

Theologie und Bildung im Mittelalter. Edited by Peter Gemeinhardt and Tobias Georges. (Archa Verbi. Yearbook for the Study of Medieval Theology, 13.) Pp. xvi + 520 incl. 1 colour ill. and 2 tables. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2015. €68. 978 3 402 10231 2; 1865 2964
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This extensive collection of essays ranges across the entire spectrum of what might be considered pertinent to the field of medieval theology and ‘Bildung’ – formation as much as education – and so resists easy characterisation or evaluation. The volume begins with a series of articles originally delivered as plenary lectures, which are brought together here to serve as a foundation for the understanding of the field. Carolyn Muessig’s study is the outstanding contribution amongst these. Muessig argues against an established viewpoint that regards the shift in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries from monastic to scholastic modes of learning, and from monasteries to universities and mendicant *studia* as the primary centres of religious and intellectual authority, as significantly deleterious to the opportunities for female learning. She draws attention instead to the Observant convents of the later medieval period in this context and offers fascinating and entirely original case studies of female learning and preaching in northern Italy, focusing on Caterina Vigri (d. 1463) and Tommasina Fieschi (d. 1534). Although less visible to the outside world, the rigorous pursuit of learning in Observant female convents equalled in standard that achieved by the nuns’ male contemporaries in their institutions of higher education, whilst differing in type and form, expressed in sermons and directed at an audience within the convent walls. The other contributions that began life as plenary lectures are essentially rehearsals of known subjects, though some, like Jacques Verger’s survey of the history of the institutional contexts of theological education across the length of the Middle Ages, are elegant and engaging introductions to their subjects.

It is difficult to do more with the research articles that follow than to draw attention to certain highlights. Sandra Klinge argues that the increasing theological and devotional focus on Christ’s humanity in the twelfth century placed a greater burden of responsibility on the individual to secure his salvation by reformation of the self in the image of Christ, pursuant to the fundamental reconception of soteriology that Anselm had offered in his *Cur Deus homo*. Rudolf of Deutz, Peter Abelard and Hugh of St Victor are compared, albeit with their texts treated less as literary works and more as carriers of certain positions, in terms of how they responded to this challenge. Hugh emerges as the most successful of the three in the establishment of an influential structure for self-reformation in this way, because of the pragmatic and imitable model that he offered. Susanne Schenk compares a series of letters written around 1100 by prominent male theologians to female recluses, in order first to contextualise the famous letters of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin to Eve of Wilton, and second to explore the evidentiary value of this epistolary corpus to understand *reclusoria* as locations of education and learning. That learning served to encourage progress in the spiritual life, as might be expected, but also to facilitate and stimulate theological discussion with the recluses’ male correspondents. In Schenk’s reading it proves to be the *De institutione inclusarum* of the Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx that strictly curtailed such contact between male theologians and female recluses, whether in person or by

correspondence. Aelred may have written the *De spirituali amicitia*, but his understanding of spiritual friendship was very strongly gendered. Christian Trottman observes how a series of prominent twelfth-century Cistercians, principally Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred, but also Isaac of Stella and Guerric of Igny, conceptualised the nature of theological knowledge and the modes of inquiry appropriate to it, impelled to reflect on this subject by the challenge posed by the new methods of the schoolmen.

Several of the essays deal with similar kinds of tension between different ways of learning. The two articles on Byzantium, by Mihai-Dumitru Grigore and Georgi Kapriev, are both concerned with the exploration of tension between the Hellenistic inheritance of particular modes of philosophical inquiry, and the ways of learning cultivated in the Christian monastic tradition. Yet in each trying to cover a millennium of Eastern Roman history and the entirety of philosophy and theology, the level of abstraction required produces some very general statements. Some of the more focused studies are consequently more successful in exploring such tensions. Marcel Bubert, for example, understands Roger Bacon as an individual socialised by his unusually long service as Regent Master in the Arts at the University of Paris to have become considerably more interested in and receptive towards 'secular' learning (mathematics, astrology and so forth) than were many of his contemporaries and Franciscan *confrères*, notably Bonaventura, in what is an exemplary examination of attitudes towards theology and intellectual formation in the thirteenth century.

The final two articles, by Florian Wöller and Ueli Zahnd, both concern the fourteenth-century Augustinian friar and philosophical theologian Thomas of Strasbourg, author of a widely-read commentary on all four books of the Sentences. These studies stand out above many others in the volume for their quality and intellectual contributions beyond their immediate object of study. Wöller explains how it can be that Thomas's commentary has been understood as both just an epitome of Giles of Rome, and simultaneously a highly innovative work. The problem lies in its unusual structure, in which Thomas first adopts Giles's position on a given subject, and then proceeds to refine and adjust it, such that Thomas operates throughout in a productive tension between the inheritance of tradition and innovation. Wöller's significant broader contribution is in the understanding of what it means to speak of 'schools of thought', and in particular the observation that this need not necessarily imply doctrinal adherence. Thomas could at once describe Giles as *doctor noster* and praise his contribution to the intellectual vigour of the Augustinian Order, and yet simultaneously deviate from his philosophical and theological positions. Zahnd offers a contextualisation of Thomas within contemporary currents of thought, and explains how radical Thomas must have seemed in his insistence that God's *potentia absoluta* could be thought about as a possible option for divine action, not just a theoretical framework within which to describe divine action. This meant, for example, that given an equally radical insistence on the separability of will and intellect, Thomas argued that God could hold a person simultaneously in a state of beatitude in the intellect and of damnation in the will (an apparently irreconcilable contradiction) by virtue of his *potentia absoluta*. And yet, for all the novelty of this position, by which Thomas could establish a certain profile for himself as an

intellectual, it was not a complete rupture with prior thinking. Rather, it developed a trend visible earlier in the fourteenth century to think about God's *potentia absoluta* and *ordinata* almost as two discrete options, rather than as terms to describe one single system of action. The reinsertion of Thomas into his institutional context of Parisian university discourse enables Wöller and Zahnd to offer instructive reassessments of a major late medieval thinker.

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The Birgittines of Syon Abbey. Preaching and print. By Susan Powell. (Texts and Transitions, 11.) Pp. xii + 347 incl. 5 figs. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017. €90. 978 2 503 53235 6
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Susan Powell's collection of essays offers a compelling vantage point from which to enter Syon Abbey studies. In a foreword, Powell indicates that she was encouraged to provide a framework and republish her many contributions to this area of study in a single volume. In so doing, she has added an entirely original overview of the Birgittines of Syon (the only foundation of this order in England, which Henry V endowed on 3 March 1415) that provides a lengthy description of this royal foundation; the foundation's arrangement (sixty sisters and twenty-five brothers of whom thirteen were priests, four were deacons and eight lay brothers); its liturgy and requirements; its books; and its patrons. In this first chapter (and throughout the revised footnotes of the previously published essays), Powell offers a rich bibliography of scholarship about the community of women and men at Syon Abbey. In framing the collection as she has, Powell offers a historiography of scholarship on this monastic community. One can see how interest has long focused on Syon's two libraries (one for the men, with manuscripts principally in Latin, and one for the women, with printed texts principally in the vernacular) and how the field has opened up to investigate authors and translators, print culture, sermons and liturgy, the nuns' learning and agency, and issues of patronage and book exchange. For those new to Syon studies, Powell's introductory essay is a crucial first step towards comprehending the beginnings of scholarship about Syon and for its subsequent flourishing; for those who are actively labourers in the vineyard, Powell's introduction is a gold mine of recent publications.

The first chapter serves as one of two bookends; the final chapter, which is also original, offers a discussion of Syon during and after the time of Henry VIII, when the community was twice exiled to the continent. As such, this pair of essays form commanding pillars to support the volume and these alone provide worthy justification for it. A generous and thoughtful scholar, Powell draws on the work of other scholars and enhances it to elucidate the intricacies of this important community. For example, Powell draws on the work of Virginia Bainbridge in the first chapter, and indicates that the men who became Syon brothers were highly educated, most coming from the universities in their later years. Several of these men, as she illustrates in the concluding chapter, were highly important during Henry VIII's break with the Roman Church. Some of the brothers actively resisted the king's title as head of the Church in England. Powell situates Syon's later years alongside a discussion of the surviving books of the men's library and the print books made