

doi:10.1017/S0036930610000979

Stephan Kampowski, *Arendt, Augustine, and the New Beginning: The Action Theory and Moral Thought of Hannah Arendt in the Light of her Dissertation on St. Augustine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 364. \$50.00/£27.99.

Church-minded followers of Arendt criticism will enjoy Stephan Kampowski's generally friendly and intriguingly Roman Catholic assessment of her work. The author is assistant professor of moral philosophy at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family so, not surprisingly, this study is heavily freighted with references to Thomas Aquinas, and Kampowski is clearly interested in demonstrating Arendt's relevance for post-conciliar moral theology. He is concerned to defend Arendt from the mainly secular charge that her account of action is individualistic and amoral. He does this in two ways. First, he teases out the communitarian and deeply ethical implications of her mature thought – particularly in *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*. Second, he demonstrates how her doctoral dissertation, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, both in its original form and in its partially rewritten (and abandoned) version, makes those implications explicit.

Kampowski argues that, for Arendt, action is always the enactment of freedom under the condition of natality (as individuals birthed into existence, we receive our selfhood as a gift from outside) and plurality (all action is interaction with other agents, to whom we are always already related through our sharing of a common world). As such, action depends on a commitment to a common life, which in turn depends on thoughtful reflection on the human condition, a will to act which is constantly being transformed into love of the world, and a faculty of judgement able to imagine the world from the perspective of others. Kampowski laments Arendt's failure to explore how our faculties are trained up to this commitment (correctly noting her consistent avoidance of virtue ethics), but acknowledges that she was suspicious of the entire moral philosophical tradition (no less the Kantian than the eudaimonists) as having discounted the realm of action.

I was surprised and fascinated to discover that Kampowski partially embraces Arendt's central critique of Christianity – that *caritas* is an anti-political principle. To be sure, he contests her claim that love of God directs our hearts away from neighbour and world. He argues (rightly) that in the Catholic tradition God is not a private good, but a good to be shared in common with others, a view which, far from replacing the common world, makes its lineaments all the more visible. But he admits that this does involve a certain 'indirectness' in our relations with one another, since we are to love God first, then, on that basis (or with our priorities reordered) to turn to one another, presumably to take up the fundamental political task of acting

together to actualise our common life. But I doubt that Arendt would agree that this task is political in the truest sense, since such action is not regarded as an end-in-itself, but as an effort to regard others primarily as the objects of God's love, and to direct the loving attention of all people to God, the object of our common enjoyment. It is precisely this 'indirection' (Arendt's term) – the deflection of the Christian's relation to the neighbour via God (and, more especially, via God substituting himself for the neighbour in Jesus Christ) – that renders Christianity fundamentally apolitical, regardless of how much care for the world it exhibits along the way. The corollary is a kingdom of God where the world as an arena for direct neighbourly interaction has no place, since all that needed to be actualised has been actualised, and human interaction turns out to be nothing more than a means to a transcendent end. My question is whether Kampowski's own understanding of *caritas* will lead him to the same conclusion?

Thomas Breidenthal

412 Sycamore St, Cincinnati, OH 45202, USA

tbreidenthal@diosohio.org

doi:10.1017/S0036930610000980

Patrick Keifert (ed.), *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*, foreword by Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 215. \$24.00/£13.99.

The essays gathered in *Testing the Spirits* are the work of the Congregational Studies Research Team (CSRT) of the Church Innovations Institute (CI), an expression of CI's commitment to 'renewing the church's focus on God's mission in the world'. This team of seven Lutheran scholars (five of whom are faculty of Luther Seminary, St Paul, MN) set out to bring the 'everyday realities of congregational life into conversation with theology' (p. 1) in order to 'study . . . how congregations engage in talking, deciding, and acting on difficult topics, especially moral issues confronting them and their communities' (p. 3). Their goal was to bring 'people to a public identity in Christ' (p. 8). The resulting essays are a stimulating and challenging contribution to the broadening discussion of the church's mission in the West after Christendom.

As the editor, Patrick Keifert introduces the research methodology that would implement the team's desire to do serious theological reflection on the congregation 'as its primary subject matter'. His discussion of 'the Bible and Theological Education', informed by many years of partnership with New Testament scholar Donald Juel (whose premature death we all mourn), is complemented by Dan Frederickson's excellent essay on 'Congregations,