

God's simplicity and our complexity, between image and reality, an admission that further prompts contemplative awe before the God who transcends both words and wordless thought.

There is much here to remind or teach us of the value of Augustine's theology, and of how far that theology builds upon a rich vision of the human person who is saved through listening and responding to the Divine Word which addresses him or her. However, this is also very much a book which betrays its origins as a doctoral thesis. Numerous and extensive summaries hope to persuade the reader that the different close readings, some of which are subtle and many of which are obscure, add up to a single and coherent argument. Despite, and to some extent because of this, the book remains hard going, and could not be recommended *in toto* to students of Augustine, let alone to the general reader. This reader at any rate fears that at several places along the way he may not have seen the wood for the trees.

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THOMAS AQUINAS: THE ACADEMIC SERMONS TRANSLATED by Mark-Robin Hoogland, *The Fathers of the Church: Medieval Continuation Vol. 11, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2010, pp. 358, £44.50*

Mark-Robin Hoogland's English translation of the academic sermons of Thomas Aquinas renders a great service to the world of Aquinas scholarship as it presents a more complete view of Thomas Aquinas, Dominican friar, a member of the Order of Preachers. In the past, scholarship has tended to focus on Aquinas as a philosopher or as a theologian (a generally unhelpful and anachronistic distinction), while more recently scholarship has reminded readers of Aquinas' primary role as *Magister in Sacra Pagina*, a lecturer in sacred scripture. Thus far his academic sermons have tended to be overlooked. The Leonine Commission are currently preparing the first complete and critical edition of the 20 sermons identified as authentic from amongst the myriad of sermons attributed to Aquinas. This work of Hoogland's contains all 20, translated from the original Latin texts, plus one whose authenticity is debated (sermon 10, *Petite et accipietis*). The sermons, composed in the logical style of Aquinas, contain solid, profound, theological content, and yet are presented in a manner accessible to the listener. Some study and reflection on these sermons might provide interesting lessons for those involved in the ministry of homiletics today. While most sermons were delivered to an audience of student theologians, this in no way detracts from their wider relevance.

A very informative Introduction provides the reader with the necessary background knowledge for fruitful and easy reading of this book. The sermons, we are told, were preached in Latin, mainly in Paris, but some were preached in Bologna and in Milan. Generally speaking while the occasion of the sermon (i.e. the place in the Church calendar) is known, the actual date is not. The sermons consist of three parts – the sections termed the *prothema* (a very short introduction) and the *sermo* were preached at mass, while the *collatio in sero* was given later in the day, during vespers. Hoogland explains the probable process of recording and transmission of these talks, and tells us, unsurprisingly, that not all of the sermons have been passed down in full. In the *sermo* itself Aquinas follows the classic rhetorical rules, beginning with an outline plan, usually identifying three or four points, and then proceeding to go through the points methodically. The language used is strikingly plain and simple. Truth, and not the entertainment of an audience, is the concern of the sermon. Knowledge, and putting knowledge

into practice, belong together. As in the *Summa theologiae* the cultivation of a virtuous life is his central teaching – ‘In all sermons Thomas urges his audience to lead a virtuous life’ (p. 15) – and Sacred Scripture is once more his foundational resource.

As one might expect God is central. The image of God portrayed is loving, kind, just, merciful. Sermon 15, *Homo quidam erat Dives*, speaks luxuriantly of God, and demonstrates Aquinas’ style in reading scripture where he posits a character in the story recalled from Sacred Scripture as ‘God’. In this way scripture’s revelation of the ‘nature’ of God is augmented. Many characters portray God, and so not only Christ, but also many other characters in the bible reveal something of what God is. Aquinas’ positive view of humanity, and his reading of scripture as speaking of God’s desire to be intimate with us, leads him to teach in a touchingly profound way: ‘If God has proved himself so intimate with us, then we also ought to prove to him that we are intimate with him.’ (p. 217) Consideration of God is presented in parallel with his consideration of the human, always presented as created in God’s image. In this same sermon Aquinas considers ‘What is proper to man (*hominis*)?’ Mildness in nature, and kindness are identified as the properties natural to a human, ‘because kindness (*benignitas*) is called humanity’ (p. 218).

Each sermon contains similar nuggets of wisdom, and the translated text is greatly augmented by the excellent footnotes provided by Hoogland. These frequently refer the reader to the relevant sections of the *Summa* or to other writings of Aquinas, while in other cases they fill out pieces of information lacking to the reader of the 21st century such as the explanatory note on the *Parvus Pons* (p. 234). The notes also remind us that while Aquinas is very much a man of his time in his understanding of women, his view that in Christ they should not be treated as secondary people (p. 234, n. 4) merits attention. In a comment on sermon 20, Hoogland cautions the reader against being too quick to make a judgement on Aquinas’ attitude toward women. It is a noteworthy comment, as some theologians have indeed dismissed all of Aquinas’ works because of the comments on women made in one or two places by a man from the 13th century.

This collection of sermons makes available a rich feast of theology presented in the trademark clear and logical fashion of Aquinas’ theology, in an eminently practical and down to earth fashion. Sermon 12 provides a rich theology of God as Trinity while Sermon 13 discusses at great length the dinner scene mentioned in Luke 14:16. Thomas concerns himself with the man who prepared the dinner, the kind of dinner, and how big it was. This practical meal imagery is used to speak of vocation, call, amongst the spectrum of peoples who live in this world. Meal imagery is again used in Sermon 20 where we read that to eat at God’s table is to delight in and to be ‘refreshed by the same thing by which God is refreshed . . . his goodness’ (p. 306). Aquinas’ stress throughout the sermons on justice and on hospitality is striking, as is his wisdom regarding the clerical state. He cites Pope Symmachus to remind us that ‘being a cleric does not amount to much if that man does not surpass a layman in virtue’ (p. 323), again a valuable teaching for today.

This edition of the sermons is greatly enhanced not only by the footnotes, as mentioned earlier, but also by the provision of two excellent indices, and an appendix providing information on people famous in the time of Thomas but perhaps not so familiar to the contemporary reader. Hoogland’s work of translation has much to recommend it. The care taken not only in translating but also in providing much additional information means that this book should be accessible to a reader approaching Thomas Aquinas for the first time. It is to be recommended to teachers and preachers alike.

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