

# Reviews

**INTELLECT AND ACTION: ELUCIDATIONS ON CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE LIFE OF FAITH** by Colin E. Gunton *T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2000. Pp.ix + 197, £23.95 hbk.*

'Divine grace is better understood', Professor Gunton says, in the last essay in this engaging, lucidly written and interesting collection, 'as a mode of God's action towards or relatedness to the creature than as some kind of substance that God imparts to the creature' (p. 182). Who is supposed to subscribe to the latter view?

It's a theme running through the book. But we must first note the variety of the topics discussed. Theology needs boundaries; doctrine means dogma (chapter 1). There is nothing wrong with 'systematic theology', far from it (chapter 2: the opening essay in the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* of which Gunton is a founder). There is such a thing as Christian *knowledge* (chapter 3). Theology needs ethics (chapter 4). Chapter 5 discusses the concept of holiness. Chapter 6, written for the Stanley Hauerwas *festschrift*, enters caveats about his idea of the church as a school of virtue. Chapter 7 discusses Calvin on salvation; chapter 8 deals with election and predestination. Chapters 9 and 10 focus on freedom, particularly in connection with the relationship between divine freedom and human autonomy.

These are the working papers, mostly recently composed, of one of the most prolific theologians in the country. There are many flashes of wit: e.g., Ezekiel is 'that austere Barthian' (page 156). There are quick put-downs that needed more justification: John Howard Yoder is suspected, in a footnote, of not finally avoiding 'the kind of moralism that directs the attention more to the community's practices than to its orientation to God in Jesus' (p. 95); Karl Rahner is right in holding all creaturely existence to be somehow graced — but, as another footnote hastily admonishes us, to say so 'is not to accept the form that Rahner's theology of grace takes' (p.183).

In the final chapter Professor Gunton steers between theories of freedom which see nothing but choice in the void and theories that subscribe to total determinism. He seeks to resolve this nasty dilemma by introducing the right-minded Christian doctrine of 'God, grace and freedom' (the title of the chapter). Like many theologians, he seems unable to elaborate the correct view — his own — except by constantly rubbishing the supposedly utterly unacceptable alternative — which he sometimes has the grace (so to speak) to admit he may be parodying (cf. p. 77). The problem with much traditional theology of grace, so the story goes, is that 'grace has so often been reified, turned into a thing, so that the mediator of divine action is effectively conceived of in impersonal, or, perhaps more accurately, only quasi-personal terms' (page 183). In Western theology, 'grace is a deeply problematic concept, having suffered a long existence semi-reified as a kind of causal agency midway between God and the creature' (p. 77). This 'semi-causal notion of grace' (p. 77), grace as 'a semi-substantial force either assisting or determining human perseverance *causally*' (p. 146, Gunton's italics), grace as a 'kind of insubstantial substance' (p. 184), is the

misconception in contradiction with which Gunton sets out the correct idea.

In the end, what we have in Augustine and Aquinas is a picture of the relationship between us and God in terms of 'causal relations between substances' — 'to be sure, personal substances' — which is what sets the problem central in all Western theology: the problem, as the Lutheran theologian Robert Jenson says, of the co-operation between the graceful God and the graced creature (cf. p.184). All talk of 'co-operating grace', as Gunton maintains in an important footnote, generates 'a doctrine of divine-human interrelation in which the human and the divine are in some way in co-operation or competition' (p.147).

The mistaken alternative against which Gunton works out his theology of grace is pretty clearly what he takes to be standard Roman Catholic teaching. Whatever is to be said about the various neo-Scholastic theories of created grace that prevailed half a century ago, with their talk of created grace as an absolute entitative modification of the graced soul and thus the basis of the soul's participation in God's nature (etc.), and even that jargon did not take created grace to be a substance, Gunton's allusions to the work of Thomas Aquinas are not persuasive.

On the single occasion when he explicitly cites Aquinas, even translating a few lines, the reference (1a 2ae, question 3, article 2) is wrong (cf. p. 191). He must have had article 1 at the back of his mind. That is where Thomas considers heavenly beatitude, distinguishing between God's beatitude in itself (uncreated) and God's beatitude as shared in by the saints in heaven (and really *theirs* and so properly described as 'created').

In article 2, Thomas is arguing that divine beatitude is not something static or substance-like (as one can imagine a certain kind of theologian supposing). Rather, God's beatitude is nothing other than God's existence which, in turn, is identical with God's activity. Moreover, as sharing in God's beatitude, the beatitude of the saints is also *activity*.

The lines Gunton translates in fact come from question 111, article 2. That is where Thomas distinguishes between grace as the divine help that moves us to choose and do well; and grace as a divinely given habitual gift in us. This, according to Gunton, displays 'another form of the dualism that separates divine and human action rather than integrating them'.

Well, perhaps. Aquinas refers us back to question 110, article 2. Already, in article 1, in his characteristically slow step by step, not to say pussyfooting fashion, he has contended that, if we are to say human beings have been drawn beyond our natural condition to participate in divine goodness, then by one's being said to have received God's grace and favour, 'something transcending our nature and coming from God is surely indicated.' Of course, this is a crux: he begins by reminding us that many have held that being graced means simply being accepted by God — with no change in the graced person. Aquinas wants, by contrast, to say that, when human beings are graced, that must make a difference to them. In article 2, then, he explores how far we may describe grace as a 'quality of soul'.

Aquinas is familiar with the idea that grace is some kind of a substance. He insists, by his standards, at some length, in his response to the second objection here in article 2, that grace cannot be a substance or a substantial form. In his no doubt thoroughly Aristotelian jargon, grace can only be an accidental form of the soul — 'that which is substantially in God happens accidentally in the soul that participates in the divine goodness.'

Grace, then, Aquinas says explicitly enough, is *not* any kind of substantial thing deposited in the soul. Rather, grace is 'a kind of quality of soul' — *qualitas quaedam animae*. It's important, as always, to note the frequent use of adjectives like 'quaedam', equivalent to modern scare quotes, here signalling Aquinas's concern that we should be sensitive to analogical use of the word 'grace'. Grace is a quality of soul, Aquinas remarks, in the same sort of way as beauty may be said to be a quality of someone's body. He has nothing 'reified' in mind.

Thus, to get to Gunton's misreferenced quotation, what Aquinas is saying is that, when we speak of how one is helped by God's gracious will, we mean in the first place that 'the soul is moved by God to know or will or do something'. In this sense, 'the gracious effect in the man is not a quality but a certain movement (*motus*).'<sup>1</sup> In the life of grace, that is to say, all along the line, in knowing, willing or doing good, the graced person is constantly being moved by God — not inspired, episodically, but permanently being transformed by God.

Having made that clear, Aquinas goes on to say this: 'In another sense, a man is helped by God's gracious will and this is by having a certain habitual gift infused in the soul.'<sup>2</sup> By this Aquinas means that a person living in God's grace has received 'supernatural qualities, so to speak, according to which those whom God moves to receive eternal supernatural good are moved by him *suaviter et prompte* to gain this eternal good'. This is the sense in which the gift of grace may be said to be a 'quality of soul' — not a quality that would act upon the soul like some efficient cause, Aquinas hastens to point out, but only on the model of a formal cause, that is to say, as the quality of whiteness makes a thing white or the quality of justice makes a man just.

If the Reformation, or anyway Lutheran, insight is that God holds us sinners to be righteous as we trust in him and not on account of anything about the way we are in ourselves, as Daphne Hampson insists in her forthcoming study of the incommensurable structures of Lutheran and Catholic thought (*Christian Contradictions*, Cambridge University Press), what we have to say is that, in Aquinas, and hopefully in Catholic theology generally, when God holds us to be righteous, that is certainly not on account of anything about the way we are in ourselves but rather that his holding us to be righteous must already bring about the changes in us that Aquinas tries to identify with his talk of grace as a quality of soul.

Moreover, when Aquinas speaks of causation his model (as with Aristotle) is what philosophers sometimes label 'agent-causation'. That is to say, causing, for Aquinas, is always on analogy with a man's own experience of doing simple things and bringing things about (as J.L. Austin reminded us, not that anyone was listening, in 'A Plea for Excuses'). The interplay of divine and human causalities that Aquinas regularly invokes is always already the interplay of agents who are persons. It is anachronistic to read him as having the impersonal, quasi-scientific, post-Humean conception of causation with which we are familiar now.

Whether co-operation is competition, as Gunton seems to suppose, is an interesting question. It takes us right to the heart of Aquinas's theology. He often quotes Isaiah 26:12: '*Omnia opera nostra operatus es in nobis, Domine*' — which he takes, as for instance at 1a, question 105, article 5, as excluding all competitiveness between divine and human agency. When he speaks of co-operation between creatures and God, Aquinas almost always

rules out the picture of two rival agents on a level playing field. On the contrary, he sees it as the mark of God's freedom, and ours, that God 'causes' everything in such a way that the creature 'causes' it too.

Of course, even if we agreed that, for Aquinas, grace was conceived as precisely *not* any kind of substance, and that causation was always already agent-causation, that would not bridge the gap between Reformation and Roman Catholic theologies.

For one thing, Gunton has an even deeper problem with Aquinas: 'God is dualistically divided from the world and can act only through a hierarchy of being, of the kind presupposed in Aquinas's Five Ways, so that action at a lower level is always mediated by action at a higher, and ultimately by God' (p.184). This 'essentially Platonizing kind of mediation' discredits Aquinas's theology in Gunton's eyes.

Plato does not make the index of names; yet, Platonizing is as subversive of Christianity for Gunton as Hamack contended long ago. For all the ecumenical *rapprochements* of the last forty years, any theology so deeply indebted as Gunton's is to Calvin and Barth, is not only incompatible but simply incommensurable with a theology indelibly marked by Augustine and Dionysius as well as by Aristotle. Interestingly, Gunton shares Barth's reasons for ruling out the possibility of ever becoming a Roman Catholic (cf. p. 14): the analogy of being, and its supposed consequences in the Marian dogmas.

FERGUS KERR OP

**DAVID JONES: DIVERSITY IN UNITY: STUDIES OF HIS LITERARY AND VISUAL ART** edited by Belinda Humfrey and Anne Price-Owen  
*University of Wales Press Cardiff, 2000. Pp. 166, £35.00 hbk.*

David Jones was recognised in his lifetime as a poet and painter of great significance, but appreciation and study of his work has increased markedly since his death in 1974. Today he is the subject of postgraduate research in universities on both sides of the Atlantic, conferences and seminars on him are fairly frequent, and the David Jones Society has a large membership. In a typical year during the last decade, two books on David Jones have appeared, Seren and the University of Wales Press being their most likely publishers, and the first full-length biography of Jones, written by Thomas Dilworth, is soon to be published by Jonathan Cape. The essays in *David Jones: Diversity in Unity* are based on lectures given at a conference at Lampeter in 1995. It is inevitable that Jonesian scholars will compare it with *David Jones: Artist and Poet*, edited by Paul Hills and published by the Scholar Press in 1997, a volume of almost identical format and length, with some of the same contributors. In my estimate, the overall quality and range of the two collections is similar, but *David Jones: Diversity in Unity* is more attractively produced and is priced almost five pounds cheaper than the earlier volume, so the new book wins by a head.

These essays could have been conveniently grouped under three headings — 'Wales and Welshness' (Hooker, Allchin and Evans), 'Experiments with Form' (Clayton, Everatt and Goldpaugh) and 'Signs and Symbolism' (Blissett, Dilworth, Price-Owen, Shiel and Humfrey) — with R.S. Thomas's contribution as an endpiece, but instead they have been arranged with a seeming randomness, except that Thomas's does indeed come last in