

THE CONVERSATION OF FAITH AND REASON: MODERN CATHOLIC THOUGHT FROM HERMES TO BENEDICT XVI. By Aidan Nichols, O.P. Chicago: Hillebrand, 2011. Pp. x + 222. \$23.

The interrelation of faith and reason demands a perspicacious eye for subtle distinctions. Nichols provides his readers with just such an eye, albeit with his own lens. Originally published in the United Kingdom as *From Hermes to Benedict XVI* (2009), this republication is a welcome contribution to Anglophone scholarship. Its greatest virtue is the ability to analyze succinctly German and French thinkers who are typically omitted from narratives of modern Catholic thought. The book follows in the footsteps of Avery Dulles's *The Assurance of Things Hoped For* (1994) while contributing a new perspective in light of John Paul II's *Fides et ratio* (1998).

N. approaches the topic from the angle of "fundamental dogmatics" (2), adopting Dulles's approach to *sentire cum ecclesia* (to think with the church). Although his starting point is the magisterium, N. also insists that an "imperfect universality" exists in the history of the Catholic intellectual pursuit of truth (20). He charts several interrelated philosophical strands in post-Kantian Catholic thought, conversant with contemporary ideas while also employing Pauline and Johannine emphases. His point is simple: one cannot begin to understand *Fides et ratio* and its magisterial precedents without learning from past voices who are "still worth hearing" (21).

Who are these voices? N.'s selection of figures forms a curious narrative. In the 19th century, the reader encounters a Kantian in Georg Hermes (1775–1831), a quasi-Hegelian in Anton Günther (1783–1863), a traditionalist in Louis Bautain (1796–1867), and a nascent neo-Thomist in Joseph Kleutgen (1811–1883). N. mediates these conflicting views by examining closely the papal pronouncements of Gregory XVI and Pius IX, *Dei filius* of Vatican I, and Leo XIII's *Aeterni patris*. It is with Leo's search for a "Christian philosophy" that N. turns to the revival of ontological metaphysics in the works of Étienne Gilson (1884–1978), and the search for the *l'unique nécessaire* in the thought of Maurice Blondel (1861–1949). Initially it seems odd to place Gilson before Blondel when chronology would dictate otherwise. N.'s narrative takes this liberty to show how Vatican I's insistence on the natural aptitude and limits of reason manifests itself in the philosophies of Gilson and Blondel. Gilson's "eschatological" Thomism sheds light on Blondel's "philosophy of action" (134), and the realization that one only arrives at a complete *intellectus fidei* via an *experience* of faith and personal assent to Christian revelation. For N., Leo's turn to Thomas did not envision the negative solution of Louvain's neo-Scholasticism. Rather, Gilson and Blondel rediscover Leo's *positive* alternative. Assent to revelation requires more than a propositional approach; rather, it demands an act of faith in the subjective *reception* of revelation.

Here the voices of Ambroise Gardeil (1859–1931) and Pierre Rousselot (1878–1915) add to the chorus. Gardeil reaffirms the need for objective historical events, while Rousselot emphasizes the subjective ability of the “eyes of faith” to discern the “signs” of revelation (167).

N. arrives at another synthetic correction in the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) and the “epiphanic nature of the Christ-event” (171). Given N.’s scholarship on Balthasar, the appeal to the latter’s “aesthetic reason” is little surprise. Balthasar is the one who sets the stage for *communio* theology and its integration of both the objective and subjective dimensions of revelation’s reception. Thus the phenomenological personalism of John Paul II shines forth in *Fides et ratio* and responds both directly and indirectly to all the preceding voices.

However, N. intimates a preference for the *logos* Christology of Benedict XVI and its location of reason within divine love. Here N. finds a Gilsonian answer, what he terms a “Chalcedonian” approach to faith and reason, theology and philosophy, such that the latter retains its own principles while recognizing its inherent limits. Without confusion or separation, faith envelopes reason without destroying it, much as the divinity of Christ ensures the integrity of his humanity.

N.’s particular lens reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of the book. Its brevity and clarity create a style that is informative for both the student and the seasoned scholar. His command of sources in their original languages is also remarkable. Yet, as with any survey, several significant Catholic voices receive only the occasional footnote. The reader finds little on the Tübingen School, Newman, the Modernist Crisis, the *nouvelle théologie*, or Rahner and Lonergan. Although acutely aware of issues related to faith and reason—such as the development of doctrine, the historical reception of revelation and the problem of nature and grace—N. does not shy away from his commitments: he is a Gilsonian Thomist, and this claim molds his narrative of “complementary and convergent” thinkers (211). One only hopes that N. will expand his writing on such a complex theological and historical question. An index and bibliography are included.

Marquette University, Milwaukee

PAUL G. MONSON