

*Theism* mostly tend to assume that we can act independently of God or as determined by God. Aquinas, I would note, has a different view of God and human freedom to recommend.

BRIAN DAVIES OP

**PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PIERRE-ANDRÉ LIÉGÉ: RADICAL DOMINICAN AND VATICAN II PIONEER** by Nicholas Bradbury [foreword by Timothy Radcliffe OP], *Ashgate*, Farnham, 2015, pp. xv + 249, £65.00, hbk

Theology and pastoral work (and theologians and pastors) often exist in tension with each other. For many pastors, the concerns of theologians are irrelevant to real, everyday pastoral needs. For many theologians, pastors encounter failure in transmitting the Christian faith precisely because they have not grounded their work in theology. Nicholas Bradbury, an Anglican priest who spent many years in difficult inner-city parishes, recognised early on the need for focussed theological resources for pastoral work, but found little. Having encountered in France catechetical programmes which he saw as able to dynamise not just pastors but a whole church community, he became interested in the man who was arguably their origin, the ‘practical theologian’ Pierre-André Liégé. This very fine book is the result.

Liégé, a French Dominican, was himself a pastor. His teacher, Yves Congar, and the other *nouveaux théologiens* were, of course, pastorally aware: they were driven by their concern at the widening gap between the Catholic Church’s theology and practice and the realities of the twentieth century, notably the rise of secularisation. But they were full-time theologians. Liégé was a chaplain to the scouts, who are still the largest Catholic youth movement in France. When not with them he was giving talks, teaching, writing, seeing people. He could not say no. He was formidably organised, deprived himself of sleep, and was profoundly rooted in prayer. ‘I like my choice’, he said. He was a loyal friend, and a zealous preacher and superior, sometimes to the point of authoritarianism. Sadly but unsurprisingly he died young, at 57, in 1979. Although he never had time to write his *magnum opus* on practical theology, he still managed to notch up 433 publications (Bradbury provides an excellent bibliography). Interestingly, although he got into trouble along with Congar and the rest in the 1950s, unlike them he escaped sanction, because several bishops defended him – not as a theologian, but as a pastor.

What is most striking is how systematic and structural Liégé’s practical theology is, and this gives it its enduring value. Bradbury’s exploration shows that Liégé does not just give us a pastoral manual of how to deal with modern people – he had no time for books of ‘techniques’, not

least because they soon became out of date. Nor does he offer a new catechism to replace the old ones. Instead, he brings us back to what catechesis is, and offers us a systematic way of addressing challenges and crises and finding solutions.

First of all, Liégé's catechetical theology is dialogical and adult. It is addressed to life in all its stages, and thus puts the Word of God – always Liégé's starting point – in dialogue with a person's or community's life. It is not just the communication of doctrinal formulae and rules. By engaging *this* person, *this* community, we help start a process in them of encounter with the Word of God, and thus a real conversion can take place, and continue into spiritual growth.

This undoubtedly helped Liégé as a pastor when dealing with the moral crisis of the Algerian War in the 1960s. He did not come up with ready answers, but asked his scouts what they thought. This was not side-stepping – rather, it was requiring mature Christian engagement. To help them in this – and any challenge or crisis – Liégé asks us to look at the facts, do a socio-critical analysis, look at the resources Christian Tradition offers us, and then see what the prospects are.

The post-Conciliar crisis took Liégé by surprise. As a practical theologian he quickly changed his approach (his favourite word was *l'agir* – 'the to act' – it had to be a verb, *l'action* was never enough). He started with the prospects and then worked backwards through Tradition and analysis. But the fact remained that his disciple and successor, Jean-Pierre Jossua OP, still had to deal with 'displacement' – the sudden and bewildering shift from modernity to ultra-pluralist postmodernity, whereby God and Christ are for people just one option among many, and everything is up for critique.

Bradbury compares Liégé's approach with contemporary Francophone and Anglican pastoral theologians, and is critical of what he sees as a lack of communal or adult catechesis in the Anglican Church. If that is so, my own Church has no cause for smugness – Roman Catholic catechetical and RE programmes do not obviously result in practising faith either. And even in France, post-Liégé catechesis, for all its enthusiasm, is not really addressing the fundamental loss of belief in God. So Bradbury's thought experiment of what might have happened if Liégé's system were applied in a post-industrial Anglican parish is fascinating. The parish is divided into smaller groups, which meet during the week – not just to plan the (colourful) Sunday liturgy, but to work through personal and communal issues – Liégé believed strongly in the human sciences. Debate is passionate and informed. Individuality is respected, while community is the base. Bishop John Robinson (*Honest to God*) leads the 1984 parish assembly.

While I really wonder if a working-class parish suffering high unemployment would be so eager for theological debate, what strikes me is

the call to honesty. Bradbury quotes Timothy Radcliffe's *What is the Point of Being a Christian?*:

We talk about love, freedom, happiness, and so on, but unless our churches are seen really to be places in which people are free and courageous, then why should anyone believe us? (p. 202/ Radcliffe pp. 2–3).

Perhaps there is a Way of the Cross to be gone with our parishes and their people. It might result in devotions and liturgical forms that Liégé would not have liked, and demand a level of engagement and service that many Christians would not like. But Liégé's very practical theology, because it is rooted in the call to conversion rather than personal tastes, offers us a structure of working that is both solid and flexible.

DOMINIC WHITE OP

**THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE: PERSONALISM, DOCTRINE AND CANON LAW** by Cormac Burke (foreword by Janet Smith), *Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2015, pp. 280, \$34.95, pbk*

Mgr Cormac Burke was an unlikely appointment as an Auditor of the Roman Rota when Pope St John Paul II appointed him in 1986, having spent the years before that in pastoral and academic work in Africa (teaching canon law at the seminary in Nairobi). He remained unusual on the Rota, being notable for sentences which included more searching and lengthy theological expositions than was (or is) usual for the deliberations of that august body. This book collects a number of his articles, and does so in a way that leads the reader into themes that are at the heart of Burke's thought. Although Mgr Burke has re-worked the essays to make the connections between them more evident, the book remains a collection – with all the advantages and disadvantages that this involves.

Given, however, that the content has been reworked, the definite article in the title will provoke some immediate reflection by readers – especially as the book (though written earlier) will appear alongside *Amoris Laetitia*. Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation echoes much recent writing on marriage by beginning with a lengthy attempt to build a theology of marriage which starts with biblical reflection, and going on to look carefully at the situation of marriage in the world of today. Mgr Burke, by contrast, appears to offer a much more timeless theology, which is attentive to the teaching of scripture but does not start with it in any obvious way. Should one therefore dismiss this book as a throwback to the theology of an earlier age (implicitly condemning the theology that underlies the canon law of marriage at the same time)? Even