

Council (appointed by Pope John XXIII, the French bishops did not invite him or, for that matter, Chenu and Congar, to advise them), he was ‘dumbfounded’ (p. 129) to learn that some of the ‘Roman theologians’ expected that one thing the Council might usefully do would be to declare Teilhard a heretic. He was surely not really so naïve. Back then, Teilhard was much reviled. Even in our part of the Catholic world, restrained and uncensorious as it was, his theology was mocked for example by Cornelius Ernst, gently enough, as ‘The cosmological myth of UNESCO man’ (*The Tablet* 7 May 1960). On 6 August 1962 the Holy Office issued a *monitum* warning us not to read Teilhard’s works, locked away in seminary libraries as they usually were, and absent in Catholic bookshops. In 1968, however, in his first important book, Joseph Ratzinger hailed Teilhard quite positively. Favourably inclined authors, on whom this volume might have drawn, include David Grumett (‘Teilhard and Ore Place, Hastings’; *New Blackfriars* November 2009), as well as A.N. Williams, in *Ressourcement* (edited by Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray 2012), where she portrays Teilhard as ‘The Traditionalist *malgré lui*’.

On the whole, however, this collection confirms Henri de Lubac’s great importance as a Catholic theologian, with essays that invite and will reward much re-reading and debate.

FERGUS KERR OP

JESUS, INTERPRETED. BENEDICT XVI, BART EHRLMAN, AND THE HISTORICAL TRUTH OF THE GOSPELS by Matthew J. Ramage, *Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2017, pp. xi + 287, \$34.95, pbk*

It is not uncommon that young Catholic students of theology here in Oxford ask me whether historical critical study of the scriptures is dangerous for their faith. This book seeks to answer that question, reassuring the believer that modern exegetical methods can be usefully applied to the biblical texts by drawing on the particular example of Benedict XVI. Benedict is placed in conversation with one of the most important living practitioners of historical criticism, especially in respect of the historical Jesus, Bart Ehrman. Ehrman is a graduate of Wheaton College, one of the most important Evangelical Protestant theological colleges in the USA, but having encountered some of the difficulties that modern biblical studies raise, he became first a liberal Christian and then a non-believer. Many of Ehrman’s conclusions are similar to those of the Jesus Seminar and of the kind of mediocre faux-shocking ‘exposés’ of the sort that one might expect to see on Channel Four, but he stands out as a rigorous, thoughtful and modest scholar, and Ramage’s genuine

respect for him comes across clearly. The author is to be congratulated for not picking a fight with a paper tiger.

After a helpful and clear introduction to his project Ramage lays out the problem and its solution in chapters two and three: the kinds of results that historical-critical exegesis of the Gospels produces are often incompatible with Catholic doctrine, and in particular many of those most widely held by scholars were explicitly excluded by the Pontifical Biblical Commission during the period from 1905 to 1933, when it produced a series of *responsa* to questions raised by scholarship. At this time, the PBC was explicitly an instrument of the magisterium, not an advisory body, and so its ruling that, for example, the faithful should not ‘easily embrace’ or ‘freely advocate’ the two-source theory of the synoptic Gospels’ literary relationship, a theory which in fact the great majority of NT scholars, including Catholics, embrace and advocate today with no obvious reluctance. Ramage notes that Benedict, in his three-volume work on the historical Jesus, but also in his other writings both pre- and post-papacy, appears to accept all sorts of conclusions that were condemned by the PBC. But Benedict is a subtle and careful scholar, and Ramage has steeped himself in Benedict’s thought, particularly in regard to the latter’s ‘hermeneutic of continuity’. He cites the emeritus Pope’s desire ‘to be true to what I have recognised as essential and also to remain open to seeing what should change’ (p. 43 citing *Salt of the Earth* p. 115). The PBC’s decisions, Benedict claims, seek to protect unchanging truths of the Catholic faith, but they do so in particular historical and pastoral contexts which may change, and so the task of the Catholic exegete is to distinguish between the unchanging ‘kernel’ or essence of the faith that was expressed inerrantly and ‘things that . . . were only expressions of a certain period’ (p. 52, citing *Light of the World* p. 141). Ramage recognises that such an approach may look to some like a slippery slope, and I must admit that some of the particular applications of this principle feel a little questionable. A sceptic might even wonder whether the decision between ‘essential’ and ‘contextual’ is sometimes arbitrary or made with the benefit of hindsight. As Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and then Pope, perhaps Benedict had a greater confidence in his ability to distinguish between essential principles and historical accidents than might be felt by a lay person.

Crucial to maintaining this continuity of course is the exegetical tradition of the Church, and Ramage lays out the way in which Benedict is able reach a synthesis of ‘Method A’ (patristic and mediaeval exegesis) and ‘Method B’ (historical-critical exegesis), a synthesis which he calls, perhaps unsurprisingly, ‘Method C’. Adhering to the rule of faith that guided our exegetical ancestors, we can nevertheless let go of certain perhaps uncritical assumptions that they made but which are not essential to their theological conclusions (e.g. the Mosaic authorship of the whole Pentateuch or the historical existence of Job); conversely, we can use

the methods of historical-critical scholarship in seeking the ‘original’ or ‘literal’ meaning of a text, but may well come to different conclusions from many of its practitioners because we start from the belief that God can and does choose to reveal himself in human history, that he has done so progressively through the life of Israel and of the Church, and crucially that a vital aspect of that progressive revelation has been the Church’s constantly developing understanding of the scriptures.

The fruit of the ‘Method C’ approach is shown in the next three long and excellent chapters dealing with Benedict and Ehrman’s treatment of the identity of Christ, his miracles, the resurrection and the second coming. Without slavishly following him, Ramage is able to show that Benedict’s reading of the NT texts is as plausible as, if not more so than, that of Ehrman over and over again, *on their own terms*, once the presupposition is abandoned that God would not involve himself, and has not done so, in human history. With copious footnotes drawing in the work of numerous other important historical Jesus scholars, particular Dale Allison, John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright, Ramage has produced in these three chapters a supremely able apologia for traditional Catholic readings of the Gospels that stand up to the most careful historical-critical scrutiny.

This is always provided, as indicated, that we accept a different set of presuppositions from those that undergird Ehrman’s work and much like it which rejects (e.g.) the divinity of Christ or the resurrection on historical grounds. Ramage succeeds in showing that ultimately such conclusions are question begging, being founded as they are, however implicitly, upon a modern naturalism that excludes traditional readings *a priori*. This point, though obvious when one thinks about it, is so well made, so clearly demonstrated and so important in helping people to acknowledge the value of historical-critical methods without being afraid of losing their faith that it alone makes Ramage’s book a vital contribution both to scholarship and to the Church.

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SOUNDINGS IN THE HISTORY OF A HOPE: NEW STUDIES ON THOMAS AQUINAS by Richard Schenk OP (*Faith & Reason: Studies in Catholic Theology and Philosophy*), *Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, Ave Maria, Florida, 2016, pp. x + 332, £41.50, pbk*

What is new about these studies is not immediately obvious. Ten of the book’s eleven chapters were published before, between 1988 and 2014, but publishing them in book form makes them not only more easily accessible but probably also gives them a new readership. The fact that most of Schenk’s academic work is available only in German is another