

previewing what was to become a “new Counter-Reformation” (143). Some of these latter novels portrayed the struggle during the rule of Henry VIII, but most focused on the Elizabethan regime as a time of Catholic martyrdom. Beneath these Catholic counternarratives (such as *Geraldine* by E. C. Agnew in 1839), as well as some by Anglo-Catholic writers, was an argument for the historical continuity of the Roman tradition.

B.’s study ends with a chapter on Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), set during the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780. In this novel, Dickens avoids arguing the usual Protestant or Catholic histories of the Reformation in order to avoid fragmentation among his Victorian society readership. For Dickens, it was time to forget the legacy of the English Reformation. A similar effort to avoid historical controversies marked George Eliot’s *Romola* (1863), based on the life of Savonarola in pre-Reformation Florence, by revealing the self-contradictions, failures, and ambiguities of this so-called “proto-Protestant Great Man” (215). Overall, B. provides Charles Laporte and other revisionist historians of 19th-century literature with convincing examples that religious debate and practice were alive and well among the Victorians. Along with Pericles Lewis and other revisionizers of religion in the modernist novel, B. bolsters the challenging work of Charles Taylor on the sacred side of *A Secular Age* (2007).

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Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought. By Torstein Theodor Tollefsen. New York: Oxford University, 2012. Pp. viii + 229. \$125.

Tollefsen is the author of *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (2008) and numerous articles on philosophy and Christianity in Late Antiquity. In his recent book, he examines the philosophical concepts of “activity” and “participation” in early Christian theology. Although he mentions Augustine in passing, T. focuses on the thought of the Cappadocians, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus the Confessor. Yet, these figures are not the most important for the work, even though they do most of the heavy lifting. Instead, the two central thinkers are the philosopher Plotinus and the monk Gregory Palamas.

T.’s stated purpose is to demonstrate that Gregory Palamas “was a traditional thinker and no innovator” (vi), especially in his distinction between God’s essence and energies. The essence–energies distinction is a core concept in Orthodox theology, helping explain how Christians can be deified. Following Irenaeus’s assertion that “God became what we are so that we might become who He is” (*Adversus haereses* V, [Irenaeus’s preface]) or Athanasius’s better-known version, “God became human, so that we might become God” (*De incarnatione* 54), Orthodox theology has sought to articulate how exactly humans can become God. The essence–energies distinction allows true participation with God while also providing the necessary limits.

To prove that Gregory Palamas is a traditional thinker, T. traces the development of the concepts of “activity” and “participation” by pagan and Christian philosophers. The most important piece of the puzzle for T. is Plotinus’s distinction between the internal and external activity of God. T. sees these dual divine activities as an inchoate version of Palamas’s later theology. To get from Plotinus to Palamas though, T. chronicles the way that Greek Christian theologians adapted Plotinus’s theory for the needs of the church. He does so by showing how Christians relied on such a distinction to portray God as simultaneously inaccessible yet accessible, unknowable yet knowable, transcendent yet immanent. After discussing how the internal activity of God relates to apophaticism and to the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity, T. turns to God’s external activity as seen both in creation and salvation with the incarnation as an important link between the two. Through this, T. successfully defends his claim that Palamas is a traditional thinker, following an important strain of Greek theological thought.

While T. excels in explaining the difficult philosophical concepts he examines, the book is difficult. He carefully explores these concepts by offering helpful illustrations along the way and engages more with primary sources than secondary; this is a good thing. He is a close and careful reader of patristic texts. Yet, when he uses secondary sources most constructively, he chooses sources authored almost exclusively by Orthodox writers. This is a problem, because if part of the book’s purpose is to demonstrate the traditional character of Palamas’s thought, T. needed to engage Protestant and Catholic scholarship and their objections more. Most Orthodox would already agree with his argument.

Since Platonism provided the philosophical milieu of Late Antique Christianity, it is no surprise that the ideas born in a pagan background would be developed and adapted for Christian purposes. Still, T. tries to differentiate between what is natively philosophical and what is Christian orthodoxy. He also seems reluctant to attribute the genesis of the concepts he examines to philosophy alone. While Platonism helped early Christians make sense of the Scriptures, it is improbable that they alone could have given Christianity the distinction between the internal and external activity of God. The Hellenization of Christianity and the Christianization of Hellenism means that most Greek Christian theologians were also philosophers indebted to Platonism. To seek the provenance of the concepts as simply philosophical or biblical seems unhelpful. For instance, when T. notes the clear similarity between Dionysius’s theory of causality and that of Proclus, he quickly suggests that Dionysius and others “probably would have retorted that this is a Scriptural notion, and in support they may have quoted St. Paul” (104).

Nevertheless, T. is successful in showing that echoes of Palamas’s distinction between the essence and energies of God can be dated to Late Antiquity. Palamas’s theology is derivative in the best sense of the word. When humans participate in God’s external activity, they truly participate with God. T.’s work will be helpful to anyone seeking to comprehend difficult and important philosophical concepts as adapted by Christian theologians. This book is a welcome step in our understanding of how philosophy has contributed to the explication of Christian theology.

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