

DEMETRIO S. YOCUM, *Petrarch's Humanist Writing and Carthusian Monasticism. The Secret Language of the Self*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2013 (Medieval church studies, 26). Un vol. di pp. 310.

The *Medieval Church Studies* series presents studies that are founded on a traditional, close analysis of primary sources but which confront current research issues and adopt contemporary methodological approaches. *Petrarch's Humanist Writing and Carthusian Monasticism*, which appears as volume 26 in this series, does exactly this, and more. Most of the “more” lies in the combined Petrarchan and Carthusian perspective, an interdisciplinary approach “involving parallel readings of Petrarchan texts, early monastic and Carthusian primary sources, together with more recent theological reflections” (back cover blurb).

Regarding the first, the close analysis of primary sources, it is evident that the words of Petrarch and early Carthusian fathers define both the argument and the structure of the book; a book that is primarily a philological probe into late-medieval spiritual intellectuality. Yocum's close reading and lavish quotation (all in the original language with English translation) make his account basic but profound, with exactness of argumentation and a fortunate expressiveness as a result. The plan of the book equally follows the “secret language of the self” thread of the sources, with clarity and a certain simplicity as a result. Chapter 2 thus “rethinks solitude”: the practice of solitude and silence in Petrarch and Carthusian spirituality. Chapter 3 “rethinks *otium*”: cultivating soul through soil. Chapter 4 “rethinks liturgy”: Petrarch and the laicization of the Carthusian liturgy. Chapter 5 “rethinks reading and writing”: Petrarch and the Carthusian practice of silent preaching. Chapter 6 concludes with a reflection on Petrarch's humanism and the practice of kenotic writing, here “the true *vocatio/vacatio* of the public intellectual envisioned by Petrarch who is called to plumb the abysses of *undosi motus pectoris* (searching heart) to empty oneself,

finding God, and thus, one's true self” (p. 276).

With regard to current research issues, the author, with his dual reading of Petrarchan and Carthusian texts and his integration of humanist and monastic perspectives, confronts both Petrarchan and Carthusian scholarship. On the one hand, the Carthusian program of *vacate et videte* (Ps. 45) is at the heart of Petrarch's solitary writing (p. 58). On the other, his appropriation of religious contemplation for intellectual study secularizes ascetic solitude (p. 57). Consequently, the confrontation with monastic spirituality reveals a core inspiration of Petrarch's humanism, which indeed transcends classical key traits such as artistic literacy, clerical celibacy, and intellectual piety. At the same time, Petrarch's adherence to Carthusian ideology exemplifies how charterhouses “were usually ‘hubs’ of humanist intellectual activity” (p. 216). More generally, *Petrarch's Humanist Writing and Carthusian Monasticism* emphasizes the academic need for a spiritual analysis of humanist cultures. In the same vein, it underscores the necessity to distinguish traditional monastic rhetoric (“purity in silence”) from certain Carthusian realities (e.g., philosophy in seclusion), and to advance the recent emancipation of Carthusian studies (as witnessed by studies on local charterhouses, secular networks, or public performances) by analyses of Carthusian humanist cultures.

Yocum's methodological approach, thirdly, shows the advantages of a theological reading of Christian humanism and hermeneutics of the self. The use of essential theological works such as Nathan Mitchell's *Liturgy and the Social Sciences* or Josef Pieper's *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* is effective and refreshing in this context. Unfortunately, some important contributions are missing, such as Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* in the discussion on identity formation and the construction of a private retreat (p. 42). Others, for example Jean-Yves Lacoste's *Experience and the Absolute*, are perhaps too dominant in this book. But it is especially through Yocum's theological re-

thinking that it becomes clear that whereas Petrarch's clerical status hardly ever emerges as relevant (p. 142), his *cella* becomes the privileged site for the fashioning of his self (p. 83); his writing an alternative liturgical act (p. 175); and his *écriture* (ritual of reading and writing; textual performance) a substitute for *ecclesia* (sacramental community; p. 195). Original is Yocum's discovery of a detailed account of specific Carthusian practices in Petrarch's *De otio religioso* (p. 156); his renewed focus on the fundamental role played by the Liturgy of the Hours in Petrarch's *De vita solitaria* (p. 160); and his observation that in Petrarch's writings "bees" is not only a classical metaphor but also a real title for the Carthusians (p. 244).

Minor disadvantages in this book include the lazy abbreviation of book titles in the text (e.g., *Dvs.* for *De vita solitaria*); the absence of a concise biographical introduction to Petrarch as well as some author information on Demetrio Yocum – his own take on Derrida's "death of the author" (p. 208)?; and the paratactic title ("humanist writing and Carthusian monasticism") which confirms a duality that Yocum actually tries to resolve. It is a double irony, furthermore, that a slip of the pen may have the most illustrative value of this book. When Yocum writes that at the outset, the writing of Petrarch's *De otio religioso* (and to a certain extent his *De vita solitaria* and *Secretum*) "is intimately related with solitude, secrecy, and self-relection" (p. 196), this unintended neologism (for "self-reflection") actually captures best Petrarch's novel, humanist achievement of a solitary and secret "rereading" of his own self in the light of traditional sources. At any rate, Yocum's journey through Petrarch's carthusianism presents itself as a wonderful invitation to scholars of humanism to reflect on Carthusian roots; to Carthusians to rethink humanist fruits; and to intellectuals in general to reread their own selves when reading humanist and monastic sources.

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