

**Lydia Schumacher. *Early Franciscan Theology. Between Authority and Innovation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xi + 311 p. ISBN: 9781108595087. Hardcover: £ 78.99**

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Lydia Schumacher devoted this volume to *The Summa Theologiae Fratri Alexandri*, composed by Alexander of Hales and other confrères in Paris between 1236 and 1245. She intends to show the innovativeness of this text, challenging the tendency, persistent in general studies of medieval philosophy, to consider Parisian Early Franciscan Theology before Bonaventure little more than a relative unoriginal systematisation of Augustine's thought.

Not without admiration, Schumacher highlights in the first introductory chapter the unicity of *Summa Halensis* in the context of his time: even if Alexander of Hales placed this work under his name, it is “a collaboratively-authored text”, endowed of no comparable size and ambition, among the Franciscan schools of the thirteenth century. The second and third chapters are devoted to a concise presentation of the context in which such a work was projected and realised. The second one deals with the close relationship between the intellectual work of the ‘Sumists’, as Schumacher labelled the authors of this text, and their Franciscan identity. She notices that the impressive engagement in Education, promoted by the first generation of Franciscans, should not be considered a betrayal of the primitive ideal of absolute poverty, lived by Francis of Assisi and his brothers. Difficulties and tensions happened when the Order of Minors was created should be considered as an expression of the eternal conflict between the ideals and the pressures of reality, rather than the effects of a corruptive rejection of the primitive ideal of absolute poverty. Thus, although Francis certainly did not urge his brothers to be a learned Order, Minors Friars early became aware of the benefits of theological training for their evangelical mission. Consequently, during the first decades of the thirteenth century, the Order developed its identity by combining absolute poverty with learning (p. 39).

In virtue of this premise, Schumacher shows in the following chapters how the *Summa Halensis* forges and disseminates a philosophical and theological ‘Franciscan’ identity. Since becoming poor is a voluntary act whose purpose is to enable us to love God, Parisian Early Franciscan theologians gave utmost importance to the reflection on free choice and to its achievement. Thus, it is not by chance that Sumists assumed an affective and practical vision of theology: they didn’t consider learning as an end in itself, but as a means to help Christians love God.

The third chapter is devoted to the philosophical context of Sumists’s time. Regarding this matter, Schumacher insists on the impact of Avicenna’s thought, providing a brief introduction to some fundamental doctrines of his metaphysics. She focuses her attention

on the theories of the *Dator formarum*, and of the plurality of substantial forms, conveyed by the thesis that each body receives its specific form from the matter already disposed by the possession of a 'form of corporeality'. Schumacher also recalls several aspects of Avicennian psychology, his theory of knowledge, and his demonstration of the reality of a «Necessary Existent». She justifies her choice of focusing this chapter almost only on Avicenna, pointing out the strength of the impact of his thought on Early Franciscan Theologians, largely undervalued by scholars, except for Étienne Gilson. She admits that Sumists usually didn't quote Avicenna explicitly; however, the lack of overt references does not prevent us from recognizing Avicennian inspiration in the development of their account, and a marked tendency to ascribe Avicennian views to Aristotle, or to Augustine.

From chapter four to eight, Schumacher deals with the image of God provided within the *Summa Halensis*. In chapters four and five, she takes into consideration the adoption of the Transcendental theory, and the appropriation of Anselm's proof of the existence of God. In both cases, she can show the impact of Avicenna's thought and Franciscan ethos on the elaboration of the Sumists's account: Avicenna's theory of knowledge and his demonstration of a «Necessary Existent» are cogent with «Francis's experience of God, as immanent within nature and intimately related to the soul» (p. 117). In chapter six, Schumacher insists on Sumists's account of divine infinity. Following Avicenna and probably influenced by a long-standing Neoplatonic tradition, Early Franciscan thinkers assumed the notion of infinity in an innovative way, assuming it as a kind of synonym of immensity, «populated by innumerable possible realities which subsist in a positive sense» (p. 128). Thanks to such a notion, they described God as closer to creatures than they are to themselves. Furthermore, Schumacher notices that infinity, at this time, was usually regarded as an obstacle to our knowledge of God; instead, Sumists made Divine Infinity a key aspect for knowing God, developing the idea that the human mind can know infinite through the finite, since the latter is nothing but a participation of the former, an effect dependent on it.

Such a way of understanding God has relevant consequences on the doctrine of the Trinity contained in *Summa Halensis*. In chapter seven, Schumacher provides a basic overview of the theological debate of the time, introducing the doctrines of Thomas Aquinas, John Damascius and Richard of St. Victor. In chapter eight, she explains that the Sumists, dealing with Trinity, made «the Victorine account his own, and indeed transforming it into a specifically Franciscan doctrine» (p. 163). So, they provided a vision, further developed by Bonaventure and Scotus, according to which «the Son is the 'centre' of Trinity and indeed all things» (p. 181).

A clear consequence of this account is the original centrality of Christology, provided in *Summa Halensis*. In the following chapters, Schumacher deals with two crucial questions: the Hypostatic Union (treated in chapter nine), and the Incarnation (chapter ten). Dealing with the first, Schumacher can show once again the impact of the Avicennian Metaphysics on the elaboration of *Summa's* account. Concerning the second, she notices several traits of innovativeness in Sumists's view. Firstly, the *Summa Halensis* was the first text that presents

a systematic account of the Lord's passion; secondly, passions do not entail only negative feelings, such as fear, agony and sorrow, as usual in the previous theological debate, but also joy, hope and desire. A third relevant feature concerns God's intention in becoming Incarnate. Several decades before Scotus, the *Summa* provides a 'supralapsarian' account, according to which the first reason for Incarnation is not men's sin, but the aim of establishing Christ at the centre of everything. Indeed, human being is the one to whom «all beings are ordered, and through whom he can be joined to all beings, thereby achieving their completion and perfection» (p. 237).

Chapter eleven is devoted to Moral Theology, providing a comparison between Sumist's and Aquinas's visions. Having chosen Aquinas's as the moral view to compare with that of the Sumists sounds rather arbitrary, since this choice is based on nothing but Schumacher's conviction, taken for granted here, that Aquinas elaborated the best account on Christian Virtue Ethics (p. 244). However, she develops such a comparison in a fruitful way, underlining the fact that Sumists based their moral theology more on an in-depth reflection of the Law of the Gospel and the obedience to the divine commandments, rather than on the notions of happiness and virtues, as in Aquinas. Schumacher clearly explains the reason according to which the view elaborated within the *Summa* is consistent with Franciscan *ethos*: «in summoning us to adhere to the divine commands God offers us not only understanding of the respects in which obedience is consistent with our well-being, but also total freedom to obey or disobey his law» (p. 258). In the last chapter, entitled «The Promise of Early Franciscan Theology», Schumacher claims that *Summa Halensis* deserves a new and more positive place in thirteen-century intellectual history: in many areas, Sumists produced strategies and solutions with respect to which great Franciscan thinkers of the following decades, as Bonaventure and Scotus, will stand in a clear continuity.

In Schumacher's rich and convincing monograph, one might have expected a more careful description of the relationship between the so-called Sumists and Alexander of Hales, a figure who is, surprisingly enough, substantially absent from the development of the book. More generally, it would have been desirable to focus on the identity of these thinkers and the relationship between *Summa* and what the so-called Sumists claimed in their authored works. Instead, Schumacher seems to use the label 'Sumist' more to silence these kinds of questions than to prompt research in this direction. Added to these remarks is the impression that the reconstruction of the philosophical and the theological context is very succinct, and basic.

Acknowledging these elements does not in any case mean misjudging the merits of this precious volume: endowed with clear writing and convincing argumentation, this volume presents the *Summa Halensis* as a text that deserves to receive renewed interest, due to the philosophical and theological richness it brings. With great effectiveness, Schumacher shows how the *Summa* is a remarkable document of Early Franciscan's strive to combine their intellectual work with the Franciscan *ethos*. This text provided important and innovative theological solutions, concerning the centrality of Christ and the loving presence of God within creation; the consideration of free will and the capacity to love as

distinguishing marks of human nature; the elaboration of a Moral vision, based on the adhesion to the law rather than on the development of personal virtues. Schumacher's volume helps us to see that several ideas of following thinkers, such as Scotus's, would not be considered as a flash in the night.