

BOOK REVIEWS

ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA: BISHOP, THEOLOGIAN, ASCETIC, FATHER. By David M. Gwynn. *Christian Theology in Context*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2012. Pp. xvi + 230. \$110; \$35.

Other books have generally dealt with Athanasius as theologian or as a political figure. Gwynn's volume portrays Athanasius in a series of transparent overlays, analogous those used by graphic designers. Each successive chapter, respectively on Athanasius as bishop, theologian, ascetic, and father, adds a new layer of detail and depth to its predecessors to furnish a more rounded portrait of its subject than is usually available. The result is a qualified success. While there are historical and theological materials in abundance to support the chapters "Bishop" and "Theologian," the ascetical works and *Festal Letters* behind "Ascetic" and "Father" offer comparatively meager supplementary details. But meager as they may be, they help fill in areas of our understanding of Athanasius. These thematic chapters are preceded by an introductory account of his "Life and Writings" and followed by his "Death and Legacy," where Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, and Coptic reactions to Athanasius are briefly but usefully presented. The volume is filled out by a good bibliography, an index of Athanasian texts, a general index, and a two-page chronology of Athanasius's life. Some points of the chronology are disputed, but G. explains his decisions, mainly in chapter 1.

Because of the book's structure just described, G. refers to Athanasius's whole adult life in each of his four main chapters, each time emphasizing the aspects important for that chapter. The reader gets used to this and may find helpful the reappearance of familiar landmark events in the course of later chapters. In recounting the events of Athanasius's life, G. avoids taking idiosyncratic or minority positions, a praiseworthy decision made easier by the fact that in a book of this sort he need not go into great detail; a reader who starts with this book and digs deeper will find little, if anything, to unlearn on that score. Similarly, G. is careful with the writings of Athanasius, though on their authenticity and dating he has choices to make and defend, as he does with the date and ordering of the *Festal Letters* (7), the composition of the *Orations against the Arians* (10), and the *Life of Antony* (15). G. now accepts as authentic the *Letter to Adelphius* (16; 101). These and other choices that G. makes cannot be fully explained in such a brief study, but his footnote references will help a reader who wishes to examine the evidence personally. G. puts "Arian" and "Arianism" in scare quotes throughout the book, and he is most

successful in showing how Athanasius succeeded in bundling the varieties of theology to which he was opposed into the single overarching heresy known to later centuries.

The treatment of theological matters tends toward anachronism, looking back from later theological developments as if what happened earlier was defective in comparison to the later. This tendency becomes apparent in the very brief and stylized background section (56–59), where the force of G.'s sound reminder about the early Christians' "remarkable sense of unity" (57) is diminished by his later comment, "for our understanding of the background to the [fourth-century] controversies, what needs to be emphasized is that, when Athanasius was born in c. 295, there was no agreed orthodox interpretation on any of the questions under dispute. Nor was there a universally agreed mechanism by which orthodoxy could be determined and imposed" (59). Another example: "No adequate language existed to express the nature of the Trinity itself as both three persons and one God" (98)—as if, for centuries before the devising of a certain language, belief in the Trinity was vague and uncertain, but we now have adequate language. This is a notion that I think G. would reject, but many readers of an introductory text such as this might infer it. There is also some confusion about the communication of idioms, where the bald assertion, "Properties appropriate to creatures . . . cannot apply to the divine Son" (76), is later qualified by "At some level, the experiences of Jesus' body were also experienced by the Word, for the sake of our salvation" (102); even this I think falls short of doing justice to Athanasius's thinking.

Academic libraries will want to acquire this gateway book into Athanasian study.

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ARCHBISHOP ANSELM 1093-1109: BEC MISSIONARY, CANTERBURY PRIMATE, PATRIARCH OF ANOTHER WORLD. By Sally N. Vaughn. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. xxi + 287. \$ 99.95.

In the past 50 years Anselm of Canterbury has been a subject of extensive research. In 1963 R. W. Southern completed his first monograph on Anselm (*St. Anselm and His Biographer*) only to rework his interpretation in his magisterial *St. Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (1992). Published between these two works is Vaughn's first monograph, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan: The Innocence of the Dove and the Wisdom of the Serpent* (1987), which argued—in response to Southern's first work—that Anselm was a more accomplished statesman/politician than Southern allowed. Aspects of V.'s argument were incorporated into Southern's subsequent *St. Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (1990). V.'s present work continues this enriching