



Reviews



James L. Heft SJ with John O'Malley, eds., *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 208. £26.99

The fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II has seen plenty of discussion of the council's achievements and legacy, both on an academic and a popular level. As always in such discussions, history is not the only thing at stake: the debates are also highly theologically and culturally charged, and have begun in some cases to reflect the increasing polarisation of the Catholic community into 'conservative' and 'liberal' camps. The result is that, in spite of the proliferation of recent books on the subject, careful, nuanced treatments of the events, documents and significance of Vatican II are rarer commodities than might be expected.

Happily, what is lacking in Catholic discourse more widely is evident in abundance in this excellent collection of essays responding to John O'Malley's *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2012). The contributors have side-stepped some of the simplistic interpretative choices that bedevil discussions of the council, including the classic 'letter' and 'spirit' dichotomy, as well as the more recent distinction between a 'hermeneutic of continuity' and a 'hermeneutic of rupture'. The result is a collection that treats both well-worn and more unusual aspects of the debates with subtlety and insight.

A number of the essays tackle topics which have received less attention in standard overviews. Massimo Faggioli's incisive essay on the relationship between the council and the new ecclesial movements asks to what extent the groups are, as they claim, the fruit of Vatican II. Several structural features of many such movements, including their tendency to bypass relationships with the local bishop in favour of direct appeals to the papacy, raise questions about how they relate to Vatican II's emphasis on collegiality. Darlene Fozard Weaver's

essay provides a helpful overview of Vatican II's impact on moral theology, surveying the state of manualist moral theology before the council, the implicit moral theology present in the council documents, and changes in post-conciliar Catholic ethical thinking. She draws particular attention to the change in *who* is doing moral theology: what was once the preserve of clergy has become far more participatory, and laypeople are increasingly engaged in moral theological reflection in both parish and academy.

The essays that engage more well-trodden areas of debate are also insightful and worthwhile. John Connelly's essay on the Catholic church and mission to the Jews tells the story of *Nostra Aetate* through the eyes of John M. Oesterreicher, a convert from Judaism and *peritus* (theological expert) at the council. As well as providing an engaging account of the changing theological attitudes towards Judaism, the essay raises interesting questions about the significance of Benedict XVI's recent decision to resurrect the prayer for Jews on Good Friday, 'that they will recognize Jesus Christ the Saviour of men', which had been dropped in the 1970 missal in favour of a prayer simply expressing the desire that Jews would 'continue to grow in the love of [God's] name and in faithfulness to his covenant'. Francis A. Sullivan addresses the question of whether Vatican II's teaching on the salvation of adherents of other religions represents a case of 'development of doctrine', and his careful exploration of a range of pre-conciliar sources, conciliar documents and post-conciliar developments concludes that it does.

Two essays deserve singling out for special mention. M. Cathleen Kaveny, also addressing Vatican II's impact on moral theology, provides an illuminating study of the value of the much-celebrated and much-maligned idea of the 'spirit of Vatican II'. Given that Vatican II did not produce a document on moral theology, Kaveny argues that the 'spirit' concept is an important analytical tool for gauging the council's impact on the field. She then goes on to provide a fascinating case study of John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). Although the document initially appears to represent a return to the kinds of issues that preoccupied pre-conciliar manualist

moral theologians – abortion, infanticide, euthanasia – and despite its vigorous use by conservative Catholic protagonists in the US ‘culture wars’, she argues that it is a document thoroughly ‘in the spirit of Vatican II’. Robin Darling Young’s excellent and illuminating essay on Henri de Lubac asks whether this soldier of the Great War, like many of his contemporaries, engaged in *ressourcement* in an attempt to access and recreate a golden age of heroic antiquity. She argues that he ‘appreciated a certain early Christian rhetorical evocation of the Church as mystery, without studiously attending to the drumbeat of strife beneath the mystic chords of ecclesiastical memory’, with the result that ‘the very nostalgic, romantic theology of the Church and its early theology – the *ressourcement* finally legitimized at the council – failed to prepare de Lubac, and many other hopeful reformers, for the rancorous conflict that followed.’ (136) While it opened up much of the richness of the early Church’s theology, the strategy of *ressourcement* left de Lubac, and the Church more widely, without the necessary resources to cope with the wrangling and messiness of the post-conciliar years.

This is a very worthwhile collection of insightful and careful essays, bookended by a clear introduction from John O’Malley, which does an excellent job of setting up the key themes under discussion, and a characteristically thoughtful conclusion from Joseph Komonchak. For those beginning to learn about the council and explore its significance, this collection provides an accessible overview of some key topics, and a helpful introduction to some of the central issues under debate. For those already well acquainted with the events and documents of Vatican II as well as the debates surrounding their interpretation, these essays provide stimulating questions, valuable analysis and refreshing balance.

Theodora Hawksley,
University of Edinburgh
theodora.hawksley@ed.ac.uk