

consciences.’ (p. 279). Shrimpton’s book is a tribute to a kind of political theology that developed from informed Christian consciences under great duress. Had the Scholls been Catholic and not Lutheran, then the Roman Catholic Church would, in all likelihood, have recognised them as saints. However, I am sure that the wide recognition of the Scholls in Germany as role models for students, their mark on the German historical conscience, Sophie’s place in the ‘Walhalla’, can be seen as a kind of secular recognition of this heroic, but hidden, Christian sainthood.

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EMBRACING OUR FINITUDE: Exercises in Christian Anthropology between Dependence and Gratitude by Stephan Kampowski, *Cascade Books*, Eugene, Oregon, 2018, pp. 172, £18.00, pbk

St Catherine of Siena received many extraordinary graces from God. One of the first was a vision of the Lord Jesus, who appeared to her while she was saying her prayers, and told her, ‘Do you know, daughter, who you are, and who I am? If you know these two things, you will be blessed. *You are she who is not; whereas I am He Who Is.*’ This reminder from God of the difference between Himself and His creatures served as the first principle of St Catherine’s doctrine. She was instructed from Heaven in the truth for which her fellow Dominican, St Thomas Aquinas, argues in the *Summa*: the Creator exists of His very nature, the creature by His gift. God is infinite, without bounds, but the creature is finite, limited in what it is and what it can do, utterly dependent for its being and activity at every moment on the Almighty and Eternal God. This truth is taught throughout Scripture. Indeed, the experience of daily life brings home his frailty to every human being – or so you would think. Yet the men and women of the twenty-first century seem to forget, even deny, their limitedness and their infirmity, physical and moral. In 2017 *The New Yorker* ran an article on the efforts of the technocrats of Silicon Valley to make death ‘optional’: ageing, they say, is encoded in our genes; therefore, once we have cracked the code, we can live for ever – assuming we do not fall under a bus as we cross the street. In such a culture of denial Stephan Kampowski’s book comes as a gift of illumination and encouragement.

In the first chapter, the foundation for all that follows, Kampowski considers the givenness of human life. We exist, we are alive, but only under certain conditions: ‘we are born; we will have to die; we do not live alone in this world’ (p. 4). Following Hannah Arendt, Kampowski refers to these givens by the terms ‘natality’, ‘mortality’, and ‘human plurality’. We are contingent beings, dependent on one another, and most fundamentally on God. In the language of Christian doctrine, we

are *creatures*, for, as St Thomas says, ‘creation is not a change, but the very *dependence* of created being on the principle by which it is established’ (*Summa contra gentiles* 2, 18, 2). Now Kampowski argues that human beings’ difficulty to be reconciled with their contingency has destructive consequences. The man in denial of his dependence in the past and present becomes a *homo faber*, one who constructs his own future.

The remedy is *gratitude*, which requires both remembering the gift of life and existence and responding in love to the One who out of love bestowed the gift. Here Kampowski, drawing on Arendt’s work on St Augustine, leads us from dependence in the natural order to dependence on God’s grace. I cannot thank the God who created me, I cannot respond in love to Him who loves me, without His first moving me to do so. ‘We are ultimately dependent on God even for being able to acknowledge our dependence’ (p. 17). Reading Kampowski’s exposition of gratitude, I was reminded of Chesterton’s confession in his *Autobiography*: even in his darkest moments as a muddled young man, he ‘hung on to the remains of religion by one thread of thanks’.

Kampowski exposes the contradiction that lies within every species of atheism, that is, all ungrateful denials of the dependence of man and all things on God. Having considered the givenness of how man comes to be, Kampowski turns to the givenness of human nature, of what man is and why he acts, at all times and in all cultures (chs. 2 – 4). From the limitations of our nature it does not follow that we are unable to make judgements about the conduct of others. (‘Who am I to judge?’) With the Tradition Kampowski asserts that, while God alone can judge the human heart, ‘believers, and especially competent authority, can and at times must judge external behaviour’ (p. 27). As Hannah Arendt sees it, common sense, the sense that is common to a community, gives birth to judgement. The Church, too, is a community, and her common sense, the *sensus fidei* or *sensus fidelium*, is the basis of her judgements. The sense of the faith ‘belongs to the whole Church, which includes the laity, but also the bishops, priests, and religious’ (p. 44). Moreover, to get at that sense, we must consult the faithful not only of the present, but the of the past, that is, Sacred Tradition, which Kampowski, quoting Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy*, defines as ‘the democracy of the dead’ (cf. p. 47). The faithful of the present, too, must embrace their dependence, in this case on the faith of the Fathers. ‘The Church’s common sense, the *sensus fidei*, is informed by the judgement of all the Popes from Peter to Francis ... It includes the judgements of all the Fathers, the Doctors, and the saints’ (p. 48).

In the second part of the book, Kampowski deals with the social consequences of human finitude. Since we live in a shared world, in dependence on other persons, we bind ourselves to each other by promises (ch. 5). Utopianism is the political expression of the refusal to embrace human finitude, whether by loving universal humanity while

neglecting individual human beings (ch. 6), or by constructing a future of ‘perfect’ social arrangements without healing the broken human heart (ch. 7). (As Péguy, the erstwhile Socialist, came to see, the true revolution must be moral or nothing at all.) Human beings are by nature political animals, and so their proper good is a common good (ch. 8). The common good *is* the person’s good. This truth is seen in perfection, Kampowski points out, in Heaven, in which the blessed delight in another’s beatitude as in their own, because what they love above all is the divine will: ‘In His will is our peace.’ If this is so, then we grasp the truth, concludes Kampowski, of Alasdair MacIntyre’s words: ‘The egoist is . . . always someone who has made a fundamental mistake about where his own good lies’ (cited, p. 146). If man is a political animal, and the common good is his proper good, then, argues Kampowski, once again guided by Hannah Arendt, there must be an authority that takes responsibility for the common good (ch. 9). However, ‘only persons who are willing to lay down their life for something greater than their own life can have authority’ (p. 154). Kampowski, Professor of Philosophical Anthropology at the John Paul II Institute in Rome, sees the saintly founder of the institute as exemplifying that truth: he ‘clearly lived all his life in reference to something greater, something that was entrusted to him, that he did not think he owned’ (p. 155).

When He revealed Himself to St Catherine, Jesus told her also of the graces that would accrue to her embracing of her nothingness: ‘Have this knowledge in your soul, and the Enemy will never deceive you’. Through studying Stephan Kampowski’s new book and assimilating its arguments, the minds of his readers will be likewise protected from the devil’s *folies de grandeur* and the forgetting of our finitude to which in his pride he tempts us. They will perceive Christian anthropology in its proper position between a metaphysics that speaks of man’s dependence on God, and an ethics that moves man to live in gratitude for God’s gifts, which are the presupposition of every other blessing lavished upon him by the Creator.

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