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Thomas F. O'Meara,

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[November 1, 2012]

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Some Resources for Studying
Albert the Great’s Theology

Thomas Franklin O’Meara, O.P.

Publications in recent years have suggested composing this survey of resources, books and articles, on the theology of Albert of Lauingen. Monographs, collections of essays, critical texts, and bibliographies have appeared and are continuing to appear. Jan Aertsen speaks of a strong interest in Albert beginning around 1980. “In this ‘Albert-Renaissance’ two motifs are at work. The first wants to present Albert’s own identity….One should not consider Albert only in relationship to Thomas or as someone standing in the shadow of his student….The second motif is to see him as Albertus teutonicus, the source of the German Dominican school.”¹  Basically the

¹ Jan A. Aertsen “Albertus Magnus und die mittelalterliche Philosophie,” Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie 21 (1996): 111-
following essay illustrates contemporary interest in Albert, even as it joins to this some past resources for his theology.

A. *Albert of Lauingen*

Albert was a Swabian scholar and a Dominican friar, a pioneer of the use of Aristotelian philosophy in Western Christian theology and a natural scientist. He was the teacher of Thomas Aquinas, Ulrich of Strassburg, and perhaps of Meister Eckhart. Ulrich wrote of him: “My teacher…was an almost divine person in every science, so much so that he was seen as an astonishing wonder of our age.” ²

Centuries later, James Athanasius Weisheipl observed: “Not only was Albert the only man of the High Middle Ages to be called ‘the Great,’ but this title was used even before his death.” ³

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Albert was born around 1200 in Lauingen near where the Danube has its source. In 1223, he entered the Dominicans at the University of Padua. In his thirties he was the director of studies in several priories of friars in German lands. Around the age of forty he was sent to Paris to attain a doctorate. In 1245 he became the first Master of German origin at one of the European universities (in 1258 he signed a document of the university at Paris as “frater Albertus Theutonicus”). In Paris where the texts of Aristotle and his Arab commentators were being studied enthusiastically, Albert became known for drawing students to their study. One of them was Thomas Aquinas. In 1248 Albert went to Cologne to start a school for the friars. “With Thomas Aquinas as his assistant, Albert formed a house


of studies for his Order. It was the first school of higher studies in Germany and the precursor of the Cologne University. Ludger Honnefelder has edited a volume of essays on the dynamic of the emergence of universities in Europe and the role of Albert in their development. Toward the end of 1249 Albert began his enterprise of paraphrasing and commenting on Aristotle’s works, “to make all the areas of philosophy intelligible to the Latins.” He was elected


superior of the German province in 1254: its thirty-six priories reached from Strassburg on the Rhine to Rostock on the Baltic Sea. He subsequently attended general meetings of Dominicans in Milan, Paris, and Florence. In 1257 he resigned the provincialate and returned to Cologne to teach.

During those years he was engaged as a mediator in important public disputes, for not infrequently, bishop, mercantile class, and nobility found themselves at odds. 

His prominence in resolving disputes attracted the attention of Pope Alexander IV who appointed him in 1260 bishop in Regensburg. The particularly intense social and political conflict involving Albert in 1271 has been described in


After he had reformed the clergy and reorganized the finances, in less than two years, he resigned that ministry and returned to teaching in Würzburg and Cologne where he died in 1280.

Yves Congar wrote fifty years ago: “Albert believed in the mind. He perceived a profound harmony between the loftiness of divine life and the world of science and of finite human reasoning. This scholar, even as he argued for the autonomy of the sciences, had a special grasp of the reality of the unity of the universe. There exists one realm in which the facts of nature and the realities of grace are physically present.”

Albert’s research into the natural sciences

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should not distract one from appreciating the theological project and
goal of his thinking and of many of his writings. “Albert’s plan can be
grapsed as a monumental synthesis considering all things in light of
the varied revelation of God, a revelation appearing through Scripture
and incarnation but also through creation.” 12 Over the last fifteen
years Henryk Anzulewicz has written a number of articles on Albert,
some highlighting the theological and unifying themes of Albert’s thought. He emphasizes the need to go beyond the past limited view
that Albert’s originality lies in philosophy and science, and to see
anew how theological principles and goals pervade his writings.
“Insight into the thought-form of Albert the Great leads to the
conclusion that his way of thinking characteristically treats the reality
of being in a perspective both encompassing and unified. That
perspective moves from its beginnings through a process of self-
realization under the conditions of contingency to its ultimate goal.
Basically it reflects his underlying idea of life.” 13 Human life,

13 Anzulewicz, “Die Denkstruktur des Albertus Magnus. Ihre
Dekodierung und ihre Relevanz für die Begrifflichkeit und
temporality, and all the causalities within creation contribute to this kind of structure, one seeking to explain the varied dimensions of life.


and time. Plato is present as well as Aristotle. In Albert’s writings “encompassing principles fashion a theological structure” as “a unified and complete system offering a total explanation of all the reality of being.” Breadth marks Albert’s thought in various ways. “Perhaps the medieval conception of a universal complex of various sciences, a university, existing in a unity inclusive of all, found its broadest expression in the structure of the teaching of that universal teacher.”

B. Albert’s Writings

Mention should be made first of editions of Albert’s works. A collection of Albert’s writings was edited and published in thirty-eight

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volumes by Auguste Borgnet in the nineteenth century. The Latin text was based somewhat on an earlier edition in twenty-one volumes by Pierre Jammy, *B. Alberti Magnis, Ratisb. Ep., O.P., Opera*. The Albertus-Magnus-Institut, founded in 1931 by the Archdiocese of Cologne but with its present location in Bonn, is editing a critical text of Albert’s writings: *Alberti Magni, Opera Omnia* (Editio Coloniensis). For that critical text twenty-eight volumes out of a planned forty-one are listed as having already appeared, while six are in proximate preparation. The institute’s website describes its library, lectures, publications, and projects


18 (Lyons: Prost, 1651).

C. Four Recent Publications


*Albert the Great: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography (1900 – 2000)* by Resnick and Kitchell is a volume of over four hundred pages. The editors point out that bibliographical resources on Albert are few and often inaccessible in North America. This bibliography


22 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1999 - 2006).

includes 2576 entries, and there is an index of names and subjects occupying thirty pages. “The print version of this bibliography should appeal to scholars who enjoy the leisure necessary to examine carefully the extensive literature on Albert.” 24 Books and articles are gathered into nineteen sections, ranging from “Albert’s Life and Works” and “Iconography and Albert in Art” to “Theology – General” and “Albertism.” Some individual articles and books are summarized.

There is also an on-going electronic bibliography: Jörgen Vijgen, “Albertus Magnus – A Selective Bibliography,” Nederlands Thomas Genootschap (www.thomisme.org). The Albertus-Magnus-Institute in Bonn now offers an “Online Edition of the Works of Saint Albert the Great” to private individuals and to institutions. 25

There have been partial bibliographies like the one assembled in 1931 by Yves Congar for the issue of the Revue Thomiste celebrating the canonization of Albert 26 or those in volumes


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At that time James A. Weisheipl edited *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences. Commemorative Essays, 1980*.³⁰ Topics from the natural sciences include herbs and falcons, alchemy and human embryology. Weisheipl also wrote “Albert the Great and Medieval Culture,”³¹ and *Thomas d’Aquino and Albert His Teacher*.³²


To return to recent literature, Walter Senner’s volume holds seven hundred pages of essays. Philosophical studies treat old and new topics like the world of nature or the relationship of Albert to Arab philosophy, while in the last two sections there are essays on the Trinity, biblical hermeneutics, papal primacy, predestination, prayer and mysticism, and women’s religious movements. This volume is a contemporary witness to Albert’s breadth of interests and to the breadth of contemporary research.  

The series *Lectio Albertina* from the Albertus-Magnus-Institut in Bonn is a series of scholarly monographs, now numbering twelve. One of them by Rudolf Schieffer on “Mendicancy and Theology in Conflict with Episcopacy” explores the papal appointment of Albert to 

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33 Related to the Senner volume is Ludger Honnefelder, et al., *Albertus Magnus und die Anfänge der Aristoteles-Rezeption im lateinischen Mittelalter* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2005) where studies on Aristotle’s philosophy and its entrance into the West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries lead to essays on Albert himself. Ingrid Craemer-Ruegenberg’s *Albertus Magnus* has been issued in a revised edition by Henryk Anzulewicz (Leipzig: St. Benno, 2005); it has sections on Albert’s influence and bibliographies.
the bishopric of Regensburg, his activities there, and his decision to resign after less than two years.\textsuperscript{34} The choice by the pope of Albert as bishop was caused by financial and ecclesiastical problems in the diocese of Regensburg (his appointment is an early example of papal appointment of bishops in Germany). In less than two years Albert saw that the diocese would be capable of selecting a moral and competent successor, and he returned to his work as teacher and writer, remaining, of course, a bishop. Schiefer’s documentary study of Albert’s time as bishop critiques legends about Albert written down after the end of the fourteenth century.

A fourth resource is the special issue of \textit{Wort und Antwort} with essays on Albert ranging from eschatology to art. Related to this is an issue of \textit{Listening} on \textit{St. Albert the Great and Dominican Teaching}. There are essays by M. Mulchahey on the Studium at Cologne and early Dominican education; W. Senner on Albert and

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Albertus Magnus. Mendikantentum und Theologie im Widerstreit mit dem Bischofsamt. Lectio Albertina} #3 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1999).
Meister Eckhart and T. J. White on Albert and modern views of Wisdom.  

The Bonn institute has begun a second series, *Subsidia Albertina*, from which a volume of essays illustrating the progress in research on Albert in the past two decades has appeared: Ludger Honnefelder, Hannes Möhle, Susana Bullido del Barrio, eds., *Via Alberti. Texte-Quellen-Interpretationen*.  

D. Earlier Writings on Albert

For the English-speaking world an early source from the 1930s was Hieronymous Wilms, *Albert the Great. Saint and Doctor of the Church*, and around the same time the journal *Blackfriars* published M.-D. Chenu, “The Revolutionary Intellectualism of St. Albert the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{35} Listening 43: 3 (2008).}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{36} (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000). An Australian journal has published three essays on Albert and education: Gabrielle Kelly, Kevin Saunders, eds., Dominica}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{37} (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1933).}\]
Great.”\textsuperscript{38} Earlier volumes celebrated the canonization of Albert in 1931 (he had been beatified in 1622). For that event the \textit{Revue Thomiste} issued a special number with historical essays by Angelus Walz and Pierre Mandonnet and theological essays like those on the gifts of the Holy Spirit by Benoit Lavaud and on predestination by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange.\textsuperscript{39} Also \textit{Divus Thomas} published a “St. Albertus-Magnus-Festschrift” opening with a letter by Pius XI and a forward by Andreas Cardinal Frühwirth, O.P. That volume held studies on Albert and modern philosophy, political science, geology, the procession of the Holy Spirit, and the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{40} Earlier in 1928 Martin Grabmann had published a lengthy article on Albert and his age.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Blackfriars} 19 (1938): 5-15.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Revue Thomiste} 36 (1931); on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Albert’s theology see Bavo M. van Hulse, “De leer over de gaven van de H. Geest bij den h. Albertus den Groote,” \textit{Bijdragen} 5 (1942): 1-78.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Divus Thomas} 9 (1931); 10 (1932).

\textsuperscript{41} “Der Einfluss Alberts des Grossen auf das mittelalterliche Geistesleben,” \textit{Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie} 52 (1928): 156-
E. *Albert and Some Theological Topics.*

The volumes by Senner and by Manfred Entrich hold studies on the theological and exegetical methods of Albert where Karl Cardinal Lehmann’s essay treats the synthesis of faith and knowing in Albert, and Mikolaj Olszewski’s looks at his theory of biblical interpretation.” Lehmann also published in the *Lectio Albertina* a monograph treating Albert’s idea of theology, and Walter Senner offers there a lengthy survey of Albert’s major works in terms of the relationship of theology and philosophy and in terms of affective and


42 Manfred Entrich, ed., *Albertus Magnus. Sein Leben und seine Bedeutung* (Graz: Styria, 1982) 111-130; the volume holds essays by Karl Meyer, Isnard Frank, and others.

speculative directions in theology. Albert distinguished science clearly from religion and sought a variety of methodologies for the sciences. Joachim Söder, Anzulewicz, and others have described with a new depth Albert’s anthropology, while Ruth Meyer inquired

into Albert’s contribution to a post-modern age, for he spoke of
sciences that would be discovered in the future and noted how
questions on the boundaries of diverse disciplines were difficult.  

To peruse the bibliography of writings on Albert by Resnick and
Kitchell is to notice that philosophical themes have been studied more
frequently than religious ones, although recent years witness a
marked increase in theological essays. Gilles Emery has written on
Albert’s theology of the Trinity, while there is no lack of studies for a
philosophy of God. In the area of Christology there were studies

45 Joachim R. Söder, “Der Mensch als Ganzheit. Alberts
anthropologischer Entwurf,” Wort und Antwort 41 (2000): 159-64;
see Georg Wieland, Zwischen Natur und Vernunft. Albert des
Grossen Begriff vom Menschen (Münster: Aschendorff, 1999).
46 Emery, La Trinité Créatrice. Trinité et la création dans les
commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d’Aquin et de ses
précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure (Paris: Vrin, 1995); see
Alain de Libera, “Toute-puissance et théodicée. Albert le Grand,” O.
from the 1930s on the hypostatic union by Vincent-Marie Pollet and Ferdinand Haberl, while decades later there are essays on Christology by Stephen Hipp, Donald Goergen, and others. 47

Aspects of the theology of grace have attracted some writers: Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange and Klaus Obenauer on predestination, Yves Congar on sanctifying grace, Thomas O'Meara on justification,


and Patrizia Conforti on the grace of union. Two early works on grace are Herbert Doms, *Die Gnadenlehre des seligen Alberti Magni* and Josef Goergen, *Des hl. Albertus Magnus Lehre von der göttlichen Vorsehung und dem Fatum.*

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49 (Breslau: Müller und Seiffert, 1929); (Vechta: Albertus-Magnus-Verlag, 1932).
To continue surveying theological areas, sacrament is also a theme for studies on Albert. A monograph from the Bonn series treats transubstantiation in the Eucharist in light of Albert’s views. The essay concerns itself with the arrival of Aristotelian conceptuality and with metaphysical problems posed by the perduration of the appearances in the sacrament. Thomas McGonigle wrote on the medieval context of Albert’s sacramental theology where the Dominican seeks to reconcile theologies of the sacrament from Augustine, Peter Lombard, and Hugh of St. Victor, while David Wright presented Albert’s interpretation of the rites of the Mass according to historical, moral, and mystical meanings of the words and actions in contrast to allegorical interpretations like that of Lothar of Segni.


51 The articles by McGonigle and Wright are found in *The Thomist* 44 (1980): 560-83 and 584-96; see too Ludwig Hödl, “Der dogmatische
Franz-Josef Nocke’s book, after treating the idea of sacrament in general, turns to the two sacraments of penance and marriage. They are of particular interest because in the view of some medieval writers laypersons can administer them, a position that interests Albert. 52 At the beginning of the twentieth century Georg Gromer composed a survey of medieval theologies on laypersons hearing a sacramental confession, and he placed the thinking of Albert the Great as the medieval climax of those affirming this activity. Albert sketched a number of ways in which sins can be absolved through faith and love among the baptized and concluded that laypeople hearing confessions is a true sacrament. “With Albert the theory of


52 Franz-Josef Nocke, Sakrament und personaler Vollzug bei Albertus Magnus (Münster: Aschendorff, 1967); on baptism there is Alfons Müller, Die Lehre von der Taufe bei Albert dem Grossen (Munich: Schöningh, 1967).
lay confession stands at its highest level of expression. Essentially the effect is the same as confession to a priest.”

For Albert’s ecclesiology one can find an orientation in Yves Congar, *L’Église de Saint Augustin à l’époque moderne*. Aspiring to unite Plato and Aristotle, hierarchy and people, Albert wrote of the Body of Christ as both church and Eucharist. Each Christian is personally joined to Christ through the Body of the church. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate principle of church unity as well as of activity and office. There is a distinction between the members of the church and the members of the Body of Christ which is a congregation of love.

Albert gives papal office and authority sparse consideration. Already in 1872 Franz Xaver Leitner had touched on Albert’s views of


the papacy in a study on Aquinas and infallibility. 55 Ulrich Horst’s analysis of papal office stresses that Albert understood the office of the bishop of Rome mainly in terms of administration and jurisdiction; the pope held in a limited way aspects of universal jurisdiction and leadership but enjoyed only to a modest extent the role of teacher. 56 Anzulewicz has written on the role of the fathers of the church in Albert’s ecclesiology and on his understanding of the church as a

55 Der hl. Thomas von Aquin über das unfehlbare Lehramt des Papstes (Freiburg: Herder, 1872) 177-81.
society. “From its origins and through its salvific work in unity with Christ the head of the ‘corpus mysticum’ the church transcends the limitations of time, space, and matter. Within the conditions of being a viator and living through faith (and not through immediate knowledge) the church participates in the glory of God. It is the house of God and of the Spirit; it is a created work like the human being. Consequently it has a double reality, transcendent and contingent dimensions: on the one hand, the mystical Body vitalized by the Holy Spirit…and on the other hand, a unified community of faith with a leader who is the successor of Peter and who leads all the members.”

To turn to the realm of pastoral activity, essays on Albert as a bishop and mediator show him to be a person of both administrative and pastoral gifts. Congar studied the efforts of the Dominican community as a “team” where the Friars Preachers’ intellectual apostolate was realized by men with varied expertise and ministries.  

58 Manfred Entrich has written on Albert’s medieval pastoral plan for religious education.  

59 There are essays on prayer and movements of  


religious women in Albert’s view as well as on forms of popular devotion to Albert. 60 Simon Tugwell has published an analysis of Albert’s spirituality along with texts illustrating it. 61

Albert’s eschatology has attracted attention: resurrection, the death of Jesus, purgative fire, and German piety in the face of death. Anzulewicz offers an essay on the finitude of creation, the omnipresence of time, and the role of fire in destruction and transformation. “In his philosophical writings Albert does not discuss the end of the world because he cannot assume with purely rational principles that this world has an end. Biblical revelation tells him that the world had a beginning (this is at the same time the beginning of time) and that it will have an end….This world must have an end and must experience a renewal because in its origins it was more perfect


60 Entrich, Albertus Magnus. Gebete zu ihm, Gebete von ihm (Cologne: St. Andreas, 1979); see the essays listed under “Mysticism” in Resnick, Kitchell, 317-19.

and because it strives towards renewal.”  

The universe’s term is not a consequence of the process of nature but results from the external and unique cause of the total reality of the universe. The process of renewal begins with periods of destruction by fire at lower levels and moves to higher levels where fire becomes illumination, holiness, and vision.  

F. Representations of Albert in Art  

Erhard Schlieter offers a survey of how Albert is presented in art over the centuries. In 1980 an exhibition on Albert in art was presented in Lauingen.  


assembled in Cologne for which Hugo Stehkämper wrote an introduction. 65  *Albertus Magnus, der grosse Neugierige* is an illustrated guide to an exhibit held in Regensburg in 2002, a colorful, brief presentation of the many sides of Albert. 66  Further studies on this topic can be found in the section on “Iconography and Albert in Art” in Resnick and Kitchell.

G. *The Influence of Albert*

Scholars speak of “Albertism,” the influence of Albert in subsequent decades and centuries. Does this imply a school at

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66 *Albertus Magnus, Begegnungen in Regensburg* (Regensburg: Stadt Regensburg, 2002).
Cologne or a movement beginning there? Does it refer to a Rhenish school of mysticism and theology?

Resnick and Kitchell arrange articles around three special figures who may have been influenced by Albert in some way: Dante, Meister Eckhart, and Galileo. Then their bibliography offers ten pages listing articles on wider movements and important disciples.

Aertsen writes of a dynamic conjunction of Arab thought, Dionysian theology, and Albert’s own perspectives resulting in a transcendental science. Alain de Libera has published a number of studies on Albert and his disciples. Albert le Grand et la philosophie surveys current research before turning to Albert’s treatment of philosophy, God and being, a dynamic metaphysics, and a theological psychology of mind. This book presents the influence of Albert on


major thinkers of the next generation like Ulrich of Strassburg and Dietrich of Freiburg. “Both as bishop of Regensburg and as professor at the University of Paris, Albert the Great was not the only mentor of his German confreres in philosophy, science, and theology. He did, however, exercise a determining influence on the theology and spirituality of his Dominican province to which he gave impressive Neo-Platonic, Dionysian, and Avicennan forms (more and more


See Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht, “Albert le Grand, Commentateur de la Théologie Mystique de Denys,” Revue des
articles are devoted to Albert’s relationships to Arabic commentators on Aristotle. The expression ‘a Dominican school of Cologne’ stands for a number of influences and a number of persons active in writing and teaching. There was a mutual interaction in terms of books and people that formed a network or terrain for Rhenish mysticism. De Libera has focused on the mystical dimension in the thought of the Cologne school. Experts describe this intellectual milieu as a speculative mysticism, a metaphysical mysticism, or a mysticism of essence of which all are a metaphysics of the Word.


“Rhenish theology is the theology of Rhenish mysticism: there is its place of discussion, its school of discussion, and its product. This is the theology that comes from Albert, and it is not totally a German theology.”  

A comment from Alain de Libera on Albert’s influence in theology and mysticism offers a conclusion for this survey. Albert is not simply a stage prior to Thomas Aquinas or a version of Avicenna. Albert has his own originality, and his works are not paraphrases or syntheses of the texts of others. “The ‘paradigm of Albert’ has its coherence, its proper horizon, its particular objects….Albert’s theology is not an alternative to Thomism. We need to forget Thomas and face directly -- without intermediaries or codes habitually used to describe Albert -- the real philosophical project of Albert. This project, born at Paris and reaching maturity at Cologne, had an epochal importance.”

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73 Alain de Libera, *L’Introduction à la mystique Rhénane…* 11.

Books and articles are researching and thereby spotlighting the theology of Albert of Lauingen. There is much to discover in his thought and not a little to be learned from it. He was an independent scholar and believer -- independent in the birth of a new age, independent in science and in faith, independent in political turmoil and in church life.
This is a survey of publications on the thought of Martin Heidegger as they influence religion and theologies. Important books from past decades as well as recent writings are gathered together.

Almost immediately upon the publication of *Sein und Zeit* in 1927 theologians, Protestant and Roman Catholic, took notice of it. Interpretations of Heidegger’s thought, of its specific attitude towards Christianity and theology, considerations of what the philosopher did and did not say about religion or God, and the deployment of his thought in explanations of Christian revelation and Scripture soon appeared. That dialogue between Heidegger and theology has lasted for eighty years. At times it seemed to be predominantly philosophical; other times it seemed open to the mystical. In some
periods a Lutheran mentality dominated, in others a medieval dynamic was present.


Heidegger – der gottlose Priester: Psychogramm eines Denkers
(Zurich: Rüffer & Rub, 2008).

Thomas Sheehan, Heidegger. The Man and the Thinker
(Chicago: Precedent, 1981) lists translations and secondary literature in English; see too Bret Davis. Martin Heidegger. Key Concepts
(Durham: Acumen, 2010); Translating Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit. 22
Translators of Sein und Zeit in 17 Languages. Studia

On the topic of God, Thomas Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999);


From the Roman Catholic perspective, R. Schaeffler’s Frömmigkeit des Denkens? (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978) and Die Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Philosophie und katholischer Theologie (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980) are magisterial surveys.


To look at important influences from Heidegger on theologians is to sketch a terrain of interpretations within modern Christian
theology (see Laurence Paul Hemming’s survey, *Heidegger and Theology* [London: New York, 2011]). It illustrates the history of theology in the twentieth century with its variety and coherence. The writings of theologians, exegetes, scholars of religion, and philosophers suggest the following groupings.

1. *Initial Theological Reactions.*
3. *Theological Hermeneutics.*
4. *Karl Barth and Heinrich Ott.*
5. *Catholic Interpretations.*

1. *Initial Theological Reactions.* The first theologians reacting to Heidegger's early publications take him at his word and accept that he is involved in a consideration of Sein and in a re-thinking of metaphysics. That group includes philosophers of religion, Protestant theologians and exegetes, and Catholic philosophers, many of who were positive towards the new style of philosophy.

Heidegger's fame and influence began with *Sein und Zeit*, and so it is not surprising that the *Dasein*-centered and existential aspects
of his philosophy (a segment of his path of thinking) stimulated theologians. Heidegger's potential contribution to Protestant theology was quickly seen in the 1920s: the early essays were collected later in G. Noller, ed., *Heidegger und die Theologie. Beginn und Fortgang der Diskussion* (Munich: Kaiser, 1967). Some noted the positive contribution of Heidegger's reluctance to describe the God who is beyond *Sein*. Heidegger appears in Protestant theologies more as an existential psychologist than as a thinker of the crisis of Western metaphysics. Emil Brunner, however, warned of the drastic results to Christian theology of the use of Heidegger (*"Theologie und Ontologie oder Theologie am Scheidewege,"* Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 11 [1931]: 111-23). Still, the rendering of ontic philosophy in an existential way could not help but raise the question of personal faith and salvation.

There are treatments of how Heidegger moves in the 1920s away from Aquinas, Scotus, medieval figures, and neoscholastics to study and lecture on Paul, Augustine, and Luther: that development lead to aspects of the thinking of *Being and Time* and to a future resonance with some theologians.


2. *Christian Existentialists.* Two figures from the theology faculties of universities in Berlin, Marburg, and Frankfurt -- Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich – head a significant group of theologians drawing on Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit.*

*Rudolf Bultmann.* In 1929, Gerhardt Kuhlmann contrasted the views of Karl Barth with Rudolf Bultmann’s insistence on history and existence in interpretations of the New Testament. Heidegger gave a philosophy of existence to support and explicate what Bultmann was developing. Theology could no longer ignore the existential nature of
revelation; revelation is not past fact or Greek dogma but a promise to the anxious subject. After Heidegger’s arrival in Marburg in 1924, Bultmann was his appreciative colleague (see Hermann G. Göckeritz, *Rudolf Bultmann-Friedrich Gogarten. Briefwechsel 1921-1967* [Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002]). If prior to the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, Bultmann's work showed characteristics of the existential atmosphere of the times, he came to insist on the need to employ Heidegger’s analysis.

There are two separate usages of Heidegger in Bultmann.

The first offers ways of thinking and words from Heidegger (existence, historicity, crisis, event) to re-express more than to interpret the New Testament. They disclose the mode of expression in the letters of Paul and the *Gospel according to John* (*Theology of the New Testament* [New York: Scribners, 1951] 2 vols.).

A second, popular form is Bultmann’s program of "demythologizing." A radical pastoral theological program from 1941, it has as its goal making the Gospel intelligible to modern people who formed by a scientific world-view; it dismisses the forms (and much of the content) of the New Testament as locked into an ancient world-view. Existentialism gives a personal re-interpretation of what are
“myths” (supernatural ideas and stories). Heidegger’s existentials are an adequate, indeed a superior expression of the inner message, the “kerygma,” of the New Testament (see the essay in *Kerygma und Mythos* 1 [Hamburg: Reich, 1954] followed by many volumes of discussion of which only the first volume was translated into English). Religion begins and ends not with a past or future historical event but with the individual; the hermeneutical process is certainly partly an unfolding of the analysis of concrete existence. A personal *Vorverständnis* is brought to the biblical text. The text is not a witness to past reality but a mirror reflecting back, stimulating in the reader or hearer an existential alteration. Existence and faith interpret the Scripture as a sermon, a kerygma of crisis, a summons and consolation and not as a divine revelation of a history of salvation. Bultmann emphasized an existentially encountered history, “realized eschatology” (*Geschichte*) over past recorded events (*Historie*). Temporality indicates a “realized eschatology” in the existential moment (see *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh, University Press, 1957).

Helmut Peukert at the end of the 1960s compares Heidegger and Bultmann. Bultmann understood and applied well *Being and*
Time; existentialism and ambiguity expressed a Christian salvation that is both temporary and existential. He noted religious themes absent from Heidegger but present in Bultmann: the issue of God, the role of death in Christology, the de-temporalizing of history, the absence of aspects of language, and eschatology (H. Peukert, "Bultmann and Heidegger," in T. O'Meara, D. Weisser, eds., *Rudolf Bultmann in Catholic Thought* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1968] 196-221).


*Paul Tillich.* Paul Tillich was a colleague of Heidegger at Marburg after 1925. He was taking up again work on his *Systematische Theologie* at Marburg. *Being and Time* gave him new directions. In Tillich a psychological existentialism colors sermons and pastoral-theological works such as *The Courage to Be.* In the
second volume of the *Systematic Theology* (1957) that Christian system became existentialist as its explained the correlation between Jesus become the Christ at Calvary and our fallen and finite existence. (In the first volume of *Systematic Theology* [1951] the theology of God conversed more with Schelling, Kant, Aquinas, and Bonaventure).


The preaching of an existential message and a faith rooted in today’s ambiguities lead to the subsequent generation of Protestant Bultmannians.

Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs looked at the New Testament revelatory texts as Heidegger looked at poems. An existential
analysis of self was the origin, place, and goal of a reading or a hearing of the text. Such a hermeneutics might revivify Protestant preaching as demythologizing should vitalize exegesis (see the essays in E. Dinkler, ed., *Zeit und Geschichte* [Tubingen: Mohr, 1964] by Fuchs, Ebeling, Ott, Heidegger, and others).


Ernst Fuchs already in 1932 had applauded an existential theology and observed that the main point of Heidegger was to show the limits and decline of all metaphysics: *Marburger Hermeneutik* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1968); *Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie: die existentiale Intepretation* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1959); *Hermeneutik* (Bad Cannstatt: Müllerschön, 1954); “Aus der Marburger Zeit,” *Errinerung an Martin Heidegger* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1977) 105-08. Fritz Buri in Europe drew radical conclusions from this

The American Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten summed up: “As Bultmann interrogates the New Testament texts for an expression of inauthentic and authentic existence, Fuchs finds in them utterances of inauthentic or authentic language. The human person is by nature a linguistic being answering the call of being. This call comes to us through history, for history is basically the history of language, of being coming to expression through language. The coming of the Word of God is understood as the coming of true language” (*History and Hermeneutics* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966] 139).

In the late 1960s, theologians learned from Heidegger not by fashionable terms but by establishing a conversation with him about in the activity of thinking. James M. Robinson and John Cobb were pioneers in presenting Heidegger to the English-speaking world in the 1960s, although the Heidegger they presented was existentialist and hermeneutical, inspiring Bultmannian and post-Bultmannian schools: *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); *The New Hermeneutic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). Cobb

Heidegger..., 157-176; "The Temporality of God," in E. Dinkler, ed., Zeit und Geschichte 381-91. On the other hand, he found the later Heidegger too poetic and ambiguous. He eventually turned to process thinkers and even to liberation theologians. Not a few of the American Bultmannians imitated somewhat Heidegger’s terse and opaque style.

A further encounter with language is found in recent analyses, for instance in the writings of John Caputo.


Around 1980 the employment of Heidegger in hermeneutics found further radical disciples. For Carl Raschke the language theory of the late Heidegger could be a "radical hermeneutics." Going
beyond the "age of the sign" (ending with Nietzsche), the death of God movement, and the default of metaphysics, a hermeneutics should allow language to speak through tradition in a semiophany, a manifestation of ever-new meaning. There is a "second coming" of divinity through a critique of technology and the end of metaphysics:

_The Alchemy of the Word: Language and the End of Theology_

After 1970, inspired by Jacques Derrida (for whom Heidegger is an important source) a number of postmodern theologians hoped that a radical hermeneutics -- isolating object, author, and cultural-historical context from the text -- might find the future by ending every direction of the past. Like Derrida they focused on language in an isolationist sense and pursued not a historical but a grammatical hermeneutics. Mark Taylor published a collection of essays, _Deconstructing Theology_ (New York: Crossroad, 1982), a book, _Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology_ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), and a number of subsequent, similar studies. Joseph O'Leary finds amid the decay of past theologies the "true Heidegger": _Questioning Back. The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition_ (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985); see also T. Altizer,

4. Karl Barth and Heinrich Ott. It can seem strange to link Karl Barth with appreciators of Heidegger. Yet, one of Barth's early American interpreters, Arthur Cochrane (The Existentialists and God [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956]) saw connections, since Barth argued for a biblical existentialism in the Word, Jesus. Barth had his own perspective on Being and Time in Church Dogmatics. He knew that objections had been made to labeling Heidegger as an existentialist, although he joined Heidegger with Sartre in the section on God. Barth was surprised at Heidegger's silence about God, and the theologian did not evaluate this silence in a positive way. Was not Heidegger saying that without revelation, God, the human person and their relationship are "nothingness?" (see B. Forte, In ascolto dell’altro: filosofia e rivelazione [Brescia: Morcelliana, 1995]); J. H. P. Verburgt, De radicaliteit van het kwaad. Karl Barths gesprek met Immanuel Kant en Martin Heidegger (University of Amsterdam,

Barth’s disciple Heinrich Ott directed Protestant theologians in a positive way to the later Heidegger. His doctoral dissertation established a new rapprochement between Barth and Heidegger.


If systematic theology was a hermeneutical process, nonetheless, there was some reality behind the sentences of dogmas and
Scripture. The subject of the New Testament is an event, a word in
flesh. Systematic theology finds a subject matter common to all
Biblical witnesses and to the church in all its periods. The proper
approach to the question of God is not through philosophical
anthropology but through the development of a fundamental ontology.
Genuine philosophical thinking is to Sein as genuinely theological
thinking is to God revealing in salvation-history. Ott moved
Protestant theologians' attention from Existentz to Sein.

5. Catholic Interpretations. Two Jesuits were among the first to
review Heidegger's thought as it was contained in Being and Time.
Erich Przywara, a pioneer of understanding modern German
philosophy within Roman Catholic philosophy of religion, wrote after
1928 on Heidegger's new philosophy even as he professed his
preference for Husserl. Heidegger's thought breathes into Dilthey's
historicity a tragic heroism as it emphasizes finitude.

"Drei Richtungen der Phänomenologie," Stimmen der Zeit 115
(1928): 252-64; "Husserl et Heidegger," Les Études philosophiques
Identität oder Distanz der Geduld," Scholastik 14 (1939): 531-41;
"Theologische Motive im philosophischen Werk M. Heideggers," In
Alfred Delp, executed by the Nazis as a resister, published his doctorate in 1935: *Tragische Existenz* (Freiburg: Herder, 1935). The Jesuit summarized his view in *Modern Schoolman* 14 (1936): 62-66, interpreting *Sein und Zeit* as an exercise in subjectivist philosophy. Delp did not see this emancipation of the self (begun by Kant and Luther) to be easily reconcilable to Christian life or to be separate from the "Germanic" movements of the 1930s. The last lines to Delp’s early dissertation on Heidegger are moving: “It seems as if Heidegger's question and position sound like a new language and a new position leading towards Being. But he also remains under the law of our (German) tragedy, for in his philosophy the view to the middle (between extremes) remains hidden....May it happen that we can work back to the middle realm and dwell there again, there where all collapses and anxieties and efforts and decisiveness find a new meaning. There existence is freedom from tragedy, because there each who loses life finds it again full and new.”
For a detailed survey of Catholic reception of Heidegger see the two books cited above by Richard Schaeffler, particularly "Seinsgeschick und ereignis der Wahrheit – Martin Heidegger und die katholische Theologie," in *Die Wechselbeziehungen...* 229-261. An early American survey of Heidegger's writings was written by James Collins at St. Louis University during World War II. He reported on German Catholic (largely neoscholastic) evaluations of *Sein und Zeit* situating them accurately in their cultural worlds ("The German Neoscholastic Approach to Heidegger," *The Modern Schoolman* 21 [1944]: 143-52). Some early Catholic reaction to Heidegger's philosophy of existence was sympathetic as well as critical, crediting him with originality and insight in the development of an ontology of existence. Catholic authors did not always accept the new separation of ontic and ontological; they found that analysis of existence to be too subjective, and see Nietzsche in the motifs of death, authenticity and decision.


Max Müller, professor at Munich until 1965 wrote a lastingly popular introduction, *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart* (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1949). He set aside the "anthropological-existential misunderstanding" of Heidegger; *Sein* is not a replacement for God, not God, and also not the essence of all beings. Müller pointed out the legitimacy and insistence of Heidegger that his thought was not a substitute theology.

Müller, *Existenzphilosophie: von der Metaphysik zur Metahistorik* (Freiburg: Albert, 1958 and 1986); W. Vossenkuhl,

Gustav Siewerth, professor in Freiburg, wrote essays relating Heidegger's thought to metaphysics, to Aquinas, and to Francisco Suarez. Noting how Western thought has made God an object, he observed that Heidegger's thought is an ontological discussion of the cultural problematic of God in light of the absence of God. Heidegger does not accept theism, atheism, or pantheism and yet he also did not see or admit the Christian origins of *Sein* ("Martin Heidegger und die Gotteserkenntnis" and "Martin Heidegger und die Frage nach Gott," in *Gott in der Geschichte. Zur Gottesfrage bei Hegel und Heidegger* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1971); *Das Schicksal der Metaphysik von Thomas bis Heidegger* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1959).

Johann Baptist Lotz’s *Sein und Existenz* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965) brought together essays on Heidegger treating his development as well as the changes taking place in Christian views of Heidegger after *Sein und Zeit*. There is also a book on Aquinas and Heidegger *Martin Heidegger und Thomas von Aquin. Mensch,*


The school of Jesuits in Pullach, Germany, studied Heidegger sympathetically. Emerich Coreth's *Metaphysics* (New York, Herder and Herder, 1968) employs Heidegger and there are other early essays by Coreth like “Heidegger und Kant” in J. B. Lotz, ed., *Kant und die Scholastik Heute* (Pullach: Berchmanskolleg, 1955). For chapters on movements and people see the three volumes of Coreth,

Karl Rahner published in 1940 "Introduction au concept de philosophie existentiale chez Heidegger" (English translation in *Philosophy Today* 13 [1969]: 127-37). Rahner observed that Heidegger wants to be a metaphysician, that theology has entered into ontology, and that *Sein* is the great question for him, not *Dasein*. The link of God with nothingness can end in atheism -- or too in the need for a revelation from a God totally other but active in history. Rahner's doctorate (pursued under the neo-Thomist Martin Honecker, not Heidegger), *Geist in Welt* has little direct reference to Heidegger, but the program of a philosophy of religion becoming a fundamental theology, *Hörer des Wortes*, shows influences like transcendental analysis, personal dialogue, freedom, and human temporality. When Rahner spoke of Heidegger's influence on him he mentioned thinking, of openly let a theme or reality disclose new and
olds aspects in its history, and not of precise ideas. Clearly the theology of salvation-history had some resonance with the history of Sein and Rahner became known for describing the universal but personal offer of grace as an “existential.”


Rahner was a channel for varying degrees of influence from Heidegger upon American theologians (M. Fahey, "Karl Rahner, Theologian, 1904 - 1984," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 39 [1984], 84-98) and the less complete and


Hans Urs von Balthasar in 1939 asked critically about the relationship of Heidegger's thought to Christianity and to Catholicism
("Heideggers Philosophie vom Standpunkt des Katholizismus," 
*Stimmen der Zeit* 70 [1939]: 1-8). The former Jesuit began by 
mentioning the "strange atmosphere of sober display and magic 
fascination for the uninitiated but also for those following the Freiburg 
Master whose words like *Sorge, Angst* ...form a fence of electric 
barbed wire enclosing an entire squadron of philosophers." For 
Christianity nature is not neutral and existential but exists within the 
redemption of Christ; from this point of view, Heidegger's thought in 
the religious sphere is not existential, and Christianity views finitude 
positively. Twenty years later in his multi-volume *Herrlichkeit* on 
aesthetics and theology, von Balthasar looked at Heidegger as he 
touched on the nature of modern thought and the history of 
metaphysics; a second system *Theodramatik* has marginal 
references to Heidegger.

Remaining within the vein of history and language, some 
theologians have written on the relationship of Heidegger to the 
thetical topic of tradition, to the specifically Catholic issue of the 
history and development of dogma: W. Reiser, " An Essay on the 
Development of Dogma in a Heideggerian Context: A Non-
Theological Explanation of Theological Heresy," *The Thomist* 39

6. Philosophers and Theologians outside Germany. For the history of Heidegger's reception and influence in France there is R.

Jacques Maritain tried to show that Aquinas' serious attention given esse with an ontic priority indicated a sympathy with and similarity to the new existentialists (Existence and the Existent [New York: Pantheon, 1948]). For over forty years there have been articles in Revue Thomiste like A. Dartigues, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et Heidegger d’après quelques études thomistes,” Revue Thomiste 95 (1995): 137-49. Recent works include Dominique Janicaud, Heidegger en France (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001) 2 vols.; Tom Rockmore Heidegger and French Philosophy (London: Routledge,


In England, John Macquarrie influenced for years theologians interested in Heidegger. Macquarrie’s use of the early existentialist phase of Heidegger was anthropological and less linguistic, more systematic and balanced and less biblical and radical than the Bultmannians (J. Macquarrie, "Heidegger. Earlier and Later Works Compared," *Anglican Theological Review* 49 [1967]: 3-16). At first Macquarrie compressed the realms of the holy and the divine into *Sein*, intending to break down the distinction between person and revelation. Among his books are *Martin Heidegger* (London: Lutterworth, 1968); *Existentialism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972); *An Existentialist Theology. A Comparison of Heidegger and*


In the United States, the thought of Heidegger initially reached theologians through the writings of Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann. This was subsequently expanded through the volumes by Robinson and Cobb. One group of theologians expounded a second modern,

Certain universities like Northwestern University, Indiana University, Fordham University, and Duquesne University have been prominent in studying and publishing Heidegger. Roman Catholic theologians were attracted by a philosopher drawing from and going beyond medieval thinkers. Their employment of him lies in the areas of history and being, psychology and hermeneutics. In general, while *Being and Time* offered insights for Christian theology, Heidegger's enterprise was larger than that unfinished book and more rooted in the history of philosophical reflection. See Martin Woessner, *Heidegger in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); S. J. McGrath, A Wiercinski, *A Companion to Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010); Gideon Goosen, *Spacetime and Theology in Dialogue* (Milwaukee: Marquette, 2008).
7. Existential Ontology and Mystical Traditions. Hearing after 1919 of Heidegger's views on the phenomenological method, Husserl observed that perhaps the young philosopher had been injured by the war and had become a "mystic." Later in 1965, after a visit to Heidegger in Germany, Jean-Paul Sartre made the same observation. In fact, an early influence on Heidegger was the German mystic Meister Eckhart. He cited Eckhart in his early writings and planned a book on him. Decades later he directed a dissertation: Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns, *Meister Eckhart* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1935).

After the 1970s, scholars appreciated anew the mystical dimension and the Eckhartian structures in Heidegger's thought. They saw the overall structure of the hermeneutic of *Sein* to be like Eckhart's birth of the Word. For some the employment of Eckhart by Heidegger pertains to the structure of both *Sein und Zeit* and the later philosophy. John Caputo writes of the similarities between the analysis of *Dasein* and Eckhart's notion of the “ground of the soul.” The event of truth in Heidegger bears a similarity to the birth of the Word. Heidegger wrote about the detachment of *Gelassenheit* in 1959. Finally, upon a closer look, post-Bultmannian hermeneutics,
with its emphasis upon the existence of the reader or hearer before the word existentially interpreted by the text may, in fact, resemble not so much exegesis but mystagogy.


Works on mysticism in general and Heidegger include:

Alexander Glück, Offenheit – Empfänglichkeit: Mystik und


G. Parkes, *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai Press, 1987) holds fifteen essays by Asian (e.g., Nishitani) and Western (e.g., Pöggeler) scholars on Zen, Lao-tzu; R. May, *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources. East Asian Influences on His Work* (New York: Routledge, 1996) offers a bibliography of writings on Heidegger and Asia.

### Conclusion

This dialogue of religious thinkers and theologians with Martin Heidegger has been lengthy and varied. Theologies have drawn from phrases and insights coming from various directions and periods in his path of thinking. Insights into existence and limits, guilt and decision, language and the holy, lighting and world resembled or illumined Christian themes. Heidegger’s insistence that philosophy and thinking need not involve faith or be theology must be respected. His influence is a stimulus, a companionship. The resonance between thinking and thinking about revelation is not surprising; it comes from one whose sources were Paul and Luther, Meister
Eckhart and Aquinas, Schelling and Hegel, Kierkegaard and Carl Braig. They helped him find a way at the end of the nineteenth century into a thinking about existence, time, and mystery. "Without this theological origins I would never have trod the path of thinking…Origin remains future" (*Unterwegs zur Sprache* [Pfullingen: Neske, 1959] 96).