

All of this leaves us with a question that Boland raises sharply, but does not resolve: can Aquinas' reflections on education be properly appropriated by resolutely secular thinkers? The more that one insists, for very good reasons, on rooting his philosophy in his theology, the harder it becomes to convince our agnostic contemporaries of his relevance. It seems urgent, however, both to be able to explain how one might do just that, and to engage in the task of doing it.

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PREACHING JUSTICE: DOMINICAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIAL ETHICS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY by Francesco Compagnoni OP and Helen Alford OP, editors, preface by Gustavo Gutierrez OP (*Dominican Publications, Dublin, 2007*) Pp. 512 €30

This is a book about Dominicans, written by Dominicans, edited by Dominicans, and distributed by Dominicans. But it is not merely a book for Dominicans. The nineteen vignettes of perhaps thirty or so friars of the Order of Preachers (the women of the Order will have to await a further volume) are about Christian engagement in the world during the course of the twentieth century. One, Dominique Pire, is a Nobel Prize-recipient; a handful, like Georges Rutten and Laurentius Siemer, are national politicians; many have started and run their own charitable and social institutes; many more are leading academics not just in theology but in sociology, anthropology and psychology among other fields. These men are Christian social leaders and are worth the effort to get to know. On the other hand, it is not incidental to their leadership that they are members of an ancient religious order. Their diversity of style, political colour and social mission have a common root in Catholic culture, particularly in the philosophy and theology of their most famous confrere, Thomas Aquinas. For those who suspect Thomism of some sort of intellectual or ideological straightjacket that dampens creativity or misses the mark about modern issues *Preaching Justice* is essential instruction.

Christian justice is not a legal right to impartial civil judgement or the economic assurance of a fair trade in an open market or the formal equality of democracy. While it may include all these, Christian justice is most importantly a relationship, in the first instance a relationship of 'rightness' with God, which is the source of rightness in the relationship among human beings. This relationship cannot be defined satisfactorily in terms of systems or procedures or political philosophy. In fact because Christian justice is mediated by the divine, it can have no fixed meaning at all. Just as the Christian life is a search for the reality of God, so it is a search for the reality of God's justice, the *mishpat*, of the Old Testament. The meaning of justice becomes clear only in the search, and it evolves with that search in the concrete circumstances of time and place. *Preaching Justice* is a chronicle of this search in both conceptual and practical terms.

Justice for the early twentieth century Dominicans whom the editors chose to include in the book, is mainly about class, poverty and trade unionism – issues central to *fin de siècle* Europe. The Belgian, Georges Rutten (the first to hold a University chair in the Social Teaching of the Church, he was also a member of the Belgian Senate for a quarter of a century), is arguably the dominant intellectual force for a whole generation of Dominicans including the Canadian Georges-Henri Levesque, the Spaniards Pedro Gerard and Jose Gafo, and his fellow Vlaam Jules van Gestel. Rutten's idea of justice is one of social reconciliation, reforming 'the system' from within through a sort of Christian corporatism. So social science, in his view, becomes a tool for moral education. The facts of our situation will lead us to awareness of our true interests and their

compatibility with the interests of others. In practical terms, therefore, the social role of unions and similar entities is as *fora* for informed discussion between workers and capitalists. By becoming aware of the divine in ourselves and in others, justice is incrementally promoted in daily life.

What a difference from the conceptions of many mid-century Dominicans, particularly those who saw the Second Vatican Council as approving a rather more aggressive stance for Church activism. For them the Breton, Louis Lebrét, provides the impetus for a quite different concept of justice, one focussed on the nature of the person, and personal relations, one that demands not just improvement but transformation of social structures. Lebrét was keen to distinguish his idea of corporative organization from the Idealist corporatism of Rutten. Science is a means of changing one's consciousness, of escaping from the interests imposed on us, not proving a point. So in the 1950s Lebrét attacked the very symbol of modern consumerist culture – the idea of GNP – as irrelevant to real human needs. The social entities he wanted to build are not those that accept and promote participation in an existing (corrupt) social structure, but those that subvert that structure: base communities and cooperatives rather than unions and professional associations. It is this perspective that can be seen in the Spaniard Jose Todoli's philosophy of work, the Polish Albert Krapiec's social ethics and the ant-conformist ethics of the Dutchman, Jos Arntz. The same trajectory of thought can be detected in a more dramatic way in the ideas of social sin developed by Albert Nolan and Bernard Connor in *apartheid* era South Africa, as well as in the work of the numerous and more well known Latin Americans associated with Liberation Theology. And it is a perspective not restricted to the 'third world'. Bede Jarrett and Vincent McNabb, patriarchs of the English Province, can be seen as prophets of transformation to the middle classes of the developed world in their contributions to Distributist thinking. The result is a practice of justice that may be shocking in its novelty and yet traditional in its incorporation of earlier thought.

The motive force for this dynamic seems to be a tension in Thomist thought itself, which, as the editors note, is perhaps *the* unifying aspect of Dominican experience. This tension is between 'natural law' and the Gospel and it seems to be a signal dimension of Dominican life. Krapiec and Nolan make this point explicitly in theoretical terms. And the disputes among the German Dominicans in the 1960s and 1970s seem centred on precisely this theme. The tension arises because Aristotelian philosophy (that is, half the Thomistic 'synthesis' of philosophy and Christian theology) presumes something called a 'common good' as the criterion of justice, which, it asserts, is superior to any individual good. For Aristotle it is a matter of universal self-interest and common sense to avoid any profound disruption of the social fabric. The rule of law is the necessary condition for justice. Controlled improvement is therefore always preferred to revolutionary transformation. On the other hand, the Gospel of Christ proclaims an entirely transformed and transformative Kingdom in which 'law' itself has been abandoned for love and in which the common good is simply the good of *individual* participation. Most of us probably try to avoid the apparent paradoxes and contradictions of the 'now but not yet' of God's Kingdom. Dominicans live continuously in this tension. Like the ancient Hebrew Levites, they are a constant social reminder of the indeterminacy of the Divine Word (and the ambiguity of Papal social pronouncements). Hence they are often in controversy with national governments as well as with the hierarchy of the Church, and, perhaps most notably, with each other. Jarrett attacked the economic foundations of society, both capitalist and socialist. The German, Franziscus Stratmann (who campaigned against both the Catholic Nazi-sympathizer, Schmitt and the Roman Nuncio Cardinal Pacelli, later Pius XII), was criticized by the Order for his stand. The German 'Walberberg' Dominicans as well as the Spaniards like Pedro Gerard and the English

Dominicans of the 'PAX' movement provoked direct conflict with local bishops about the social policy of the Church while remaining unquestionably loyal to the ecumenical Body of Christ and to the Order. Aidan Nichols and Carlos Pinto, writing on Herbert McCabe and the Church in Brazil respectively, continue the tradition by expressing explicit disapproval of their confreres' errors.

Preaching Justice is not, therefore, a panegyric about possible saints. It is, on the other hand, more than biography, more than mere intellectual history, more than an account of controversial and even heroic figures. It is a description of a way of being, a way of being Dominican, certainly, but, more generally, a way of being truly Catholic and Christian, of assimilating a tradition of thought so completely that the tradition transcends itself in its diversity, its creativity, and its unity in the world. The result is something that goes beyond the conventional antinomies of the individual and society. This is, it seems to me, the real 'Dominican patrimony of social thought': not a single idea or theory of the world, but a continuous struggle to understand the world in its relation to God. This is justice that is real, a justice that accepts personal injustice for the sake of justice.

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**CHRISTIAN BIOETHICS: A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED by Agneta Sutton
(T&T Clark London, 2008) Pp. 180, £14.99 pbk**

'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10). Inspired by these words of Jesus Christ, the Church has long cherished the gift of life and, increasingly, all of creation. The Catholic Pro-Life movement is well known but what it means to be Christian, and so abundantly pro-life, is perhaps often less apparent.

Following the lead of official Church documents like the Vatican's *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004) and *Cherishing Life* (2004), a teaching document of the Bishops of England and Wales, Agneta Sutton's book on Christian bioethics encompasses everything from the conventional issues concerning reproduction to climate change and vegetarianism. This is a welcome broadening of the scope of bioethics because it is all too easy for us to allow the great importance of the debates concerning issues of medical and sexual ethics to dominate and even restrict the scope of life issues. As Sutton puts it, then, 'besides medical issues, bioethics concerns issues such as our relationship with other creatures and even our environment as a whole... Bioethics is concerned with the question of how we should care for creation in general' (p. 3). The ethics of life thus concerns human beings, whom we believe to be created in the image of God and to be held in being by God, as well as the world in which human beings live and interact.

Life issues are often debated in Parliament and they generate passionate responses. But not all bioethical questions figure with equal prominence in the public consciousness. While many people are now aware of carbon footprints or animal rights, few talk about the sanctity of human life or embryo rights. While Western society has progressed in protecting the rights of the child many hardly even think about the rights of the unborn child. In this situation, the Church has to take a prophetic stand, to look beyond the superficial good that some aspects of modern medical technology presents and look deeply into the fundamental questions of life, its goodness and its foundation in God, the giver of Life.

Modern medical and reproductive technology is advancing speedily and they present us with new ethical challenges, notably 'questions about the value of the human life both in its early and in its later stages' (p. 2). Perhaps one of the reasons why so few Catholics engage in these questions or are able to challenge