

Christ in the New. He notes rightly, for example, that the *Letter to the Hebrews* (which Girard saw as a piece of dangerous backsliding on the part of the Christian scriptures, vis-à-vis Paul and the Gospels), though it portrays Christ's death-and-exaltation as the fulfilment of the Day of Atonement ritual, completely overlooks that day's scapegoat ritual which is paradigmatic for Girard.

Old Testament sacrifice, indeed, is not, or at least not only and not straightforwardly, about death and the shedding of blood: it is about gift, communion and/or expiation. Moreover, this expiation is not a penalty imposed by an angry God upon his sinful people, but rather an act of God in which he permits his holy people to participate symbolically in his *real* work of atonement. McCosker's article builds helpfully on these insights to explore the ways in which twentieth-century Catholic theologians – concentrating on Vonier, Chauvet and Ratzinger – have interpreted the Eucharist as sacrifice.

I have concentrated thus far on the essays by Fiddes and McCosker simply because for me as a Catholic biblical theologian they offer easily the most helpful insights. Perhaps not coincidentally they are also the least burdened by what seems in some of the other contributions like an excessively polysyllabic obscurantism. Nevertheless there is plenty of other material that will reward the reader: Jessica Frazier's 'From Slaughtered Lambs to Dedicated Lives' opposes Girard, in all his phases, with what seems to me to be a more plausible and profound take on the nature of human desire, while Nick Allen offers an intriguing and refreshingly straightforward *apologia* for the Durkheimian-anthropological study of sacrifice by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, published in 1899.

The final third of the book is perhaps of less immediate relevance to the theologian, including as it does a learned exposition of *Dr Strangelove* and two chapters on Aztec and other Mesoamerican human sacrificial practices. Yet these chapters are fascinating: in the second of them, David Brown asks whether such practices might pose some helpful if probing questions to Christian theology (rather than simply being subject to critique *by* Christianity) and in the course of the essay makes important contributions to the debate about the interpretation of difficult passages such as *Deuteronomy 7*, demanding total destruction of the Canaanites, and the near-sacrifice of Isaac in *Genesis 22*. In Laura Rival's preceding essay, a plausible, if unprovable, analysis is offered of the anthropology and cosmology that lay at the heart of the Aztec 'sacrificial complex'. There are, in fact, fascinating parallels between this analysis and the relationship between cosmology and sacrificial cult discernible in later pre-Christian Jewish writings such as the *Book of Jubilees* and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls; if there is anything missing from this volume, it is an examination of whether the complex thought-world of late Second-Temple Judaism, centred as it was upon one of human history's most remarkable places of sacrifice, might have any light to shed upon the meaning of sacrifice for modern Christian theology.

RICHARD JOSEPH OUNSWORTH OP

RENAISSANCE TRUTHS: HUMANISM, SCHOLASTICISM AND THE SEARCH FOR THE PERFECT LANGUAGE by Alan R. Perreiah, *Ashgate*, Farnham, 2014, pp. x + 209, £65.00, hbk

This is a book which is difficult for an intellectual historian to review fairly. It is full of interest, but in the end it lacks a satisfactory coordination of its ideas. The reader is left in some uncertainty as to whether it is primarily about the late medieval or the modern scholarly debates about its main subject or subjects. And those subjects sometimes seem to be shaken into new patterns with the randomness of a kaleidoscope.

The author says at the outset that he has tried to give the whole debate a 'fresh perspective' by locating humanism and scholasticism 'within a new frame of reference suggested by' Umberto Eco's *The Search for the perfect language*. The introduction then goes on to consider the *status quaestionis* mainly in terms of the debates of a number of other modern writers.

The first chapter sets out a (but as it emerges not the only) central question. Was there once, before the Fall and before the fragmentation of human language in the episode of the Tower of Babel, an original 'perfect' language? If so, can it be recovered? Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Raymond Lull and Leibnitz are considered. The chapter ends by proposing to take Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae linguae latinae* as representing the late medieval 'humanist' approach to this question and Paul of Venice's *Logica Parva* to speak for the scholastics, though other protagonists enter the fray as the book progresses. Much of what follows is concerned not only with Valla (*Dialectical Disputations*) but also with Vives (*Adversus Pseudodialecticos*), and rather less with Paul of Venice, whose views on truth get a final chapter.

In the body of the book the author engages with a complex of emerging questions, a number of which he might seem to a medieval author to beg. This tendency is perhaps encouraged by his continuing reliance on the views of key figures in the modern scholarly debate rather than the original texts in identifying the points and concepts to be discussed. A sentence may give the flavour: 'Although linguistic determinism is a modern hypothesis about language, several scholars have adopted it for study of the Renaissance'.

This approach seems to presume that there were two profoundly distinct approaches, the scholastic and the humanist. There were certainly 'camps' and active hostilities between them. Yet is not always obvious where the reader is being led in relation to the assumption that two ways of thinking and schools of thought were at war and humanism and scholasticism fought it out at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance.

It is hard to be sure that if this book had been put into the hands of any of these medieval and early Renaissance authors he would have found his place in it with ease or recognised himself. This reader longed for more Latin, closer engagement with the problems as the late medieval world put them, and wanted to spend more time with the views of the medieval thinkers themselves. It was startling to find neither 'nominalism' nor 'realism' in the index.

This is an ambitious book, but perhaps too much so, and too loath to leave the meta-level of modern scholarship for the solid ground of the sources in their original language.

G.R. EVANS

VATICAN II: CATHOLIC DOCTRINES ON JEWS AND MUSLIMS by Gavin D'Costa, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, pp. xii + 252, £55.00, hbk*

The fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council has highlighted the contested nature of accounts of the Council's teaching and there is perhaps no more contentious area than that of the Church's relations with other religions. Did the Council intend a radical break with the doctrines and attitudes of the past, as many have claimed either in praise or dismay? In his address to the Roman Curia in 2005 Pope Benedict XVI brought clarity and focus to such debates by identifying two competing and conflicting approaches at work: a hermeneutic of 'discontinuity and rupture' and a hermeneutic of 'reform and renewal.' The Pope