

Book Review

James L. HEFT with John O'MALLEY, ed.,

After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics

(Grand Rapids & Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2012) pp. xxii + 194. Pb.

Published in *Mission Today* XV/4 (2013) 276-279.

Someone may be tempted to ask: Another book on Vatican II? But this constructive book, through 8 important essays (including the introductory one), convincingly reaffirms the continued relevance Vatican II. A significant book on Vatican II appeared in 2008: John O'Malley's *What happened at Vatican II* (Belknap/Harvard University Press). In many ways, that work was the inspiration behind the project that birthed the present book.

In his Preface, the editor, J. L. Heft, explains the importance of a 2009 symposium, from which this book emerged. The participants of that symposium took up and carried forward the basic issues addressed in John O'Malley's book. The coherence of the essays in *After Vatican II* comes from the writers' choice to take *What happened at Vatican II* as a foil against which to approach the Council (p. x). The result is very agreeable and reading it very rewarding. In his very enlightening introductory essay, co-editor O'Malley helps us understand the significance of this book even though we already have a number of great works on Vatican II. He comments briefly on the importance of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 (a real 'turning point'), which assessed the impact and implementation of the Council 25 years after its conclusion. Although 'reception' could quite well be considered the rubric under which we read the essays in our book, O'Malley suggests that 'trajectory' may better suit the purpose. The book helps us trace the path of growth and development that Vatican II made possible. O'Malley notes that whereas a number of important studies have analysed the Council documents as discrete units (Vorgrimler's work and that of Hübermann and Hilberath being exceptions), the present book is marked by a wholesome intertextuality. He reminds us moreover that it is necessary "to construct and apply a hermeneutic that takes full account of the inviolable integrity of the full corpus of the documents" (p. xv). In paying attention to the trajectories of Vatican II, the essays in this book deal with hermeneutics, showing us that the Council is not about a collection of documents, "but an event in the long history of the church that had a beginning, an actualization, and an ongoing impact" (pp. xv-xvi). Hence we must pay attention to the intersection of trajectories and hermeneutics.

Massimo Faggioli's article is entitled "Between Documents and Spirit: The Case of the 'New Catholic Movements'" (pp. 1-22). In it the author shows how new ecclesial movements, like other entities within the Church, 'received' the Council in peculiar ways, and how they have flourished, taking good advantage of the Council's empowerment of the laity. Faggioli shows that the link between these movements and the Council is more theological than historical. In his opinion, these movements have moved away from the Council's emphasis on the local Church, preferring a more universalistic ecclesiology.

Moral theologians Darlene Fozard Weaver and M. Cathleen Kaveny show us how although the Council did not produce a specific document on moral theology as such, it had a tremendous impact on the field. Moral theologians subsequently drew heavily on the Council's teachings and provided much-needed reorientation in their field. Again, the word 'trajectory' fits this reorientation better than the term 'reception'. Weaver's article is titled "Vatican II and Moral Theology" (pp. 23-42). It deals not only with the Council's contributions in contrast to the preconciliar scenario, but also with *Veritatis Splendor* and postconciliar moral theology in general. Kaveny's article, "The Spirit of Vatican II and Moral Theology: *Evangelium Vitae* as a Case Study" (pp. 43-67), too dwells on moral theology before and after Vatican II. It also speaks of how "the field of moral theology was badly fractured, perhaps irreparably, in the wake of *Humanae Vitae*" (p. 52). After dealing with the importance of *Veritatis Splendor*, Kaveny dwells at length on *Evangelium Vitae*, a work in applied/special moral theology. Importantly, this encyclical is carefully crafted in the spirit of Vatican II. Following O'Malley's lead, Kaveny examines "whether the invocation of Vatican II [in *Evangelium Vitae*] reveals a genuine intellectual debt, or nothing more than mere proof-texting" (p. 58). Her careful analysis is really worth reading.

Francis Sullivan's "Vatican II and the Postconciliar Magisterium on the Salvation of the Adherents of Other Religions" (pp. 68-95) is indeed a very welcome article. Sullivan traces modern Church teaching on this topic from Pius IX to postconciliar times. By an intertextual analysis of the Council documents, he underlines the crucial role of the Council in developing a theology of salvation of non-Christians and in serving as a springboard for subsequent related theological developments. He is consoled that the Church's new way of thinking about non-Christian religions "can have profound consequences for the peace of our religiously pluralistic world" (p. 95).

John Connelly in "The Catholic Church and Mission to the Jews" (pp. 96-133) considers whether the Church still has an obligation to work for the salvation of the Jews. Here, Connelly dwells on the importance of *Nostra Aetate* in particular. The topic here is certainly as controversial as the previous one, and Connelly's careful discussion sympathetically explores arguments from both the Jewish and the Catholic sides. Of great importance is the writer's discussion on the role of Mgr. John M. Oesterreicher, who converted from Judaism to Catholicism, becoming a priest and later playing a decisive role as a member of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, which drafted *Nostra Aetate*. Painfully aware of the sometimes erratic course of the trajectory in this case, Connelly says: "The challenge for Catholics remains not only to affirm, but to build upon the insight – affirmed many times by John Paul II and others – that Jews are embraced by the saving grace of the covenant made to them, while not denying that Christ's offer of redemption extends to all humankind. That challenge faced the drafters of *Nostra Aetate* as it faced Paul: Will theologians of the future improve upon the Apostle's eschatological vision?" (p. 133).

Robin Darling Young has an important article on De Lubac entitled "A Soldier of Great War: Henri de Lubac and the Patristic Sources for a Premodern Theology" (pp. 134-163). De Lubac was undoubtedly a major contributor to the Council's theological output. However, it is well-known that after the Council he expressed some disillusionment with the direction the

Church seemed to be taking. The article has an enlightening discussion on these and related issues. Young says: “Perhaps de Lubac’s fabrication of a patristic theology for the purposes of renewal actually failed the renewal it envisioned because it could not anticipate or give space to the discordant elements that have comprised Christianity from its beginnings, elements that seem to take the lead whenever reform is the order of the day. De Lubac was a theologian, not a historian. Lacking the skeptical perspective of the latter trade, he may have expected too much of his theological reconstruction – it could excite theologians, but not return the church to its golden age of mystery” (pp. 162-163).

In the final essay, “Interpreting the Council and its Consequences: Concluding Reflections” (pp. 164-172), Joseph A. Komonchak comments on the *progressive*, the *traditionalist* and the *reformist* interpretations of Vatican II, pointing out the role of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI in promoting the third type of interpretation. He carefully evaluates Benedict’s ‘hermeneutic of reform’. He then brings together the linking threads in the preceding essays in this volume, offering a brief but well-deserved conclusion to the whole book. Komonchak is convinced that “a full appreciation” of the “dramatic moment” that Vatican II was in the life of the Church “will also have to wait until the council has deployed all its virtualities in the life of the Church. We – all of us – are even now determining ‘what happened at Vatican II’” (p. 172).

Well in keeping with Eerdmans tradition, the book has an inviting look and a good format. At the end of the book there are helpful bio-data of the contributors (pp. 173-176). It has also a very good index (pp. 177-194). There is no select bibliography; however, the footnotes to the various articles make up for this.

After Vatican II is a boon to students and professors of ecclesiology, moral theology, Church history, soteriology and interreligious dialogue. No serious librarian or researcher can afford to neglect this important book.

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