

FIRST THINGS

BRIEFLY NOTED

by
Nathaniel Peters
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On the Road to Vatican II: German Catholic Enlightenment and Reform of the Church

BY ULRICH L. LEHNER

FORTRESS, 414 PAGES, \$49

On *the Road to Vatican II* focuses on German and Austrian theological debates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as examples of the Catholic Enlightenment. Historians and theologians will be grateful for Ulrich Lehner's careful, dispassionate treatment of under-studied figures. His work is primarily historical. Lehner argues that Catholic Enlightenment theology offers lessons in how to go about engaging with modernity, not answers to contemporary questions.

Patristic and medieval theology is popular in part because it clearly comes from an age so different from our own. By contrast, Enlightenment theologians' concerns, interests, and exegetical inclinations are our own. The breadth of figures Lehner studies is astonishing, as is the degree to which they seem familiar. Three hundred years ago, they tried to reconcile their faith with modern culture. They navigated ecumenical dialogue without flattening doctrinal differences or encouraging indifferentism. They negotiated between historical-critical scholarship and traditional interpretations of the Bible. They renewed the liturgical life of the Church by removing baptismal exorcisms and adding vernacular liturgy. They also accused each other of heresy and obscurantism. There is nothing new under the sun.

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University.

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