

same explanation of the causal role may be given to Christ's charity and his gift of wisdom (pp. 295–6), Spezzano seems to give the impression that exactly the same may hold for Christ's pre-eminent light of glory and ours (p. 190). A comparison of q. 10, a. 4 ad 1 with q. 7, a. 12 ad 2 suggests that such a position may need some nuancing.

Finally, readers will doubtless be familiar with A. N. Williams's *The Ground of Union*, which compares deification in Aquinas and Palamas. How theologians of East and West differ on deification is a key question in ecumenical theology. May we hope that in a future study Spezzano will re-address this important point of comparison in Aquinas and Palamas?

SIMON FRANCIS GAINÉ OP

**GOD AND THE GAWAIN POET: THEOLOGY AND GENRE IN *PEARL, CLEANNESS, PATIENCE AND SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT* by Cecilia A. Hatt, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2015, pp. x + 249, £60.00, hbk**

This study of the four poems of MS. Cotton Nero A, X does what it says: it examines the relationship between theology and genre. As such, it presents an important argument concerning the relationship between the deeply religious focus of each of these fourteenth-century poems and the secular literary genres that each poem brilliantly exploits. The four poems, while anonymous, are usually ascribed to a single author, variously known as 'the *Pearl*-Poet' or 'the *Gawain*-Poet', after the two most famous poems in the collection. Cecilia Hatt explores what the theological furnishings of this poet's mind are likely to have been, before examining how this theology finds an appropriate embodiment in his chosen genres.

In this, Hatt is taking issue with previous scholars, notably David Aers, whose 2000 study *Faith, Ethics and Church* finds assimilation of Christian values into courtly genres and lifestyles somewhat suspect. Modern scholars have tended to posit a dualistic relationship between religious and worldly concerns, spirit and matter, which sees as problematic the poet's obvious revelling in the ceremonious, luxurious, glamorous lifestyle of the court. Hatt relates this unease to a theology derived predominantly from Augustine, infused by Platonist distinctions between ideal form and imperfect matter. She points out, however, that many other influences were at play in the late medieval theology that would have shaped the poet's mind. In particular, she draws attention to the very different relationship between spirit and matter presented in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, drawing on Aristotle, sees matter as the body of the soul; he emphasises connection rather than separation.

Thus the body, for him, is created in grace and has a sacramental value. This explains, argues Hatt, the poet's interest in 'embodied human life', which she sees as central to the poems. While Aers seems to disapprove of 'the poet's evident and unashamed enjoyment of materiality', Hatt sees this as key. She argues that the poet's incarnational theology inevitably seeks expression in the kinds of poetry he writes: courtly dream-vision, university-style sermon, comic fable, courtly romance.

Hatt adds a particularly interesting nuance to her discussion of the poet's theology. She points out the importance of the concept of Creator and creation in the poems, but then draws a distinction between a post-Reformation emphasis, in all traditions, on a Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative of salvation, and a pre-Reformation narrative of Creation-Consummation. In Aquinas's theology, human beings and all creation are destined for an eschatological union/reunion with God. This gives Creation an inbuilt dynamic shape, a drive towards consummation. She comments, 'Hence it is in that context that we are to understand the role of our bodiliness in our engagement by redemptive grace.'

Readers who know the poems will be aware of how central seeking understanding of puzzling situations on earth is to each of the poems. This puzzlement could be said to be a by-product of the poet's understanding of creation. Hatt comments that 'being created by God gives legitimacy to the world but also gives it its own integrity, into which God does not intrude in order to justify or explain.'

This lack of obvious explanation is then explored in each of the poems. The bulk of the book consists of four chapters, one on each poem, in the order in which they occur in the manuscript. These chapters can function as stand-alone studies of each poem, and therefore will form a useful addition to undergraduate reading-lists. The main interest of the study, however, lies in the application of this 'embodied theology' perspective to each chapter. Hatt is at pains to point out that there is nothing startlingly original in this theology or in what it reveals in the poems. For example, in the chapter on *Pearl*, she emphasizes that the poet is describing a dream, not a vision, and that what he comes to understand are aspects of the stock teaching of the Church of his time, which would already have been somewhere inside his mind: what the dream does is to move some elements into the foreground. What each chapter seems to me to achieve is to make it possible to read each poem as having a more natural, unforced, obvious coherence than much modern scholarship might lead us to expect. Even *Cleanness*, universally regarded as the most uncomfortable of the four poems and the least accessible to a modern audience, benefits from Hatt's careful situating of it within secular, ironic uses of the sermon-genre, as in Chaucer or in French courtly love literature. This helps to draw together its challenging meditation on the purity that allows us to see God, and the earthy vividness of the retelling of the Old Testament scenes of destruction that forms its main content. Hatt's approach removes some

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