



Reviews

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF EARLY CHRISTIAN STUDIES, edited by Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter, *Oxford University Press*, 2008, pp. xxvii + 1020, £85, hbk

EARLY MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITIES, C. 600-1100: THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY VOLUME 3, edited by Thomas F.X. Noble and Julia M.H. Smith, *Cambridge University Press*, 2008, pp. xxix + 846, £100 (\$195), hbk

To study the early history of Christianity can rarely have seemed more attractive or more daunting. On the one hand, the blinkers previously imposed by confessional allegiance have been largely removed, whether those of a Catholicism which projected its institutional and doctrinal developments back into its earliest past, or those of a Protestantism which confused development with moral decay and with the invasion by foreign elements of an originally pure deposit of faith. The history of Christianity has been greatly enriched in the past fifty years by insights from sociology, literature, archaeology and art history, feminist theology, economics, and yet other disciplines. Doctrines and institutions have found new meaning in broader contexts attentive to rhetoric, politics, popular piety, and more general cultural history. Scholars over several generations have provided us with critical editions of many important texts. A beam of light which previously began by picking out the Roman empire and then narrowed over time to focus on the Latin West now illuminates a wider swathe of lands and churches. On the other hand, as a result of these processes, once-simple narratives have fractured. As the title to volume three of the new *Cambridge History of Christianity* exemplifies, historians now speak of 'Christianities' in the attempt to acknowledge the varying patterns of Christian belief and practice across times and places. It becomes ever harder to keep up with new research in any given area, or to put the pieces together and achieve a coherent overview.

In this situation there can be enormous value in handbooks and multi-volume histories. They serve, at a price, as large-scale maps which orientate the new arrival in an unfamiliar landscape, whether she is the lay person who is visiting from further afield in need of an accurate overview, or the student from a neighbouring area of special interest. Handbooks which review previous work, comment on current research and outstanding issues, usually have the shorter life-span, and are inevitably to some extent out-of-date even when published, but they are often the more valuable tools. The multi-volume history can hope for longer relevance, but its approaches and bibliographies are often less helpful to the person for whom a given chapter is merely the starting-point in addressing a specific topic.

Both the Oxford Handbook and the Cambridge History reviewed here manifestly deserve a place on the library shelves in universities, seminaries, and religious houses. Together they cover a little more than a millennium. Many of the contributors are among the leading scholars in their chosen field. For the handbook, which covers the period from *ca.*100–600 CE, authors were asked to 'reflect on the main questions or issues that have animated research, to provide an introduction to the relevant primary sources, and to offer some guidance on

the directions in which future research might be profitably pursued' (p. 2). For this reason, the work is of particular value to students. The book is prefaced (i) by essays of general relevance, before sections on (ii) the material and textual evidence; (iii) religious identities; (iv) geographical regions; (v) church structures and authorities; (vi) expressions of Christian culture; (vii) ritual and piety; and (viii) specifically theological and doctrinal issues. Individual chapters each conclude with guidance on suggested reading and a helpful bibliography.

Space here precludes much comment on individual contributions, though William Tabbernee's entry on 'epigraphy' may be praised as exemplifying how the history of a discipline may be integrated elegantly with an account of what the discipline can reveal about Early Christianity. The chapter also offers helpful updates on how to interpret particular epigraphic formulae. Andrew Jacobs, writing on Jews and Christians, conveys well the limits of what we can now recover of a complex past. Chapters by Rebecca Lyman and Mathijs Lamberigts are welcome for discussing Arians and Pelagians respectively outside the usual frame which views them from the perspective of their doctrinal opponents. Many who are not historians of Early Church liturgy may benefit from Maxwell Johnson's discussion of 'Christian Initiation', which sets out the variety of baptismal practice, at Epiphany as well as at Easter, before the late fourth century: Easter in the early churches was not always nor everywhere what the liturgical reforms of the twentieth century have taught Catholics to look back upon as normative. Likewise, the chapter on 'Doctrine of God' by Lewis Ayres and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz will alert the reader to new readings of the Apologists and their engagement with Ancient Philosophy. Clearly no volume, however large, can cover everything. Something more on the Christian appropriation and adaptation of the virtues would certainly have been welcome; but this should not detract from what is a well-structured and impressively comprehensive handbook. Perhaps its weakness lies rather in its confidence: the resolutely upbeat nature of its introductory essays on Early Christian studies. If the traditional confessional blinkers have been largely removed, what are the other, newer blinkers now at work?

Early Medieval Christianities c. 600-1100 opens with a magisterial introductory essay by Peter Brown and is then organized into five sections. The first, sensibly, is a set (i) of overarching regional histories, some of which unavoidably overlap, but which taken together shift the reader from an undue attention on Western Europe. This is followed (ii) by chapters which outline the relations between Christians and Jews, Moslems, and the pagans tribes of northern Europe, as well as between different Christian churches. The next section (iii) deals with institutions, including the tedious (but no doubt necessary) information about which see was established when, as well as a much more intriguing discussion by Rosemary Morris of how property rights were understood and disputed by clerics and lay people before the Gregorian 'reforms'. A further section (iv) looks at 'Christianity as lived experience', its liturgies, and how religion influenced the way people experienced birth, illness, and death. The final section (v) concerns 'books and ideas', biblical interpretation, doctrinal orthodoxy and heresy, and beliefs about the afterlife. The volume finishes with an important essay by John Van Engen which might profitably be read first, on how to understand the period overall, the relation of early medieval Christianities to the later medieval churches and to European culture. Van Engen argues that 'after the year 1100 bishops ceased to play the shaping role in Latin Christendom they had regularly exercised in early medieval Christian societies', while monasticism entered a new and unstable era in which the degree of separation of monks from their secular patrons was repeatedly re-negotiated (pp. 631–32). He examines the shift from a Church in which baptism was the paradigmatic sacrament to the later centrality of the Eucharist, and notes the difficulty of envisioning 'the inner shape of

early medieval Christianities, if we peer back too unselfconsciously through the framing of this subsequent order' (p. 636). Much about this book thus tantalizes its reader: cultures very different from our own are glimpsed in outline, with occasional details that whet the appetite, like the practice mentioned by Julia Smith of 'depositing consecrated bread in an altar whenever saints' relics were unavailable' (p. 603). For want of space, we are left to wonder about the logic involved in such acts. The reader is encouraged to move on, and hunt down other studies through the bibliographies. It is a mark of this history's worth, and of the *Oxford Handbook*, to send us further down the shelves in search of more.

RICHARD FINN OP

ANSELM ON FREEDOM by Katherin Rogers, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 217, £40 hbk

In *Anselm on Freedom*, Katherin Rogers develops an original approach to the question of Anselm's understanding of freedom (both human and divine), the key to which can be found in the following claim: 'Anselm's thesis is that God, in making man in His image, has succeeded in sharing a measure of His aseity' (p. 91).

Rogers argues uncontroversially that Anselm is a 'classical theist', who holds that God is absolutely simple, His attributes being identical with each other (chapter 1). Although Anselm is one of Augustine's 'devoted disciples' (chapter 2, p. 30), he differs from Augustine in his view of human freedom and does not follow Augustine's compatibilism (i.e. that moral choice is ultimately causally explicable in terms of external factors). Anselm leaves 'a small space' for human agency (p. 33), for he is a 'libertarian' (i.e. he believes that the agent's free choice is not explicable in terms of external factors nor of internal factors which themselves ultimately possess external causes). In chapter 3, 'The Purpose, Definition, and Structure of Free Choice', Rogers finds evidence in Anselm's writings for her claim that the human agent, 'through its free will, shares in God's aseity' and 'imitates God in being a genuine cause', 'a primary agent' (p. 59), whose freedom is characterized by the power to preserve rightness (*rectitudo*) of will for its own sake (see *De Libertate Arbitrii*, 3). There are two sorts of desire: the desire for benefit and the desire for rightness (*rectitudo*). They are not competing desires: 'the will for rightness is a second order desire that one's first order desires for benefits should be properly ordered and limited in accord with the divine will' (p. 72). In chapter 4, 'Alternative Possibilities and Primary Agency', Rogers develops her case for Anselm as a 'libertarian'. Open options, though not definitional of freedom, permit the created agent 'to choose *from himself*' (p. 76). Anselm regards the created agent as confronting 'alternatives such that its own free will genuinely plays a causally efficacious role' (p. 78). In chapter 5, 'The Causes of Sin and the Intelligibility Problem', Rogers argues that the mystery surrounding self-caused choice (that a choice whose cause is not derived from external causes is not a random or accidental event) is what 'one ought to expect to find attached to an *imago dei* in the universe of traditional classical theism' (p. 87). Anselm's solution to the intelligibility problem lies in a 'very modest' autonomy of the agent. There are two genuine causal forces in the world: 'God and the free creatures He has made' (p. 101).

In chapter 6, 'Creaturally Freedom and God as *Creator Omnium*', Rogers asks how God can be the creator of all that exists, but not be responsible for sinful acts. In *De Concordia*, 3, Anselm makes it clear that evil actions are the fault of man, since God 'would not cause them, if man did not will to do them' (p. 121). God chooses to be affected by the created agent's actions. To deny