
Perhaps the only thing more difficult than attempting to write a brief review of a book on Aquinas is attempting to write a brief book on Aquinas. Geisler is to be commended for the way in which he sets forth the main tenets of Aquinas' philosophy without (1) losing the reader in unwarranted details (for an introduction) and (2) being too simplistic.

Geisler is also to be commended for, as an evangelical, taking Aquinas seriously. It is unfortunate that Aquinas has been too quickly ignored or dismissed in conservative Protestant circles without giving due credit both to his genius and his insights as he attempted to develop a Christian philosophy. (If I may offer an editorial comment relevant to Aquinas’ task, the development of a truly Christian philosophy is still, some seven centuries beyond Aquinas, a pressing need in the Reformed world today.) Geisler knows Aquinas and gives his readers a useful introduction to his thought.

The first chapter of the book seeks to set forth “The Contemporary Relevance of Aquinas” and begins with some of the typical evangelical criticisms that have been lodged against him. There is a significant error here that should be corrected if the book goes into a second printing. On p. 12, Geisler is surveying criticisms of Aquinas. In the second paragraph he purports to give a summary of Cornelius Van Til’s analysis of Aquinas, yet n. 2 refers us to an article by Gordon Clark (“Special Divine Revelation as Rational,” in Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible*) which, in the pages to which we are referred, contains none of the statements Geisler cites. This particular paragraph, then, is neither Clark on Aquinas nor is it Clark on Van Til on Aquinas. This is a technical oversight that should have been corrected before publication.

After lining up the anti-Thomists (Schaeffer, Van Til, Clark, Carnell, Henry, Holmes, and Nash) and the pro-Thomists (Gerstner, Sproul, Hackett, A. Vos, and C. S. Lewis), Geisler asserts that there is an irony involved in evangelical criticism of Aquinas because the “use of reason to argue for one’s view of God would warm the heart of the Angelic Doctor” (p. 15). There is a typical and erroneous notion implied in this “irony” that those who oppose Aquinas oppose also the use of reason in Christian thought. Such notions betray more about the author than about his intended subjects. “As for myself,” says Geisler, “I gladly confess that the highest compliment that could be paid to me as a Christian philosopher, apologist, and theologian is to call me ‘Thomistic’” (p. 14).

Before moving to a more general survey of the book, of particular interest to those of us who follow in Van Til’s apologetical footsteps is Geisler’s comparison of Van Til and Aquinas. Interestingly, Geisler wants to say that Van Til’s apologetic is, as a matter of fact, Thomistic in crucial ways: “Aquinas would agree: (1) that speaking in the realm of being (metaphysics), logic is dependent on God and not God on logic, (2) that the existence of God is ontologically necessary, (3) that without God nothing could be either known or proven to be true, (4) that the basis of Christian truth is neither reason nor experience but the authority of God as expressed in Scripture, and (5) that there is revelation of God in nature that depraved natural humankind is willfully repressing.” The problem, according to Geisler, is that Van Til “confuses the order of being and the order of knowing.” While Van Til and Aquinas “both agree ontologically that all truth depends on God, Van Til fail[12] to fully
appreciate the fact that finite people must ask epistemologically how we know this to be a fact. . . . What Aquinas would ask of Van Til's apologetical approach is this: How do you know the Christian position is true? If Van Til answers, 'Because it is the only truly rational view,' then perhaps the medieval saint would reply, 'That is exactly what I believe. Welcome, dear brother, to the club of red-blooded rational theists'" (p. 18).

This is an interesting scenario that exhibits, it seems, a misunderstanding both of Van Til and Aquinas in a crucial area of their respective positions. Van Til is a Reformed apologist. As such, he was a master of the transcendental approach in apologetics. He could not be content simply to compare one proposition (just to use an example) to a similar proposition in hopes of finding the maximum amount of agreement among propositions. This sort of analysis would have never produced his penetrating criticisms, e.g., of Barth. Van Til would ask such questions as: Given Aquinas' insistence that the existence of God is not self-evident but can and must be demonstrated to the unbeliever, what are the presuppositions behind such an assertion and which make the assertion possible? At this point, Van Til and Aquinas would part ways. Aquinas, in his apologetical method, could never see clear to give the sense of deity in man the full biblical weight it deserves. The very problem that Aquinas' method faces is the inability for one to bring together his metaphysics with his epistemology. But more on that below.

One more particular point. Geisler affirms what others (e.g., Plantinga, Wolters-torff) have criticized about Aquinas, i.e., that "[w]e must possess good reasons and evidence for believing that it is this God we face before we believe in him for his own sake" (p. 21). Thus, Aquinas is set squarely, by Geisler, in the foundationalist tradition.

After the initial chapter dealing with the contemporary relevance of Aquinas, there is helpful material both on the life of Aquinas and on an overview of his thought (chaps. 2–3). In Geisler's discussion of Aquinas on "The Bible" (chap. 5), the author insists (as might be expected) that Aquinas was a hermeneutical literalist, though Geisler wants to affirm that "the literal meaning is what God meant by it through human authors" (p. 53). Aside from these chapters and, perhaps, chap. 12 on law and morality, the rest of the book wants to deal specifically with Aquinas' Christian philosophy (chaps. 5–11: faith and reason, the first principles of knowledge, reality, God's nature, God's existence, religious language, and evil).

Geisler summarizes Aquinas' philosophy on p. 39, "The heart of Aquinas' metaphysics is the real distinction between essence (what something is) and existence (that which is) in all finite beings." When Geisler later goes on to deal with the theistic proofs, Aquinas' "Five Ways," he affirms, rightly, that the presupposition behind the theistic proofs is Aquinas' distinction between existence and essence. Every being whose essence is not to exist, must be caused by another (p. 122). "Behind his famous 'Five Ways' is one less famous metaphysical proof that has withstood the assaults of the critics down through the centuries" (p. 135). Though Geisler claims, in his Epilogue, not to "buy into" Aquinas' ideas "lock, stock and barrel," the primary areas of disagreement between Geisler and Aquinas seem to deal with theology and not philosophy: "I certainly disagree with his view on transubstantiation. I also disagree with his acceptance of the Apocrypha as part of the canon of Scripture. I also disagree with his acceptance of the divine authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Likewise, I disagree with his view of infant baptism" (p. 177). And on the list goes.
Whereas one who has yet to read Aquinas himself could greatly benefit from Geisler's "frameworking" of Thomistic philosophy, any "Reformed Appraisal" of Geisler's "Evangelical Appraisal" would have to be a bit more cautious. It is true that Aquinas' metaphysical position can best be summarized by his appeal to the distinction between essence and existence. It is also true that such a distinction lies behind Thomas' theistic proofs. But where will such a metaphysic lead us? Invariably, it will lead either to a monism which Aquinas himself rejected (pp. 91ff.) or to an absolute separation between God and man such that the twain can never meet.

Because Aquinas asserts that existence is a transcendental notion, it by definition applies to all that is, to all that exists. Yet all finite things exist only to the degree that their respective essences permit. Man participates in the transcendental notion of existence only to the degree that his humanity permits. Angels are limited by their essences, as are dogs, rocks and plants. God, on the other hand, is unlimited. God is Pure Act. Only in God are essence and existence one so that it is of the very essence of God to exist.

How then does the existence of God relate to the existence of everything else? Aquinas would of course affirm that God's existence is the only Necessary Existence and that all contingent beings directly depend on him (pp. 112, 120ff.), which is of course true. The problem, however, is that Aquinas' metaphysical distinction will not allow for the biblically delineated relationship God has to his creation. If "being" is a transcendental notion and inclusive of all that exists, then the being of man must be a part of the being of God, since both exist, and thus we are left with a monism, or better a panentheism such that man is absorbed in God's unlimited being, though still essentially limited himself. Since this would not satisfy Aquinas, we could say, with Aquinas, that man's being is related to God's Being by analogy (p. 140). Aquinas posited the analogy of proper proportionality for the relation that obtains between essences and beings, but, because in God, his essence is his being, Aquinas needed another type of analogy in order to explain such a relation, analogy of intrinsic attribution (see pp. 142ff.). Yet both analogies have no way of bringing the "Being" of God into fruitful (read, biblical) relation with the being of man and the world. In Aquinas' notion of being as a transcendental notion, we have only two options. If, for example, the transcendental notion of being applies to all that is created, including man (since in all that is created is the combination of essence and existence), then God's "Being" is quite apart from the transcendental notion of being and thus there is pure equivocation between the two "beings." The Christian, of course, affirms that the being of God is distinct from the being of creation. The point here is that Aquinas is not able to account for such a biblical distinction. If, to use our second option, the transcendental notion of being includes both God and man (a notion with which Aquinas would agree and thus formulate his principle of participation), then man is of a piece with God, not simply by way of dependent or contingent being but by way of metaphysical participation, and pure univocism results. The existence of man and God is identical, only the essences individuate, and thus the incomprehensibility of God is compromised.

Such an analysis is not included in Geisler's "Evangelical Appraisal." It would appear that such an analysis could never appear in any evangelical appraisal unless and until such an appraisal takes seriously the necessary condition of beginning all thought, in metaphysics as well as in epistemology, with the presupposition of the God of Christian theism. Aquinas' genius, as well as Geisler's appraisal, would have been
invaluable in such a case. As it stands, the book is quite helpful for introductory material on Aquinas. It is less helpful if what is hoped for is a Christian critique.

K. SCOTT OLIPHINT

Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia


Libraries and specialists in sixteenth-century Reformed theology will want a copy of this invaluable resource. The price will deter all others, acid-free paper and excellent binding notwithstanding.

Since the mid-nineteen-fifties, Vermigli studies have gained pace, spearheaded by such as Joseph C. McLelland, Marvin Anderson, and the coauthors of this volume. All seems set now to go into overdrive. This is welcome, for Vermigli (1500–62), also known as Peter Martyr, is an important figure who expresses with great clarity the teaching of the early stage of Reformed theology. This volume has been upwards of twenty years in the making, the work having been begun by Kingdon in the mid-sixties and continued by Donnelly. This is a very considerable expansion of Donnelly's appendix, "Short Title Bibliography of the Works of Peter Martyr Vermigli," in Kingdon's The Political Thought of Peter Martyr Vermigli: Selected Texts and Commentary (Genève: Droz, 1980).

Many of Vermigli's works were published posthumously. Most of the corpus are biblical commentaries, the first of which was published after his death. This poses problems of classification: should the listing be based on the date of composition or publication? Neither alternative is entirely satisfactory. Donnelly and Kingdon choose a chronological listing in the order of first editions. The user will need to bear in mind that the dates of composition do not bear a necessary connection to the publication date.

The material is arranged in three groups: major works, minor works, and partial works or extracts. At the back is also a register of Martyr's correspondence compiled by Marvin Anderson, an expansion on Anderson's earlier register of 1975. For each major work there is a photograph of the title page of the edition, a short title, information about the place and date of publication, and the publisher. Then follow details of the format of the volume (folio, quarto, and so on), its approximate measurement in centimeters, the number of pages or folios, and the gatherings. Prefatory letters are listed, together with the indexes (whether at the beginning or end). The editors then supply details of the time, place, and circumstances of the publication of the first edition, followed by a list (for the biblical commentaries) of loci communes. Beneath this apparatus is a list of libraries that have the specific edition. Privately owned copies and microform copies are not included. Part of the problem of including copies owned by private individuals is the likelihood of these changing hands without public knowledge. On occasions, the editors were unable to determine for certain whether a particular copy may not be in microform. They note that the library of the University of Madison-Wisconsin has almost all Vermigli's major works in microform.