

Reviews

T&T CLARK COMPANION TO HENRI DE LUBAC edited by Jordan Hillebert, *Bloomsbury*, London, 2017, pp. xix + 492, £140.99, hbk

In twentieth-century Catholic theology the most animated and acrimonious controversy was set off in 1946 with the publication of the book *Surnaturel* by the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), to whose diverse and extensive *oeuvre* this generously conceived and richly documented volume is devoted.

In 1942 de Lubac co-founded ‘*Sources Chrétiennes*’, the series of patristic and medieval texts now running to over 500 volumes, which opened Catholic tradition to a generation hidebound by anti-Modernist Neo-Thomism. A key figure in creating the intellectual climate that enabled the Second Vatican Council to make some of its most significant doctrinal moves, his role was acknowledged in 1983 when Pope John Paul II named him a cardinal (already too old to vote had there been a conclave).

The question of human desire for union with God had been discussed quite serenely in the professional journals since the 1920s. Basically: should our longing for union be described as innate and thus natural, or elicited by knowledge of God and so supernatural? And what does Thomas Aquinas say? The Oxford Dominican Victor White found de Lubac’s reading of Thomas ‘unsound’ but strongly endorsed his negative account of post-Tridentine theological developments (*Dominican Studies* January 1949: 62–73): whatever its flaws, de Lubac’s ‘disturbing’ book prompted theologians to ‘radical re-examination of the very assumptions, purpose and methods of their thinking’. Indeed, Fr Victor compares the revolutionary effect of de Lubac’s project with that of Karl Barth’s in Protestant theology, thus anticipating the claim by John Milbank, who regards de Lubac as ‘a greater theological revolutionary’ than Barth, even comparing the effect of *Surnaturel* on Catholic theology rather hyperbolically with Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* and Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* on European and Anglophone philosophy respectively (see *Companion* p. 4).

After a generous tribute by Rowan Williams (‘paradoxical humanism’) the volume opens with five context-setting essays: Jordan Hillebert places his bibliography in de Lubac’s biography; Tracey Rowland sketches the ‘Fundamentalist Thomism’, which defined de Lubac’s work negatively; Francesca Aran Murphy documents his immense debt to the philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), whose *L’Action* (1893) was

regarded by influential Dominicans at the time as little better than pragmatism; Jacob W. Wood argues that, for de Lubac, *ressourcement* never required the ‘liquidation’ of post-Tridentine theology that Dominicans like M.D. Chenu and Yves Congar assumed; while, according to Aaron Riches, de Lubac’s decisive presence at Vatican II did not involve him in as much backroom drafting as (say) Congar undertook, let alone lecturing in the hope of making the bishops more ‘progressive’, as did Chenu, Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx.

These contextual studies are followed by nine chapters analysing particular doctrinal issues in de Lubac’s work: Gemma Simmonds expounds his now widely accepted thesis that the eucharist makes the church while the church makes the eucharist; Nicholas J. Healy defends his account of the relationship between grace and nature, against the ‘neo-neo-Thomists’ (Ralph McInerny, Steven A. Long, Reinhard Hütter *et al.*); Kevin L. Hughes describes de Lubac’s counter-cultural rehabilitation of patristic-style biblical exegesis; Patrick X. Gardner examines de Lubac’s analysis of post-Christian atheism; David Grumett surveys his interest in the great non-Christian religions; D. Stephen Long discusses his philosophical theology, engaging with the debate over whether Thomas Aquinas believed in ‘pure nature’ (Lawrence Feingold as well as Steven A. Long); Cyril O’Regan discusses de Lubac’s ‘theology of history’, essentially the grand narrative from the apocalyptic eschatology of Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202) to diverse Western European Marxisms; Bryan C. Hollon reflects on the book on mysticism which de Lubac never managed to write; while Noel O’Sullivan reconstructs the dogmatic Christology implicit in de Lubac’s work, though never formally articulated.

The collection concludes with five essays on de Lubac’s theological legacy: Jean-Yves Lacoste discusses the difference, metaphysically, between desire (for beatitude) and claim (to it), in the light of Heidegger’s meditations and ‘the dying philosophical posturings of Roman neo-scholasticism’ (respecting how the nobiliary participle works, Lacoste says Lubac throughout, never de Lubac); Kenneth Oakes deals with de Lubac’s idea of Protestant thinkers (always ‘either/or’, whereas Catholics are ‘both/and’); Simon Oliver describes Radical Orthodoxy, a ‘theological sensibility’ which is very Lubacian in provenance and perspective; Joseph S. Flipper documents how indebted, from *Catholicisme* onwards (1938), de Lubac’s work has always been to the stimulus of surrounding socio-political realities; and finally, Nicholas M. Healy considers the realities and possibilities of the ordinary Catholic’s spiritual life, with which de Lubac was concerned all along.

Compendious as this volume is, it could not cover everything. Apart from some tantalizing allusions by Cyril O’Regan, the three substantial books (1962, 1964 and 1968), which de Lubac devoted to his lifelong friend Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), are ignored, rather surprisingly. In 1960, arriving in Rome as a *peritus* to draft texts for the

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