

Nouvelle Théologie-New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II by Jürgen Mettepenningen.

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***Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* by Jürgen Mettepenningen (review)**

Jörgen Vijgen

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

125 BOOKREVIEWS Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II. By JÜRGEN METTEPENNINGEN. London: T. & T. Clark, 2010. Pp. 218. £19.99 (paper). ISBN: 978-0-567-034010-6. In the ongoing debate over the hermeneutics of the Second Vatican Council it is neither pertinent to search for an elusive “spirit of the Council” nor sufficient to focus on the promulgated texts and their geneses: it is also necessary to study the various pontificates and theological schools and movements in order to reach an insight into the minds of the council fathers and their periti. This study is therefore a welcome

contribution to this debate since it intends “to introduce the reader into the most important building blocks, into the specificity and development” (xiv) of the *nouvelle théologie* “as the inheritor of Modernism and one of the precursors of Vatican II” (xiv). The author considers the contribution of several Dominicans to be “innovative” in this respect. He describes this innovation as follows in the introduction: “before, during and after the Second World War, [several Dominicans] called for a theology that was oriented towards the sources of the Christian faith and not (exclusively) towards a system based on scholasticism. In short, theology needed to restore its contact with the living reality of the faith. . . . In order to achieve this goal, theologians had to become aware of the urgent need to refresh theology’s bonds with history. . . . To draw from the well of history is to return to the true sources of the faith and thereby transform the faith into the living object of theology” (xiii). Whether and how the author succeeds in giving the reader a deeper insight into this rather vague description remains to be seen. The book has two main parts, each divided into three chapters, in which the author, drawing on published and archival material in various modern languages, studies the concept and context of the movement (3-40) and the various phases of the *nouvelle théologie* prior to the Second Vatican Council (41-140). The book ends with some brief conclusions (141-46), which are followed by endnotes (147-86), which contain almost solely bibliographical information, a bibliography (187-214) and an index (215-18). In part 1, chapter 1, the author considers the *nouvelle théologie* to be a “cluster concept” (7) which is difficult to define, the more so since representatives such as Congar, de Lubac and Bouillard were critical of its use and its application to their thought. He nevertheless considers the following four features to be essential to the movement: the use of the French language, the place of history within theology, the appeal of a positive theology in search of the sources of the faith and in particular the thirteenth-century Thomas, and finally a “critical attitude towards neo-scholasticism” (11), which was viewed as a “conceptual system” that “defined the norms of orthodoxy” to the detriment of the “relationship between theology, faith and life”; it “was not open to reality and history and was thus closed to the fully fledged contribution of positive theology” (ibid.). The author intends, in chapter 2, to offer the “theological background” and “historical embeddings” of the *nouvelle théologie* between 1819 (the year in which Johann Sebastian Drey established the *Tübinger theologische Quartalschrift*) and 1960 in less than 15 pages (15-29). This leaves little room for nuances. For instance, to John Henry Newman is ascribed the idea that “Christianity is not a theory or a closed system,” that “[neither] the Church’s doctrine nor the Church itself are static entities, but rather living realities,” that the faith is “not simply to be imposed from above (the magisterium), but requiring consultation and an awareness of the faith of the laity” (17). Or, treating ultramontanism, neo-Scholasticism and Vatican I under the same heading, the *Syllabus errorum* of 1864 is stated to be “a rejection of modern thought,” which “necessitated the creation of a counterweight: an anti-modern intellectual framework” of which Thomism “became the focus of attention” (18). The one-page description of Modernism ends by describing its relation to the magisterium as “a clash of good...

BOOK REVIEWS

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