

BOOK REVIEWS

the so-called “hard problem of consciousness” (subjectivity, qualia), rather than being just relevant to some region or subdomain of reality, is one that challenges our understanding of the cosmos and its evolution as a whole. He expects any new science of the future that is prepared to struggle in earnest with the problems of consciousness, cognition and value to be one that has gone through a process of fundamental self-reassessment.

Viewed in the most general terms, Nagel is engaged in the traditional philosophical quest to determine the boundaries of scientific cognition. My own view is that his proposal, taken as a whole, constitutes a line of thinking about this that deserves to be taken seriously. However, independently of whether we are sympathetic to that line or not, reading this book will certainly prove a worthwhile venture, as it is certain to have an inspiring effect on the reader’s own attitude towards mind and the cosmos.

JOZEF BREMER

Marcus Plested. *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Having once had the opportunity of listening to an interesting paper by a young scholar, Marcus Plested, on Georges Florovsky’s approach to Thomas Aquinas, which he gave at the International Colloquium at Saint-Serge,¹ I was intrigued and therefore very eager to read the book he has written on the subject of *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*. I must confess that my expectations were more than satisfied. The author has succeeded in shedding light on Aquinas from a perspective that is remarkably new, not only for those coming from a background in Eastern Christian thought, but also for those specializing in the Western tradition. As someone who sees herself as having been raised in and formed by Thomas’ legacy, I shall discuss Marcus Plested’s book as seen through the eyes of a committed Thomist.

Plested convincingly shows that numerous studies devoted to the original thought of Thomas Aquinas notwithstanding, there is an area of which

1. Marcus Plested, “Georges Florovsky and the West: Thomas and Thomism” (paper presented at the Colloque international à l’occasion du 30^e anniversaire de la mort du P. Georges Florovsky (1893–1979), Institut Saint-Serge, Paris, November 27–28, 2009).

we Western scholars in fact have scant knowledge. This concerns the treatment and reception of Thomas' ideas within the Orthodox tradition. Even if a Thomistic scholar should happen to be familiar with some of the Orthodox thinkers mentioned by Plested, their works will usually have been neglected by him or her on the assumption that they are irrelevant to the field, no matter how important they in fact were for Eastern thought itself.

Plested applies an interesting methodological approach, which he calls "the principle of multiple perspectives" (9–11). This approach reflects a technique used in iconic art—one that involves challenging our human way of perceiving both phenomena and facts in terms that are subject to the categories of time and place. It shows a person or an event as exempted from time and place, in a permanent "now," by depicting it simultaneously from different spatial and temporal perspectives. What the author proposes is clearly different from *Rezeptionsgeschichte*. For his approach, as with an icon, allows the reader to be a part of the picture "responding and relating to Aquinas within a rich and ever-expanding vista" (10). It is according to this principle of multiple perspectives that Plested describes, in the first part of his book ("Greek East and Latin West: An Exercise in Multiple Perspective"), both Aquinas himself and George Palamas, who often is presented as an Orthodox antagonist of Thomas. Where Aquinas is concerned, Plested concentrates on an extremely significant aspect of his legacy: that is to say, he demonstrates Thomas' genuine and deep ties with the teachings of the Greek Church Fathers. Aquinas appears to be not merely the one who baptized Aristotle and embodies the Western doctrine, but a man of the one single Christian tradition from which both Eastern and Western philosophies, theologies and cultures had grown. In a similar manner, Plested argues that Gregory Palamas' teaching is multidimensional: being based in its innermost core on the Greek patristic tradition, it embraces Platonic philosophy—but also elements of Aristotelianism and Latin Christian thought.

The chapter devoted to Palamas, however, raises some concerns. To be sure, the rhetorical and historical reasons for concentrating on one of the greatest Eastern thinkers who temporarily precedes and is constantly compared with Thomas are quite clear. Yet, for anyone only superficially acquainted with Palamas, this chapter must count as falling short of being comprehensively informative, while for someone familiar with his works, a chapter primarily devoted to Palamas himself in a book devoted to Orthodox readings of Aquinas will seem excessive—especially given that it is a third larger than the chapter devoted to the thought of Thomas himself. Besides, Plested, discussing philosophical tendencies in Byzantium, seems

to ignore recent studies of late Hellenistic thought, and applies very broad text-book-style labels such as "Platonized Aristotelianism," "Aristotelianized Platonism," "eclecticism", etc. This is regrettable, as references to recent studies of later ancient thought would only have served to reinforce his claims regarding the character of Palamas' philosophy.

Plested ends the first part of his book with an important claim, which sheds more light on the later understanding of Aquinas in Byzantium. Namely, he emphasizes that Thomas and Gregory are not adverse, but diverse. Both of them exceed the constraints imposed when labeled, respectively, as typically "Western" or "Eastern". "Each has substantial interests in the other's tradition, shares a complementary approach to theological endeavor, and displays an unusually irenic attitude to the Latin-Greek schism. In each case they stand out among their contemporaries for the breadth, depth, and openness of their theological vision" (60). It should not be surprising that Aquinas was not considered alien and hostile by the Byzantines. Even when his conceptions were being criticized, Byzantine thinkers treated him as a true authority. It is well known that John of Damascus was accepted as the last Eastern authority in the West. But a very similar conclusion can be drawn from the material presented by Plested (in the second and third parts of the book—"Byzantine readings of Aquinas"; "Ottoman Era and Modern Orthodox reading of Aquinas"): Thomas seems to have been the last Western author recognized as an authority by the Orthodox Church.

In the second part of the book ("Byzantine Readings of Aquinas"), Plested discusses numerous Byzantine authors who fathomed Aquinas' thought. I am quite convinced that most of these authors are unknown to Thomistic scholars. It is enough to mention only a few of them: Demetrios Kydones, John VI Kantakuzene, Theophanes of Nicaea, Neilos Kabasilas, Matthew Panaretos, Kallistos Angelikoudes, Manuel Kalekas, Makarios Makres, Joseph of Methone, Maximos Margounios, George Koressios, Vincent Damodos. Unfortunately, Plested does not offer detailed analyses of their stances on Thomas' thought. Therefore, a reader seeking comprehensive information on the actual reception of Aquinas' thought and its interpretation in the East will probably feel disappointed. However, the material provided by Plested could be treated as a kind of *isagoge*, and as a thread to guide the Thomistic researcher through this *terra incognita*.

The reasons for there having been serious interest in Aquinas' works in the East are well explained in the book. Nevertheless, one fact pointed out by Plested seems truly surprising: in the third and last part of his book ("Ottoman Era and Modern Readings of Aquinas"), he emphasizes that

"The Byzantines stole a march on much of the medieval West in regarding Aquinas as the pre-eminent expositor and exemplar of Latin theology" (137). As a matter of fact, Aquinas' philosophical and theological synthesis was subjected to a lengthy process of questioning and even rejection before coming to be recognized as the leading teaching within the Catholic theological world. Recognition came only in the 16th century, while in the East from the very beginning Aquinas was univocally referred to as an authority, even if his teaching was subject to criticism. Plested points out that "Gennadios Scholarios was, then, not wholly exaggerating when he claimed in the 1430s that Thomas had no more devoted disciple than himself in all the world" (138). Thomas was even praised in the mellifluous cadence of Byzantine hymnography composed by a most ardent unionist, Joseph of Methone. Plested, however, underlines the fact that reception of Aquinas' thought depended neither on any particular author's philosophical views nor on the stance taken towards the Florentine union. Palamites, as well as anti-Palamites, unionists and anti-unionists, embraced and made constructive use of Thomas' teaching.

In the context of this impressive recognition of Thomas in the East, the rejection of Aquinas in the modern Orthodox world described by Plested in the third part of the book seems to be, at first, a bit surprising. The author elucidates this fact mainly by appeal to the strong influence of Slavophile tendencies on Russian philosophical and theological thought, a conception accentuating the dichotomy of East and West. Although it is difficult to disagree with such an explanation, there is another important aspect of this rejection, hinted at, but not elaborated on, by Plested. Plested claims that Sergey Bulgakov and Vladimir Lossky saw Aquinas as the chief exemplar and exponent of "Western theology characterized by rationalism and impersonalism, and responsible for many of the ills of the modern world" (196–7). Plested mentions that both of them were exposed to Thomas through representatives of the Neo-Thomistic revival. Many times, describing their (negative) approach to Aquinas, Plested uses "Thomas" and "Thomism" synonymously. For him, the two are identical, as they probably were for Bulgakov and Lossky. Thomism, however, is merely an interpretation, and neither constitutes nor stands on a par with the original doctrine of Aquinas. While Byzantine thinkers, when referring to Thomas, saw a man sharing and understanding their own tradition, Russian theologians did not relate to Thomas himself, but to a "neo-scholastic Thomas." They saw him through the lens of "Thomism," stripping the Christian theologian of his theological roots and presenting him instead as a rationalist who relied primarily on philosophical argumentation. With all

due respect to the Thomistic revival of the 20th century, this eventually made of Saint Thomas Aquinas—the Doctor of the Church—a man who merely baptized Aristotle. Somehow, we lost the awareness of Thomas as rooted first and foremost in the Church tradition and as someone who only used philosophy as a tool. One has to be as thoroughly acquainted with the teachings of the Fathers as George Florovsky was, to be able to perceive the “easternness” of Thomas and not merely the Thomists’ own portrayal of him.

Marcus Plested finishes his extremely interesting and inspiring book by emphasizing that “whether by approbation or critique, the East has honoured Thomas far more consistently than has been the case in the West” (223). Orthodox thinkers saw a natural continuity between John of Damascus and the Angelic Doctor. Plested says that as with John, Thomas has been widely considered by the Orthodox as “an exemplar of the proper and disciplined use of reason within theology—always, that is, in due subservience to revelation” (223). Byzantines depicted Aquinas as philosopher and theologian faithful to Greek patristic and philosophical sources, “a figure received not as the voice of a new and superior theological methodology but as a fresh articulation of a shared tradition” (224). This Byzantine portrait of Aquinas seems to rival that presented by Thomism.

In the last chapter of the third part, Plested considers some potential contributions that Orthodox readings of Aquinas might make to studies of his thought, and also explores the prospects for an Orthodox re-appropriation. However, having declared myself at the beginning of this review to be a committed Thomist, I would like to draw some conclusions of my own from the issues presented in the book. The book, apart from pointing to a new, intriguing and interesting field of Thomistic study, suggests some points of great importance for studying the thought of Thomas Aquinas as such. In the 19th century, the Russian orthodox theologian George Florovsky proclaimed that Orthodoxy must find its way “back to the Fathers.” I think that we, who consider ourselves to be representatives of Western culture and philosophy, must find *our* way back to Aquinas: not to the scholastic and neo-scholastic product, but to the original Thomas—a creative theologian and philosopher who was heir to the then already developed Latin and Greek traditions of the one Church, and who was also both a poet and a mystic. Studies of Thomas should be cleansed of the preconceptions about his “philosophical orientation” that were formulated in order to force him into the niche provided for him by neo-scholasticism. Aquinas’ philosophy ought to be reconsidered in the light of recent studies of Neoplatonism and its influence on medieval philosophy. Last, but

not least, the works of Thomas should be studied with reference to the patristic sources—especially those of Greek origin. This should be done without any artificial separation of Thomas’ heritage into philosophy and theology. There is a need to investigate how the patristic theology, which already contained an interpretation of Hellenistic philosophy, influenced Aquinas’ doctrine.

Just as Thomas was recognized by the Byzantines well before he received his appreciation in the West, so the inspiration to undertake such an endeavor may come from the works of an orthodox scholar.

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Morwenna Ludlow. *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and (Post)modern*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Dr. Morwenna Ludlow, a renowned researcher in the history and theology of the early Christian Church, has, in her two books to date,¹ been engaged in developing a conception of the significance and relevance of ideas of the patristic period for modern theology. The second of these books, to which I would like to turn the reader’s attention in this review, was first published in 2007. Still, it has been reprinted twice already—most recently in the paperback edition of April 2013, presumably targeting a wider readership. This fact encourages me to ask the question: what reason has driven the publisher to want to issue it again and again?

In this comprehensive and up-to-date study of Gregory of Nyssa’s heritage, Morwenna Ludlow has tried to approach the figure of Gregory of Nyssa by relating him to the notion of “elusiveness,” which she has elevated into a leitmotif for her entire work. From the outset, the author draws our attention to the intensity and contradictoriness of the Nyssean’s thought: indeed, it is precisely the latter’s elusive character that makes his legacy attractive for both researchers of the patristic period and modern theologians. Ludlow points out that Gregory of Nyssa has attracted the

1. The first of these books is Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). The other is the subject of this review.