

that is why he is more revered today among secular philosophers than among theologians. He strongly denied that Christians need to be intellectuals. Yet he was an intellectual of a most careful and sophisticated kind. And, like all great thinkers, he is not easy to understand and learn from. He was a theological and philosophical genius, so we need people able to present him to a wide audience. *Sheer Joy*, however, does him less than the justice he deserves. Like Bertrand Russell's famous denigration of Aquinas in *A History of Western Philosophy* (which it so curiously resembles), it will probably mislead readers rather than inform them. Those who want a text-based introduction to Aquinas's thinking are still, therefore, currently best advised to read Timothy McDermott's *Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation* (London, 1989). This book really does allow Aquinas to speak for himself in modern English. And its commentary on him is accurate, clear, and stimulating.

BRIAN DAVIES OP

THE GLORY OF THE LORD. V: THE REALM OF METAPHYSICS IN THE MODERN AGE by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Edinburgh: *T. & T. Clark*, 1991.

The present volume of *The Glory of the Lord* is surely one of Balthasar's most fascinating studies. On the one hand, it is a book with a simple thesis, namely that glory has disappeared from modern culture. On the other hand, it is an extremely complex book, for it takes the reader through a complicated journey involving a significant number of major literary and philosophical figures of modernity.

The thesis of the book is fairly straightforward. Modern thought after Thomas Aquinas marks a sharp decline, for the key insight of Thomas was lost sight of, namely the analogy of being. The proportion between created Being and infinite subsistent Being allowed the splendour of God's Being to be reflected in the creation. After Aquinas, two lines of development were opened up. One was the conceptual school represented by Scotus according to which Being is a comprehensive *concept* of reason. In this case the concept of Being applies univocally to God and creatures but Being is a hollow concept, for it excludes all its own determinations and hence the glory of created beings. The other option pursued after St. Thomas was the identification of God and Being. For Balthasar this seems to be the more intriguing possibility. It is reflected in the great mystical tradition represented by Eckhart. In this tradition the key virtue of the creature is indifference by which it opens itself in transparency to God. Obviously the tendency to pantheism is strong here. This path once embarked on easily leads to the tradition of German idealism where Being and finite spirit become identical. The difficulty is that in this scheme the world really becomes only a manifestation of spirit, hence it is robbed of its own glory. Thus,

516

ultimately the world is swallowed up in idea.

According to Balthasar, the great interlude between mysticism and idealism is the return to classicism. This was really an attempt by modernity to regain the glory of the world but it was doomed to failure. Once the monism of Greek thinking was broken through by Christianity with its faith in an infinitely free God, it was impossible to regain the ground of antiquity. The classical revival embodied in a genius such as Goethe was anti-Christian. The religious dimension of the world was excluded. Prayer was replaced by reverence. But in so doing the depth dimension of the creation was lost. In Balthasar's opinion, in such a climate, the only alternative is a philosophy of beauty not an epiphany of glory. Hence he argues that it is no accident that the science of aesthetics emerges in the modern period. Aesthetics can pretend to be an exact science only because it is no longer open to the depth dimension of Being. The only way to recover the glory of the world is to reappropriate the Christian perspective.

The skeleton of the argument just produced in no way conveys the richness of the book. This volume is filled with detailed analyses of many of the greatest thinkers of modernity such as Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, Goethe, Hölderlin, the German idealists, and Heidegger. I personally found the pages on Heidegger one of the clearest presentations of his thinking I have encountered which offer as well a penetrating critique of his approach to the Mystery of Being. For Balthasar, Heidegger's fatal flaw is the limitation of his inquiry to the ontological difference, thus failing to move beyond it to the mystery of the *analogia entis*. By remaining fixed within the distinction between Being and beings (thus rendering the distinction absolute), Heidegger makes the ontological difference a sphinx before which we cannot live and love.

As the last point suggests, for Balthasar the Mystery of Being, made present in the ontological difference, can be finally illuminated only when it opens out to the infinite free Creator who wishes to share his Being with the creature. The mystery of freedom is therefore the mystery of love. Already in the primordial experience of the child, the human being gets a hint of the truth that Being is love through the smile of the mother. Here the child first gets the intuition of the permission to be. The human being discovers that he is allowed to be and has a unique participation in Being by which he can never be inserted as a *part* into the totality but rather is a unique freedom in which the totality can be grasped. This original metaphysical intuition will finally be grasped in its depths only when the Mystery of Being is illuminated through the revelation of the God of love.

This book does not make easy reading. The thesis of the book is simple but the paths to the goal are often complicated, filled with dense analyses of difficult thinkers.

The final part of the book offers an overview of Balthasar's own approach to metaphysics. These pages are extremely challenging but also rewarding. They offer the best comprehensive account of

Balthasar's understanding of the Mystery of Being which I know. Although this volume on glory in the modern age of metaphysics is difficult reading, it demonstrates the plausibility of de Lubac's judgment that Balthasar is the most cultured Catholic mind of our century.

JOHN O'DONNELL SJ

BENEDICTINE TAPESTRY by Felicitas Corrigan *Darton, Longman & Todd, London, Pp. 223, £ 9.95.*

A number of books in recent years have dealt with the subject of monasticism, examining its origins, development and relevance to contemporary Christianity. *Benedictine Tapestry* represents a further contribution to this genre. The author, Dame Felicitas Corrigan, offers us a look at some of the basic elements characteristic of the monastic life as interpreted within the Benedictine Order, drawing upon information from historical and biographical sources as well as her own experience as a nun of Stanbrook Abbey.

In the introduction, Corrigan states that she senses a need to explain some of the fundamental principles of the monastic life in order to dispel a part of the mystique that often shrouds the lifestyle of the monk or nun. Although some people may at different times have questioned the value of the monastic life, how far Corrigan's present work will go to set matters aright remains unclear. Taken as a whole, the book offers a wealth of illuminating details concerning Benedictine spirituality, as well as a first-hand look at the lifestyle and customs of the Stanbrook community; however, the writing style reflects a certain disconnectedness in the development of ideas. Consequently, several times while reading the book I felt at a loss to discover how the paragraphs within a given chapter relate to each other. The author's tendency to express her thoughts disconnectedly strikes one especially in the first several chapters.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One discusses the historical development of the Benedictine Order, with particular attention given to how the Order took hold in England. The opening chapter focuses on the remote origins of Christian monasticism, tracing in some detail the etymology of the word 'monk' to its Syriac root while contrasting non-Christian ascetic practice to that adopted by the Egyptian Fathers and Mothers of the desert. The succeeding chapters discuss the role of women in the evolution of the monastic life, examine the contributions made to the upbuilding of the Benedictine Order in England by Saints Gregory the Great and Wulfstan, and acquaint us with the personal histories of Hildegard of Bingen and Heloise.

Throughout Part One, Corrigan exhibits skill as a researcher and interpreter of historical data, as well as a remarkable grasp of the foundational principles of monasticism. Unfortunately, these elements combined do not overcome the effect created by the pervasive juxtaposition of disparate ideas. In almost every chapter in this first