



# Perfection in Death: The Christological Dimension of Courage in Aquinas

*Patrick Clark*

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*Perfection in Death* brings together topics—Christian martyrdom, virtue ethics, the "ethics of the end of life"—that have each seen a flowering of academic interest in the past two decades. Patrick Clark shows that these topics are in fact closely connected by examining one of the pre-eminent masters of Christian ethics, Thomas Aquinas.

*Perfection in Death* compares and contrasts the relationship between conceptions of courage and death in the thought of Aquinas and his ancient philosophical sources. At the center of this investigation is Aquinas' identification of martyrdom as the paradigmatic act of courage as well as "the greatest proof of the perfection of charity." Such a portrayal of "perfection in death" bears some resemblance to the ancient tradition of "noble death", but departs from it in decisive ways. Clark argues that this departure can only be fully understood in light of an accompanying transformation of the metaphysical and anthropological framework underlying ancient theories of virtue. *Perfection in Death* aims to provide a new, theological account of this paradigm shift in light of contemporary Thomistic scholarship.

*Perfection in Death* concludes with the relevance of the change in framework manifested by Aquinas's thought to recent and future trajectories in Catholic moral theology. In particular, treating Christ as moral exemplar has been proposed by scholars seeking a theological approach to the virtues that is more closely linked to Christology. Clark critically examines the promise and limitations of exemplarist models of virtue for moral theology.

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