

THOMAS AQUINAS – CONSULTATION

Topic: Another World is Possible: Violence, Resistance and Transformation
Convener: Anna Bonta Moreland, Villanova University
Moderator: Eric Mabry, Christ the King Seminary
Presenters: Jeremy D. Wilkins and Ligita Ryliškytė, S.J.E., Boston College
Robert St. Hilaire, Niagara University
Joshua Furnal, Radbound University in Nijmegen

Wilkins and Ryliškytė’s paper, “Atonement as Attunement: The Cross, Conversion, and Politics,” explored the ramifications of two distinct interpretations or models of Christ’s cross on political theology. According to a “penal substitute” model of Christ’s cross, what is important about the cross is “His not ours,” and therefore the resulting political theology results in public allegiance as the focal point of discipleship and Christian culture. According to an “attunement” model of Christ’s cross, Christ bears a cross that is not His but rather ours, thus serving as a Head rather than a substitute. The resulting political theology is a joyful (or at least willing) acceptance of the cross by Christ’s members the church. Wilkins and Ryliškytė recognize that the models are generalizations and thus overly simplified. Yet the models are useful for examining the ramifications of Christology for political theology. Wilkins and Ryliškytė argue that the penal substitute model offers an account of justification and Christianization of the state that is extrinsic and nominalist. They rely in part on Aquinas’ thought to advocate an attunement model whereby conversion is not exemption from the penalties of sin but rather a transformation of suffering through love that results in political involvement of enduring redemptive suffering rather than succumbing to Machiavellian politics.

Robert St. Hilaire’s “Thomas Aquinas and the ‘Dionysian Principle:’ Reconciling the Diffusion of Divine Goodness with the Freedom of Creation” was a response to the charge against Thomas Aquinas by Norman Kretzman that the so-called “Dionysian Principle,” whereby goodness is inherently diffusive, renders God’s free creation of the world a necessary rather than free act. Although others have defended Aquinas on this charge, St. Hilaire’s tack is to establish that Aquinas does not hold this principle absolutely. He examines the rather limited references to the diffusion of goodness throughout Thomas’ *corpus*, and is careful to distinguish between how goodness diffuses among creatures, between God and creatures, and within the Godhead. St. Hilaire finds Thomas rather “agnostic” as to diffusion within the Godhead, but argues that goodness diffuses itself between creatures and between God and creatures only conditionally. In fact, he claims, previous defenders of Thomas overlook “just how conditionally and even tentatively Aquinas uses the Dionysian Principle.” That conditionality disproves Kretzman’s assertion of the necessity of God’s creative act.

Joshua Furnal’s “Another World is Possible: Cornelio Fabio’s Thomistic approach to Kierkegaard’s Theology of Creation,” engages in a true rarity for Thomistic scholars, namely, constructive dialogue with the work of Soren Kierkegaard. Given the common assumption that Thomas is an intellectualist and Kierkegaard a paradigmatic voluntarist, dialogue engaging the work of these two thinkers rarely gets off the ground. Furnal uses the work of twentieth century Italian Thomist Cornelio

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Fabrio to advance such a dialogue. He recounts Fabrio's articulation of the centrality of *creation ex nihilo* in Kierkegaard's thought, and concludes it "does not entail a competitive relationship between divine and human agency." Furnal goes on to identify two "important subterranean links" between Thomas and Kierkegaard: an endorsement of Aristotelian metaphysical realism and an emphasis on the freedom of the act of will in faith. Furnal recognizes his case constitutes a "minority report" as to the commonly presumed incompatibility of Kierkegaardian and Thomistic thought. But he suggests Fabrio is a "crucial dialogue partner" for a more "conciliatory reading" of the work of these two giant thinkers.

Brief discussion for eight to ten minutes followed each paper, with those comments and questions focusing on that particular paper. The final fifteen minutes was reserved for discussion of the papers in common. Lively discussion ensued during each of these periods. In fact, the quality and fervor of the discussion made it most evident that there is a strong appetite at CTSA for the highest-level technical scholarship on Thomas Aquinas. Not only were the three papers of outstanding quality, but the audience participation evidenced expertise in the thought of Aquinas that enabled the discussion to bear great fruit for the scholars present.

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