

Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses

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Daniele GIANOTTI. *I Padri della Chiesa al concilio Vaticano II: La teologia patristica nella Lumen Gentium* (Biblioteca di Teologia dell'Evangelizzazione, 6). Bologna, Dehoniane, 2010. (24×17), 530 p. ISBN 978-88-10-45006-2. €42.00.

Undoubtedly, the present book can be counted among one of the more interesting and relevant publications regarding Vatican II. Over the past years, and increasingly so, entire libraries have been devoted to the study of the latest council, and many of these writings are not deprived of ideological premises. The ongoing hermeneutical debate features a spread of theoretical approaches, which often are more emotionally than scientifically fed. Gianotti's book provides an interesting approach with a balanced and quiet consideration of the current hotly debated topics. He has studied the importance of the Church Fathers in the conciliar constitution *Lumen Gentium* with surprising nuance, and thus, has acquired a keen awareness of the issues at stake when touching upon such a topic. Previous studies have been conducted on the presence of patristic sources in Vatican II documents and have often lead to interesting results. This book takes the field a step further. Its scope is clearly limited: it looks at the importance of patristics with regard to only one of the Vatican II documents – although the choice falls upon a major document, on which no full redaction history has yet been written. The structure of the book is abundantly clear: the first part is devoted to the evolution of Catholic ecclesiology in the period preceding Vatican II. In this part, the author offers an overview of the era of ressourcement in Catholicism, focusing on the patristic revival from the 1940s up to the eve of the Second Vatican Council. This part closes with an analysis of the preconciliar vota on ecclesiology and the way in which patristics were present there. Here already, it is clear that Gianotti does not limit his research to studying clear and explicit references to Church Fathers, but widens the scope of his investigations to the extent that he shows ample attention to a “patristic discourse of style”, to the question of the authority of the *Patres* as keystones of the Catholic tradition, and to the way in which “patristic thinking” occurs and plays a role in the possible (re-)orientation of Roman Catholic theology. All of this remains present in the book's second part, which carefully traces the subsequent redaction steps of the schema *De Ecclesia*. The author seeks to understand not only the evolution of explicit references, but the evolution of conciliar ecclesiology itself, as an attempt to reconnect the theology of the church with its ancient roots. In doing so, Gianotti makes clear that the

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ecclesiological “turn” of Vatican II was not a sudden one, but that it was already in motion in the preconiliar milieu of patristic scholarship. When reading this study it becomes evident that the struggles inherent to the council’s ecclesiological debate, carrying on for three council periods, was not a struggle born during the council, but might be better described as a struggle between distinct models of doing and approaching ecclesiology, having their roots either in a patristic tradition or in the neo-scholastic interpretation of the Thomistic tradition. This opens up and complexifies the actual debates on the hermeneutics of Vatican II, touched upon in the last part of the volume. The author discusses the importance of understanding Vatican II’s “reditus ad fontes” critically and properly, as a work both of “destruction” and “construction”: some of the remnants of a neo-scholastic theology, its style and discourse, were left behind, not so much in order to damage the church’s tradition, but in order to seek a new liaison with this tradition and its ancient Biblical and patristic roots. The result was not so much the abolishing of classic Catholic doctrine, but rather the choice for a different perspective and reformulation of doctrine, closer to the Biblical, liturgical and patristic origins. The consequences for ecclesiology are not to be underestimated. On top of delivering an interesting and rich study, the book written by Gianotti is written in an open and accessible style. One hopes for it to be translated into English so that it might reach a broader public.

K. SCHELKENS