

Politics for a Pilgrim Church: A Thomistic Theory of Civic Virtue. By Thomas J. Bushlack. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. viii + 271 pages. \$35.00 (paper). doi: 10.1017/hor.2016.89

This book advocates for a Thomistic theory of civic virtue, understood as “a firm and stable disposition to direct the acts of the virtues toward the common good of one’s society” (33), that will be of use to a pilgrim church that must struggle to uphold that vision of the good in the contemporary world without forfeiting its ultimate goal of the Kingdom of God. Thomas Bushlack begins with an analysis and critique of three ways in which Catholics have engaged with political concerns in recent years: a conservative ideology that largely distrusts the coercive power of modern liberal secularism and argues for greater personal freedom and market-based solutions (36–39); a second tendency, inspired by various antistatist positions, that advocates for withdrawal from the political structures of the modern nation-state (39–43); and a third “liberal political theology,” with which the author largely agrees but ultimately criticizes because it fails to describe or work toward “anything that might be construed as a common good that cannot be reduced to an instrumental good or a sum total of individual goods or rights” (43).

In contrast to these problematic strategies, Bushlack presents a well-thought-out alternative model of how Christians can engage in fruitful discourse in the contemporary public square. He commences with an overview of Aquinas’ understanding of the intersectionality of justice, passion, and political prudence, which fosters an “ongoing discernment with regard to whether particular choices and actions contribute to the common good” (126). This sets the stage for part 2, where the author brings this account of civic virtue into fruitful conversation with the Catholic natural law tradition, present-day political philosophies, and Christian public rhetoric as it is practiced today. Bushlack examines Henri de Lubac’s thesis on the relationship between nature and grace (129–64), and argues that a Thomistic “construal of natural law requires maintaining a stronger distinction between nature and grace than de Lubac’s collapsing of this distinction tends to allow” (163). Having established that a Thomist-based concept of civic virtue provides the foundations for a constructive engagement within a pluralistic society, Bushlack puts his theory to the test in a series of creative encounters with such secular figures as John Rawls and Philip Pettit. Even though the author concurs with much of Rawls’ work, he is troubled by Rawls’ tendency to “bifurcate the human person between the private individual and her engagement in private life” (177). However, according to Bushlack, Pettit’s notion of classical republicanism overlaps to a considerable extent with Catholic political thought’s “understanding of the civic virtue” as a robust

account of justice grounded in a concern for freedom as nondomination “demanded of the members of the body politic in democratic states” (194).

Finally, in what may be the most pertinent section of his book, Bushlack assays a constructive practical account of civic virtue and public rhetoric. He begins by identifying three negative effects of public Christian rhetoric in recent years: First, a “public language of discrediting, vilification, and denunciation of one’s (perceived) opponents contributes to a culture of public shame and exclusion” (203); consequently, “Christian engagement in these forms of political witness further contributes to the breakdown in meaning of the broader culture” (204); with the result that in the “context of the culture wars rhetoric it becomes impossible to speak about the common good as a real and existent good shared by all members of a society” (205). As an antidote, Bushlack proposes a Thomistic ethos that reimagines “Christian civic engagement in late modern democratic culture and politics” (209). He believes this proposal is of particular value, since it is capable of persuasively arguing that the “pursuit of the common good can only function to motivate human behavior if persons perceive this as a real, existent good and believe that the attainment of the common good will contribute to human flourishing or happiness for themselves and for others” (228). In conclusion, Bushlack’s proposal for a constructive public discourse on the common good is particularly relevant in today’s fraught political culture.

GREGORIO MONTEJO

Boston College

Beyond the Abortion Wars: A Way Forward for a New Generation. By Charles C. Camosy. Foreword by Melinda Henneberger. Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2015. xiv + 207 pages. \$22.00.
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Most Americans probably assume that the abortion debate between “pro-life” and “pro-choice” proponents is stalemated. This is one of the reasons I have never published on the topic, although it is a regular unit in courses I teach. What more is there to write? The landscape appears overplowed, with desertification surrounding the canyon separating the opposing camps. With this book, however, Charles Camosy of Fordham University argues that fecund common ground now exists upon which we can move past this putative impasse.

Much has been and continues to be written on abortion, especially in op-eds and social media. Yet, as Camosy notes, “Very few pieces are even aware