

[1970. Review of *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, by Per Erik Persson. *Christianity Today* 9 Oct.]

DESERVES A PATIENT READING

Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas, by Per Erik Persson (Fortress, 1970, 317 pp., \$9.75), is reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, professor of philosophy, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

This careful work of fine scholarship, with the bottom third of nearly every page covered with finer footnotes, aims to explain the relation between reason and *sacra doctrina* in Thomas Aquinas's idea of *revelatio* and its relation to Scripture, the status of elements derived from Greek philosophy, and the systematic principle in the structural framework of Christianity.

One of the points Persson makes is that an event, a miracle or a war, is not as such a revelation; nor is its observation: there must be interpretation of the event, for the cognitive content is all decisive. Faith is “an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth at the command of the will moved by God through grace.” All *doctrina* or teaching consists in the communication of knowledge by the use of words; but what is thus communicated is not the object about which the teacher speaks [the truth??] but concepts that signify the objective. Nevertheless Thomas identifies the contents of faith with the written words of Scripture.

Most interestingly, the author notes several important points on which Thomas differs from modern Romanism; e.g., the papacy is founded not on Peter but on the content of Peter's confession. “There is a clear distinction between Thomas and post-Tridentine Catholic theology.”

Since the concept of cause is one of the great confusions in the argument for God's existence, one may be somewhat disappointed that Persson did not more fully explain Thomas's substitute of Plato's *causa exemplaris* for Aristotle's formal cause. This omission may not be entirely his fault: he may have included everything Thomas says. At least he gives many delicate details; for example, is it true (footnotes 199 on pp. 136, 137) that Thomas's metaphysics provides a better foundation for the Trinity than Bonaventura's neoplatonism? If pages 159 ff. are intended to give the remainder of the explanation, one can hardly fail to be impressed with the emptiness of the verbiage—Thomas's, not the author's—because to say that “God is in things as a cause is in its effect” explains neither God's nor a cause's inherence. See also Thomas's amusing comment on Romans 8:1 in footnote 60 page 241.

The work is a worthy contribution to Thomistic studies and deserves a patient reading.