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Book Review: Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard. By Joshua Furnal. Pp. xv, 255, Oxford University Press, 2016, \$99.00.

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Joshua Furnal, *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, ISBN 978-0-19-875467-1, xv + 255pp.

Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard by Joshua Furnal is, from the start, refreshingly straightforward in terms of cataloging 20th Century Catholic responses to Kierkegaard. What is clear is that putting Kierkegaard in dialogue with *ressourcement* Catholic thought provides an interesting byway through which to view productive Catholic responses to modernity anew. This highly specific focus of its subject matter does at times lack a certain engagement with a larger contemporary theological horizon upon which the reflection takes place, only pointing at times toward a desire for further study in league with the Thomism of figures such as John Milbank or Alasdair MacIntyre (p. 217). Nonetheless, the book, in my opinion, succeeds in reminding its readers of how influential Kierkegaard has been upon 20th Century thought, and this is a situation that is not soon to let up. Indeed, Furnal's repeated suggestion that Catholic theologians in particular need to pay more attention to a seminal Protestant figure they have often dismissed out of hand is a reminder too of the ecumenical age in which we live and which must grow more and more comfortable with what had at first appeared to be an unwanted otherness.

The first chapter attempts to open Kierkegaard's theological anthropology toward Catholic thought by demonstrating how it is perhaps more ecumenical than has previously been maintained, and might even point toward a profitable 'Catholic' reading of Kierkegaard's work on the whole. Furnal searches through various critical readings of Kierkegaard's work in order to reveal, for example, a mystical undercurrent of thought that might join together with the Catholic tradition. Likewise, a closer reading of *Works of Love* seeks to demonstrate how Kierkegaard in fact deviated from a more or less standard Lutheran account of the human person, opening up our understanding of his point of view toward a Catholic horizon that much further. Rather than read Luther as at the root of his thought, Furnal demonstrates how Kierkegaard 'offers instead a *parody* of Luther, which carries within it an implicit criticism of an extrinsicist interpretation of grace' (p. 27), pushing Kierkegaard perhaps somewhat closer to Aquinas than to Luther, and maybe even, he suggests, to Benedict XVI's remarks on love as expressed in community in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*.

Kierkegaard's theology of creation and redemption, which Furnal examines next, likewise is shown to have a deeper resonance with Aquinas' thought than one might initially suspect—a recurring conclusion within each chapter, but one that is played out effectively enough. Furnal subsequently addresses Kierkegaard's allegedly 'non-historicist approach to the Christian faith' (p. 44), which is, in truth, entirely compatible with Catholic efforts to integrate faith and history. He also takes up the themes of paradox and contemporaneity in an attempt to reiterate the trajectory of the book in ever subtler terms: 'Again, my claim is that Kierkegaard actually shares the basic task of *ressourcement* theologians: a paradoxical relation of faith and history in the modern age' (p. 57). In this paradoxical relation, we find too that there is a Kierkegaardian illustration, one picked up by various *ressourcement* theologians, for the necessity of performing a continuously self-critical 'autopsy of faith' when standing before God, one that sustains those of faith throughout a variety of circumstances.

The second chapter, comprehensively titled 'Catholic Reception of Kierkegaard's Writings in the Twentieth Century', attempts to find a particular resonance between a Kierkegaardian theological anthropology and the general trajectory of *ressourcement* thought, targeting specifically such luminaries as Theodor Haecker, Romano Guardini, Erich Przywara, Erik Peterson, Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, James Collins and Louis Dupré. What unfolds is a brief historical narration that takes a deeper look at how Kierkegaard was generally received after his death in English, French and German-speaking contexts, focusing in particular on the seminal studies of, in France, Jean Wahl and, in Germany, Theodor Haecker, who translated both Kierkegaard and John Henry Newman. Alongside this history, we find too a survey of the reception of various themes in Kierkegaard's writings—wonder, idle chatter, the absurd, melancholy, the leap of faith, his attacks on the (mainly Protestant) Church, sin and grace, paradox and faith—as they are picked up and enmeshed with the aforementioned *ressourcement* theologians. Each highly balanced discussion of a major Catholic theologian engaging with Kierkegaard's work suffices to demonstrate that the latter's influence was real and lasting, even if at times subtle or seemingly of secondary importance.

The third chapter outlines the impact of Kierkegaard's work upon the personal life and writings of Henri de Lubac. In general, and as with the chapters that follow, Furnal spends a good deal of time chasing down references to Kierkegaard within each theologian's work, evaluating them for what they are worth and looking at the same time for fainter homages to Kierkegaard's thought and stylistics within the oeuvre. What struck de Lubac about Kierkegaard's work specifically, Furnal demonstrates, was how he was able to formulate an authentic response to atheist humanism in the modern era, something that Kierkegaard had made a legitimate enterprise and that from which de Lubac drew continuous inspiration as he faced a good many challenges both theological and personal vis-à-vis the Catholic Church. Overcoming self-deception and formulating a theology of grace became central concerns for de Lubac and, as Furnal shows us, he meticulously worked Kierkegaard's thought into each domain in order to construct relevant, modern notions of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and inwardness as a spiritual dimension, among other ideas.

The fourth chapter takes a more sustained look at Hans Urs von Balthasar's various critiques of Kierkegaard while also mounting what Furnal refers to as 'A Kierkegaardian Critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics' (p. 144). Accordingly, Furnal devotes the first section to re-assessing Balthasar's critique of *The Concept of Anxiety*, eventually concluding that, in league with Kierkegaard, 'anxiety is necessary and redeemable through the theological virtue of faith', something which Balthasar overlooks (p. 151). Indeed, there is an apparent lack of nuance present in Balthasar's critique of Kierkegaard's account of the aesthetic, one that Furnal takes him to task for in order to reveal a specific 'Christological malfunction in Balthasar's theology because of his divergence from Kierkegaard' (p. 167). At the same time, Furnal will speculate that theological insight can be recovered from Kierkegaard's take on the sacraments if he is only read much closer than Balthasar was willing to do. It is in this sense that Catholic theologians might profit a good deal from that which is typically underestimated or devalued in Kierkegaard's thought.

The 20th Century Italian Thomist and translator of Kierkegaard, Cornelio Fabro whose own unique Thomism, Furnal demonstrates in the final chapter, is not only compatible with modern, Kierkegaardian thought, but engages with the latter's work on Mariology and ecclesiology (read alongside John Henry Newman) specifically. Fabro's analysis of modern atheism, which too draws from Kierkegaardian influence, is the only work of his to be translated into English, *God in Exile* (1968). By moving beyond this single work, in many ways Furnal does the reader a great service by simply providing insight into Fabro's deeper work and legacy. Fabro's claim that Kierkegaard's work uniquely brings us to the doorstep of Thomism seems in many ways to be the underpinning to Furnal's argument that Kierkegaard should be taken more seriously than he has by Catholic theologians. Bringing Fabro's claims to light, then, perhaps serves as the central lynchpin of the book on the whole. Framing a positive reception of existentialism in the context of both Kierkegaard's work and Catholic theology, Fabro does what many Catholic theologians of the time were unable to do, recover the thought of Kierkegaard in such a way as to strengthen Catholic claims and to point the way toward a more feasible theological future. Among the many insights Fabro gleans from Kierkegaard are his sustained critique of idealism, an 'ethical defense of individual human freedom' and the charges levied against liberal Protestant theology watered down in the wake of modernity (p. 195)—each of which providing a stable platform for Catholic thought to renew itself in relation to Kierkegaard.

There are passages in the book where the link between Kierkegaard and some particular *ressourcement* theologian wears perhaps a bit thinner than might be desired, or where the connection to Thomistic thought seems perhaps a bit too forced as a tidy conclusion. The central argument of the work, however, never wavers or buckles under the weight of the general thesis: Catholic theologians must dig deeper into Kierkegaard's work than they have done thus far, and immense riches await those willing to take the time to study one of the most complex and edifying theological minds of the modern era.

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