

of the dissonances that have perhaps been read into the pomes by modern assumptions about Christian theology.

This reader, notwithstanding a lifetime of reading and teaching the poems, found the theological exposition contained in this study lucid, useful and illuminating. As such, I hope it will be of use to many other scholars of the *Gawain*-Poet, as well as to students and general readers.

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ERASMUS'S LIFE OF ORIGEN, translated with commentary by Thomas P. Scheck Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2016, pp. xxxv + 234, \$64.96, hbk

Origen was a controversial figure in the early Church. For quite different reasons, Erasmus became controversial in his own time, and he could certainly express himself too strongly to allow him an easy passage to acceptance among his contemporaries. The Preface acknowledges both problems, exploring the debate over Origen and that which surrounded Erasmus himself with detailed examples from the sources. Scheck extends its history to modern times in the Preface and again at the end of the Introduction.

The Introduction proposes a 'thesis' for this book, that Erasmus had a 'program for the renewal of Catholic theology in the first half of the sixteenth century'. It was perhaps a pity to seek to mount such a thesis upon what emerges from this invaluable set of translations rather than letting Erasmus tell it his own way.

The first chapter of the book explores 'Erasmus's Program for Theological Renewal'. Erasmus published his own 'theological method' (*Ratio verae theologiae*) in 1518, an expansion of his *Paraclesis*. This is presented by Scheck partly in terms of a discussion of modern scholarly criticism and partly in the terms of the contemporary wrestlings of those who defended the late medieval scholastic method in Erasmus's day, and those who called for a return *ad fontes*, and preferably in the original languages.

A second chapter follows, introducing Origen, his writings, and Jerome's and Rufinus's Latin translations. Origen's 'speculations and dogmatic errors' occupy little more than two pages at this point, which is a pity, because there is a great deal more to be said about the reasons for his condemnation by patristic writers. The context here would have benefited from fuller reflection and development.

Next comes a chapter on Origen's legacy in the 'Catholic exegetical tradition'. This is all useful scene-setting but it seems a pity to confine the story substantially to the Latin tradition when the Greek was also important through the patristic period and beyond. There is more here about the 'Origenist controversy', with special emphasis on Jerome's

involvement; a little on mention of and reference to Origen, from Casiodorus to the end of the Middle Ages; sections on Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and an excellent discussion of the publishers of the first printed editions of Origen's writings.

In Chapter 4 comes a meticulous analysis of Erasmus's acquaintance with the texts, and a close-up study of the ways in which he used Origen in his own work. Then in Chapter 5 we arrive at the translations. The book includes the first English translation of the prefaces to Erasmus's edition of Origen's writings, including his *Life of Origen*. The English is especially welcome because of the rebarbateness of Erasmus's attempts to make his Latin more classical than medieval. He is never a comfortable read in the original.

Erasmus's *Life of Origen* goes a long way beyond the conventions of late medieval hagiography. He weighs the evidence for the various details of Origen's life; he analyses the evidence for the authenticity of his writings and tries to set out the order of their composition and the datings. Here Scheck once more comes into his own as a scholar, providing comprehensive annotation and reference.

Erasmus's own prefatory 'assessments' are translated next, of Origen's Homilies on *Genesis*, *Leviticus*, *Joshua*, *Job*, three *Psalms*, the *Song of Songs*, *Luke*, *Romans*, lost works and the inferences to be drawn about Origen's 'method'. These 'assessments' are often a startling read. Erasmus pulls no punches in his judgements of the behaviour of the 'booksellers' who have sometimes 'laid aside all sense of shame' in their falsifications, as when they 'inserted the name of Jerome in place of Rufinus' (*Romans*). He dismisses some works as so awkward in their Latin that neither the translator nor Origen as author can be relied on. The preface to the commentary on *Job* is by a 'loquacious, unlearned, and shameless creature'.

A substantial appendix translates sixteenth-century assessments, sketching in detail the condemnation and rehabilitation of Erasmus's work. The translation is highly readable, and the collection will be invaluable both the scholars of the Renaissance and Reformation and to students of Origen himself.

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EXPLORING CATHOLIC THEOLOGY: ESSAYS ON GOD, LITURGY AND EVANGELIZATION by Robert Barron, *Baker Academic*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2015, pp. xv +250, \$24.95, pbk

Robert Barron, recently consecrated a bishop, is well known as an American Catholic priest who has made extensive use of IT to expound the Catholic Faith, reaching huge global audiences through his 'Word