



Reviews

DARK PASSAGES OF THE BIBLE: ENGAGING SCRIPTURE WITH BENEDICT XVI AND THOMAS AQUINAS by Matthew J. Ramage, *Catholic University of America Press*, Washington, DC, 2013, pp. viii + 303, \$ 39.95, pbk

The excellent document *Verbum Domini* (2010) issued by Benedict XVI is the inspiration for the title of this book. The document speaks at # 42 of the 'dark passages' of the bible where God appears to be condoning or even commanding immoral acts. *Verbum Domini* states that such passages are problematic for believers, but should not be avoided or glossed over. They require expertise and a certain reverent approach to the bible to understand them. This sentiment itself echoes Vatican II's *Dei verbum* of 1965 which, while reaffirming the inerrancy of scripture, also says that there is much in the Old Testament which is 'imperfect and provisional'. Both documents assert that historical-critical tools can be used to help analyse and make sense of such imperfect and provisional matters, remembering that, as Pope Benedict points out, God's revelation of himself was progressive and carried out over successive epochs.

The main purpose of this book is to carry forward the suggestions of *Dei verbum* and *Verbum Domini* in a more systematic way. This is to help believers appreciate the bible and to be less alarmed by the 'dark passages', and to provide a firm basis for apologetic presentations of the sacred scriptures; or at least a sound defence when the 'dark passages' are used to discredit christianity. Dr. Ramage (who hosts the blog truthincharity.com) presents three methods of doing this, and three key areas where these methods can be applied. The three approaches he describes are designated respectively as 'Method A, B and C'. He characterizes Method A as the classical, patristic/medieval approach which either cheerfully accepts some of the dark passages at face value or spiritualises them. An example of cheerful acceptance would be the fact that some ancient writers argued that, strictly speaking, God could command the death of idolaters, not only because they had sinned, but also because the whole of creation belongs to God anyway, and is his to dispose of as he wills. Thus God could also ask for the death of the innocent Isaac with no injustice on God's part. The second strategy was that if a passage is morally repugnant, it could be given a spiritual gloss. Thus taking the children of the Babylonians and dashing their heads on the rocks should really be taken as an exhortation to take the beginnings of our sinful desires and firmly extinguish them. Dr. Ramage insists that there is much of great value in the patristic/medieval approach, especially the multi-dimensional view of scripture that the fourfold approach affords. However, in terms of the dark passages, he finds some Method A attempts at exegesis unconvincing or unacceptable.

Method B, the modern historical-critical approach also has strengths and weaknesses. It has been used in a destructive way which ends up undermining the faith of the Church. Ramage is absolutely correct here. Properly used however, as a tool, rather than an end in itself, it can help illuminate the way in which some of the material itself is 'imperfect and provisional' in the light of the fullness of revelation.

Method C is a combination of the two previous methods, urged by Benedict XVI. Such a method would therefore be profoundly ecclesial and integrated with

the rule of faith, while at the same time prudently using the fruits of modern critical scholarship. The result should be something that is both theologically authentic, intellectually rigorous and able to give a good account of itself in the face of modern scepticism.

The three main areas where Ramage thinks that the Method C approach could be most pertinent are the development of doctrine throughout the scriptures (was it the same faith being revealed all the time?), and the nature of God linked with the nature of good and evil, and the biblical teaching on the afterlife. For example, the sacred scriptures while stressing the uniqueness and unity of God, also appear to refer to God as one being among other 'gods'. Again, God is said to create and cherish life, but is seen to be demanding the death of various people or peoples. Modern research can help us see that it is possible that the early Israelite people did believe in a range of divine beings, but gradually come to realise that there is only one transcendent God.

One definite strength of the book is the attention it gives to a somewhat neglected work by the Dominican scholars Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration* (ET *Desclée*, 1961, trans. Avery Dulles SJ and Thomas Sheridan SJ). This is a commentary and exploration of *Summa Theologiae* II-II questions 171–178. St Thomas's subtle analysis of the different formalities of prophetic and scriptural inspiration helps not only to rescue the prophets from being mere social reformers, but also helps us see that the supernatural impulse which stimulates the will of the sacred writers operates primarily in the field of practical judgement. This second fact greatly influences the presentation of the sacred books themselves. Ramage is certainly to be thanked for bringing Synave and Benoit's work back into focus.

Dr. Ramage's work is written in a very lively and accessible style, and shows obvious enthusiasm for the work of Benedict XVI and St Thomas, and how their insights and exhortations can help us move beyond any perceived impasse between Method A and Method B approaches to sacred scripture. Certainly, from the earliest times the Church has always used Method A tools to appreciate better the depths of Sacred Scripture, but both the perceived and actual rifts between the biblical theology academy and the living interpretation of the scriptures is certainly a pressing issue within the Catholic Church. This is particularly the case when irresponsible and misunderstood use of Method B is popularised through sermons and talks. The book would be an excellent introduction to the whole subject for, for example, seminarians, and would also help those critical of the sacred scriptures to appreciate that the church's tradition has always recognised the obscure and sometimes alarming nature of the sacred texts.

Ramage's work also leads us to probe the dark passages further. If God really is utterly transcendent it would surely be surprising, and indeed disappointing, if there were no 'dark passages' in sacred scripture. If God, as utterly transcendent, attempts to communicate himself to us, without overriding or short circuiting our own capacities, then we are going to be confronted with our own inability to apprehend that transcendence. Also, St Thomas's expression of the traditional teaching that, after the Fall, certain people had *explicit* faith in the coming redemption by Christ, is another dimension that could be studied with great profit.

NEIL FERGUSON OP

THE FATHER'S WILL: CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION AND THE GOODNESS OF GOD
by Nicholas E. Lombardo OP, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. xi + 270, £ 65.00, hbk*

This is a book about the theology of ransom and its claim to be taken seriously in an age when the 'rehabilitation of the Devil's ransom argument' may seem like uphill work. It begins with an introduction giving a brief historical survey of the history of the problem, followed by Part I's five chapters setting out clearly the *Philosophical prolegomena*: 'intending and willing'; 'moral value and moral obligation'; 'double effect reasoning'; 'the ethics of self sacrifice' and 'God's will, moral evil and the crucifying of Christ'.

Part II looks at the 'New Testament evidence', in two chapters on 'Jesus' attitude towards his death' and 'The crucifixion in God's plan of salvation' respectively. The author argues in the first of these that the gospels are consistent in portraying Jesus as knowing and accepting that he will die and regarding his death as fulfilling his mission. In the second he sets out the case for saying that 'God gave Jesus over to his death, and in doing so obtained something for our benefit and salvation'.

The culminating chapters of the book come in Part III, with its analyses of Anselm's argument in the *Cur Deus Homo* and Peter Abelard's response, and its substantial final chapter 'The Devil's Ransom revisited'. This chapter argues that the exchange between Anselm and Abelard shifted the focus away from the 'ransom' theories which had been the familiar stuff of the patristic debate. The reader is taken in detail through the varieties of the patristic arguments of the millennium before Anselm and Abelard took their opposing positions. The 'ransom' theories, as Anselm realised, depend both on a strong theory of Satan and an acceptance of his 'Devil's rights' and power over sinful humanity. Dr. Lombardo's conclusion is that the 'Devil's ransom' 'interpretation of the Crucifixion' deserves to be rescued from its 'eclipse' and a 'warm welcome back into the fold of mainstream theological reflection'. It gives a 'role to evil' in the drama.

This is asking a good deal, but the book makes its case throughout with care, erudition, thoroughness, modesty, clarity and elegance. And even for those who may not wish to accept its conclusions it offers a tempting invitation to revisit many corners of the discussion of this central question of the purpose and achievement of the Crucifixion.

G. R. EVANS

OBEYING THE TRUTH: DISCRETION IN THE SPIRITUAL WRITINGS OF SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA by Grazia Mangano Ragazzi, *Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, pp. xvi + 197, \$ 45.00, hbk*

Dr Grazia Mangano Ragazzi is an independent researcher with an international academic formation in theology. She brings to this very accomplished study of St Catherine of Siena (c.1347–1380) the kind of passionate engagement that characterised the saint herself. The quip, that mysticism begins with mist and ends in schism, is not applicable to Catherine, and from Mangano Ragazzi's book we can see why in scholarly detail. Catherine's works are available in modern English translation by Suzanne Noffke, and now we also have an up-to-date and reliable point of entry in English into the life and thought of a most remarkable saint with the focus on a single, pivotal term.

This term is '*discrezione*', translated as 'discretion', and it is taken as basically synonymous with 'prudence'. Mangano Ragazzi makes clear from the outset that today's widespread understanding of these two English terms has been so devalued that far from signifying an attitude of courageous witness to the truth they have largely come to mean timidity if not outright connivance in sin. The notion of 'vericide', the murder of a word or at least of its original or nobler meaning, is adapted from C.S.Lewis and used vigorously. Discretion is also understood as a wider and more complex term than discernment.

Minimal but sufficient biographical information is provided, more attention being paid to the still vexed, although of paramount importance, questions of Catherine's 'authorship' of the writings attributed to her: the *Dialogue*, the *Letters* and the *Prayers*. The research involved is subtle and substantial. Whether engaged in textual criticism or in analysing the meaning and role of discretion (Parts I and II), these three sets of writings are examined in turn and considered as a whole. The extent to which Catherine could read and write remains unsettled, and we cannot go back to anything written by Catherine herself. The degree of interpolation and interpretation attributable to her disciples and amanuenses has to be a constant concern, yet Mangano Ragazzi repeatedly and for good reasons argues in favour of reliability and coherence. We can get a sense of the divergences among scholars simply by noticing that when it comes to *Letter* 273 (the dramatic account of an execution), Fawtier rejected its authenticity whilst Dupré Theseider thought there was nothing imaginable that is more authentically Catherinian.

The fourth and last Part offers a synthesis by considering discretion as the bond between mysticism and morality. In it, a concluding and illuminating definition is offered. For Catherine, discretion may be defined as knowledge and love of the truth *in action*, namely that knowledge and love of the truth (which is God) that leads concretely to virtuous action. It is the practice of discretion that leads us to dwell in divine grace, to unify the human faculties of memory, intellect and will, and to advance in charity. Not surprisingly then, the New Testament passage most frequently quoted in Catherine's writings is *John* 14:6 where Christ reveals himself as the way, the truth and the life. Mangano Ragazzi might have given a more prolonged and systematic discussion of Catherine's knowledge and use of the bible. The *Letters* of Catherine, some 382 in total, can be read as evidence of her intense desire to discover the truth and apply it to real life (she was very Dominican in this). There are letters to popes, cardinals, religious, sovereigns, politicians, relatives, friends, acquaintances and some to people she had never met.

In essence, Mangano Ragazzi proposes three fundamental aspects of discretion for Catherine: its central place in her writings, its originality, and the role it plays in integrating the unity of her teaching. The argued-for centrality needs and receives sustained attention based on chapters 9–11 of the *Dialogue* and *Letter* 213 (to another *mantellata*, Daniella d'Orvieto) yet is not limited to those fundamental texts. The mention of originality needs to be assessed in terms of the survey offered in Part III of this book, which consists of a comparison in historical perspective. Here are traced the origins of discretion for Catherine: from the tradition of *discretio* and prudence to the synthesis of Aquinas and the reflections by some of Catherine's contemporaries. Comparison with St Thomas Aquinas is of course necessary although not straightforward, and Thomas Deman is quoted approvingly as saying that Aquinas entrusts prudence with the task of perpetuating the constant and venerable tradition that discretion had carried through to him. It is improbable that this doctrinal richness resulted from Catherine's direct access to the texts, and so its mediation must have come mainly through her way of life and contacts. Spiritual affinities must not be ruled out, and Catherine believed that in Aquinas ('*il glorioso Tomaso*') divine Truth involved supernatural light

and knowledge infused by grace. Thus Aquinas learned more through prayer than through human study.

In terms of the influence on Catherine of the Dominican milieu in particular, attention should be paid to Domenico Cavalca's *The Mirror of the Cross*, a small book written in the vernacular and with a wide dissemination. Mangano Ragazzi maintains, however, that Cavalca could not have been more than a minor source of Catherine's exposition of discretion. Something Kenelm Foster wrote in his insightful introduction to *I, Catherine* (1980, in collaboration with Mary John Ronayne) is apposite; in a certain sense, all theology worthy of the name is in tendency 'mystical'. As for mystics in the more usual sense of the term, whether their contact with God will give rise to clearly articulated doctrine will depend, humanly speaking, on their natural gifts and circumstances. For Mangano Ragazzi, Catherine's thought seems to depend on a unique form of inspiration, expressed in all her writings and giving them a unified character.

According to Giuliana Cavallini, and how great a debt is owed to her scholarship, there is perhaps no virtue which is so characteristic of Catherine as discretion. It is a characteristic feature of Catherine because of the prominence she attributes to it and the great extent to which she practised it. Mangano Ragazzi has now enabled us to see this. One can only conclude that, in Catherine, Christian mysticism, doctrinal truth and sustained action interpenetrated to an extraordinary and saintly degree.

ROBERT OMBRES OP

THE FRIARS IN IRELAND 1224–1540 by Colmán Ó Clabaigh OSB, *Four Courts Press*, Dublin, 2012, pp. xxv + 389, € 29.95, pbk

It is somewhat unfortunate that the most popular image of friars associated with medieval Ireland is the quartet beset by devils in a copy of an anti-mendicant tract by Richard Fitzralph, archbishop of Armagh, now in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. These representatives of the four orders feature on the cover of this book. But they are put in their place by Colmán Ó Clabaigh, who demonstrates that the mendicants made an invaluable contribution to the religious vitality of late medieval Ireland. The depth of Dom Colmán's knowledge and the sensible and measured tone of his observations make this, the first general survey of the friars in medieval Ireland, a valuable contribution to mendicant studies.

Unlike the friars in England, who with the exception of the Austin Friars, have clear foundation narratives, the coming of the friars to Ireland is beset with obscurity. Although post-medieval accounts claimed independent links between Ireland and SS. Francis and Dominic themselves, contemporary evidence points to prominent Anglo-Irish families as the chief promoters of the friars. Very often they were continuing connections first established in England. For example, William Marshal, the most likely founder of the first Dominican house in Ireland, at Dublin in 1224, was already a benefactor to the London Blackfriars. He was certainly the founder of the Black Abbey, Kilkenny, which remarkably survives to serve as a Dominican church. Similarly, the Carmelites in Kildare were founded by William de Vesey, a member of a family which had established one of the earliest English Carmelite houses. The spread of the friars in Ireland, well illustrated by a series of maps in the book, is remarkable. Houses were even being founded in the difficult years immediately after the Black Death. Later foundations are mainly in the West, and are typically associated for mutual protection with the strongholds of

local chieftains. An interesting example of the moderating effect of the mendicant presence is provided in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, which records that the Donegal chieftain Tuathal Balbh O'Gallagher (d. 1541) never killed anyone in his military career, having been influenced by a sermon on the sanctity of life preached by a Donegal Franciscan. Another notable feature of the development of the mendicant orders in Ireland is the way in which observant movements within all four orders took firm root in the country.

A good measure of the importance of the mendicants in Irish ecclesiastical life is the high proportion of friars who were appointed to Irish sees from the thirteenth century onwards. These bishops are often to be found in England, performing essential episcopal functions in lieu of English diocesan bishops busy in royal service. The friars were significant conduits of continental scholarship, in particular, as Aisling Byrne has demonstrated recently, by translating such works into Gaelic. An interesting episode, first studied by Aubrey Gwynn, was Archbishop Alexander Bicknor's foundation of a university at Dublin in 1320, with staff drawn from the Dominican and Franciscan *studia* in the city. This came to nothing, as did Pope Sixtus IV's approval in 1475 of the foundation of a university at the request of the superiors of the four mendicant orders in Ireland.

With a few glorious exceptions such as the Norwich Blackfriars, the physical presence of English medieval friaries has often been reduced to a street name, a featureless fragment of walling, or foundations revealed during the construction of a shopping centre. Ireland, on the other hand, is rich in mendicant architecture. Apart from the Black Abbey at Kilkenny and the Augustinian friary church at Adare, now in the hands of the Church of Ireland, there are numerous friaries which, though roofless, survive in such good state that their function can be studied with ease, as Dom Colmán demonstrates in his well-illustrated account of the friars' lifestyle. Particularly fine examples are the Dominican friary at Sligo, which retains its high altar and cloister, and the Franciscan friary at Quin. Despite the tribulations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, several remarkable treasures survive, often still in fraternal care. One of the most moving is Our Lady of Graces, a thirteenth-century French ivory devotional image, worn with kisses, which was originally in the Dominican friary at Youghal and is now in the care of their *confrères* at Cork. Liturgical manuscripts have fared badly, but there are exceptions, such as the Kilcormac Missal and Breviary. The former, although written in 1458, has been shown to have been copied from a pre-1339 exemplar. More up-to-date was the library of the Youghal Franciscans, of which we possess a 1523 catalogue. Of the 150 books, among which works of use to preachers predominate, there are several recent printed works, including a *Summa vocabulorum cum expositione in lingua teutonica*, presumably picked up by friars during their continental studies.

The friars' reaction to the Reformation and the Dissolution was as varied in Ireland as in England. There were some sympathizers with Lutheranism, most notably the Augustinian Richard Nangle, who worked in concert with the English Augustinian George Browne, archbishop of Dublin and chief agent of the Crown in the official dissolution of the Irish friaries. But more significant was the part played by Irish friars in organizing resistance to the Reformation. Friars gave their support to the religiously-motivated Kildare rebellion, and an Irish Dominican, Ulick de Burgh, was hanged in the aftermath of the Pilgrimage of Grace. It may well be that the strong presence of the friars was one of the reasons for the survival of Catholicism in Ireland. Wedded to poverty rather than property they were able to relocate where necessary to Gaelic territories beyond the Pale. Some communities managed to survive thanks to local patrons. The Dominicans remained at Limerick, Kilmallock, Tralee and Youghal for much of the sixteenth century under the protection of the earls of Desmond. Most remarkable of all is the case of Quin, in MacNamara territory, where the Franciscans retained some

sort of presence until 1820. When the Franciscan Donatus Mooney reflected on the reasons for the survival of the friars, the most potent reason he gave was divine providence. His words deserve to be considered by present-day Irish clergy: 'Nor have we any doubt that God will sustain us, and give us increase from day to day as long as we shall be useful labourers in his vineyard of Ireland, living purely and devoutly according to our state'.

NICHOLAS ROGERS

ERIC GILL: WORK IS SACRED edited by Martin John Broadley, *Catholic Archives Society*, in association with Koinonia Press, Manchester, 2013, pp. ix + 92, £15.00, pbk

Since the publication of Fiona MacCarthy's biography in 1989, any discussion of the work of Eric Gill inevitably falls under the shadow of the sexual revelations disclosed there by the author's close examination of his private diaries. As Conrad Pepler OP (son of Hilary Pepler, co-founder with Gill of the community at Ditchling) remarked in a review of MacCarthy's book in this journal in April 1989, the life revealed poses a 'glaring challenge to what society even in the second half of the twentieth century takes for granted as established human and religious behaviour'.

The occasion for the present short but engaging volume of essays is the recent centenary in 2013 of Gill's conversion to Catholicism. As such, it is faced at the outset by that challenge and by the apparent tension between what an earlier biographer (Malcolm Yorke, *Eric Gill Man of Flesh and Spirit*, 1981) identified as the 'two great moving forces' in Gill's life, namely, religion and sex.

Yet as the editor Martin Broadley explains in his comprehensive Introduction, the intention is to limit the present exploration to 'the significance of Gill's faith and how it influenced and fashioned his work and thought'. Analysis of Gill's 'sexual antinomianism' lies beyond its scope. The response to the challenge here is, in other words, one of apparent evasion, the separation of the life from the work, the sex from the religion. Yet the eight tantalising essays that follow, of varying length and ambition, arranged in chronological order and interspersed with more than thirty illustrations, nonetheless captivate.

The chronological span ranges from Gill's early years in Chichester between 1897 and 1899, up to his design of the church of St Peter's Goreslton, Norfolk shortly before his death in 1940. As befits a publication of the Catholic Archives Society, each essay is firmly, and admirably, rooted in primary archival sources, notably those held by West Sussex Record Office, the newly re-opened Ditchling Museum of Art+Craft, the University of Notre Dame in the USA, Westminster Cathedral and the Clark Memorial Library at the University of Los Angeles, including some 'hitherto unknown or unexplored'.

The first two essays effectively set the scene. Timothy McCann's essay on Chichester, although dealing with the period before Gill's conversion to Catholicism in 1913, nevertheless evokes the importance for Gill of Chichester as a model of humane urban environment, reflecting the 'beauty and order of a Roman city'. Joe Cribb (Co-ordinator of the Eric Gill Society) then offers a reflection on a single letter from Gill to Everard Meynell (dated 18 January 1912) seeking 'information, instruction and enlightenment' on Catholicism.

As Cribb points out, it was about the same time that Gill, briefly working in association with Jacob Epstein, carved a large relief, *Ecstasy*, which was to be the model and inspiration for his *Divine Lovers*. The latter visualizes Christ as husband of the Church his bride, and so represents the concept which Cribb recognises as central to Gill's Catholic faith and which reveals 'the religious thought behind his otherwise startling sculptures and engravings'.

It was in fact Gill's brief association with Epstein that framed the Royal Academy exhibition *Wild Thing* in 2009–10, which demonstrated how Epstein, Gill and Gaudier-Brzeska became pioneers of a modern British sculpture whose sexual explicitness and boldness of form shocked contemporary viewers. In the case of Gill, the aftershock reached the Catholic hierarchy and the English Dominican Province (of which Gill had become a lay member in 1913) in especially acute form. In answer to the question posed by the present volume, 'How far did Gill's faith influence his work?', their contemporary answer was, 'Clearly, not enough'.

The subsequent chapters ostensibly redress the balance in favour of a more positive estimation of the 'influence' of Gill's Catholic faith, with insightful essays by John Sherman, Naomi Billingsley, Michael Curran, Ruth Cribb and Andrew Derrick, respectively on the production of illustrative posters to promote the work of St Dominic's Press, on the Stations of the Cross for Westminster Cathedral and for St Augustine's Church, High Wycombe, on the BBC sculptures of Ariel and Prospero and on the design of St Peter's Church, Gorelston.

Cumulatively, they leave the impression that not just the overtly (or, in the case of the BBC sculptures, implicitly) religious content but the distinctive form of these various creations confirm a profound debt to Gill's faith, and in particular to his embrace of Aquinas, made possible by the work of Jacques Maritain: Gill wrote the introduction to the 1923 St Dominic's Press translation by the Rev. John O'Connor (model for Chesterton's Father Brown) of Maritain's *Art et Scholastique*, which he described as 'cooling medicine' for the English people, 'heated by the burden of overproduction'. The text became compulsory reading at the Ditchling dinner table.

In contrast to the other contributions Martin Broadley's own essay on *Eric Gill in Manchester* deals with 'opinions fashioned in spoken word, hewn from notions of industrial society and belief in social justice, rather than by stone-carving or letter-cutting'. It is here that the attempt in this volume to divorce the work from the life, the sex from the religion, breaks down most conspicuously.

It is, for example, apparent that, whilst working on a sculpture for Manchester Cathedral and incidentally preparing a lecture on *Money and Morals*, Gill was staying with his long-time mistress and future model for his *25 Nudes*, May Reeves, who was also the sister of John Baptist Reeves OP. The gist of *Morals and Money* is that no one can be expected to live a good life under the conditions imposed by industrial capitalism, and that the Catholic priesthood is complicit in this travesty by failing to speak out against the capitalist system and 'the beehive state': 'being good is economically impossible... there would be no sex problem, no marriage problem, no prostitution problem, no birth control problem, no population problem, no unemployment problem if our economic problem were solved'. As Broadley points out, the juxtaposition in this way of personal ethics and public pronouncement raises important and unavoidable questions about the relationship between sin and virtue, nature and grace. Critically, for Gill, 'an immoral life might not be a sinful life'. As Broadley concludes, until those issues of nature and grace, sin and virtue are adequately addressed in relation to Gill, it is unlikely that a more positive study of Gill's attitude to work and social justice 'will, or indeed can' be made.

However, as the editor also points out, the recent re-opening of the Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft, the depositing of the archives of the English Dominican Province at Douai Abbey Library and the cataloguing of the Gill Archive at Westminster Cathedral 'will greatly facilitate' further research into aspects of Gill's work of which the present volume by its concise nature can offer only 'glimpses'. Three aspects in particular afforded by those glimpses invite future exploration.

First, there is the question of ‘influence’. At several points there is reference to the ‘influence’ of Catholicism on Gill’s work, whether it be the recognition that his ‘new found faith would influence his more intimate art work’, such as the transgressive and ‘startling’ image of *The Nuptials of God*, or the ‘highly influential’ impact of Vincent McNabb OP and other Dominicans in the creation of the Guild of St Dominic and St Joseph at Ditchling or of ‘Thomistic theology’ more generally. However, as Aidan Nichols OP has demonstrated both in his contribution to *Preaching Justice: Dominican Contributions to Social Ethics in the Twentieth Century* (2007), and in his monograph *Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (2007), the relationship between Gill, his Arts and Crafts predecessors and the various cross-currents of French Catholic aesthetic theory is fertile but complex. It is the distinctive and active ‘use’ and appropriation of that tradition by Gill rather than his status as passive recipient of its ‘influence’ that can offer the necessary context to his genius as artist and social ‘prophet’, and thereby provide the framework within which further archival research might be best interpreted.

Secondly, Gill’s incursion into social ethics would also gain salience if seen as part of that broader interest in political pluralism that marked English political thought up to the Second World War and that, as exemplified in the writing of Bede Jarrett OP, the Prior Provincial of the English Dominicans for much of Gill’s life, had a certain resonance with the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, cited in this volume as central to his social activism. Gill’s experiments in communal living, his commitment to Distributism and social justice in the face of industrial capitalism, and his reflections on the nature of human labour can be seen to occupy the space that falls between the very differently accentuated anti-statism of Belloc’s *The Servile State* on the one hand and the guild socialism of G.D.H. Cole on the other. Despite its sub-title, there is in fact relatively little in this volume that explicitly addresses Gill’s views on the ‘holy tradition of working’, and the editor’s own contribution on *Eric Gill in Manchester* concedes that it amounts to ‘merely pointers for possible further research’. The broader hinterland of English political pluralism remains largely neglected.

A third topic for more comprehensive investigation is that of Gill as ‘preacher’. At several points in the present volume reference is made to the importance of individual Dominicans in Gill’s life, including most famously Vincent McNabb but also Hilary Carpenter, Hugh Pope, Austin Barker, John Baptist Reeves and Bede Jarrett. As a member of the Dominican Third Order, Gill espoused not just the teaching of Aquinas but the ideals of the ‘Order of Preachers’. Yet the extent to which Gill’s identity as a ‘preacher’ in stone, wood, words and lettering might provide coherence to his life and work is largely unexamined.

Gill’s views on the relationship between erotic love and divine love admittedly have more in common with ‘hot’ Cistercian and Carmelite spirituality than with the ‘cooler’ Dominican identification of divine love with friendship. Yet in other regards it is clear that Gill found much in the Dominican charism to help shape his genius. Had Gill conformed to Dominican thinking on ‘love as friendship’ (*caritas* as *amicitia* rather than as *amor*) he might just have strayed less eccentrically into the byways of sexual antinomianism. The current volume’s avoidance of the issue may be prudent, but the relationship between Gill’s views on (and practice of) religion and sex remain fundamental to an integrated assessment of his life and work. His Dominicanism offers a potential prism through which to view his complexity afresh.

NICK O’BRIEN

HEIDEGGER'S ESCHATOLOGY: THEOLOGICAL HORIZONS IN MARTIN HEIDEGGER'S EARLY WORK by Judith Wolfe, *Oxford University Press*, Oxford, 2013, pp. xi + 181, £50.00, hbk

There was a time when the philosophy of Martin Heidegger was one of the primary reference points for theology. Both in works of protestant and catholic theology one could find the typical language of Heidegger's philosophy, and it seemed as if one had to use his concepts in order to be taken seriously. This time is long over now, and only post-modern theologians still refer to Heidegger and his philosophy when they try to explain the idea of an 'absent God'. One could therefore ask the question whether Heidegger is still important for theology today or if he is just a prominent figure of 20th-century philosophy, without any meaning for the contemporary theologian's questions.

The Oxford theologian Judith Wolfe now tries to show in her work on Heidegger's eschatology that Heidegger still matters and that he can still be an eminent dialogue partner for christian theology, especially in his critical questions to theology. At the same time Heidegger remains one of the most important and influential philosophers of the 20th century, without whom not only the development of philosophical thinking could not be understood, but whose constant debate with theological issues shows how essential his philosophy is for a better understanding of theology 's development in the last 100 years. Wolfe refers here mainly to the development of Heidegger himself, who, as generally known, started his philosophical development as a student in catholic theology in Freiburg, Germany and continued with his interests in theological questions even then when he changed his subject from theology to philosophy. Later he broke with the catholic system, in order, as he said, to embrace a protestant understanding of christian faith without ceasing to be interested in the debate with the tradition of theology's. Wolfe bases herself on recently published documents to ask when this break with the catholic faith actually happened.

The way of Heidegger nevertheless led eventually to an understanding of philosophy as an a-theistic analysis of the human existence, understood as '*Da-Sein*'. The human being, thrown into the world as '*Da-Sein*' is oriented towards death, as the last frontier and the last determination of his existence: man is 'Being-unto-Death'. Whether this last frontier of death is the absolute nothingness, which negates radically our human existence, or if this frontier is just the gate to a new life in God, as christian faith hopes, cannot be decided by philosophy, as Heidegger points out. What remains is therefore in Heidegger's philosophy an 'Eschatology without Eschaton', which means an eschatology without a positive designation of the 'whereupon' of human existence. Wolfe then tries to trace this development from Heidegger's devotion to catholicism to an a-theistic understanding of human existence in philosophy in his thinking, and she refers in her work mainly to recently published new sources, such as letters and lecture notes, which are supposed to shed a new light on the first turn in the philosophy of Heidegger. By doing this she is able to show how much the development of Heidegger is influenced by his debate with theological sources like Martin Luther, Søren Kierkegaard and Franz Overbeck.

Wolfe starts her account of Heidegger's way in philosophy by presenting the historical background of this development, especially his relations to Roman Catholicism in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, which was shaped by the conflict between Modernism and the enforcement of Neo-Scholasticism as the official theology and philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church. Wolfe shows how Heidegger starts from a strictly anti-modernist standpoint in his early years, in order to get into a critical distance to the whole system of neo-scholastic philosophy later. It seems that it was the inadequacy of the scholastic method,

understood as a timeless system of metaphysical concepts, which led Heidegger to the point of distancing himself from this system and which led him to the appreciation of protestant theology, which was much more open for his own questions than the closed system of Neo-Scholasticism. The period before *Being and Time* and the years shortly after its publication are therefore marked by Heidegger's debate with protestant theologians like Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and others.

Not only did protestant theologians respond to the challenge of Heidegger's philosophy, however, but also catholic theologians tried to develop a response to this challenge, like for instance Erich Przywara, Edith Stein, Romano Guardini and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Heidegger's focus on the question of 'being' allowed these catholic thinkers to relate Heidegger again to the catholic tradition of metaphysics, with the hope that his fundamental ontology could be used to establish again a primacy of being against Kant's epistemology. This might be the fundamental misunderstanding of catholic thinkers regarding Heidegger, which led eventually to the so-called 'Catholic Heidegger school' later in the 30s. But Judith Wolfe highlights especially the response of Edith Stein, who saw the deficits of Heidegger's philosophy and eschatology more clearly than others.

The greatest achievement of this book is for sure that Wolfe is able to show the historical background of Heidegger's development in a unique and comprehensive way and by doing this she makes it possible especially for English-speaking readers to gain access to this background, with its sources and various figures, which might be quite unknown to the English theological and philosophical world, because this background was so much shaped by early 20th-century theology and the German academic culture of the same time. As well as this more historical background, Judith Wolfe also shows how much Heidegger is influenced by theological questions and debates, when at the same time he is already on the way of distancing himself from christian faith.

It is this permanent debate with theological issues, which makes Heidegger a philosopher, whose thinking still matters for theology in general, and with his own approach to eschatology without eschaton, especially for theological questions concerning the ultimate future of man in the face of his inevitable death. Wolfe describes Heidegger here as a kind of critical corrective for every eschatology, which, as she puts it, on the one hand denies and ignores the temporal conditions of the human spirit, which leads to the God's eye view of the '*philosophia perennis*' of catholic Neo-Scholasticism, or, what Wolfe calls, the divided eschatology of Lutheran eschatology on the other hand. But Wolfe does also show the deficits of Heidegger's approach, whose analysis of human existence unto death depends in its pathos on a desire of human beings to transcend the finitude of our existence. If this desire is part of our human condition of life, the simple denial of an object of this desire cannot be the last word of the phenomenological analysis of the human '*Dasein*'. With this conclusion, Judith Wolfe shows in this excellent work how Heidegger's critical thoughts can be fruitful for the further task of theological inquiries in eschatology, by providing an opening for the idea of a God, who will await us in the end to fulfil our restless desire.

CARSTEN BARWASSER OP

LYING, MISLEADING, AND WHAT IS SAID: AN EXPLORATION IN PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE AND IN ETHICS by Jennifer Mather Saul, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. xiii + 146, £32.00, hbk.*

Given the obvious importance of the issues, it is perhaps surprising how little agreement there is about what exactly constitutes lying as opposed to misleading and regarding the moral significance of the distinction. In this excellent and concise book Jennifer Mather Saul shows why there is such disagreement, basically due to the inherent complexities of the subject matter, but also manages to steer a course through these complexities to a relatively clear position of her own.

There are, Saul points out (p.69), two leading traditions regarding the lying/misleading distinction. One tradition has a rather inclusive understanding of what constitutes lying, where any deliberate deception constitutes a lie, thereby downplaying the lying/misleading distinction. The other tradition defines lying much more strictly in terms of the deliberate assertion of false propositions, and so the lying/misleading distinction is upheld. The former tradition generally allows for the moral permissibility of some lies, whereas the latter often tends to the view that lies are never or very rarely permissible. When traditions and intuitions clash so explicitly, it is clear that the philosopher faces serious challenges.

In one simple, but deceptively straightforward, move Saul lays the ground for how to move forward. She advocates from the outset the view that any satisfactory definition and linguistic theory of lying must allow for a contrast with misleading, to the extent that this is a necessary condition for an adequate theory of lying. It is therefore particularly notable that Saul's conclusions regarding the morality of lying and misleading give less significance to the lying/misleading distinction than is usual in the literature.

It is impossible to do justice here to the detail and rigour of Saul's analysis. A brief example must suffice. Take Saul's preferred definition of lying (p.19):

'If the speaker is not the victim of linguistic error/malapropism or using metaphor, hyperbole, or irony, then they lie iff [if and only if] (1) they say that P; (2) they believe P to be false; (3) they take themselves to be in a warranting context'.

Saul arrives at this definition at the end of a series of arguments designed to test each element of the definition. What might not be obvious, though, is what is left out of the definition. It might, for example, seem a platitude that a necessary condition for lying is the intention to deceive. As Saul rightly points out, a witness in court under oath who has good reason to fear reprisal and who has been recorded on CCTV clearly witnessing a crime, might lie in asserting that he did not see the crime taking place, even though he can be reasonably sure that in so lying he is deceiving no one.

With this definition in place, Saul proceeds to the philosophy of language. She divides the leading theories of what is said into three groups: the unconstrained, the constrained and the austere. The difference between these is largely to do with the role of context in determining what has been said. Saul concludes by finding them all inadequate for tracking the lying/misleading distinction, and so she finds them all inadequate as theories of lying.

The theory that Saul arrives at is neither overly unconstrained nor austere. In particular, she argues for the position (p.57):

'A putative contextual contribution to what is said is a part of what is said only if without this contextually supplied material, [sentence] S would not have a truth-evaluable semantic content in [context] C'.

Thus a satisfactory theory of lying and misleading should allow contextual contributions to what is said in terms of completion, but not of expansion (p.66). A sentence like

'Beau is late.'

requires contextual contributions for the utterance to be truth-evaluable (Beau is late – *for what?*), whereas in the case of the sentence

'Billy went to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped.'

contextual contributions are not necessary for the utterance to be truth-evaluable, but nonetheless contribute to what is intuitively asserted (presumably jumped *off the edge*, but not excluding the possibility of *up and down on the spot etc.*).

Having put forward her linguistic theory of lying and misleading, Saul proceeds to examine the moral issues. She defends the view that the act of misleading is generally not to be morally preferred to the act of lying, though in some specific sorts of cases it might be (*e.g.* in an adversarial context such as a courtroom). To help explain a conclusion that might be counter-intuitive for many, Saul appeals to the distinction of act-evaluation and character-evaluation. She argues, citing a host of examples, that misleading and lying tend to be on an equal footing in terms of act-evaluation, but to mislead rather than to lie might indicate a better character. Saul moves too quickly here, and has relatively little to say about why acts of equal moral standing should reflect differences in moral character. She continues her account of the morality of lying/misleading in a final chapter dealing with some special cases, such as some of the finer details of the Clinton/Lewinsky case and various theories in the Christian casuistical tradition, such as the doctrines of mental reservation and of equivocation.

Throughout her analysis Saul generally takes a middle position between the leading competing linguistic and moral theories. In this she not only rejects commonly held positions, but also presents an important and novel position of her own. This position possesses the considerable merit of being relatively clear, whilst not downplaying the inherent complexities of the subject matter. The conclusions she draws from her examples struck me as plausible in the main, even if I part company with her in a few, but important, cases. This, however, highlights for me a weakness in an otherwise very strong book, namely, an arguably excessive reliance on a largely assumed consensus regarding our intuitions in response to specific examples and the lack of adequate reflection on the nature of intuitions and on the value of the inferences we might draw from them. Such reflection seems particularly important in ethics, given the extent of disagreement on moral issues and the range of factors (*e.g.* cultural, religious, the nature of the relationship with one's interlocutor *etc.*) that can affect our intuitions in this area. Apart from this, Saul's book struck me as a model of how philosophy of language and of ethics can be combined to help shed light on difficult questions with subtlety, rigour and insight.

JOHN D. O'CONNOR OP

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: BIBLICAL, CLASSICAL, CONTEMPORARY by Anthony Towey, *Bloomsbury, T&T Clark*, London, 2013, pp. xviii + 537, £22.99, pbk

This is a review of the paperback version, but there are e-book versions, which seem to me easier to read. E-books have given a new meaning to the phrase, 'you cannot judge a book by its cover', and the purpose of this book is easier to

judge in its 'book' version. It is a text book, written in largish font, and neatly subdivided into sections which can easily be read out of sequence. The front is entirely taken up by a painting, 'The Martyrs' Picture' by Durante Alberti. You can find this picture in the kindle version, but without the bright colours we tend to associate with pictures of martyrdom. The painting is in the chapel of the English College in Rome and the title of the book obscures the map of Britain on a globe onto which drips the blood of the crucified Christ. He is held up by his Father, while the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove hovers above him, but there is no cross. Angels hold up the cloak of the Father, while two martyrs St Edmund, King of East Anglia, and St Thomas of Canterbury are seen at the side. The complexity of the painting says something in itself about the complexity of theology, a complexity that will always reflect on particularity. The universal truths of the Trinity and the death of Christ impinge on two very different martyrs, from two very different phases in the life of the British Isles, and this book comes out of the life that continues in these islands.

The title of the book gives pause. It is an introduction to Christian theology, not Catholic theology. It certainly could be read with profit from outside the Catholic world, but it is hard to imagine it coming from someone who is not well versed in Catholic ways of thinking. Still why shouldn't Catholics write 'Christian' theology? Or to put it another way, why should we assume that guides to Christian theology are necessarily protestant?

What we have is a comprehensive introduction to theology, taking in the Old Testament and the New. Then we are given sections on dogma, ecclesiology and the sacraments which come under the heading of 'Theology in the Classical Period'. The next section brings in the modern and the contemporary, which are not quite the same, since modernity begins in the sixteenth century. Ethics too comes under modernity. This could be justified if we see theology in the classical period as being the structure, and modernity as the attempt to test the solidity of that structure. Ethics too has a classical structure which can be undermined. One difference though is that classical ethics has also been challenged in the modern age by all-pervading structures such as various forms of Marxism. Classical ethics steers its way between extremes of individuality, irresponsibility and monistic views of morality, which allow for no leeway. We see this in our contemporary society where a public figure can see their career destroyed for committing the wrong sort of offence, or conversely for wrongly condemning what is no longer considered an offence. Which is which, can change very rapidly.

This is where the book comes into its own. It moves from *Genesis* right up to recent pronouncements on the television and the internet. We have not quite reached the point where the blog will replace the book entirely, but it is coming and this book itself shows awareness of the constantly changing range of thoughts about how reality works. So we have a book which gives a kickstart to anyone who wishes to pursue the conversation of theology. To help with this, we are given a brief summary of the important objections to faith, but also those who come to its defence in unexpected ways, such as Victor Frankl, working from his own experience in a concentration camp. The conversation is not necessarily just between human beings. There is a conversation with God. It may be that reality itself is a dialogue into which we are drawn. At the end of the last chapter, the author says that Erasmus translates the word '*logos*' from the first verse of the Gospel of St John as '*sermo*' which he then translates as 'conversation'.

Conversation might imply the possibility of disagreement but it need not. It is possible for conversation to be the statement of truths which are simply accepted as truths. This is what St Thomas Aquinas thought was the basis of conversation between good angels. For human beings conversation can involve doubt, disagreement and sometimes abuse. Yet without conversation, our ability to learn truth would be very limited. We have to choose how we will pursue

conversation for ourselves. So the last words of the book, a book which gives us such a full and joyful set of material to pursue for ourselves the conversation we are called to pursue, he ends with three simple words, 'Over to you'.

EUAN MARLEY OP

HUMAN DIGNITY IN CONTEMPORARY ETHICS by David G. Kirchhoffer, *Teneo Press*, New York, 2013, pp. xii + 356, £16.00, pbk

When Ruth Macklin wrote her editorial entitled 'Dignity is a useless concept' in the *British Medical Journal* in 2003 no doubt she hoped to generate debate. However, presumably she did not expect the constant stream of articles and monographs on the subject of human dignity that, some ten years later, shows no sign of abating. Perhaps the overwhelming interest in the subject is itself a testimony to its significance even if responses frequently conflict and are varied. Since so much has been written on human dignity, in order to make a real contribution to the ongoing debate any new work needs to show at the very least rigour as well as perhaps originality and clarity. The danger is that yet another definition of human dignity would merely add to the confusion or advance a feeling of saturation of the topic or simply alienate a different readership.

Kirchhoffer's book, *Human Dignity in Contemporary Ethics*, certainly demonstrates rigour though his book is at times dense. Kirchhoffer takes the critics of human dignity seriously and he thinks that their critical questioning through a hermeneutics of suspicion is justified. However he disagrees with their solution which is to dismiss the concept. Nevertheless he thinks that choosing one of the current alternative understandings of the concept is also inadequate. Instead he calls for a hermeneutics of generosity, a reconstruction after the deconstruction that develops, he claims, a better understanding of the concept.

According to Kirchhoffer the alternative understandings on offer are 'human dignity as something human beings have *versus* human dignity as something that human beings acquire' (his italics p.228). At times he seems to link these two understandings to dignity as biological life or dignity as autonomy. His objection is that this 'either or' approach means that the concept of human dignity is used in 'dignity talk' to resolve conflict by using it as the last decisive word instead of as a starting point. This results in moralism and moral relativism, a 'we are good, they are evil' approach. The fault he finds with treating human dignity in its one dimension as 'some acquired sense of self-worth' is that this makes it difficult to formulate an idea of universal human rights and, in the case he offers of the violent criminal there is no reason to acknowledge the dignity in other persons. The fault he finds with treating dignity in its one dimension as something that all human persons already have is that it creates a deontological obligation to respect that dignity. However, he argues, this 'radically reduces morality, since it removes any teleological incentives from the equation' (p.314). By this Kirchhoffer means that it neglects the 'moral event' by its legalistic focus on the act.

In contrast to these two understandings Kirchhoffer seeks to present 'a more appropriate 'both...and' paradigm' of human dignity that is relevant to ethics (p.228). Human dignity 'properly understood' refers to 'the multidimensional existential reality of the human person' (p.316). Kirchhoffer's understanding of human dignity is not, he says, designed to lead to resolution of ethical conflicts but rather to make the protagonists aware of what is really at stake (p.312).

According to Kirchhoffer, a legalistic and moralistic ethic that focuses on the act does not take meaning seriously and it risks judging before understanding. He

argues that the human person is a 'meaning-seeking and meaning-giving social being' (p.165) and the task of the ethicist is not to judge but rather to help people ask questions about their moral behaviour and convictions (p.168). The clue to Kirchoffer's own methodology comes in his introductory heading 'Research claim and working definitions of key terms' (p.2ff). Kirchoffer is interested in a descriptive account of the 'moral event' rather than the physical act. 'Moral' denotes simply a description of the human behaviour and it includes what the agent believes is morally good or bad. Using the language of non-moral or pre-moral goods and evils and pre-moral values and disvalues, descriptive ethics does not evaluate whether the action is right or wrong. For this evaluation Kirchoffer turns to normative ethics understood not, it seems, by reference to norms or the law but rather by reference to his 'proper understanding' of human dignity based on an 'appropriate multidimensional anthropology' (p.212).

To tease out this anthropology and his understanding of the human person as an intentional, meaning-seeking being Kirchoffer relies on the eight facets of the human person given by Louis Janssens. Kirchoffer summarises this meaning-seeking as the 'desire for self-worth' (pp.169; 180–181). Included in this desire is the notion of 'fundamental choice' ('fundamental option' in the index), 'the meaning she chooses for her life' (pp.170–183). In place of treating the dignity one has as entirely distinct from the dignity that one acquires Kirchoffer argues for a 'both . . . and' interpretation that he calls the 'Complementary Duality of the Dignity We Have and the Dignity We Acquire'. He grounds the universal claim to human dignity that all human beings have in 'the potential inherent in the human person as a meaning-seeking, historical, corporeal subject in relationship possessing numerous capacities, including, among others, the capacities to experience, judge, and engage in moral behaviour' (p.313). Kirchoffer uses 'potential' to refer to 'the realisation of a sense of a meaningful life well lived'. However Kirchoffer believes he avoids relativism by his 'Social Component Dimension' that one should also strive for the universal claim by acknowledging dignity in others.

Kirchoffer's example of 'Diane's' assisted suicide explains how he sees his interpretation of human dignity in action. Kirchoffer explains that Diane's carefully considered aim to die with dignity can be seen to fulfil her sense of inherent self worth. Moreover she did not disregard the dignity of others and 'even worked for their good' by ensuring that no one would be held criminally responsible for her actions or subjected to watch her painful deterioration until she eventually died (p.280). Kirchoffer claims that it cannot be said that her choice was morally wrong: this would be a legalistic focus on the act rather than on the moral event. At most it can be said that her choice of assisted suicide may not have been the 'better choice, the more dignified choice' because her action risks being associated with an exaggerated autonomy. This in turn might undermine the Social Component Dimension because there are many who are prevented from exercising autonomy in countless other areas and who may therefore be considered undignified (p.281). For Kirchoffer, then, human dignity has an important descriptive function in helping to explain a particular course of action.

Kirchoffer seeks to engage not only with secular understandings of dignity but also with the tradition in which he appears to situate himself, Roman Catholic theology. He intentionally avoids basing human dignity explicitly on religious beliefs in order to head off claims that such a foundation is not useful in a pluralistic world or that dignity is just a cover for a conservative 'theocon' agenda. Nevertheless, using the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et spes*, he also seeks to show that his multidimensional understanding of the human person and of the moral event does not conflict with a theological understanding of the human person as created in the image of God. Furthermore he uses the Second

Vatican Council document *Dignitatis humanae* to demonstrate the association of human dignity with a person's own sense of integrity and authenticity.

Viewing Kirchoffer's thesis through a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' it would seem that his main concern is with what he terms moralism and moral absolutes. After all, in traditional Catholic moral theology suicide 'when viewed objectively, is a gravely immoral act' involving, among other things, 'the rejection of love of self' (Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, n.66 referencing Augustine and Aquinas). *Gaudium et spes* also regards wilful suicide as a crime against life itself (n.27), a point that Kirchoffer neglects to mention. Kirchoffer's decision to link the descriptive to the normative in order to show how even if a person acts badly that person can still *believe* that they are acting in a morally good way (p.15) may help in the analysis of the 'moral event'. However, in view of the Roman Catholic moral tradition it seems problematic then to conclude that it cannot be said that this was a wrong act and simply to rule that a better choice could have been made. Kirchoffer denies that he is proposing relativism or that he is advocating the absence of universal norms. Rather he says he is 'highlighting the unattainability and hence the critical nature of such norms on concrete material behaviour' (p.184). According to Kirchoffer a certainty that something is 'always and everywhere unequivocally' right or wrong is not only unattainable, it also 'undermines the very notion of a meaningful, well-lived, human life' to which he says all human persons aspire and which underpins the very concept of human dignity itself (p.319). Whatever his views on the inadequacies of moralism and the notion of moral norms, a glaring omission in Kirchoffer's account is some kind of engagement with Pope John Paul's encyclical on moral theology, *Veritatis splendor* beyond a footnote to Selling's interpretation of the encyclical (pp.144, 194).

Kirchoffer's aversion to absolute norms seems to be why he critiques those who advocate inherent dignity where some 'go so far as to afford the same dignity, and hence rights, to all human life from the moment of conception to death' (p.229). As he explains, the claim to inherent human dignity leads to reductionist approaches that, for instance, 'purely associate human dignity with human biological life and the state of being physically alive' thus opening the door to moralism (p.230). Instead Kirchoffer asserts that it has to be shown how the claim to inviolability from conception to natural death 'serves the realisation of a proper multidimensional understanding of human dignity and the flourishing of human life' (p.318). This is something that he does not undertake, ostensibly because he is interested in the dignity of the morally acting subject. However, a glance at his view of a 'meaningful anthropology' where a human person 'adequately considered' is 'a conscious being who possesses the capacity to knowingly and wilfully act' (p.169) seems to rule out all human beings who are not meaning-seekers or able to have desires of self-worth. These are the very human beings that Roman Catholic theology, particularly as expressed in Pope John Paul's encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, has sought to protect by affirming their inherent dignity.

Kirchoffer's book may be rigorous but it is incomplete. His assumption that the only alternatives offered to date are 'human dignity as something human beings have *versus* human dignity as something that human beings acquire' and that he is offering 'a more appropriate 'both...and' paradigm' (p.228) ignores much work that has already been done, notably in the essays commissioned by the US President's Council on Bioethics. Daniel Sulmasy's analysis of dignity as intrinsic, attributed and inflorescent can in no way be described as one-dimensional.

PIA MATTHEWS