

Il diavolo in Paradiso: Diritto, teologia e letteratura nel "Processus Satane"
(sec. XIV). Beatrice Pasciuta.

I libri di Viella 194. Rome: Viella, 2015. 270 pp. €26.

This is an extremely interesting volume, which aims to reevaluate a poorly known medieval text through an exhaustive analysis of its historical, cultural, and religious background. Written in the fourteenth century, the so-called *Processus Satanae* stages a fictitious legal battle in heaven between the devil and the Virgin Mary about the possession of the human race. Pasciuta shows a remarkable knowledge of the legal and theological intricacies founding the text, and also makes a convincing case for its cultural originality. In the short but informative introduction, Pasciuta stresses that this brief text, which has survived in two main versions, tries to doubt the redemption by submitting the Christian belief to a strictly legal reasoning, which leads to a fascinating dialogue between theological dogmas and the contemporary legal system. The *Processus Satanae* had a clearly didactic goal and was used in a variety of social contexts, law and theology schools, and also public places such as squares. It is a fascinating hybrid, at once play and narrative, which also makes an astute use of parody and paradox, if we consider, for example, that Christ plays two roles at once, supreme judge and lawmaker, who at times turns to the hypothetical audience to comment on what is happening on stage. The two basic Latin versions are reproduced in an appendix to the volume. Pasciuta interestingly underscores the intrinsically legal structure of Christian theology and points out that the core of *Processus Satanae* is the issue concerning the devil as owner of sinful souls, which leads her to approach human salvation less as redemption than as compensation for man's debt to God.

Pasciuta's study is divided into five main chapters, each with several subdivisions. The first section offers a detailed summary of the main phases of the trial, with long Italian translations of the most relevant passages. The second chapter deals with the history of the text, with special emphasis on its modern reception and the history of its various manuscripts. The third part studies the cultural context that produced the text, explaining how *Processus Satanae* must be placed in a well-defined legal tradition that staged hypothetical trials for didactic goals. Pasciuta also studies its sources, including medieval legends and apocryphal gospels. This is probably the most interesting section of Pasciuta's volume, because of its meticulous references to the various legal and theological textual allusions within the *Processus*. The fourth chapter dissects the legal

aspects of the *Processus*, focusing in particular on the structure of the procedure itself and the three main figures involved in the trial, especially the Virgin Mary, whose presence is contested by the fallen angel primarily because she is a woman, although Pasciuta explains in what legal circumstances a woman could actively participate in a trial. The *Processus* has the two contenders follow two different legal strategies. Where the devil pursues a strictly legal logic, which would lead to his possession of the human race, the Virgin Mary opts for *aequitas*—that is, the application of the law to the concrete case in question (120). Pasciuta underscores that the character of the Virgin does not always handle this approach in a coherent manner. The fifth chapter discusses the main theological points of the *Processus*. It analyzes the complex issue of divine justice, which is at once just and merciful, in contrast to the fallen angel's demands.

Pasciuta's work is very engaging and fascinating, but its structure is not totally convincing. Ideas are repeated in different parts of the book and the analyses of the theological background could have been more cohesive. Ideas, remarks, and comments about the legal and theological aspects of the *Processus* are always useful and enlightening but at times could have followed a stricter format. For instance, the study of the cultural context in chapter 3 at times does not differ from the examination of the theological points in chapter 5. However, this volume is certainly fascinating and necessary.

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