



BOOK REVIEW

Emmanuel Durand, O.P., *Divine Speech in Human Words: Thomistic Engagements with Scripture*, ed. Matthew K. Miner

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Stephen Fowl

Church Divinity School of the Pacific, San Mateo, CA, USA (sfowl@cdsp.edu)

As one whose primary training is in biblical studies and who also finds Thomas Aquinas a thoroughly engaging interpretive partner, I was eager to take on the task of reviewing a volume with a title such as this one. I was especially intrigued by the subtitle, which promises something more than a summary of Thomas' interpretive views of any particular passage. Having read this volume, I now fear I am not able to do justice to its breadth. Yes, the first half of the book (and, perhaps, chapter 17) contains wonderful Thomistic engagements with Scripture. The second half, however, ranges much further afield, into systematic and dogmatic theology. Indeed, there is sufficient material here for two distinct volumes. Nevertheless, anyone who purchases this volume will have a wide-ranging and rich collection of essays on Thomas. Although virtually all of the chapters have appeared in various journals and edited volumes, only a few have appeared in English.

The first chapter is the only chapter composed just for this volume. In it, Durand reveals a pastor's and teacher's ongoing concern to make Christianity intelligible to beginning students, students who come with a particular predisposition against scripture's account of God. 'The central thesis of this volume is that the portrait of God revealed in scripture is fundamentally intelligible... the book seeks to address our contemporary culture's profound sense ... that the biblical God is a weak concept that cannot be taken seriously by those wishing to reflect rationally concerning God's existence, nature and relations with creation' (p. 30). Durand's case in this chapter is driven by a wide-ranging account of scripture read through Augustinian eyes. Thomas plays little direct role here.

The next eight chapters engage questions that many of us who teach undergraduates often face when students first encounter scripture in a deep way, whether they are already believers or not. In chapter 2 Durand addresses the idea that a holy God is too different, too transcendent to engage and be engaged by us. Instead, Durand proposes, 'God's revealed holiness enables us to critique a superficial conception of transcendence, understood as a kind of projective difference' (p. 35). Isaiah 6 and Exodus 3 play key roles here. Chapter 3 takes up the fact that scripture regularly speaks of God having passions and emotions, and how these might fit into a picture, also written into scripture, of an unchanging God. In his account, Durand reminds us that, in addition to all the other things one wants to say about human emotions, they are also specific ways of engaging the world. 'Thus, when the biblical God reveals himself

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as having emotions, we learn something about the unique manner of God's engagement with his beloved creation and creatures' (p. 53). This chapter leads nicely into a discussion of God's love in chapter 4, beginning with Hosea and moving into a discussion of trinitarian love and the incarnation. This is followed by a discussion of anger, both human and divine. The climax of this chapter is a subtle discussion of Exodus 32.

Chapter 6 asks if the immutable God is subject to sorrow. Durand emphasises that acceptance of divine immutability does not result in an inert or indifferent God. Instead, the assertion of immutability is primarily designed to 'hold together the properties of Christ's divine nature along with the truth of the economy that he lived out in the flesh' (p. 129). Durand thus seeks to reconcile immutability and the sorrow of God in the light of the cross. The final two chapters in this section address God's power in relation to the notion of what is and is not possible, and the relationship between petitionary prayer and God's providence. Throughout these chapters, Durand displays a close attention to the detail of scripture. In full recognition of that detail, he also draws out insights, clarifications and interpretive advances with help from Augustine and Aquinas.

If chapter 17, 'Aquinas on the Incarnation as a "Conversation" in Charity', was included with these eight chapters, the volume would be a manageable whole presenting a wonderful set of Thomistic engagements with scripture that would enlighten biblical scholars and theologians alike. The pastoral and pedagogical commitment of Durand is nicely served by his acute philosophical insight to produce a deeply fruitful engagement with some of the knottiest theological problems that arise from a sustained and comprehensive reading of scripture.

For better or worse, depending on one's perspective, the volume contains six more chapters that address matters less directly biblical and more directly systematic: 'The Interplay of Effects of Nature and of Grace in Knowing God'; 'From Conceptual Rectitude to Truthful Speech *vis-à-vis* God'; 'The Practice of Trinitarian Theology as Wayfaring Pilgrims'; 'Should the Cross Be the Sole Revelation of the Trinity?'; 'Paternal Theocentrism: The Eschatological Finality of God the Father'; 'Christ's Mission Implies His Preexistence: A Scriptural Argument'; as well as 'Aquinas on the Incarnation as a "Conversation" in Charity' and 'The Universal Amplitude of Christ's Singularity'.

Indeed, some of these chapters continue to engage scripture, but the tenor of the discussion becomes much more technically Thomist. I do not mean that as a criticism. Rather I want to recognise that different audiences will engage the parts of this book very differently. I simply am not able to make judgements about the more technical Thomistic discussions. Chapter 12, 'From Conceptual Rectitude to Truthful Speech *vis-à-vis* God', seeks to engage and criticise the work of George Lindbeck. I can say two things in this regard. First, I think those who are persuaded by Lindbeck's work will find that Durand caricatures rather than characterises charitably Lindbeck's main assertions. Second (and more importantly), he never engages Bruce Marshall's essay on Thomas as a post-liberal theologian.

Whatever the correct size and scope of this volume ought to have been, English-speaking audiences now have access to Durand's work. He combines penetrating scriptural interpretation with acute philosophical insight to address his pastoral concern with the questions many students bring to the study of theology in general and scripture more particularly. All of this is a great gift.

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