

of scholars: Isabella Schiller (who made the initial discovery), Clemens Weidmann and Dorothea Weber. Meanwhile the texts are finding their way into mainstream scholarship on Augustine and will soon be added to the material usually surveyed in thematic research on topics such as the poor in Late Antiquity, early Christian liturgy or the martyr cult. The first aim of the book under review, however, is not to contribute to the body of scholarship on these sermons. Rather it seeks to provide in 7 essays a larger readership with a background into the collection of the Bibliotheca Amploniana and the discovery of these sermons. The first three contributions deal with the Amploniana: B. Pfeil introduces Amplonius and the way the collection came about and developed (11-21); T. Bouillon presents the manuscripts in the collection that contain text by Augustine and the importance of the *doctor gratiae* in the intellectual universum of Amplonius and his time (21-27); J. Pilvousek sketches the history of the University and the *Collegium Porta Caelis* as the context in which Amplonius lived and worked and his library was developed (27-37). The pièce de résistance (37-67) is a contribution by the three philologists who edited the texts: they present the research project that led to the discovery, the discovery itself, the content of the new sermons and include the Latin texts with German translation and brief commentary of *sermo* Erfurt 5 (a sermon on the resurrection). The volume concludes with a brief discussion by K. Brodersen over findings of new Latin, pre-Christian texts (67-75) and more general portrayals of Augustine by J. Rüpke (75-81) and J. Hofmann (81-109). The book reminds us that systematic research in rare book collections by specialists pays off and results in new findings. It may be hoped that this book about the finding of the *sermones* Erfurt together with the revised version of Schum's catalogue of the *Amploniana* results in more intensive scholarly attention to the *Amploniana*.

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Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification. The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 2008, xi + 297 pp., including bibliography and index. ISBN: 9780268041281.

This book, which is a version of the author's 2004 University of Iowa doctoral dissertation, is an attempt to document and discuss the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* in the West of what is easily one of the most

important New Testament commentaries ever composed: Origen of Alexandria's commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans, or, to be more precise, the reception history of the condensation and translation of that mid-third century commentary into Latin as it was performed by Rufinus of Aquileia during the first decade of the fifth-century (cf. p. 5). Even the casual student of Historical Theology will immediately sense many of the difficulties inherent in such a task: as a scholar, Scheck is clearly no coward!

After a brief introduction, the book discusses (the Latin) Origen's views on justification in detail (Chapter 1). Chapters 2-6 each discuss the reception of Origen's commentary in general and of his views on justification in particular by a handful of the West's most interesting – if not always its most important – commentators and exegetes. Scheck dedicates chapters respectively to: Pelagius, Augustine, William of St. Thierry, Erasmus, and Luther/Melanchthon, before Chapter 7 addresses "Post-Reformation Controversies," a phrase by which Scheck means late 16th-century Protestants and Jansenism. Chapter 7 is then followed by a very brief (less than 3-page) conclusion. The notes, bibliography, appendix and index take up just over seventy pages.

Looking at the book's introduction more closely, the reader immediately realizes what he can expect: while he is certain to learn much about how Rufinus of Aquileia's "Latin Origen" read and exegeted *Romans*, he will also be exposed to a method of connecting the dots between that exegesis and (Scheck's digest of) the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church of the 20th-century. Not without import is the fact that the latter is done by showing that the "errors," both of the Protestant Reformation in general and of the Reformed exegesis of Luther and Melanchthon in particular – to say nothing of the extremist views of Cornelius Jansen – were actually rooted in a wrong-headed rejection of Origen and an equally misguided, or even disingenuous, misappropriation of Augustine (cf. p. 8 and p. 10).

Although not quite the longest, the book's best chapter is Chapter 1. After a brief review of some of the relevant scholarship (cf. pp. 14-20), Scheck helpfully discusses the theological and ecclesiastical context in which much of Origen's exegesis was done (cf. pp. 20-29), before settling in to summarize both Origen's general attitude toward *Romans* (cf. pp. 30-32) and Origen's views on both the significance of justification and the means by which it is obtained (cf. pp. 32-53). According to Scheck, Origen presumed both freedom and responsibility on the part of those seeking justification, just as the great Alexandrian also had no qualms whatsoever in highlighting the necessary role played by merit, i.e., by "human contributions," in

obtaining justification and, by extension, salvation. In fact, according to Scheck, Origen's emphasis on both of these can be easily explained by noting the presence of "the deterministic heresies against which he [was] fighting" (cf. p. 52). Although far from being unquestionable, these conclusions are neither unreasonable nor unsupportable.

Just after this, however, an otherwise good chapter is marred as elements of the book's methodology become clearly visible in its nine-page excursus (cf. pp. 53-62). Under the guise of discussing "modern assessments" of Origen's views on grace, Scheck wants to show how Origen's views on justification are much more closely aligned with the teachings of "the Church" than is often assumed. The excursus' opening sentence,¹ by capitalizing the word "church," by using the words "understanding" and "teaching" in the singular, and by employing such formulations as "less precise," comes perilously close to implying that, for Scheck, the church always has been a monolithic institution that never wavered (either internally or externally) with respect to what it should teach and believe regarding justification. Scheck makes it seem as if the church has always possessed the pure and fully-formed doctrine of justification somewhere within it and as if the only challenge all along has been to focus on those voices that, whether they knew it or not, were in possession of that complete formulation.

In this same vein, even a perfectly impartial historian of western theology (if such a creature could be shown to exist!) would probably be quick to raise questions about the theologians and exegetes that this book has chosen to analyze. Beyond the fact that book leaps over the (almost) 700 years between the death of Augustine and the *floruit* of William of St. Thierry, i.e., between 430 and ca. 1120-1145, in the space of one page (cf. pp. 104-105), important questions to ask here include: Why was William of St. Thierry chosen as the representative of "a medieval Augustinian" theologian at all (cf. p.106)? Does not Thomas Aquinas, who clearly had much to say about justification and who could not have avoided at least the indirect influence of Origen, deserve more than a single and clearly *en passant* mention in this context (cf. p. 105)?² Moreover, even if one is unwilling to question

¹ Cf. p.53: "With regard to the Church's understanding of divine grace, scholars generally concede that the teaching of the Fathers before the fifth century, especially the Greek Fathers, is less precise than that of the Fathers who lived after the Pelagian and the semi-Pelagian controversies."

² Note that while Aquinas does appear in the book's index, he is only to be found under "Thomas, St." (cf. p. 297). He neither appears nor is there a cross-reference to him in the section dedicated to items beginning with the letter "A" (cf. p. 293).

the (highly questionable) assertion that William was “perhaps [the 12th-century’s] most outstanding theologian,” the chapter dedicated to him makes no overt effort – beyond the aforementioned quote, which comes from L. Bouyer’s 1958 book on the heritage of the Cistercians and not, as one might expect, from an acknowledged survey or handbook dedicated to the whole of medieval theology – to explain or to demonstrate that, in fact, William’s Origen-incorporating work(s) actually made an impact on those who followed. In other words, even if William knew, respected and consciously attempted to further the “correct” approach to *Romans* via a “correct” reading of Origen’s commentary, among whom and to what degree did his opinions on these topics have an impact on the western tradition? The reader is left to wonder. And, although similar questions need not be raised over the choice to analyze the works of exegetes like Erasmus, Luther/Melanchthon and Jansenius, since their respective influences on the later tradition is clear, methodological concerns similar to those mentioned above are raised when, for example, we are repeatedly told that Erasmus was a good exegete because he only wanted to retrieve “the patristic consensus” (cf. p. 156 *et passim*), when we encounter the unqualified claim that biblical commentaries can safely be assumed to be more free from bias than “polemical tracts” (cf. p. 136), and when the positions of Luther/Melanchthon are sweepingly dismissed because they themselves have somehow or somewhere once and for all “arrogantly dismissed ancient Christian exegesis” (cf. p. 139).

In sum, this book’s several positive features allow this reviewer to recommend it, provided that several of its significant deficiencies are also kept in mind. First, this book is to be applauded for its boldness: any study courageous enough to attempt to survey a doctrine as controversial as justification in the western tradition and which makes that attempt via largely self-contained analyses of some of the West’s major theological thinkers and writers is bound – almost by definition – to be a contribution to the field. Second, this book provides a service for scholars by assembling such a significant portion of the essential primary evidence for the crucial issue of justification into one volume. Third, while not discussed in detail in the foregoing, this book is written in a style that is at once clear, concise and accessible – and, given that this work’s first incarnation was as a doctoral dissertation, this is no mean feat.

At the same time, when viewed comprehensively, this book strikes this reviewer as being a bit out of balance. Firstly, as noted above, to dedicate just one twenty-three page chapter to the entire medieval period and to do that via a figure that no one regards as the

period's most important or most influential in a work that purports to survey such a large swath of history is, at best, mystifying. Secondly, this book's apparent presumptions about both the history of the development of doctrine, the history of the Roman Catholic tradition and, specifically, about how these two exceedingly large and complex themes overlap, mar both its methodology and bring into question more than a few of its conclusions. It is surprising to see how the author's overall scientific and historical-critical attitude is at times jeopardized by his apparent endorsement of views regarding the development of doctrine in history, of revelation, and of ecclesiology that were rightly relegated to the margins many decades ago. Thirdly, the potential reader (and purchaser) of this book should keep in mind that it – often at some of the most crucial junctures – seemingly relies upon secondary sources that are out of date and, sometimes, are seemingly outside the mainstream of contemporary scholarship. On this last point, let it suffice to note the frequency with which sometimes crucial points are made, supported or challenged using obscure or sectarian works from the 1950's or the 1960's (cf. the "Notes" and the "Bibliography" on pp. 225-288).

Scheck is a competent scholar; and his book is well worth reading. However, if one happens to be in search of a book that will comprehensively cover either the West's centuries-old debates on justification or the complex impact that was surely made in the West by the Latin version of Origen's *Romans* commentary, one would do well to keep the words *caveat lector!* firmly in mind.

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