

HAMMAN Adalbert G., *La vie est un long jour de fête. Mémoires*, (Brepols, Paris 1995) 410 p., ISBN 2-503-83033-1.

This book can be classified as a theologian's autobiography. The author - a French patristic scholar and expert on Christian antiquity, whose teaching role in Metz, Paris, Montréal, Québec and Rome (at the Augustinianum Patristic Institute), spans more than four decades - reflects upon and describes the milestones of his life. Born in 1910 in Rahling (Lorraine), Adalbert G. Hamman (AGH) is a Franciscan friar who has had a deep urge to make the Fathers of the Church and their teachings more well-known and appreciated. The book's title is itself a phrase from Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* (VII, 47, 3).

Strictly speaking, the work under review is not a theological text. It would be more aptly described as the spiritual journey undertaken by a man who has delved deeply into patristic texts, commented upon them, published articles and books, taught in three continents ... a life devoted to spreading the richness of the Fathers. It is what Henri de Lubac has called "l'actualité de fécondation" (pp. 194, 243) when referring to the patristic and liturgical sources and their importance for theology.

The book offers an insight into the ongoing, dynamic experiences which

have characterized AGH's life: the profound influence exercised upon him by his parents (pp. 9ff), the first promptings which marked his religious vocation (p. 20), the negative experience of two world wars (pp. 14, 17, 41ff, 70, 79, 86), teaching in different countries (Morocco [pp. 93ff], Canada [pp. 109ff], Italy [pp. 131ff]), his travels all over the globe at the invitation of French cultural centres, his visits to sites intimately connected with Christian antiquity.

AGH talks about the influence of theologians such as Scheeben, Chenu and de Lubac. About Scheeben, he asserts that "*ses Mystères du christianisme* me conduisirent à la théologie des Pères. Ma vocation à la patristique s'est déclarée à cette époque" (p. 26). With reference to the French Jesuit theologian, AGH states that "aucun homme n'aura exercé sur moi l'influence de Henri de Lubac" (p. 63; cfr also pp. 236, 242). He describes his contacts with Chenu (p. 65), von Balthasar (p. 231) and with Abbé Pierre (p. 107). His travels to many countries are given an important place in the book: his vivid account easily renders the reader present in meetings with soldiers at war, editors, his Franciscan confrères, students, university colleagues, and so on. We also see him as a theological expert to two Canadian bishops during Vatican II (p. 125), and as a member of the commission entrusted with the revision (and choice) of the patristic texts in the Liturgy of Hours (p. 131).

In the book, AGH shares his ecumenical experiences with the readers. This takes us back to the decade which precedes Vatican II. As early as 1946, he was organizing a Christian Unity Week at Metz (p. 273). On several occasions, AGH was invited to deliver lectures and conferences in Protestant faculties of theology and universities, especially in Germany (pp. 275ff), Switzerland (pp. 282ff) and the Scandinavian countries (pp. 285ff). He also talks of his contact with Orthodox Christians (pp. 302ff), Judaism and Islam (p. 96).

A section of the book is devoted to AGH's endeavours as editor of various patristic collections. From 1957, AGH was the leading co-ordinator behind the publication of two important collections - *Ictys (Lettres Chrétiennes)* and *Les Pères dans la foi* - whose aim was to bring translations of patristic texts to the general public. The latter collection contains more than fifty titles, published from 1977. From 1958 to 1974, he was the driving force behind the extensive task which entailed the publication of a *Supplementum* to Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. In 1975, on the centenary of Abbé Jacques-Paul Migne's death, AGH endeavoured indefatigably (in conferences, articles and a book) to spread far and wide a renewed appreciation of the undaunted 19th century publisher who remains famous for his mammoth undertaking of publishing hundreds of volumes of

Christian literature.

In another chapter, AGH describes the context and the composition (pp. 200ff) of two important works, *La vie quotidienne des premiers chrétiens* (which he published in 1971) and *La vie quotidienne en Afrique du nord au temps de saint Augustin* (1979). In conjunction with the latter, his travels to various sites in Algeria and Tunisia make very interesting reading. The three characteristic features of the author's sixty years of service as a scholar - *enseigner, écrire, rassembler* (i.e. teaching, writing and compiling) - serve as the three foci around which the book's chapters are assembled.

In *La vie est un long jour de fête*, it is clear that an underlying feature which characterizes the author's scholarship and research is the return to the early Christian sources. Emphasis is made on the permanent validity of the Fathers of the Church to the various fields of theology. AGH repeats de Lubac's famous phrase "*l'actualité de fécondation*" (pp. 194. 243) when referring to the centrality of the Fathers in theological reflection. Investigating the early Christian texts is for AGH an adventure where "*la foi devienne expérience de vie, à l'école des Pères*" (p. 62).

One of the book's easily identifiable substrate is the spirituality of St Francis of Assisi. The author's Franciscan vocation is a key to his book to the extent that it has to be read in the

light of "l'école du Poverello" (p. 371), as the book's epilogue is called. Within this framework, the theme of human solidarity (e.g. pp. 16. 39. 56. 124. 211. 216. 221. 242) can be implicitly traced throughout AGH's experiences as a religious priest and a patristic scholar. The intrinsic relationship between liturgy and social action is indeed central to the author's reflection on the sacraments and the Christian vocation (e.g. pp. 200ff. 242-243), especially as described in one of his more important works, *Vie liturgique et vie sociale* (1968).

La vie est un long jour de fête leads the reader to appreciate AGH's valid contribution to the study of the Fathers and their milieu. This vivid and exhilarating mosaic of experiences displays several aspects of ecclesial life during the theological and sociocultural debate before and after the Second Vatican Council.

Fr Hector M. Scerri
Pontifical Scots College
Via Cassia, 481
00189 Roma