

God's eternity is certainly noteworthy, as well as his reinterpretation of the Chalcedonian dogma's formula, his conception of the sacraments as divine language, and his non-triumphalist idea of the Church as 'the sacrament of the future united humanity' (p. 250).

For Manni, Fr. McCabe's peculiar Christocentrism, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, is 'the key to maintaining faith [...] while slaloming among sciences, liberal capitalism, Marxist revolutions, medieval philosophy, church reform, secularization, and new atheism, and while remaining a loyal member of his church, though acknowledging that this church is morally corrupt and intellectually muddled' (p. 268). And here, in addition to Manni's several references to Marxism and criticism of the hierarchy, some pages on Fr. McCabe's theological politics would have been particularly appropriate. Very far from being considered as a Jurassic 'sacred monster of Thomism', Fr. McCabe was rather a paradigmatic example of what I like to call *creative Thomism*, especially in his successful attempt to put Aquinas 'in dialogue with modern thinkers and modern society's needs' (p. 53). For the proven ability in triggering and supporting the thought of his contemporaries, Fr. McCabe can be a witty travelling companion for philosophers and theologians, who actually want to think. According to Manni, reading McCabe's writing is useful to awaken our desire to understand and explain why God matters, even within a humble but strong apophaticism, or to take seriously the tragedy of human life without losing hope, or finally to consider the problems of today's society in the liberating light of Christian (and Thomist) tradition.

Even with the inevitable limits and the few anachronisms of his writings, the thought of the brilliant and audacious Dominican must become known at least by reading Manni's book. Above all Fr. McCabe's vivid Thomism can be a very effective antidote against the grey neo-Thomism epidemic, found in certain sectors of the Anglo-American philosophical and theological world: 'In theology, in liturgy, to be truly traditional is not to repeat past formulae (though it is important to know about and be interested in past formulae); it is to be in organic continuity with the worship and forms of understanding of two thousand years of Christian life' (partially quoted by Manni, p. 19).

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PIERS PLOWMAN AND THE REINVENTION OF CHURCH LAW IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES by Arvind Thomas, *University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2019*, pp. xiv + 267, \$75.00, hbk

That law can feature significantly in works of literature is clear simply from considering Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dickens to take three

well-known English authors from different centuries and genres. Conversely, literary techniques and imagined realizations of the human condition and significant concepts can influence lawyers. At the most fundamental level, law and literature share a concern with language and its uses. In terms of religion, the sacrament of penance is an apt testing ground for how law and linguistics might relate because the penitent is obliged to speak a narrative and to dialogue with the confessor. In addition, for a sacrament involving such concepts as sin, guilt, repentance, and forgiveness, there are illuminating literary works, as well as canonical and theological texts.

In this closely-argued, innovative, and challenging book, Dr Arvind Thomas considers what kind of relationship Langland's *Piers Plowman*, another English literary masterpiece, had to canon law. It turns out to be a surprisingly close and to some extent reciprocal relationship. The key to the whole enterprise, stated in the title, is 'reinvention'. The term certainly needs explanation, and it is supplied and illustrated throughout this volume. The focus is on the Church's penitential discipline, and we might even say that both the poem as a whole and the relevant canonical material share a pressing, detailed concern for repentance and salvation.

To study the different versions of *Piers Plowman* alongside canon law and its commentaries, as well as the closely related penitential and pastoral literature, is to discover the reinvention of canon law within and beyond the poem. By 'reinvention' Thomas means both 'finding' ('*inventio*' in classical Latin rhetoric) and 'founding' ('invention' in contemporary English usage). It should be noted that Thomas also claims that the C text, as presented in its modern editions, exhibits a sharper or more substantial engagement and enrichment of canon law than does B. For Thomas the A-B-C paradigm remains a useful tool, and he underscores the significance of variations in the handling of ecclesiastical norms within and across the poem's versions.

It seems fair to say that Thomas assumes his readers will know a good deal about *Piers Plowman*, including the attendant problems about authorship and text, and less about canon law. In the opening page of his Introduction he even explains twice that the term canon law means church law, and whilst quotations from *Piers Plowman* are generally left in Middle English, the Latin of canon law is usually given in the original and translated. That Thomas considers so extensively canon law rather than the Common Law in relation to *Piers Plowman* corrects a widespread modern distortion in presenting law as it was in medieval England. Thomas's list of primary sources is substantial. Incidentally, the complete quotation from F.W. Maitland that Thomas says he is unable to locate must be: 'It is hard to think away out of our heads a history which has long lain in a remote past but which once lay in the future'. It is from Maitland's introduction to his 1893 edition of *Records of the Parliament Holden at Westminster [A.D. 1305]*, p. lxxxiii.

Thomas goes further than simply identifying canonical and related sources in *Piers Plowman*, thereby making the poem more creative and less passive. He also correctly underlines the degree of creativity present in the evolving canonical and penitential systems. The intersections sought by Thomas include the practice of a shared hermeneutic and the pursuit of a common end. He proposes a ‘community of concepts’, and through its lens will uncover evidence for the co-production of canon law and literature. This is evidence for a history that lies hidden behind the proximity of *Piers Plowman* to the *Decretum*, the *Decretales*, the *Oculus sacerdotis*, and other closely related penitential and pastoral literature. It is characteristic of Thomas’s approach, for example, that he finds in the vividly demonstrative aspects of the poem’s confessional scenes not so much parody as the performance of canon law. At moments when penitents and even confessors act like players – especially bad ones – they stage the canon law pertaining to contrition.

Thomas is aware both of how the poem is replete with scenes of litigious debates over the interpretations of *sententiae* that frame cases at hand, and the wide variety of canonical topics treated in *Piers Plowman*. His focus, though, is on the sacrament of penance, and he highlights the key components of contrition, confession, restitution, and satisfaction. He does not neglect the socio-political questions of distributive justice and economic ethics, thereby mutually illuminating both the poem and the related canonical texts. A good idea of Thomas’s achievement can be gained from how he concludes the chapter on the requirement of *contritio cordis*, cast as the laughter of Mede and the lack of tears of Contricion. The chapter also makes more general points about the reinvention of canon law. This is neither a matter of promulgating norms to govern the penitential forum nor a contribution to the doctrine of contrition as found in the confessional manuals. Versions B and C reinvent by means of a poetic mimesis, that is, by having the confessor and penitent act in ways that recall and reinforce the evolving canon law. Although we might think it was for the poet to take a strong interest in appearances, it was an interest mirrored graphically in the confessional treatises.

Usury and related issues feature strongly, and they receive detailed study including the canonical aspects. Discarding any claim to finding an acknowledgment of poetic reinvention in legal records, Thomas does say that even though Conscience’s model of ‘relacioun rect’ was at the time of its inception yet to be realized by someone else, it was nevertheless available for readers to think through the canon law governing restitutive justice and, thereby, to envision change for the future. It is at this point that the quotation from Maitland (identified above) is deployed. The chapter on ‘satisfaction’ (*satisfactio operis*), like the one on restitution, shows among other things the poet as robust critic. It also contains a fascinating discussion of the maxim ‘*nullum malum impunitum, nullum bonum irremuneratum*’, and the varying uses to which it could be put. To illustrate this, Thomas moves

effectively from Paul of Hungary OP, Hostiensis, Cardinal Robert Courçon, and others, on the medieval juridical side, to Paul Ricoeur. The last chapter is a very thought-provoking contrast between Christ's penitential 'patente' in B and the Church's penitential 'chartre' in C. For Thomas, the C passages discussed offer a most radical re-envisioning of the institution of private sacramental penance. Perhaps a discussion was needed on the distinction between the particular judgment immediately after an individual's death and the Last Judgment, with special reference to Benedict XII's constitution *Benedictus Deus* (1336).

Early on, Thomas describes his project as to show that poet and canonist – even if the latter did not know or care about the former – as being engaged in a common approach to writing, revising, and thereby co-producing the law. On the last page, Thomas refers to the sixteenth-century Protestant receptions of the poem, and how a particular configuration of theology, ecclesiology and politics seen in *Piers Plowman* had become impossible after the 1530s. To the components of this configuration Thomas would add such books of canon law as were burned by Luther in 1520, and are now used by Thomas to study *Piers Plowman*. For Thomas the poem's innovations within the terms of canon law became increasingly strange and unintelligible to readers for whom the Church's legal institution no longer represented an open dialectical process.

This is a brilliant book, as complex and multi-layered as the medieval poem it deals with.

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A NEW HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES: GOVERNANCE AND MINISTRY, THEOLOGY AND SOCIETY edited by Norman Doe, *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, pp. xxi + 370, £24.99, pbk*

This collection of essays, produced under the editorship of the distinguished Anglican canon lawyer, Norman Doe, marks the centenary of the foundation of the Church in Wales. On 31st March 1920, the Welsh Church Act 1914 came into force, disestablishing – and disendowing – the Church of England in Wales. A separate Welsh Province came into being on 1st June 1920, incorporating the four Welsh dioceses (St David's, Bangor, Llandaff, and St Asaph) which had become ecclesiastically separated from the Province of Canterbury.

The volume is divided into key parts, and each part is divided into chapters written by 18 prominent scholars, mostly clerics.

The opening chapter of Part One provides an overview of the history of Christianity in Wales until the late nineteenth century in order to identify issues rooted in the past that became significant during the