

medieval views about the reality of their ability to fly at night and perform other magical deeds. For a reader not thoroughly grounded in the medieval Church's changing attitude towards witchcraft – calling the allegations illusory in the tenth century and later prosecuting witches for the magical powers acquired from the Devil as a reward for their heretical worship of the Prince of Darkness in the fifteenth century – this part of his discussion might prove to be confusing. From angels and demons, Bartlett moves on to discuss some of the weird animals Pliny described in his *Natural History*. Medieval writers continued to discuss *cyno-cephali* (basically humans with the heads of dogs), humanlike creatures that had faces on their chests and creatures with one large foot that they could use as a built-in umbrella. Bartlett discusses the dog-heads at length, demonstrating how they functioned in medieval discourse as a way of determining the boundaries between humans and animals.

The other two chapters have their interest too. In the second, Bartlett considers several ideas about the physical universe, comparing the views of various theologians and philosophers with those of the common people. In one especially intriguing passage, he discusses the theologians' reactions to the popular response to a lunar eclipse. As men having university training, theologians were acquainted with the physical causes of eclipses, and reacted very negatively to the behaviour of some villagers who shouted at the moon to help prevent its being consumed during an eclipse. The theologians dismissed the villagers' beliefs as magical, based on the belief in the efficacy of incantations. In the fourth chapter, Bartlett turns to consider Roger Bacon's philosophy and experimental approach to knowledge of the world. Briefly describing Bacon's natural philosophy, Bartlett emphasizes the Franciscan's naturalism, at the same time describing his belief that knowledge of the sciences would provide a powerful weapon to fight the Antichrist, whose arrival seemed imminent.

Despite Bartlett's engaging style and his use of interesting examples, the book suffers from some serious flaws. Lack of adequate analysis of the basic concepts presents the most serious problem. Although he sets out criteria for distinguishing between the natural and the supernatural, he fails to clarify further concepts such as magic, miracle and wonder. Consequently, the point of many of the examples he uses is not entirely clear. For example, by the late Middle Ages, the Church regarded the practice of witchcraft per se as a form of heresy, not magic. The Devil or demons were thought to give witches the ability to use magic to carry out their evil deeds. This point does not emerge from Bartlett's discussion. In other examples, he fails to place the figures he discusses in their historical contexts. He never mentions the Augustinian and Neoplatonic assumptions that guided Roger Bacon's natural philosophy – assumptions that lay at the basis of the Franciscan tradition and distinguished it from the Aristotelian Dominicans. Many of the items cited in the bibliography are very old, and many important more recent studies are absent, such as Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park's *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (1998), Edward Grant's books on medieval science, and David Lindberg's important work on Roger Bacon.

For its sheer interest, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* seems ready-made for recommendation to students. But unless they can be engaged in extended discussions of some of the fundamental contextual and analytical issues missing from the book, the temptation should be resisted.

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CHARLES WEBSTER, *Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic and Mission at the End of Time*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008. Pp. xiv + 326. ISBN 978-0-300-13911-2. £30.00 (hardback). doi:10.1017/S0007087410000555

Here it is at last, the Paracelsus book that some of us have been waiting for for years, ever since we learnt in the 1970s that this was one of Charles Webster's projects. It is not that Webster has

been a slow worker. Far from it: it is just that he has been busy with other things. One of these other things, his history of the National Health Service in Britain – itself a task large enough, you would have thought, for a whole team of historians – is not even mentioned in the dust jacket sketch of the author's achievements! He has accomplished at least twice what a normal scholar might have achieved in a working lifetime. But now Paracelsus's turn has at last come, and Webster is able to take advantage of several decades of fresh scholarship in sixteenth-century studies. In the 1970s, of course, it was still a matter of dispute within our profession whether Paracelsus and alchemists were proper subjects for us to study, or whether they simply represented a philosophical and medical dead end. This brilliant book, I think, settles the matter: Paracelsus was not a weirdo who can simply be dismissed from our accounts of the history of the study of nature and medicine, but a central challenging figure whose impact in the sixteenth century continues to have resonances today.

'Let him not be another's, who can be his own'. It is perhaps the most celebrated of Paracelsus's remarks, and appears on his earliest portraits as 'Alterius non sit qui suus esse potest'. It is a claim about individuality, about identity and about originality – quite apart from what it might be said to be saying against the feudal political, social and economic structures of Paracelsus's own time. But Paracelsus has actually been made other people's more than any other dead curer. He has been adopted as a hero by modern scientists and modern lunatics, by Nazis and psychoanalysts, as someone who in some way – some very important but usually very imprecise way – prefigured their own concerns and designs.

Half a century ago, Walter Pagel presented Paracelsus as a philosophical physician of the Renaissance, and he attempted to specify how in Paracelsus's doctrines 'mystical, magical and scientific elements are all blended together into a single doctrine' (Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 1958, p. 4). This is the Paracelsus who has been dominant in the interpretations by English-speaking historians until recent reconsiderations.

Now Webster has come forward as Paracelsus's modern-day advocate to say who he was, what he did and why, and to present him to us. In politics advocates often undertake to represent the oppressed, the poor, the vulnerable and the dispossessed. Charles Webster presents himself as the advocate of the much-misunderstood Paracelsus, armed with a probably unrivalled mastery of the sources. In particular he has been able to consult the voluminous 'theological, social and ethical writings' (p. xi) of Paracelsus which have appeared in the last half-century, and it is these which Webster considers constitute the core of the real Paracelsus. So it is evident at the outset that Webster's Paracelsus will be much more of a socially, religiously and politically engaged figure than Pagel's Paracelsus, who almost seemed to live in a unique (and very strange) philosophical bubble. Webster's Paracelsus is much more a man of his political time, where Pagel's may be described as being a man of his intellectual time. Webster seeks to explore every facet of Paracelsus the social, political, religious and medical reformer.

Paracelsus is undoubtedly an important historical figure, and one who plays a significant role in the history of medicine and chemistry. He is, as Webster remarks, the most famous physician who ever lived. But it is still devilishly difficult to put one's finger on precisely what he is famous for, either in medicine or in any other area of human life. Webster gives us an account which is both biographical and thematic, placing Paracelsus firmly within his local, social, political, medical, intellectual and religious contexts, portraying him as 'our turbulent reformer' (p. xii). But there were so many voices against him in his time, there have been so many misinterpretations of him since: the campaign to blacken his character and to blame his actions on personality defects began even before he died. He was accused by those who knew him of being a drunkard, being in contact with demons and practising magic.

After the Peasants' War, from 1525, there were many visionaries predicting the end of time, and Webster presents Paracelsus as one of these, and not an isolated crank. But Paracelsus was not

just a negative and despondent voice: Webster presents him as energetically producing ‘a blueprint for scientific and medical reform as well as social transformation’ (p. 9), and as doing so in a rapidly changing economic and political environment.

One of the dimensions of Paracelsus’s life that Webster explores, for the first time, is his connection with ‘the book’ – with printing and publishing. The vast quantity of printed material and manuscript is placed here in the context of the ‘history of the book’ which has been of such importance to other historians in recent decades. He even talks of “‘Paracelsus’”: birth of a brand’, indicating how important was control of one’s image in the new printed media, and how Paracelsus sometimes favoured pamphlet publication in opposition to the formal treatises of traditional medical men in order to get his message across to his intended audience.

The role of magic in Paracelsus’s beliefs is explained by his initial fascination with the Magi, and his view that spiritual enlightenment was a precondition for all other change. Indeed, magic is shown to have underlain all Paracelsus’s medicine, and to have biblical sanction. Paracelsus’s religious position, a disputed issue among historians, is placed as being close to that of the Anabaptists (p. 30). The direct link in language and concepts from Paracelsus’s religious to his medical thinking is well developed, showing how, like many of his contemporaries, he attacked the exclusive institutions of the professions, especially of medicine, whose practitioners he regarded as parasites and compared to the corrupt priesthood.

With respect to the novel kind of medicine that Paracelsus constructed and advocated, Webster shows not only its inner coherence, but also its coherence with radical religious views of the time, including those held by Paracelsus himself: health and cure were a matter of inner spirituality, not something at the mercy of the imbalance of humours.

All in all this new account of that mysterious but compelling character Paracelsus will be widely welcome and will provide the stimulus for further study of this fascinating period of revolutionary strife in Europe, which its participants believed to be a turning point in world history: nothing less than the approach of the Second Coming. But in warmly welcoming this new account of Paracelsus, I nevertheless have one reservation, which is to do with the role of historian as advocate. The downside to working as an advocate is that one is always speaking on behalf of one’s client. The client is rarely heard. Sometimes an advocate will deliberately keep his client silent lest he give the game away and incriminate himself. Indeed I was astonished to find quite how silent Paracelsus is in this book. Once I noticed that I could not hear Paracelsus speaking in his own voice, I actually went back and looked again at the whole text in detail to check my impression. Each chapter begins with a printed image from the period, and with a quotation in German, usually from Paracelsus, which sets the theme for the chapter. The publishers have done Webster a real disservice here, by presenting the images as tiny little things in which it is difficult to see anything much, and with the pertinent quotations in small type. (And with the translation of each of these quotations – the essence, as it were, of the chapter that follows – only in the endnotes; all of which makes Paracelsus even less audible.) But that is almost it, except for the odd phrase or term of abuse. Thereafter Paracelsus never speaks again in his own voice.

This is a pity because, as Jung is quoted here saying about Paracelsus, he treats his reader like ‘an invisible auditor afflicted with moral deafness’ (quoted on p. 59). We are told that Paracelsus wrote ‘in his own lively manner’ (p. 85). Certainly we hear lots about what Paracelsus said and what he wrote, but it is always reported, always summarized or paraphrased, almost never directly in his own voice. And this advocacy way of writing means we are always having Paracelsus interpreted to us as he is being reported to us. I am absolutely certain that if one were to go to the Paracelsian text being discussed at a given moment, then one would find that, yes, Paracelsus does say what Webster reports him as saying, for Webster is of course a scrupulous scholar. But that is not my point – my point is: why can we not hear him himself? Have we failed

to capture him again? Or, as Paracelsus himself might have put it (though probably not in Latin, which he despised), ‘Let him not be another’s, who can be his own’.

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PETER M.J. HESS and PAUL L. ALLEN, *Catholicism and Science*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008. Pp. xxvi + 241. ISBN 978-0-313-33190-9. \$65.00 (hardback).

DON O’LEARY, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science: A History*. London and New York: Continuum, 2006. Pp. xx + 356. ISBN 0-8264-1868-6. £18.99 (hardback).
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Despite titles suggesting otherwise, these two recent books on the Catholic Church’s engagement with the sciences break with tradition and concentrate on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both books are entirely devoted to the interaction between the Catholic Church and science, rather than between Catholics and science. Thus neither looks substantially beyond official Vatican sources, approved publications (such as *La Civiltà Cattolica*) or self-consciously Catholic scientists. The books do, however, offer slightly different perspectives and approaches; Don O’Leary, a scientist and historian, is consistently critical of Church officials, while Peter Hess and Paul Allen, both Catholic theologians, maintain a neutral to positive stance. What is more, O’Leary’s main concern is really the biological sciences, and evolution in particular, rather than modern science as a whole. (If you were to read only these two books on Catholicism and science, you would come away with the idea that evolution is the single most important issue in the history of the relationship.) The small amount of space devoted to the physical sciences tends to dilute a coherent structure rather than add to it. That said, overall, O’Leary engages more fully with the debates he discusses, and his book reads more like a complete project than Hess and Allen’s, which seems to me flawed in its conception.

What Hess and Allen provide is not so much a synthesis as a summary. Although they seem generally to accept the complexity thesis about Church–science interaction, they have failed to see that complexity requires clear explication. They pinpoint no themes and offer no arguments about the Catholic Church and science, aside from occasional references to the views of others. Discussion of some of the complex philosophical issues raised tends to be too limited to be useful. To take but one example, Aquinas gets barely three pages, but his writings and philosophy continue to be referred back to in later chapters, and with very little explanation of the changes in interpretation. If the ordinary reader – or even this overeducated reader – is to have any success at following the subtleties of new interpretations of old philosophies, more assistance is needed, not least in deciding whether the individuals chosen are representative or unique. And although the twentieth century is dealt with in greater detail than is any other century (it is the focus of the final three chapters), here too there is a tendency simply to describe the writings of one thinker after another. This makes reading tiresome and creates confusion.

O’Leary’s book manages to provide a greater level of synthesis. The chapters are roughly chronological, with the first five chapters focused on the nineteenth century and the next six on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The early chapters would serve very well for introducing students to the subject, and represent one of the few general overviews of the relationship between the Church and science in the nineteenth century. As the book wears on, however, O’Leary’s account tends more towards summary of positions rather than analysis of attitudes, and the detail of his examination of evolution is not matched in his discussion of any other topic. Unfortunately, much of the material he covers on the Church’s engagement with evolution and evolutionists has appeared recently in M. Artigas, T.F. Glick and R.A. Martinez’s *Negotiating Darwin: The Vatican Confronts Evolution* (2006). O’Leary comes to similar conclusions as Artigas *et al.*, but cannot have seen their book before his own was completed. The only other substantial flaw in the