Aquinas is much studied. Nor is there much reason to believe that his work is central in the curriculum in Catholic seminaries. Indeed, throughout the Catholic world, systematic theology is expected to grapple with the revolutionary effects of 'postmodernism' (Heidegger, Levinas and so on), rather than engage in what many would regard as nostalgic retrieval of medieval ideas. As the editor of a book on Aquinas (*Contemplating Aquinas*, reviewed by Vivian Boland OP, November 2005: 658-662), I have seen eyes glaze over when I mention it, especially in Continental European faces. Research, however, obviously persuades American and British publishers that the market is there.

I

Far too many students, including Catholics, are put off Aquinas, not just because he has been dead since 1274, which makes him 'medieval', or because he wrote entirely in Latin, making him rather inaccessible; but mainly because his thought is supposed to exhibit an intolerable clarity. Students anticipate having the same insuperable problem that Pope Benedict XVI remembers having when he was a seminarian some sixty years ago: 'I had difficulties in penetrating the thought of Thomas Aquinas, whose crystal-clear logic seemed to me to be too closed in on itself, too impersonal and ready-made' (*Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977,* San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1998: 44).

That is still a widely shared perception. As a seminarian, Ratzinger was taught 'a rigid, neoscholastic Thomism', he records, by a professor, Arnold Wilmsen, formerly a worker in the Ruhr, who had

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studied Husserl and phenomenology at Munich, but, dissatisfied with this, had gone to Rome to imbibe the *philosophia thomistica* imparted in the Roman universities. This led to his teaching in a way that brooked no questioning, so Ratzinger reports.

Wilmsen was no doubt an exponent of what has been labelled 'Thomism of the Strict Observance', with luminaries in Rome such as Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange OP and Charles Boyer SJ, at the Angelicum and the Gregorianum respectively. This school treated Thomas Aquinas as a neo-Aristotelian, giving priority to metaphysics over physics or any other science, keeping the philosophy well clear of the theology, and paying little attention to historical context.

No doubt, Joseph Ratzinger eventually met other versions of Thomism. He gives one example. As theological adviser to Cardinal Frings of Cologne, one of the great figures at Vatican II, young Ratzinger (he was 35) found himself working closely with Karl Rahner, drafting an alternative to the schema on divine revelation composed by the Roman university theologians — an experience, so he recalled 35 years later, during which he realized that Rahner and he 'lived on two different theological planets': 'Despite his early reading of the Fathers, his [Rahner's] theology was totally conditioned by the tradition of Suarezian scholasticism and its new reception in the light of German idealism and of Heidegger' (*Milestones*: 128).

Just how much Rahner took over from Heidegger, whose seminars he attended, is open to dispute.[1] His thought seems far less 'Heideggerian' than that of Hans Urs von Balthasar — who also had to attend lectures on 'sawdust Thomism', which (however) enraged him, to a degree of paroxysm that neither Rahner nor Ratzinger ever felt. No doubt this version of neoThomism was the Suarezianism then taught in the Society of Jesus. By the time Rahner was teaching the doctrine of grace (1937/38), he explicitly rejected the 'baroque scholastic tradition', meaning Suarez among others.

Defining 'Suarezianism' is no easy matter. George Tyrrell, for example, as a young Jesuit, was removed from teaching his juniors because he favoured 'Thomism' rather than 'Suarezianism'. When Bernard Lonergan was a student at Heythrop College in the 1930s, so he says, one of the professors was so committed a Suarezian that, perversely, he said a ferial Mass privately on the feast of St Thomas Aquinas. In Dominican study houses, in the 1960s (believe me!), Suarezianism was certainly regarded as a perversion of Aquinas — although it would not be easy to say what we supposed to be wrong with it, or indeed what it actually amounted to.

[1] By the way, despite what is often said, Heidegger was never much of a Jesuit: he was sent away at the end of two weeks, in October 1909, aged twenty, because he got out of breath when they took him hiking — see Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil* (1998): 15.

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Funnily enough, in *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II commends the *Disputationes metaphysicae* of Francisco Suarez as a 'blessing', valued 'even in the Lutheran universities of Germany' (a compliment!). It established a *ratio studiorum*, a 'methodology', the abandoning of which in recent times 'has brought grave consequences, whether it be in priestly training or in theological research' (§ 62). This is, of course, not an endorsement of Suarezianism, however conceived: the point is only that the average seminary curriculum, and Catholic theology at large, have abandoned 'the discipline of philosophy', in the sense of courses in general and special metaphysics, and so on, on the pattern of Suarez's work.

Pope John Paul II commends the 'renewal of *philosophia thomistica*' — speaking in the same breath, however, of the rise of 'new Thomistic schools' (§ 58). In other words, so he recognizes, Thomistic philosophy was never a single, homogenous, internally uncontested tradition — whatever Thomists of the Strict Observance would have said. For them, all other versions of Thomism were simply perversions.

In his previous life as an academic, John Paul II contributed a good deal to a synthesis of Husserlian phenomenology with elements of a certain Thomistic philosophy — best described, perhaps, as a version of the personalism that many Catholic philosophers developed in the mid twentieth century, rather than anything distinctively 'Thomist'. Quite commonly, however, he is included in the school of 'Lublin Thomism' (the most eminent representative of which is Mieczyslaw Albert Krapiec OP.) In the encyclical, on the other hand, he seems to recommend something like the 'Existential Thomism' represented by Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Joseph Owens CSSR, and many others (see John F.X. Knasas, '*Fides et Ratio* and the Twentieth Century Thomistic Revival', *New Blackfriars* September 2000: 400-408).[2]

Young Ratzinger, by the way, was trained in the historical approach to patristic studies that had been characteristic at the University of Munich for generations. He wrote his doctoral thesis on 'The People and the House of God in Augustine's Doctrine of the Church'. The topic was suggested by his professor, Gottlieb Söhngen, one of the finest theologians of last century, little known in English-language theological circles (unless by students of Karl Barth). Söhngen also suggested the subject for Ratzinger's *Habilitationsschrift* (the higher degree required in German universities), namely, a study of St Bonaventure's theology of history, in connection with the notion of *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history), much discussed then

[2] For a learned and entertaining account see Wayne J. Hankey, 'From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: the Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America', *Dionysius* N.S. XVI (December 1998): 157-188.

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(1953) by Protestant theologians and biblical scholars. In the event, though approved by Söhngen, the dissertation was sent back for considerable revision at the behest of Michael Schmaus, the most eminent theologian in Germany at the time, who suspected it of misinterpreting Bonaventure and, even worse, of 'a dangerous modernism that had to lead to the subjectivization of the concept of revelation' (*Milestones*: 109).

Gottlieb Söhngen, by the way, is picked out in Otto-Herman Pesch's masterly survey of the place of Thomas Aquinas in modern German theology (see *Contemplating Aquinas*: 201). He picks him out, indeed, as the pioneer who transformed Thomas from being 'the dogmatically binding head of the Thomist school' to 'the most significant medieval impulse to modern theology'. Pesch is thinking of Söhngen's remarkable essay in the collective volume *Mysterium Salutis* (Cologne: Benziger 1965), on theology as wisdom reached by way of scholarship, in which Söhngen heralded the kind of readings of Thomas Aquinas which are becoming common now, forty years later. As the 'sawdust Thomism' of the seminaries collapsed, at Vatican II, new ways of reading Aquinas were already in the offing.

II

One recent move has been to resituate Thomas Aquinas in the context of the Order to which he belonged. Attention should be drawn to the superb collection of essays edited by Kent Emery, Jr., and Joseph P. Wawrykov: *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans: representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 1998: 600 pages, including indices, Dominicana in UND Library, and 103 plates, £41.95 paperback).

Six of the 25 chapters deal with Thomas Aquinas: extracts from his course on Isaiah, which survive in his own hand (presented by Denise Bouthillier); the 'Adoro te devote' (Robert Wielockx); 'Wisdom in the Christology of Thomas Aquinas' (Joseph Wawrykov); Christ in Thomas's 'spirituality' (Jean-Pierre Torrell OP); the thesis of the unique existence in Christ (Stephen F. Brown); and 'Christ, *Exemplar Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, according to Saint Thomas Aquinas' (Ulrich Horst OP).

The *expositio* of Isaiah, of which there is no English translation, is Thomas's first theological work, probably composed while he was still assistant to Albert the Great in Cologne, prior to 1252. The marginal annotations, his own pastoral and spiritual reflections, as Bouthillier shows, reveal the 'teleology' of his thought, the orientation of his mind towards the beatific vision.

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From the outset, not that he was in this respect in any way unique at the time, Aquinas unfolded his theology in the light of the end, the *finis*, which was the fulfilment of the promised face to face encounter with the triune Godhead. It is difficult for modern students who naturally regard his theology as erected bit by bit on the basis of the theistic proofs to realize that, for Aquinas, the whole thing unrolls from the end — backwards, as we are inclined to think.

The authenticity of the 'Adoro te devote' has long been contested. The translation most familiar to Catholics is by Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore'. Unlike Thomas's other eucharistic hymns, it was not composed for the Office of Corpus Christi. Some have held that the theology in the hymn is not compatible with his theology of the eucharist. Once and for all, one would think, Wielockx establishes that Thomas was the author and that the hymn's theology is entirely consonant with what he says elsewhere.

Joseph Wawrykov argues that the citation of Isaiah 64:4 ('The eye has not seen, God, without Thee, what Thou hast prepared for those who love Thee') in the very first article of the first question of the *prima pars* indicates that Thomas expects us to see Christ — the crucified Christ — present from the beginning of the *Summa Theologiae*.

The radical Christocentricity of Thomas' work is documented even more impressively by Jean-Pierre Torrell.

Stephen F. Brown's topic would no doubt seem esoteric to many Catholic theologians these days. Assuming that we believe that in Christ there are two natures, one divine and one human, do we think that there is an existence, *esse*, corresponding to the human nature as well as the existence, *esse*, that corresponds to the divine nature? (Do we even care?) In most of his comments on the question Thomas says that there is only one existence in Christ, the existence that belongs to the eternal Word. In what we assume to be his maturest discussion (*Summa Theologiae* 3.17.2), Thomas argues against the thesis that in Christ there is not only one act of existence but two. In the *Quaestio disputata de unione Verbi incarnati*, however, of more or less the same date (around 1272), Thomas allows that there is a 'secondary existence' corresponding to the human nature.

This has long been a problem. Cajetan, the great sixteenth-century Dominican commentator, regarded the *de unione* as an early work, which Thomas later repudiated. Louis Billot, the greatest of the Jesuit theologians in Rome from 1885 onwards, maintained that the text must simply be spurious. Anything was allowed, to head off the impression that Thomas contradicted himself.

Now, however, it is clear that the text is by Thomas and it is late in his career. How are the two texts to be reconciled?

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In one of these ferocious controversies that marked Catholic theology in the middle of last century, the Benedictine monk, Herman-Michel Diepen, opened up this apparent contradiction for debate. He contended that denying a proper, though of course not independent, act of existence corresponding to the humanity of Christ would amount to denying the humanity altogether. In effect, if he did not admit two existences in Christ, Thomas was crypto-monophysite. Accordingly, Thomists who took their stand on the one existence thesis in the *Summa* were effectively also monophysite in their sympathies.

Professor Brown takes us back to Thomas's own day, showing the diverging interpretations already then. He concludes with the neat solution offered by Hervé de Nedellec (ca. 1250/60-1323), an early defender of Aquinas's work, who eventually became Master of the Order of Preachers. In a nutshell, Hervé's thesis is that, if we take it at face value, what Thomas rejects in the *Summa* is the claim made by 'some' (unnamed) theologians that the human nature pertains to Christ 'not hypostatically or personally but accidentally' — and that's all that he does here. That claim, of course, amounts to saying that, with his human nature, he would acquire 'a new personal existence', *novum esse personale* — which would indeed saddle him with two acts of existence. For Thomas, however, it is better to say that 'with his human nature ... [Christ] acquires merely a new relation of his already existing personal existence to the human nature'. This new relation, however, is not nothing. In effect, Hervé equates it with the 'secondary existence', pertaining to the human nature, of which Thomas speaks in the *de unione* passage. Hervé assumes, that is to say, that, when ruling out the idea of the human nature as an accident, Thomas is not necessarily ruling out any act of existence whatsoever, pertaining to the human nature. In short, while it often used to be said, in the heyday of Thomism of the Strict Observance, that St Thomas 'semper dicit formaliter' — 'always speaks formally', that is to say, refutes or substantiates one thesis at a time — we can already learn from Hervé how to practise such cool hermeneutics. The unthinkable — that Thomas contradicted himself — is thus quietly removed. The way to do so, then, is to return to the original historical context.

Richard Newhauser documents the early Dominican picture of Jesus as 'the first Dominican' (!): quite unlike the image of Christ as the bridegroom of the soul, as in Cistercian mysticism, for example, or the cosmic Christ of neoplatonizing patristic literature, so Newhauser says, the early Dominican Christ is a preacher who leads a life of poverty and is charged with rousing sinners' hearts to repentance.

This image is confirmed by Ulrich Horst OP, who reviews the texts in which Thomas assumes that Christ is the paradigm of the Friar-Preacher. Aquinas seldom speaks explicitly about the Dominican

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Order and never once mentions St Dominic's name; yet he again and again, indirectly, especially in connection with the 'following of Christ', sketches a portrait of his ideal Dominican.

For the record, we may mention, among the many other interesting chapters in this splendid Notre Dame volume, 'Christ as Model of Sanctity in Humbert of Romans' (by Simon Tugwell OP), 'The Dominican presence in Middle English Literature' (Siegfried Wendel), and two on the English Dominican theologians, Richard Fishacre (R. James Long) and Robert Kilwardby (Richard Schenk OP).

III

One of the fundamental studies of the 'doctrine of analogy', by the Toulouse Dominican Bernard Montagnes, published in 1963, has now appeared in English: The *Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas* translated by E.M. Macierowski (Milwaukee: WI: Marquette University Press 2004).

Back in the 1960s there were then, as there still are, exponents of the thought of Aquinas for whom he never changed his mind, on any significant matter. As Montagnes shows, however, there was an interesting development, not so much as regards anything as explicit as a 'theory of analogy', something Aquinas did not have, compared with later Thomist theories of analogy; but in some of the related concepts.

Aquinas writes of two types of analogy: analogy of proportion, when the relation between two items is close to the relation between two other items (*a* is to *b* as *c* is to *d*); and analogy of order, when we use the same word for many of the items in a cluster of relationships around some focal item ('healthy' is the familiar example).

For Aquinas, so Montagnes insists, it was never simply a matter of analogical uses of *language*. However different from one another, all beings are held together by 'being'; and are thus in some way 'analogous'. This is metaphysics as well as semantics.

The Aristotelian notion of analogy by order was never separated in Aquinas's work from a basically Platonic doctrine of the participation of all beings in the primary instance from which they receive their being. This analogical unity depends on a bond of causality, for only if an effect is in some way like its cause may we reason from the effect to the cause. In the *Scriptum* on Peter Lombard's *Sentences,* which Aquinas composed in 1254-56, he refers to the creator as *causa efficiens exemplaris,* thus blocking 'exemplarity' and 'efficient cause' together — the significance of which is that the dependence of being on God looks dangerously like the likeness that an image bears to its original.

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This 'Platonizing' line Thomas came to think a threat to divine transcendence. In his later work, as in the *Summa Theologiae,* he sees God's efficient causality with regard to creatures as the communication of being, and, consistent with this, refuses to allow anything like a common form to be the basis of a likeness between God and creatures, even if such a form is received in an extremely diminished form. Now, maintaining that being is *act*, rather than form, and certainly thinking analogically, he is free to rethink the relation between efficiency and participation so as to protect divine transcendence as well as creaturely autonomy.

According to Montagnes, Duns Scotus accentuated Thomas's repudiation of the quasi-Platonizing exemplarity thesis, which is what brought about Cajetan's reaction in favour of it, distorting Aquinas's mature position in the opposite direction.

Montagnes traces this change in Aquinas's thought very persuasively. It touches on a central issue. As Thomas Gilby noted, in his introduction to Herbert McCabe's translation of the key questions in the *Summa Theologiae* (1. 12-13, Blackfriars 1964), Thomas 'has suffered the fate of being caricatured towards one extreme or the other'. In particular, 'while it may well be that the subject of analogy has been overblown by some of his followers he certainly did not leave it at the level of linguistics'. We must not 'minimise the metaphysical quality of his theology' — here by attempting 'to confine his use of analogy to a grammar of terms' (page xxxv).

In the appendix on analogy, which the translator wrote himself, we are informed that, in his opinion, 'too much has been made of St Thomas's alleged teaching on analogy' — 'For him, analogy is not a way of getting to know about God, nor is it a theory of the structure of the universe, it is a comment on our use of certain words. (page 106).

In short, the general editor of the Blackfriars *Summa* believed that Aquinas was trying — 'unconsciously' — 'to recover Plato from the Neo-Platonic mystics', while, 'as an Aristotelian', he laid stress on the 'ambiguous conditions in which [divine perfections] are discovered and the creaturely manner in which they are wrapped up' (pages xxxiii-xxxiv). For Gilby, there is much more to Thomas's use of analogical thinking than mere 'linguistics'. On the other hand, when he says that Aquinas, in appealing to analogy, 'sets himself to show how words can tell us something about what God really is' (page xxxiv), he seems to be flatly contradicted by McCabe: 'analogy is not a way of getting to know about God'. For McCabe, 'the possibility of speaking about God rests on the possibility of using words to "try to mean" more than we can understand by them' — 'it is to pass beyond language altogether' (page 51).

Passing beyond language altogether is a difficult idea. For Gilby, Thomas's appeal to the analogical use of certain concepts allows us to

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say things about God which are true: positive, informative, cataphatic. For McCabe, on the other hand, the principle must be taken seriously that, as regards the divine nature, it is 'what manner of being God is not, rather than what manner of being God is' that is all we may consider (cf. *Summa Theologiae* 1a.2 preface). According to this rule, then, all knowledge of God can only be negative, apophatic.

As usual a third way may be suggested. In his fundamental essay, 'Metaphor and ontology in Sacra Doctrina' (first published in *The Thomist*, 1974, reprinted in *Multiple Echo: Explorations in Theology* 1979), Cornelius Ernst cited Montagnes, agreed that the 'doctrine of analogy' had become 'an obsession on the part of commentators, who have extracted St Thomas's remarks on this topic and used them to pile up enormous metaphysical constructions: towers of Babel'; and goes on to situate the originality of his appeal to the Aristotelian notion of analogical thinking in the context of the revelation in Scriptural tradition of divine names, transmitted in particular by Pseudo-Dionysius (*Multiple Echo*: 68-9). Retrieving historical context is again, then, the way to go.

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