Joshua Furnal

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This book is an important contribution to both Kierkegaard studies and Catholic theology. Furnal's approach is primarily one of charting the course of Kierkegaard's actual reception within and influence upon Catholic theology, laying special emphasis on Kierkegaard's reception by Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the Italian Thomist Cornelio Fabro, each of whom receives his own chapter. Along with these come a battery of other figures in Chapter Two's somewhat survey-style treatment of Theodor Haecker, Romano Guardini, Erich Przywara, Erik Peterson, Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, James Collins, and Louis Dupré.

In the introduction, Furnal explains his methodology and its contribution. While some (here Furnal mentions this reviewer explicitly in connection with this approach) like to stage conversations of a hypothetical sort between Kierkegaard and the Catholic tradition and see what kind of potential exists for dialogue and rapprochement, Furnal's approach, while mostly complementary, is different. He is concerned with the actual Kierkegaardian tradition within Catholic theology (7). By this he means the decisive (though sometimes hidden) ways Kierkegaard actually shaped pre- and post-conciliar theology because of his existential approach to Christian life and revelation that becomes central to the spirit of *ressourcement*.

In Chapter One, Furnal offers a reading of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. Here Daphne Hampson's work on Kierkegaard is rather the villain, and Furnal attacks her "extrinsicist" readings of Martin Luther and Kierkegaard (see Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structure of Luther and Catholic Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001]). This is the stronger portion of this chapter, and Furnal's discussion of Kierkegaard's nuance does a nice job of explaining where Hampson's critique misfires. Indeed, there has also been a widespread tendency to assume that Kierkegaard follows Martin Luther's tracks on many things. Furnal is certainly right to critique this as too heavy a background assumption since Kierkegaard was no uncritical Lutheran. The latter portion of this chapter discusses *Philosophical Fragments* and its criticism of any secondhand following of Christ. Part of it is helpful for what follows, but I will not say it is easy going.

Chapter Two provides a helpful romp through the eight figures listed in the series above. Some of them were champions of Kierkegaard (indeed, some, like Peterson, became Catholic after reading Kierkegaard's texts) and some (like Guardini and Congar) saw promise in Kierkegaard while also succumbing

to various canards that Furnal ably brushes aside. In some ways, this chapter is perhaps most necessary to Furnal's overall project, since it shows that there is an actual "Kierkegaardian tradition within Catholicism" (102).

The next three chapters concern de Lubac, von Balthasar, and Fabro. For my money, the chapter on de Lubac is the gem of the bunch. Not only does Furnal provide some helpful discussion on convergent areas between Kierkegaard and de Lubac, Furnal even shows how, in places, de Lubac has pretty clearly "removed the explicit references but left the [Kierkegaardian] argument intact for those with eyes to see" (128–29). Furnal offers a helpful discussion of de Lubac's concerns about the natural and the supernatural, and about some convergence in Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus writings. While this can hardly come as a surprise to anyone familiar with von Balthasar, the chapter devoted to his reception of Kierkegaard is, I think, especially hard going. Sometimes that is because of the texts in question to be sure (von Balthasar and *The Concept of Anxiety* to boot!), but at other times one wants the interpreter to, well, interpret a bit more. I have some sympathy with the allegations Furnal levels at von Balthasar, to the effect that his misreading of Kierkegaard plagues his very Christology, but it takes some real work to get there. Furnal's chapter on Fabro is hailed as a real contribution, since it brings Fabro to English-speaking Kierkegaard circles for the first time. Fabro is, of the figures in the book, the most self-conscious and explicit about bridging the Thomist revival of *Aeterni Patris* (Pope Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical with its vigorous support of Thomism and denigration of more modern systems) with Kierkegaard, setting the latter apart from other figures perceived to be more secularizing (Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, etc.). So glimpsing how Fabro does this is helpful. Whether Fabro himself succeeds in his positive assessment of Kierkegaard's Mariology and ecclesiology is a contestable question.

Furnal moves freely across multiple languages and literatures and, in some cases, brings long hidden figures and the debts of better known ones (such as de Lubac's debt to Kierkegaard) to light. It cannot be said that Furnal wears his learning lightly, though chronicling the reception history that this book does may not necessarily call for a heavy dose of that virtue. The book's claimed genre (reception history) is sometimes a double-edged sword. A piece of reception history cannot be detained with settling all the *minutiae* of Kierkegaard scholarship. Nevertheless, actually to disabuse these august thinkers of the errors in their reception of Kierkegaard (of which most have at least some) requires serious defending of Kierkegaard himself. So you need Kierkegaard scholarship, but you can not be detained by it for too long.

Thus, this may be an unavoidable tension, but there are times when one feels that one gets the Kierkegaard Furnal wants one to get. My own view is

that while Kierkegaard is something of a prophet for philosophy and theology, he himself often wants more out of his own thought than can consistently be gotten. Just as with Luther, there are moments when he looks extrinsicist, and there are moments when he does not. There are moments in Kierkegaard when he looks anti-ecclesial, and there are moments when he does not. There are moments when his Eucharistic theology sounds like it succumbs to some classic error, and there are moments when it does not. Some of these things can be, and have been, smoothed out in the literature pretty decisively (I do not think Kierkegaard ever seriously meant for the incarnation to be thought a bold-faced logical contradiction, for example). But some really have not, probably because there just is some tension in Kierkegaard's extraordinarily fertile, but not exactly systematic, work.

There are also a handful of areas where, again, we could not be detained for too long, but maybe we should be detained for at least a passing mention. For instance, Furnal (in my view, rightly) situates Kierkegaard easily with the mystical tradition, though Furnal never tells us that Kierkegaard himself actually rejected that label. Likewise, in Furnal's discussion of merit (19–28) and “merit-scepticism” (this is Furnal's term), we glimpse a subtle challenge to Luther's particular take on good works in the Christian life, but we are never told that Kierkegaard himself, later in the same text under discussion (*Works of Love*) actually rejects the concept of merit explicitly.

Furnal's book is a solid contribution to the growing body of work on convergences and divergences between Kierkegaard and the Catholic tradition. The actual debt the contemporary Catholic tradition owes to Kierkegaard is significant, and this book proves it. Occasionally one feels that Kierkegaard is just a little too good to be true, and that is because the Kierkegaard glimpsed in this book is. But the book's major contribution is in charting Kierkegaard's reception by Catholic theologians in the *ressourcement* mold. In this respect, the book is without peer.

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