

## Reviews

**THE PINCKAERS READER: RENEWING THOMISTIC MORAL THEOLOGY**  
edited by John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus, *Catholic University of America Press*, Washington, D.C., 2005, Pp. 422, £23.50 pbk.

Without a doubt, the French-speaking Belgian Dominican Servais Pinckaers has been the key figure spearheading the effort to renew Thomistic moral theology in the Twentieth Century. Thanks to the 1995 English translation of his celebrated *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (*Les sources de la morale chrétienne*), this effort at renewal has spread to the English-speaking world (Pinckaers has also been translated into Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, Polish, Hungarian, and Russian). The influence of Pinckaers is especially noticeable in America, where a whole Pinckaers school of thought, as one might call it, has been spawned in the wake of the English publication of *The Sources*. Indeed, at a conference in Fribourg, Switzerland this past October honoring Pinckaers's eightieth birthday, of the twelve invited speakers who have taken up his renewing work in moral theology, a full eight were American, and a ninth teaches in America. Two of these eight are the editors of this present volume.

By their own admission, the editors intend this work to serve as a sequel of sorts to *The Sources*. To this end, it provides a collection of Pinckaers's most significant scholarly essays—most of them translated for the first time into English—since the publication of this earlier work. The essays are organized systematically around the key themes of Pinckaers's thought. These key themes all relate in some way to that invaluable observation by which Pinckaers has staked his claim in the field, namely, that modern moral theology has been dominated by a 'juridical' approach to the moral life, characteristic of both proportionalists and manualists alike. Such an approach views moral action as 'primarily about what one is 'obligated,' 'permitted,' or 'forbidden' to do in this or that situation,' and stands in sharp contrast to 'the virtue-oriented approach which dominates Aquinas's work, where discernment and pursuit of the good, the excellent, and the holy underlie the evaluation of an act being permissible or forbidden' (xv). Pinckaers, of course, has spent his entire career attempting to recover the latter.

The present volume opens with an informative introduction, as it offers a brief biographical sketch of Pinckaers's life, the significance of his work, and an explanation of the systematic division of Pinckaers's essays collected in this work into five sections. The first section is devoted to essays which exhibit Pinckaers's methodology, notably the Belgian Dominican's insistence that the sources of Aquinas's thought (especially Scripture and the Fathers, but also philosophy) are the key to understanding Thomas's moral doctrine. This section includes a wonderful entry on the Eucharist and the Church as sources of Aquinas's moral thought. While the modern reader might wonder what the Eucharist and the Church are doing in a consideration of the sources upon which Aquinas builds his moral system, it offers telling evidence of what Pinckaers has always sounded in his recovery of Thomas's moral thought; namely, that Aquinas knows nothing, because it is most unnatural, of the modern separation between spirituality and moral theology. After all, for St. Thomas beatitude—the supreme fulfillment attained in the loving beholding of God's essence—marks the proper *telos* of the moral life, and thus the keystone to any comprehensive moral edifice worthy of its name.

Not by accident, then, the second section moves to a consideration of the notion of beatitude and, more generally, of Aquinas's theological anthropology. The third section follows by highlighting Pinckaers's critical regard for both Kantian moral thought and modern proportionalism. Regarding the latter, there is a significant essay offering an historical examination of the bane of proportionalism: intrinsically evil acts.

The last two sections deal with the principles, as Thomas calls them, by which the human person attains beatitude, namely, the virtues, law (including natural law) and grace. As for the virtues, particular emphasis is placed on the role of the passions in the work of moral virtue, since for Aquinas the human yearning for the First Good and for ultimate happiness builds upon and brings to proper fulfillment the human inclination, via the passions, to created bodily goods. Emphasis is also given to the paramount role of prudence in conscientious decision making. The final essays centre on the convergence of law and grace, which is nothing other than the New Law of the Christian Gospel, and of the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in the human quest for beatitude. A rich comprehensive bibliography and several helpful indices complete the work.

With this book the editors have provided a valuable service to the field of moral theology (a keynote speaker at the aforementioned conference justly hailed this work as 'a great gift to the English-speaking Church'). It is a 'must read' for anyone seriously interested not only in Thomistic moral theology but, more generally, in the renewal of moral theology called for by the Second Vatican Council and by *Veritatis splendor*. While one might quibble over the particular selection of essays chosen for this book, as more was excluded than included, it succeeds well in offering a representative sample of the entire range of Pinckaers's work. Admittedly, Thomistic moral thought has made its greatest inroads recently in the revived interest in virtue-centered ethics—and on the back sleeve Fergus Kerr does not hesitate to don Pinckaers 'the greatest exponent of (the virtue ethics) tradition.' Yet the role of virtue in the moral life marks but one element among several in Aquinas's moral system, and it is this entire system which Pinckaers has sought to reintroduce into moral discourse. In the minds of many, Pinckaers is the master in showing how a radical re-thinking of moral theology need not follow the path trodden by proportionalism, but instead emerge as a genuine response to the call for renewal in moral theology that truly remains within the Catholic tradition. I share with the editors the hope 'that this volume will help inject Pinckaers's perspective into the on-going debate in English-speaking context as to how moral theology is to be renewed and reinigorated' (xxiii).

PAUL GONDREAU

**A CHURCH THAT CAN AND CANNOT CHANGE** by John T. Noonan, Jr.,  
*Erasmus Institute Books/University of Notre Dame Press, South Bend, IN,*  
2005, Pp. 280, £23.50 hbk.

John Noonan returns here to issues he has considered at greater length elsewhere: slavery, usury, religious liberty, and divorce. His approach is forensic, a careful accumulation of evidence (especially in regard to slavery) which he then allows to speak for itself. What he wants us to hear it saying is clear enough: that Catholic moral teaching has changed significantly both in terms of now rejecting as intrinsically evil what it once considered morally acceptable (slavery) and of now regarding as acceptable what it once considered morally reprehensible (usury). He argues that the Church's teaching on religious liberty has changed between statements of Gregory XVI and Pius IX, and Vatican II's decree *Dignitatis humanae*. The twentieth-century application of what may or may not be called 'the Petrine