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*After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism.* By Fergus Kerr. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. ISBN 0-631-21312-0. Pp. viii + 254.

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Thomas Aquinas is back in the spotlight. A stream of books on him have come out in the past several years. One notable book among these is *Truth in Aquinas* (2001) by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock. Another is this one by Fergus Kerr, the Regent of Blackfriars Hall, Oxford.

From the title you may expect an historical theology covering the dozens of Thomisms over the past seven centuries, but instead the book is an exploration of a number of important themes from the Thomas corpus and interpretations of them by twentieth-century theologians such as Balthasar, Barth, Jenson, Gunton, deLubac, Maritain and many others. In addition, Kerr also explores how Thomas is understood in light of twentieth-century developments in philosophy.

The purpose of *After Aquinas* is to "highlight work which opens alternatives to the standard account" of Thomas's own work (vi). The "standard account" is Leonine Thomism, a version inaugurated by Pope Leo XIII in 1879 in reaction to Cartesian/ Kantian philosophy and which was influential in Roman Catholic seminaries until the 1960s. But according to Kerr Leonine Thomism has left us with a distorted image of Thomas Aquinas, especially in the English-speaking world. The image is of a theologian deeply influenced by Aristotelian metaphysics and natural law, who leaned heavily on reason to prove the existence of a God with "little if anything to do with the God of Christian revelation" (vi).

The book has twelve chapters, including a biographical introduction and a conclusion. The ten chapters that form the body of the work roughly follow a format that includes a standard interpretation of a theme in Leonine Thomism, non-standard interpretations from modern theologians, Kerr's own reading of the theme in its original context and his concluding remarks. All this helps to bring Thomas's ideas to life, as topics of lively and enduring debates rather than the stuff of "sawdust Thomism."

The first half of the book covers philosophical themes, with chapters on epistemology, natural theology, proofs for God's existence, ontology and natural law. Kerr's aim in this section is to destabilize the standard view which portrays Thomas as a proto-modern philosopher. Instead, it is argued that Thomas was mainly a pre-modern philosopher who took for granted the existence of God and the intelligibility of reality, as his philosophy was moored in the Church Fathers, the Bible and the philosophy of antiquity.

The other half of the book deals with explicitly theological subjects. This is one of the book's distinctive features. Many English books and anthologies devoted to Thomas Aquinas reflect the "standard account" of him and thus give

little or no attention to such subjects as Christ and the Trinity. *After Aquinas*, by contrast, contains chapters on theological ethics, grace, deification, and Christ and God in the *Summa Theologiae*. In his book Kerr not only reckons with the Leonine version of Thomism which subordinated Thomas the theologian to Thomas the philosopher but also with the post-Barthian critics of Thomas. They see the subordinate role of theology in modern Thomism as a consequence of Thomas's subordination of Christ and the Trinity to the abstract God of a naturalistic metaphysics. He concedes that Thomas's approach to Christological questions "comes much later in the *Summa Theologiae* than modern theologians would usually prefer" (162), but in his defence rightly points out that while the Christ event is not the starting point in the *Summa* it is nonetheless the "consummation of his theology" (162) and an "effect of God's self-diffusive goodness" (189).

This "effect of God's self-diffusive goodness" provides a lead-in for Kerr's penetrating examination of the concept of God in the *Summa Theologiae*, the subject of the last and longest chapter in the book. While the received accounts of Thomas's doctrine of God describe a static, monistic entity, Kerr insists justifiably that Thomas's view of God could not be more different. Centuries before Barth arrived at a similar conception, Thomas conceived God to be "more like an event than an entity" (190). Moreover, this event is none other than the God of Christian revelation, for it is an event that originates in the Trinity—the "triad of action-based subsisting relations" (200).

If other books on Thomas fail to pique your interest in him and the contemporary significance of his thought, this book should succeed. The author is immensely learned and manoeuvres deftly through the rather arcane world of Thomism, the deep waters of Continental and Anglo-American philosophy, and post-Barthian theology. And though the contents are often weighty and complex, they are presented with verve, clarity and conciseness.

Yet while *After Aquinas* provides a fresh introduction to Thomas and his influence in the twentieth century, it may leave one bewildered by the myriad and often incommensurable interpretations of the writings of this great thinker. Kerr believes we have to live with this enormous and strange diversity. While some interpretations are surely flawed, the fact remains that the breadth and ambiguity of Thomas's writings invite a broad range of divergent interpretations, emphasising either the theological or philosophical side of his thought.

This is not a hefty tome and, as the author admits, "more might be said" (207). Certainly one might wish for more on that current version of Thomism which highlights the patristic, Neoplatonic influences on the Angelic Doctor, as it is one that Kerr clearly has sympathy for.