"Thoughts on Aquinas By Catholic 'Insider'"

a review by Carroll Quigley in The Washington Sunday Star, 23 April 1967, of two books:

THOMISM IN AN AGE OF RENEWAL.
by Ralph M. McInerny.
Doubleday: New York, 1967
and

Philosophy in Process. Vol. 2: 1960-1964,
by Paul Weiss


Washington Sunday Star
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THOMISM IN AN AGE OF RENEWAL.
By Ralph M. McInerny.

207 pages. Doubleday. $4.95.

By Paul Weiss.
Southern Illinois University Press. 731 pages. $25.

When the new, 50-volume, bilingual, version of the works of Aquinas began to appear, The Times Literary Supplement asked scornfully, "Who reads Aquinas?" The belief that no one does is shared by Professor McInerny of Notre Dame, but, unlike the anonymous reviewer, he has no scorn and has written a slim volume to persuade philosophers to return to the "Summa Theologica." It is doubtful that his intelligent, well-written, but parochial, little volume will achieve its aim. It shows a deep understanding of the crisis
through which the teaching of philosophy is now passing in Roman Catholic colleges, but it is written inside
the family, will be read only by the few already converted in that small group, and will present many
puzzling pages to outsiders.

The trouble is that McInerny, intelligent and well-read as he certainly is, has been inside the family of
American Catholic academic philosophy too long and is too much at home in its concepts and vocabulary
to be able to communicate easily with those for whom these modes of expression are alien.

Contemporary Novelties

He would like the members of this family, who are now wandering off into the novelties of contemporary
analytical, existential, or semanticist philosophy, to return to the conceptual and verbal modes of Thomism.
He is unlikely to succeed, or even to obtain much of a hearing, because he is not sufficiently aware of two
things: (1) That Thomas' philosophic vision of the nature of God, man, and reality must be separated from
the culturally-determined, Greek-inspired, conceptual and verbal forms in which it was embodied; and, (2)
that, once that is done, some of the weaknesses of that vision (largely resulting from these parochial,
culture-bound forms of expression) can be remedied.

The chief of these weaknesses of form and expression are rooted in the limitations of Greek two-valued
logic, which, by excluding any middle ground between rest and motion, made it logically impossible to pass
from one to the other and made most Classical thinkers reluctant to deal with time, change, or other
continua; this forced philosophy into extremist poles, such as idealism vs. materialism or thought vs. action,
which gave scholastic Christian philosophy a weakness which made it insufficiently flexible to deal with the
dynamic qualities of 17th century science, 19th century evolutionism, or 20th century social crisis.

The Inheritance

The appeal of Teilhard de Chardin in recent years has rested precisely on this quality: that his writings,
however confused or vague, did introduce dynamic and, above all, evolutionary elements into the
hierarchical outlook Catholics had inherited from medieval Christian thought. If Thomism is to have any
significant message for "an age of renewal," it must seek to replace the contemporary view of reality, which
is dynamic and chaotic, by an outlook which is hierarchic and dynamic (probably evolutionary), for the
fundamentally static quality of Thomism makes its very great merits and meaning unacceptable to an age
which is in full revolt against Greek logic and metaphysics. The value of Thomism to an age of renewal will
be demonstrated by someone who recognizes that these Greek elements which bind Thomism to a
specific (and now obsolete) culture-context are not intrinsic to it and must be removed to make it
sufficiently general to fit the needs of philosophy today. McInerny, with all his talent and good will, has not
done this.

The second volume of "Philosophy in Process" by Prof. Weiss of Yale consists of his random thoughts
over four years. A less than complete examination of these jottings impressed me with the idea that they
were fully contemporary, as chaotic in content as in presentation, and were addressed very largely to a
private audience made up of those who have read his earlier book, "Modes of Being." Since I am not one of
that audience, I cannot fairly judge the content of this new volume, but it seems to be a representative
example of that growing phenomena, the non-book, once defined as "a volume whose only unity rests in its
binding."

—CARROLL QUIGLEY.
Please email the editors (editors@carrollquigley.net) with corrections, questions, or if you have other works by Professor Quigley you would like to see posted.

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