

faith

Promoting A New Synthesis Of Faith And Reason

Editorial: SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Fr Mark Vickers looks at ecumenical ventures of the 1930's

Dr William Newton examines The Transgender Moment and the Catholic vision

Paul VI's prayer before the Blessed Sacrament

INTERVIEW: a nurse is beatified

Fr Holloway on The Covenant of Christian Marriage:2

Crossword

Book Reviews:

Conor McDonough on Alister McGrath presenting Christianity to humanists

Mark Higgins on whether Thomism is compatible with evolution

Paul Marsden on the modern martyrs of Iraq

Sr Mary Thomas Brown on contemplating Mary Immaculate



Issue: Volume 54 Number 1 January & February 2019

Price: £4:50

faith.org.uk

- the 'true myth' towards which all other myths merely point' (p.69). This would not fully satisfy many Christian theologians, but McGrath's aim here is perhaps evangelical rather than systematic.

Chastening rationality

The following chapters treat various themes which aim to reframe standard objections to the idea that there is any meaning to life beyond the physical and factual. He proceeds not only by argument, but also by 'chastening human rationality' (p.196). Chapter 6, for example, asks whether meaning is discovered or invented, and introduces the question of God's existence. Rather than present arguments for the objective existence of God, McGrath responds by interweaving objective and subjective approaches, including an element of personal testimony. McGrath's very manner of proceeding here is itself testimony to the fact that religious belief can be thoughtful, aware of alternatives, and open to revision.

The myth of progress

The final section, 'Wondering About Our Future', is significantly meatier than what went before. The first chapter of the section deals with the question of sin, making cautious parallels between the Christian account of human sinfulness and the Darwinian struggle for life. McGrath goes on, in the following chapter, to examine the idea of 'humanism', or, rather, 'humanisms', showing, with his usual historical sophistication, that this is by no means a univocal term, nor is it a phenomenon which automatically

excludes religion. Again, drawing on history, McGrath takes on, in Chapter 12, 'The Myth of Progress', a resilient myth often associated with the rejection of religion. Once again, though, McGrath refuses to enter apologetic mode, and concludes the chapter with an accessible meditation on 'The Hope of Immortality'.

Humility, reality and generosity

The book concludes by proposing three values that have emerged in the work: 'Humility: Reality is a lot bigger than we are [...]. Generosity: We will have to learn to live with unresolved questions [...]. Wonder: A willingness to expand our vision' (p.196-8):

Our place is on the Road, not on the Balcony - not a settled habitation of detached privilege, but a process of journeying in hope through an opaque and puzzling world (p.199).

McGrath's aim is worthy, his prose is attractive, and his erudition is impressive. But at the end of this meditation, I am left wondering whether he has underestimated the strangeness of the Gospel, the surprise of the Christian mystery, and the radical discontinuities that ought to mark the Christian life. Whether this is so or not can be put to one side, however. I am not the intended reader of this book, and those 'humanists' who expect to find only strangeness and objectionable truth-claims in Christian faith may well find a great deal to interest them in McGrath's latest work.

Conor McDonough OP teaches dogmatic theology at the Dominican House of Studies, Dublin.

Can Thomism cope with Evolution?

Aquinas and Evolution - Why St. Thomas' Teaching on the Origins Is Incompatible With Evolutionary Theory by Michael Chaberek, OP, The Chartwell Press, 272 pp, £14.00

reviewed by Mark Higgins



The contemporary scene of Catholic apologetics, at least in terms of the apologetics that deals with theological and philosophical questions, is largely underpinned by the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. This reflects the gradual re-ascendency of the Angelic Doctor in seminaries and universities which has occurred over the last twenty years, spearheaded by a new wave of orthodox Dominican scholars and a genuine thirst for theological clarity and certainty by a new generation of seminarians. Fr. Michael Chaberek, the author of this volume, can undoubtedly be included within this category of new Thomists, that is, with a rather significant caveat related to the theory of evolution.

Isolationists and compatibilists

As Fr. Chaberek identifies within this present work, generally speaking, the new breed of Thomists has taken one of two approaches to Darwinism, they have either entirely bracketed off any discussion of the theory of evolution, as a kind of academic inquiry separate and isolated from their disciplines of philosophy and theology (isolationists), or otherwise, they have gone to lengths to assure the reader that St. Thomas, whilst unaware of evolution, offers philosophical principles highly compatible with this scientific theory

(compatibilists). Our Polish Dominican author argues, on the contrary, that the philosophical and theological teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas do touch the areas of human origins, and that secondly, the claims of Darwinism have metaphysical implications, Darwinism cannot simply sit on top of Thomism, not at least with a Thomism intent on being entirely faithful to its foundational metaphysics.

Scholastic method

As a true son of the scholastic method, our author follows a classical methodology: he begins by defining the key terms; secondly, he outlines the arguments of his compatibilists and isolationist interlocutors (18 discreet arguments, well referenced and explained); thirdly, he offers a '*sed contra*'; and fourthly, a '*corpus*' (a general outline of his position), before finally responding to the eighteen arguments already outlined. The book does not however conclude on this note and contains two further, albeit shorter sections, the first a response to the popular characterisation of Augustine as a proto-evolutionist, and the second, a defence of Intelligent Design approaches from a Thomistic standpoint. These additional sections of the book don't carry the same sense of purpose or pace as the first, but are nonetheless thought-provoking, more so

the chapter on Augustine which elucidates his rather complicated understanding of creation succinctly and clearly.

The Gap theory

Fr. Chaberek has certainly researched his subject thoroughly, and the reader is left deeply impressed at the responses that he offers to his interlocutors and their proposals, always utilising the *ipsissima verba* of St. Thomas. Uncomfortable as the conclusion may seem, the book ultimately presents a very well argued case towards the metaphysical incompatibility of the Aristotelian-Thomistic synthesis and evolutionary theory. Interestingly, Chaberek cannot simply be accused (or even dismissed) as simply being a Young Earth Creationist intent on appropriating the saintly Dominican to the cause of Answers in Genesis. Chaberek always sides with Aquinas, and since Aquinas has no metaphysical attachment to a young earth and a universe 6,000 years old, neither does Chaberek (p.217). Chaberek's conclusions are always from the standpoint of, fundamentally, being unflinchingly committed to Aquinas' *sana philosophia*. For example, we read that only God can initiate a species, that for Aquinas this is a divine act, directly caused and not something attributable to secondary causes, and so on St. Thomas' terms we must conclude that any species with a given matter-form cannot gradually, through environmental influences and natural selection, lead to a distinct new species - such is beyond the framework of Angelic Doctor and his understanding of change (p.56). The Polish Dominican therefore seems to approximate St. Thomas towards a position akin to the 'Gap Theory' in which Almighty God periodically creates each individual species, sequentially, through history, and *ex nihilo* (p220), a position which, scientifically, to put it as charitably as possible, would be considered a non-mainstream, minority position.

Rejecting evolution

Given the theological crisis that followed the Second Vatican Council and the lack of clarity experienced by three generations of seminarians in formation, it is understandable that many would seek refuge in the clear, solid and coherent argumentation of St. Thomas. What Fr. Chaberek has shown is that a Neo-Orthodoxy pinned strictly to Aquinas cannot then claim to be compatible with a modern scientific world-view. For whilst St. Thomas can tolerate and even embrace a universe 6 billion years old, he cannot, within his Aristotelian, static, understanding of matter/form and substance/accident accept also the continuous emergence and evolution of different species as a result of natural, secondary causes. For Fr. Chaberek, his findings are clearly a summons to reject the science of evolution.

A revised metaphysics

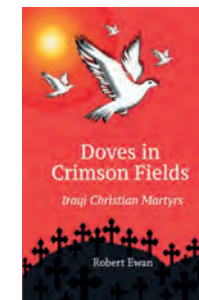
But, of course, this need not be the case, and he too at least shows an awareness of the possibility that perhaps it is the philosophy of St. Thomas that may require a revision (p.236). Fr. Chaberek unfortunately offers very little consideration to the alternative pathway; he cannot see how anything other than the 'classical metaphysics' of St. Thomas could ever act as an underpinning for the unchanging truths of the faith (p.240-45). In one sense then, this book is very much calling for a revised metaphysics along the lines of that conceived by Fr. Holloway, or at the very least it is alerting that there is most definitely a need for a revised metaphysics if orthodox Catholics are to coherently accept the science of evolution alongside the theological truths of the faith.

Fr. Mark Higgins is a Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Southwark.

Iraqi Christian Martyrs

Doves in Crimson Fields by Robert Ewan, Gracewing, xiii + 213pp, £11.99

reviewed by Paul Marsden



Pope Benedict XVI wrote that, even in our times, 'the Church does not lack martyrs' (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 85). In many places things have got worse since then, and in *Doves in Crimson Fields* Robert Ewan gives us a detailed account of Christian martyrdom in Iraq from the very earliest times to the present. Crucially, he stresses the importance of past martyrs in contemporary spirituality.

Robert Ewan is a freelance writer who was born in Baghdad (where he lived until 1977) and who writes extensively about Iraq, especially in the Catholic press. He also edits *Mesopotamia*, a publication of the Chaldean mission in the UK. The Foreword is written by John Pontifex of Aid to the Church in Need (UK), who writes that 'this book acts as a tribute to the timeless virtues of faith, hope and charity that are so firmly imprinted on the history of Iraq but which run the risk of being stamped out by forces that have contorted faith into a mantra of hatred, violence and hyper-extremism'. In the author's own Introduction, he links the early Christian martyrs in Iraq with Jesus' own Sacrifice and His prediction of what would be the price His followers would pay.

From prosperity to persecution

How exactly Christianity became established in Mesopotamia in apostolic

times is not known with certainty, but the fact is it did. We know that people from Mesopotamia were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 5-9) and it seems likely that they took the new faith home with them. Before giving an account of individual cases of martyrdom, Ewan gives a detailed account of the history of Christianity in Iraq with its truly bewildering changes of fortunes for the Faithful. The position in the first five centuries was constantly changing, between toleration (and even prosperity) to savage persecution (including probably the worst persecution in Christian history under the Persians beginning around 315 AD). These ups and downs continued through the various Caliphates and the Moguls up to the Ottomans and the disaster of the First World war genocide. The massacre of August 1918 involved several thousand Christian martyrs amid a bloodthirsty brutality which we have sadly seen again in our own day. Saddest of all is the account of the last fifteen years with its catalogue of brutal persecution, displacement and emigration. With the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, many Iraqis considered their Christian neighbours as collaborators of the invaders and acted accordingly. Before 2003 Christians in Iraq were estimated at almost one million; now barely 200,000 remain.