

results from Judas's free choice to persist in sin. But Scotus is elsewhere quite clear that making divine knowledge and activity contingent on anything external to God 'demeans the divine intellect'. These are hard texts, but it would have been helpful to see how the Research Group would build this into their reading.

The final selection is on the procession of the Holy Spirit – an infinite act of divine self-love. The selection shows how God's will is constrained to love the supreme good (i.e. himself), and how it is that love is at the heart of Scotist theology as well as of his ethics. Overall, a very helpful selection of texts and commentaries, written in a style that will make it useful not only to specialists but also to undergraduates and others interested in an accessible presentation of this distinctive Franciscan theology.

RICHARD CROSS

THE CONCEPT OF WOMAN, Volume II: The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1500, by Sister Prudence Allen RSM, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002, xxiv + 1161 pp.

In the first volume, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 BC–AD 1250*, Sister Prudence Allen, professor of philosophy at St John Vianney Theological Seminary, Denver, Colorado, traced the concept of woman from the beginnings of Western philosophy until the High Middle Ages. This was the history of the dominance of what she calls the 'gender-polarity' concept of woman: woman is inferior to man, physically, psychologically, morally and spiritually.

Now, in this massively documented and brilliantly conducted work of scholarship, Allen takes us from the leading thinkers of the High Middle Ages through to the concept of woman that unfolds in Renaissance humanism. Gradually, over these 250 years, the 'gender-polarity' concept gives way to the concept of 'gender-complementarity with equality'. This time, however, we hear the voices of women themselves, attended to for the most part in primary sources, many of which have never been previously researched, and none of which has ever been integrated into a work of philosophical insight on this scale.

The structure of the book is as follows. Chapter 1 opens up the archive of medieval women's religious communities, revealing their unself-conscious self-understanding, with models of wisdom and virtue, for example, which assume that woman is a generic model for all human beings (Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete and others). Chapter 2 deals with gender polarity in some male philosophers in the medieval university milieu, captivated by Aristotelian logic (Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas especially). Chapter 3 highlights the assumptions in contemporary satires about women (*Le Roman de la rose*, *Le Livre de Mathéolus*, 'Frau Welt', *L'Évangile aux Femmes*, a couple of *dits* and Boccaccio's *Corbaccio*): monotonously denigratory. Chapter 4 breathes a completely different air: dialogues in which men respect women (Cavalcanti and the Lady, Dante and Beatrice, Petrarch and Laura, Boccaccio and Fiammetta). Chapter 5 describes how the idea developed, in leading women religious authors (Mechthild of Hackeborn, Gertrude the Great of Helfta, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena and Julian of Norwich) – with twenty pages on 'the Dominican influence': Eckhart, Tauler and Suso, all of course formed in the Aristotelian gender-polarity tradition, nevertheless disclosing a certain openness towards gender complementarity. Partly this is because of their Neoplatonism, which tended to a gender unity theory; and partly, no doubt, because they were frequently in conversation with women religious, often at least as intelligent as themselves.

The path was not smooth, however. Chapter 6 deals with new coarse and unlovely satires against women (*Le Miroir de mariage*, *Les Quinze joies de*

marriage); the cases of Margery Kempe and Joan of Arc; and the horrors of the *Malleus maleficarum* – ‘The hammer of witches’ – in which the two very distinguished Dominicans, Krämer and Sprenger, while clear that men could be witches too, propagated the idea that women are much more susceptible to demonic temptation, thus adding incalculably to the number who were burned or drowned.

Chapter 7 is entirely devoted to the work of Christine de Pizan (ca. 1344–1430), with a handful of contemporary images, including one of her ‘writing in her study in Paris’ and another of her ‘instructing four men’. Some of her writings were enormously popular. Evidently made free of her father’s library (he was a physician who held a chair in astronomy at the university of Bologna before moving to Paris as physician and astronomer to Charles V, King of France), Christine is a key figure in the history of the philosophical idea of woman. She translated some of Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, *Ethics* and *Politics* into French. She does not engage directly with the Aristotelian concept of woman but, as Allen shows, Christine is the thinker who first established the philosophical foundations for gender complementarity.

Chapter 8 analyzes the admission of woman to higher education at the early Humanist Renaissance. Chapter 9 discusses the gender theories of the great Humanists: Nicholas of Cusa, Leon Battista Alberti, Lorenzo Valla, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola – on the whole, in various ways, largely through their admiration for Plato’s doctrines of love and friendship, these thinkers were able to break free of the dominance of long-standing views that denigrate women.

Finally, in chapter 10, we come to Isotta Nogarola (1418–1466) and especially Laura Cereta (1469–1499), widowed at the age of sixteen, who, in her short life, Allen contends, ‘did more personally in terms of offering a new humanist model for woman’s identity than any woman before her’.

As this skeletal outline of the contents suggests, this book retrieves some highly important thinkers in the history of the concept of woman, not least Christine de Pizan, Isotta Nogarola and Laura Cereta. Feminists are no doubt familiar with Cereta’s letters, translated and published by Diana Robin in 1997; but much of the work of these remarkable women is unfamiliar in the English-speaking world. More than simply recovering so much fascinating, neglected and even unknown work, this book sets it all in the context of a powerfully and persuasively argued thesis. As Diana Robin says on the cover, Sister Prudence’s book is ‘essential reading for scholars in comparative European studies, women’s history, and feminist theory’. And especially in theology, Catholic and Protestant, one may surely be permitted to add.

FERGUS KERR OP

LIFE TOGETHER: FAMILY, SEXUALITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND TODAY by Stephen C. Barton, *T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2001, Pp. 256, £16.95, pbk.*

Dr Barton’s book is at first sight unexciting. It consists of a number of essays and addresses written or delivered on various occasions, with, as a connecting theme, the understanding of family and community by the writers of the New Testament. On a first reading, I was not very impressed. I thought it would have been better to ‘cannibalise’ the collected essays and make a new book out of them. Subsequent readings discovered other half-hidden themes, which are not fully developed, but which give the book a stimulating quality.

The book is divided into three parts: ‘Family and Sexuality’, ‘Community’ and ‘Interpretation’. In the first part, Barton’s problem is to see how it can be said that