

it does move things in that direction by providing a space sympathetic to reason regardless of its source, to the extent that the best of pagan thought can be a resource for Christian theology and the internal life of the Church.

This way of doing theology, theology as informed by the method of *scientia*, allows St Thomas to arrive at a number of substantive positions that Decosimo employs to support his case for pagan virtue. There are many detailed theological and metaphysical arguments here, but the foundation of Decosimo's position is basically that since the good is understood in terms of being, then pagans participate in the good simply by existing; and since all desire the good, pagans are oriented to the good as the rational human beings created by God that they are. This leads to Decosimo arguing that St Thomas 'views creaturely perfection as participation in the Son, good-seeking as Christ-seeking, and, for that reason, he welcomes Aristotle as a genuine seeker, trusted teacher, and wise friend' (p.41).

Many of the more general arguments put forward by Decosimo are familiar to Thomists, but the detail of his analysis, the acuity of his insights and the careful distinctions he draws are where the merits of this work reside. This book is also a timely contribution to the current debate, given the recent increase of interest in the infused virtues among Thomists. Where I think Decosimo could have easily improved this book, though, is by giving the reader more guidance as to the aims of individual sections and chapters, explaining step by step how they contribute to the overall argument. Had he done this, I suspect a number of sections would have been shorter and more focused and the arguments clearer. But to mention a reservation like this is implicitly to pay Decosimo a compliment, that some additional argumentative clarity would have allowed the force of his arguments to make the impact they deserve.

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**JUAN DE VALDES AND THE ITALIAN REFORMATION** by Massimo Firpo, *Ashgate*, Farnham, 2015, pp. xvi + 261, £70.00, hbk.

Massimo Firpo opposes the use of any 'confessional framework' to interpret the Italian Reformation. Such an approach, he claims, fails to recognize complexities and ambiguities which 'cannot be reduced to an uneven clash between grim inquisitors and heroic martyrs of the faith'. The book scrupulously avoids any partisan interpretation. Firpo prefers to use the term 'Italian Reformation' rather than 'The Reformation in Italy', thinking that the latter term risks ideological bias. He is unsympathetic to the approach of recent English and American historians who fight

shy of the terms ‘Catholic Reformation’ and ‘Counter-Reformation’, subsuming them in the vague category of ‘early modern Catholicism’. This approach, he believes, fails to take account of the severities of the Holy Office, smoothing rough edges and gliding over the ‘gaps, delays and failures’ of post-Tridentine reforms.

But Firpo is no neutral interpreter – he laments the failure of the Italian Reformation and believes that, in consequence, Italy: ‘gradually became more and more marginal, divided, provincial and lazily immobilized in its moral and social apathy, unable to free itself from its perennial subjection to popes and priests’. This severe judgment reprises some of the old battle cries of the ‘*Risorgimento*’. Firpo clearly finds ‘the rigidities of post-Tridentine Catholicism’ unappealing. Yet it is extremely doubtful whether any middle way between Lutheranism and Catholicism, advocated by men such as Pole and Morone, would have saved Italy from inertia, apathy and fragmentation.

The author regards the Spanish exile, Juan de Valdés, ‘charismatic master of Christian life’, as the animating spirit of the Italian Reformation. From his early experience and studies, Valdés developed a ‘creative synthesis of Erasmianism, Lutheranism and alumbradismo.’ It was perhaps the ‘alumbradist’ influence which was most significant. Valdés had imbibed this heretical teaching, ‘the only original and constantly Spanish heresy’ (Marquez), in the household of the Marquis of Villena during 1523 where Pedro de Alcaraz was expounding it. Quintessentially Spanish it may have been, but it bears strong ‘family’ resemblance to strains of mystical teaching elsewhere and in other eras. The ‘alumbradists’ insisted that the fundamental authority in faith was divine illumination - interior experience had absolute priority - without it, religious tradition, scripture or doctrine, could not be appropriated. Such teaching was implicitly subversive, although doctrinal controversy was to be avoided and the Church’s unity preserved. Valdés and his disciples practiced what Calvin called ‘Nicodemism’ – careful dissimulation of their deepest convictions. In 1526 Valdés studied at the great University of Alcalá. His thinking was deeply marked by the Erasmian humanism and Lutheran sympathies current there.

In his late twenties, Valdés published the *Diálogo de doctrina christiana* which, though discreetly written, betrayed these influences. His powerful sympathisers were unable to prevent prosecution and Valdés thought it prudent to move from Spain to Italy, working first in the court of Clement VII and then for Charles V as imperial secretary and secret agent. During these years he seems to have received minor orders. Although employed as a court official, he continued religious studies and, after the election of Paul III whom he detested, he moved permanently to Naples in 1535. Here he remained until his death in 1541, writing prodigiously, not for publication - copies of his works were discreetly circulated. He gathered a group of devout noblewomen of whom Giulia Gonzaga was the most prominent and, in the last

few years of his life, a group of men who would proclaim Valdesian doctrine, in coded rhetoric, the length and breadth of Italy and beyond. This circle included Flaminio, Ochino, Vermigli, Carnesecchi, and Soranzo who were to have influential careers, ending in exile or execution. Friars were prominent in spreading reformist doctrines, especially justification by faith. Like heterodox books, these mendicants could circulate surprisingly easily. Augustinians and Franciscans, but not Dominicans, were prominent among reformist preachers.

The sclerotic Church was slow to respond to Luther's rebellion. Attempts at finding a middle way, reconciling Lutheran and Catholic teaching, failed. Leading reformists like Pole and Morone placed much hope in the Council of Trent. Flaminio preached Valdesian doctrine in Pole's household in Viterbo and it was there that the widely circulated Valdesian 'manifesto' the *Beneficio di Cristo* was edited and prepared for publication. Firpo is convinced that Pole's doctrinal position was one of 'undeniable heterodoxy'. As heterodox books circulated and charismatic preachers like Ochino occupied pulpits up and down the land, the guardians of orthodoxy began to marshal their forces. Carafa, head of the Holy Office, was determined to reinvigorate and centralize the activities of the Inquisition. By one vote he prevented Pole's election during the 1549–50 conclave. Voting at Trent swung emphatically against the Valdesians. Luther's doctrine of justification, the 'sweet doctrine of freedom and predestination' (Politi), was condemned. Before long, Valdes was regarded as an arch-enemy of the faith and 'Valdesianism', like 'Modernism' in 1907, 'a compendium of all heresies'.

The 'Nicodemism' practiced by Valdesians no longer shielded them and the subversive implications were recognized. It was systematically rooted out, together with the anabaptist groups who had assimilated some of the Valdesian doctrines. It became clear that Valdesian teaching threatened both Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy. Prominent exiles, like Vermigli, Regius professor in Oxford for seven years, held academic posts abroad and continued to expound Valdés' eirenic principles. Others began to follow unhesitatingly the subversive logic of the teaching. By driving leaders of Valdesian reform beyond Italy, the Inquisition spread radically heterodox teaching throughout Europe. Fausto Sozzini, of a distinguished Sieneese family of lawyers, became leader of the Polish Lesser Brethren in Rakov. From there, Socinianism 'was to trouble theologians from one end of Europe to another.' Repression is a blunt instrument and its repercussions unpredictable. Firpo regards the 'rigidities of post-Tridentine Catholicism' as disastrous, but would a Valdesian reform of the Church have been preferable? This fine, challenging study subverts any attempt to read the Italian Reformation simplistically, but there is no simple answer to that particular question.

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