



## Reviews

**CHRISTIANITY IN WESTERN EUROPE c.1100–c.1500** edited by Miri Rubin and Walter Simons (*The Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 4, Cambridge University Press, 2009*) Pp. xxi + 577, £110

After a brief explanatory introduction, this volume offers some thirty-one essays on the social and intellectual history of medieval Christianity which are grouped together under seven broad subject headings, and in some cases sorted into rough time periods: 'Institutions and change, 1100–1200'; 'Forging a Christian world, 1200–1300'; 'The erection of boundaries'; 'Shapes of a Christian world'; 'Christian life in movement'; 'The challenges to a Christian society'; and, finally, 'Reform and renewal'.

Most essays are judicious summaries of major topics, while some also identify the principal questions besetting scholars. Footnotes send the reader to detailed studies. The more interesting pieces are mainly those that are more narrowly focussed and lead the reader into unfamiliar territory. Some experts in their field have gamely covered large topics in too short a space. Social history receives better treatment than intellectual history. Thus, the history of religious orders, especially that of their Observant reforms and their relationship to the *Devotio moderna*, is especially well served, as is the place of preaching in its political context and in relationship to biblical exegesis.

There is a welcome interest in 'semi-religious' life, and there is also the attention we now expect for those whom medieval Christians treated in different ways as outsiders: heretics, Jews, and Muslims. On the other hand, this is not the book to induct someone into medieval theology, and you will find little here to help in understanding the work of Bonaventure, Aquinas, or Occam. It is perhaps too easy to fault such a volume for its omissions but there are some surprising gaps in the institutional and cultural history: the Avignon papacy; papal schism; the history of conciliarism in relation to such matters; and the rise of Christian Humanism. These are among the topics glanced at in the context of other subjects but which deserved greater space.

Occasionally, an English focus is detectable: Wyclif and Lollardy are the subject of a separate study, whereas Hus appears only within other contexts. More generally, and perhaps inescapably, we hear most about Italy; we hear least, and too little, about Ireland, Scandinavia, Poland, Central Europe, and the Iberian Peninsula. More explicit reflection on what constituted *Western* European Christianity would have been helpful in this regard.

Very rarely, the details themselves look wrong: in an otherwise admirable essay on 'Sacramental life', Miri Rubin translates Hugh of St Victor's 'sacramentum est corporale vel materiale elementum foris sensibiliter propositum ex simili repraesentans, et ex institutione significans, et ex sanctificatione continens aliquam invisibilem et spiritualem gratiam.' This she renders as: 'A sacrament is a physical or material element, which represents externally according to the senses by similarity, and which signifies by the fact of its institution, and as to the sacred, contains a certain invisible and spiritual grace' (p. 222). Should we not take 'foris sensibiliter propositum' with the noun rather than limit its scope to the first present participle? And should 'ex sanctificatione' not refer to the divine

act of consecration? Nonetheless, this is a valuable reference work for students and scholars.

RICHARD FINN OP

**PRAYING WITH CONFIDENCE: AQUINAS ON THE LORD'S PRAYER** by Paul Murray OP (*Continuum*, London, 2010) Pp. xiii + 105, £10.99

In this book Paul Murray, a contemporary spiritual master, expounds the teaching of an earlier Dominican spiritual master, whose writings can be a bit daunting for the majority of Christians, let alone for the merely curious spiritual seeker. It is a vital part of the resurgence of interest in St Thomas that he should be appreciated as a preacher, and as a spiritual master, for these are hallmarks of a Dominican saint. St Thomas was canonized because he contemplated Wisdom and handed on the fruit of his contemplation of *sacra doctrina*. It is this holy teaching that Murray shares with us again in this little volume. Just as St Thomas drew on other commentators, notably Augustine and Origen to explain the Lord's Prayer, Murray also draws on other Dominicans to illuminate his text. In this way, it is the work of a community, a 'holy preaching', in the best Dominican tradition.

The author has done an excellent job of pulling together St Thomas' writings on the Lord's Prayer for they are found not in a single treatise but in seven different texts. He helpfully explains the history and context of these texts in the 'Appendix'. In the main text, Murray follows St Thomas' own practice and we are led to consider the Lord's Prayer one brief phrase at a time. Readers who are not accustomed to the scholastic method of analysis may be astonished by how much St Thomas derives from the first two words alone, but the result is not academic nit-picking or dry distinctions but the illuminating insights of a saint who has prayed over every precious word taught by the incarnate Word. So, we are led into a Thomistic *lectio divina* of the Lord's Prayer in which spirituality and theology cannot be separated.

St Thomas's well-known *Summa theologiae* is famously structured as a series of questions, objections, and responses, and any reader of it knows how very relevant are the questions he poses, and how apt the answers he gives. So too in this consideration of the Lord's Prayer, many of the objections to petitionary prayer, and erroneous ideas about prayer and the spiritual life, are answered, and so we are taught to pray. Moreover, we are taught to live well, for St Thomas brilliantly shows how the Lord's Prayer begins with the goal of life, namely God, and then shows how we can attain that goal with hope and confidence by loving ourselves in God (see p. 37). Therefore, we are more fully human and more free the more we love and desire God above all else.

However, in all this, and particularly in St Thomas's treatment of the phrase, 'forgive us our trespasses' (chapter 7), his humanity stands out in the depth of his understanding of human weakness and of our need of God's grace and compassion. Similarly, Murray highlights some of the difficulties of living the Christian life such as forgiving our enemies, coping with suffering, and distraction in prayer, and he shares St Thomas's eminently practical and compassionate responses to such struggles.

St Thomas says that prayer should "last long enough to arouse fervour of interior desire". This book is just long enough to be read with ease, and to stir up our desire to pray with confidence and hope, but it also contains such richness that it will amply reward many meditative revisits.

LAWRENCE LEW OP