

doctrinal verbiage. Always he invokes the language of social practices exercised in the spiritual and religious sphere.

It is most telling also when Hector considers the end. He argues that eternal life is conceptually fraught in a range of ways (owing to the unique epistemological challenges based on a non-eternal being seeking to know and speak of an eternal reality). One nonetheless might move forward productively, wisely, beneficially with a 'vision of eternal life that might endlessly fulfill one categorical desire, namely, the desire for communion with God' (p. 247). Worldliness is challenged here in that the world's end comes from beyond.

Readers can ask whether that frame of the book matches its central account of Christianity. Its beginning warns of worldliness, and its end suggests that communion with God may and should characterise the eternal end. In both regards, Hector strikes a note for theocentrism and for invoking language of God not merely as cipher for worldly concerns but as real, metaphysical claim and, still further, for inter-personal engagement with that triune Lord. Central chapters on creaturely being, however, fix sights predominantly – at times exclusively – upon human spiritual practices. Here the book particularly develops a textured sketch of acquired virtue, and one might wonder to what extent infused virtue also plays a role. Is this a case of an extrinsic frame (in chapters 2 and 7) being matched by an immanent middle (particularly in chapters 4–6)? How might a more fervent account of the workings of the Spirit mark that core section of the Bible? Hector might turn to a Reformed approach to the so-called means of grace, by which God effectively imparts his gifts; or he might turn to any number of sacramental approaches developed in varied communions; or he might invoke the lexicon of apocalyptic theology as a means of attesting divine provision here, too. At one point he aims to attend to Schleiermacher's account of both Christ and Spirit, but the latter immediately pivots to the topic of imitative practice. We are subjects of verbs – the Spirit does not do much (though he is 'carried forward through a chain of imitation', p. 141).

The book's tone largely makes sense of Christianity in a way that will enable it to convey value to a wider reading public. There's rather less concern given to exploring controversies or debated points internal to the Christian theological tradition (though the discussion of love and faith as focal lenses for discerning 'worldliness' in chapter 2 is a great exception here). In one sense, this approach opens the book up to questions as to the extent to which it depends on the concerns of the moment. In another sense, the discussion of worldliness as problem and of eternal life as communion with God in Christ does gesture to values which supersede the merely immanent.

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Matthew Levering, *Reconfiguring Thomistic Christology*

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It is no secret that academic theology has become largely compartmentalised. The reasons for which are well-documented. The explosion of information in the past

two centuries has encouraged a certain modesty of scope among scholars. As many have chosen to stay within the narrowing bounds of their methodological competence, we have witnessed a move towards hyper-specialisation in the theological guild. When combined with the felt need for novelty (issuing from hiring policy and publication pressures), we arrive at the current state of highly learned quasi-disintegration in the discipline. It's every man and woman for his or her theological (or non-theological) self.

In *Reconfiguring Thomistic Christology*, Matthew Levering proposes a way forward. His work concerns the enhancement of dogmatic theology, specifically Christology pursued within the contemporary Thomistic school, by a fuller recovery of its biblical foundation and inspiration. While the Angelic Doctor himself profited immensely from the study of sacred scripture, the Thomistic school, with its penchant for technical language and precise distinction, has, at times, profited less from the biblical text.

On the one hand, this tendency is understandable. The general move to hyper-specialisation is especially conspicuous in biblical studies. The requisite mastery of various domains, ranging from ancient Near Eastern languages to literary theory and from archaeology to exegesis, has made the discipline increasingly forbidding to the non-specialist. And so many, even many within the theological guild, relegate themselves to biblical silence rather than prove themselves biblical bumpkins.

On the other hand, this tendency is intolerable. Scripture remains 'the soul of sacred theology' (*Dei Verbum* §24), supplying the lifeblood of the whole theological enterprise. 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood' (Lev 17:11). So, while the Thomist may despair of mastery in all matters of biblical wisdom, he has no choice but to engage it, at least so long as he hopes to engender *life*. And if theology is in some way ordered to Christ-conformity, then biblical studies ought to inform its practice of receiving the life of Christ.

In his book Levering proposes *typology* as an entrée to biblical wisdom. The choice may seem strange, as some exegetes have argued that typology distracts from the historicity of the biblical text. Levering argues that this is wrong-headed. Typology, he contends, reads sacred scripture in deference to the divine intention at work in sacred history. For, is not God both provident Creator and sacred Author, disposing all things strongly and sweetly even as he reveals his purpose on the sacred page?

In successive chapters Levering explains how Christ fulfils five different Old Testament types: he is the New Adam, New Isaac, New Moses, New Joshua and New David. He argues further that Christ – provident Creator and sacred Author – *intends* these fulfilments for the purpose of a divine pedagogy (or even mystagogy). In effect, Levering has chosen these titles because Christ has chosen these titles. Thus, they – the titles and the realities they mediate – afford keen insight into the very dispensation of salvation and so enrich theological inquiry.

The bulk of the book is dedicated to defending the historicity and applicability of these five titles. Levering shows, with the help of contemporary biblical scholarship, how each title appears in the literal sense of the biblical text. He shows further how the fathers received this biblical teaching. He shows next how St. Thomas, as a reader of sacred scripture and student of the fathers, appreciates each title in his biblical commentaries and theological treatises. Finally, he suggests how typology might feature yet more prominently in our reading of the theology of St. Thomas and in the Thomistic school. His intention is not so much to 'add' a biblical theology to an otherwise unbiblical theological synthesis, as to show how it affords access to the most basic intelligibility of Christ's words and deeds and so offers privileged resources for a renewal of Thomistic Christology.

Clearly, Levering has succeeded in holding these disciplines together in himself. He has dedicated his life, in part, to the task. But his intention is not simply to demonstrate that the reconfiguration can be accomplished; his intention is to inspire and communicate it. Hopefully, as members of the theological guild look up from the limited fare on offer in their disciplines, they will find in Levering's work an invitation to greater abundance, for Wisdom 'has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table' (Prov 9:2).

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Josef Sorett, *Black is a Church: Christianity and the Contours of African American Life*

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In *Black is a Church*, historian and black religion scholar Josef Sorett offers a provocative claim: Afro-Protestantism has provided a set of logics and practices through which blackness has been, and *continues to be*, embodied and imagined. This assertion seems counterintuitive when turning to both contemporary black scholarship and black popular culture writings, where Afro-Protestantism is imagined as inconsequential, a relic of early black social life in America. Sorett complicates this taken-for-granted assumption about the waning influence of Afro-Protestantism or the black church by arguing that 'the mutually reinforcing discourses of racial authenticity and religious orthodoxy came together, over time, in such a way that Christianity...was made constitutive of the contents and forms of blackness' (p. 17). In other words, Afro-Protestantism (and black churches) has an abiding influence on black life, which should have implications today for scholars who study black life. In unfolding this argument, Sorett is driven by several questions related to the ongoing influence of the black church (or Afro-Protestantism) such as: *how* did Afro-Protestantism come to shape the contours of black subjectivity and social life through diverse institutional arrangements, political ideologies, theological views, cultural imaginations and social practices? And how is it that across these iterations of Afro-Protestantism that 'church' conjured certain ideas of blackness that were disciplinary yet empowering with respect to black life?

Sorett doesn't waste one sentence in mapping out his argument in four tight chapters marked by historical precision and practical insights. Chapter 1 maintains that Afro-Protestantism was initiated not simply through evangelical revivalism but through literary performance. He interprets the function of slave narratives as not just about literacy but about a particular religious Afro-Protestant performance through literacy. His exploration of the literary beginnings of Afro-Protestantism, in large part, aims to intervene into literary studies and black studies, which has underarticulated or outright dismissed the role religion, and especially Afro-Protestantism, has played in theorising blackness and shaping black subjectivity. Chapter 2 moves further into