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Yelena Mazour-Matusevich, *Le père du siècle: The Early Modern Reception of Jean Gerson (1363-1429). Theological Authority between Middle Ages and Early Modern Era* (Lectio, 14), Brepols 2023, 522pp., ISBN 978-2-503-60225-7

The recent publications that Isabelle Fabre, Isabelle Iribarren, Bénédicte Sère and others have dedicated to Jean Gerson provide undeniable proof that the Chancellor of the University of Paris and major figure of the Great Schism in the Western Church continues to fascinate modern scholars. Yelena Mazour-Matusevich's book investigates how Gerson's theological authority led to a wide dissemination of his works, attempting to discern and map out where clusters of readers of Gerson were found across the continent. These objectives are ambitious because, as the book reveals, Gerson was associated with momentous episodes in European history—the Schism, the Reformation, the birth of the Jesuits, the Spanish Inquisition—during which Western Christianity renewed its spiritual identity. Gerson was read because his works provided comfort and answers to new questions in theology widely construed: how to prepare for death; why attention should be accorded to the education not only of priests, but also of laymen, children, and even women; how confession can be practiced for its psychological benefit; how the scruples of conscience play a crucial role in confession; or how *synderesis*, in his conception, leads to new considerations on the human instinct to do good. Gerson also revisited the definition of sin, encouraged the cult of Joseph as model for the male role in marriage, and acclaimed music as an aid to faith that could alleviate depression and chase away demonic thoughts. His famed aversion to dogmatism and scholasticism in theology led major figures such as Luther and Calvin to embrace his reformist promotion of the primacy of Scripture.

This book explores in four main chapters how a number of Gerson's ideas found fertile ground in different religious contexts. The goal of the first chapter, "The Background: Gerson and the Long 15th Century" (pp. 29-145), is to quantify the early reception of Gerson, particularly in German-speaking countries, but also in France, Spain, Italy, and Sweden. The chapter could have benefited from the findings of some additional studies on two major aspects of the reception of Gerson in the Empire: (1) Gerson at Melk Abbey and (2) the reception of his writings via the University of Vienna. For example, in the conclusion of this chapter, the author still discusses the theory of Gerson's physical presence in Vienna as fiction (p. 141). Almost three decades ago, however, Michael H. Shank ("University and Church in Late Medieval Vienna: *modi dicendi* et operandi 1388-1421," in *Philosophy and Learning. Universities in the Middle Ages*, ed. M.J.F.M. Hoenen, J.H. Schneider, G. Wieland, Leiden/Boston 1995, pp. 43-59, at p. 55 n. 35) demonstrated that on 10 August 1418 Gerson was in Klosterneuburg, just over eleven kilometers from St Stephen's Cathedral. Not only was Gerson in Vienna, where he was offered a position as a professor in the Faculty of Theology, but he was also intensively read there. Indeed, leading figures in the Faculty, such as Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl, Peter of Pulkau, and John Grössel of Tittmoning, collected the Parisian Chancellor's books for their personal libraries (for example, ms. Wien ÖNB 3954, which Dinkelsbühl bequeathed to the library of the *Collegium Ducalem*). Appeal to an article published in 2014 entitled "La *Lectura Mellicensis* de Nicholas de Dinkelsbühl dans le sillage de l'esprit réformateur de Jean Gerson" would have provided new information on Gerson's reception at the University of Vienna and also about Gerson's thoughts on St. Joseph in his theological texts. None of the Viennese authors listed above appears in the book, which merely mentions Thomas Ebendorfer. Likewise, the dissemination of Gerson's manuscripts in Basel, particularly in the Dominican Library, where Albert Löffler considerably enriched the collection by copying and gathering Gerson's texts (which Giacomo Signore is investigating), is missing from this analysis. An scrutiny of the early reception of Jean Gerson in Eastern Europe is also absent, despite the fact that many of Gerson's manuscripts circulated in

Hungary and even, from the mid-fifteenth century, in Transylvania, where medieval library catalogues attest to a circle of Gerson readers on the periphery of Europe (see Adinel Dinca's findings). If much is lacking, some claims that are in the chapter are not backed up. For example, regarding the reception of Gerson in Italy, without strong evidence, Ficino (p. 132) is depicted as a fervent reader of Gerson solely based on a passage saying that the human being is the *nexus* between two horizons. But why would Ficino be reading Gerson here and not William of Auvergne, a popular thirteenth-century theologian (and bishop of Paris) who espoused the doctrine of *homo nexus* long before Gerson?

Although the conclusion of this chapter mentions an occurrence of the plague, no discussion is made about the fact that recurring epidemics might have impacted the reception of Gerson's treatise *Ars moriendi*. In fact, a few pages are dedicated to the treatise, but it is interpreted rather as a basic guide to preparing for death that would be of "great interest to historians of medicine and public health" (p. 90), inspired by Gerson's pastoral experience at the Hotel-Dieu, where he probably became familiar with people dying. Gerson's *Ars moriendi* enjoyed a wide reception mainly because it provided a simple answer to all of Europe, shaken by repeated episodes of plague, on how to accept a violent, rapid, and unpredictable death. Gerson wrote the treatise after surviving an illness that lasted a few months during a new wave of the plague in Bruges in 1400. It is surprising that Gersonian scholars have never linked this detail in Gerson's bibliography with his treatise about *la science de bien mourir*, which was not only translated into many vernacular languages but also inspired a new literary genre in the fifteenth century.

The second chapter, "The Protestant Reception of Gerson" (pp. 147-243), focuses on Luther's fervent reading of Gerson's works (pp. 149-171), complementing the picture with examples of his reception by Philipp Melanchthon (pp. 171-183), Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (pp. 183-188), Martin Bucer (pp. 188-192), Johannes Bugenhagen and Andreas Osiander (pp. 192-198), and Martin Chemnitz (pp. 199-207). This gallery of authors exhibits how Lutherans embraced Gerson: "as a prominent critic of the Roman Church, a true reformer, a precursor of the evangelical movement, or even a martyr for the Lutheran cause" (p. 210). The reception of the Chancellor of Paris is also traced in the camp of non-Lutheran Protestants via an investigation of references made by Jean Crespin and Simon Goulart (pp. 225-235), who were equally looking for a new spiritual model to consolidate a long-lasting community.

The third chapter, "The Catholic Reception of Gerson" (pp. 245-345), evaluates how and why the Chancellor's works in the Catholic camp during the sixteenth century were less attractive than among the Protestants. Different geographical contexts are investigated, such as in the Empire; the Low Countries; France, notably during the Gallican crisis (1552); Spain, especially in Salamanca, where Gerson was considered the forefather of international law, and also via the Spanish Illuminati, with special attention to Francisco de Osuna (pp. 305-312), John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila (pp. 312-315), who promoted the veneration of St. Joseph, strongly influenced by Gerson's reflections in his *Josephina*. One interesting aspect in the attraction to Gerson's ideas is the misattribution of *De imitatione Christi* to him. As a result of this error by early Jesuits, the treatise also circulated under the name *Gersonzito* (p. 317). The Jesuits embraced Gerson's spiritual model mainly for his pastoral ideas and his position on daily confession. The chapter ends with the Council of Trent, where Gerson's name was never explicitly mentioned, although "Gerson's pastoral innovations found continuity in Trent's final outcomes" (p. 337).

The fourth and last chapter, "The Reception of Gerson in England and Scotland" (pp. 347-434), explores different aspects of Gerson's dual legacy, namely the role he played in spreading the concept of equity in England and the impact of his new definition of *synderesis*, which apparently found echoes in many writings of English literature. One of the most

surprising examples of this reception is Thomas More (pp. 364-389), a fervent reader of Gerson, with whom he shared many ideas. More quoted extensively from the French author, although they did not share the same style, since “The Englishman’s humanist elegance contrasts sharply with Gerson’s scholastic expression” (p. 388). Nevertheless, the Chancellor’s texts can help us better decipher More’s writings.

The book’s conclusion explains the paradoxical situation of Gerson’s legacy, which is not linear since the circles of readers were “often in substantial disagreement and even in open conflict with one another” (p. 428). Only the variety of his writings and the reformist wave he unleashed can explain this situation. The considerable merit of this book is to offer an ample and detailed perspective of Gerson’s reception. The reader has the unique chance to find in one tome a wealth of evidence mapping out the trajectory of a reformist yet scholastic mind that inspired religious communities all over Europe for centuries.