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Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Vigiliae Christianae Supplements 120), Brill, Leiden 2013. ISBN: 978-90-04-24509-9. € 249.

Both in a historical and in a theological perspective the subject of this voluminous study (xx + 890 pp.) is most interesting. Ramelli investigates the roots and reception of the doctrine of God's universal restoration of his creation, including the ultimate salvation of all human beings. For this research, which took her fifteen years, beside her numerous publications on related and other themes, she studied the New Testament and subsequent Christian works in Greek, Latin, and Syriac up to the ninth century CE. In Western Christianity, Augustine's eventual repudiation of the doctrine of *apokatastasis* and his conviction that God's grace is given to those he predestines and elects to salvation, and that punishments in hell will have no end, were very influential. Therefore it is praiseworthy that Ramelli demonstrates to what extent this alternative doctrine was and is spread in East and West. She reviews apocryphal Christian texts, Irenaeus, Bardaisan, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, Methodius, Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius, Didymus of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ephrem the Syrian, the Cappadocian Fathers and Gregory of Nyssa's sister Macrina, Evagrius Ponticus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyril of Alexandria, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyrus, Marius Victorinus, Ambrosiaster, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, Rufinus, Augustine, John Cassian, Cassian the Sabaite, Philoxenus, Sudhaili, Ps. Dionysius, Maximus Confessor, John Eriugena, and far more authors to whom she devotes only one or a few pages. This does not imply that in all these authors she finds the doctrine of *apokatastasis* with the same clarity or to the same extent, and she also briefly discusses opponents to it. Apart from her research up to the ninth century, she incidentally refers to later Medieval authors such as Hildegard of Bingen, Hadewijch, and Julian of Norwich, and to theologians of the modern period, like Sophronius Sacharov, Jan Bonda (erroneously called a German pastor; he was Dutch), John Hick, Thomas Talbot, and Richard Bell. Her command of the numerous sources in both ancient and modern languages is impressive. It is clear that she did her research not as a detached historian, but in deep sympathy for the subject.

However, in spite of the positive remarks that should be made on this notable and instructive book, it is far from flawless. First, it does not have a full bibliography. One might find the titles of the numerous publications that Ramelli refers to through the index of modern authors, but since she refers to her own dazzling number of articles and books at least 300 times, there is no other choice but to leaf back, sometimes hundreds of pages, to the first reference in a footnote if one wants to know the full title and other data, especially in which journal or book an article has been published. In this respect the book is user-unfriendly. Another remark on references is yet more critical. As we may expect, Ramelli often refers to the editions of ancient sources that she investigates, but just as often she fails to do so. This is no problem for those who are acquainted with the ancient authors and know which editions are authoritative, but it is not friendly for those who first have to find out elsewhere which editions may have been used. For instance, it is clear that for detailed references to Rufinus' Latin translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* Caroline Hammond Bammel's critical edition has been used (*Aus der Geschichte der Lateinischen Bibel* 16, 33, 34), but neither her name nor the series is ever mentioned in this

context. In other instances Ramelli gives rather vague or erroneous references. According to the index she refers six times to this *Commentary* 4,10, quoting a most relevant passage about the power of Christ's cross which extends to humans and angels of past and future ages, but this should be 5,10, a chapter that counts 14 pages in Hammond's edition. For uninitiated readers this repeated reference is difficult to trace. Surprisingly, two more times Ramelli refers to the same passage as 5,10,187-195, which includes the lines in Hammond's edition. This is but an example. The index contains a reference to the same *Commentary* 67,70-76, although it has only ten books. Unfortunately, wherever I checked the sources, I found erroneous or incomplete references, and sometimes no reference at all. In addition, it is regrettable that from the index of ancient authors and sources Biblical references have been excluded, although numerous Biblical texts are discussed and referred to in this book. Another disadvantage is that the table of contents is extremely concise. If one wants to consult the book for a particular Church Father, one has to look in the index of ancient authors and sources to find on which pages he is quoted.

From such formal weaknesses I proceed to material aspects. An argument that comes back again and again is that in the New Testament, as in the Septuagint, αἰώνιος does not mean "eternal" unless it refers to God, but basically means "otherworldly", "belonging to the world to come". Such translations are possible indeed. Ramelli maintains that the term for true eternity is ἄιδιος, which belongs to the philosophical vocabulary and is only rarely used in Scripture. She argues that when NT texts speak about αἰώνιος fire or punishment, this term does not mean "eternal", and that this was understood by Greek Church Fathers; she generally interprets the duration of this expression as "long-lasting", with the possibility of purification through chastisement, which should lead sinners to post mortem repentance and salvation. In Latin, however, both αἰώνιος and ἄιδιος were translated as *aeternus* or *sempiternus*, "eternal", so that the distinction was lost. She also points out that with Aristotle, κόλασις means punishment in the interest of the sufferer, contrary to τιμωρία, which is inflicted in the interest of him who inflicts it and – according to Ramelli – is not found in the NT; yet she exaggerates that otherworldly punishment in the NT is *invariably* indicated by κόλασις, for in this sense it occurs there only in Matt 25:46 (and see 1 John 4:18, the sole other NT occurrence), and as for τιμωρία she overlooks Hebr. 10:29. However this may be, her observations on αἰώνιος are certainly interesting, for if she is right, many Bible translations, even recent ones, would have to be revised. In the same way Ramelli interprets even Mark 9:47-48, about *gehenna* "in which their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched", in the sense of purification that will have an end. In response to her exegeses, I would underline that αἰώνιος means "eternal" when it refers to God. This means that this term at least does have this connotation as well. She correctly points out that the Gospel of Matthew contains explicit sayings about God's love and mercy for all people, including evildoers (5:45; 19:26), but this does not imply that such texts should influence the interpretation of stern passages about αἰώνιος fire, which lack any allusion to a punishment limited in time which should serve as purification of the punished. One gets the impression that Jesus or the evangelists wanted to intimidate the audience by threatening them with everlasting punishments in order to lead them to conversion in the present life, and did not deal there with their possible hope for universal restoration. The philosophical term ἄιδιος simply did not belong to their vocabulary, so that their use of αἰώνιος does not imply that they wanted to distinguish between these terms as later Greek Church Fathers did. Differently from these Gospels, the universalistic outlook is clear in the Gospel of John and in the Pauline epistles, as Ramelli demonstrates convincingly. It seems

that the Greek Fathers who thought that there will be an end to αἰώνιος punishments introduced this idea from the Johannine and Pauline universalism to Matthew and Mark as well, but this is not how NT scholars work nowadays. Furthermore, Ramelli's exegesis of Matt 17:11 and Mark 9:12, which holds that Elijah comes first after which it is *God* who will restore (ἀποκαταστήσει / ἀποκαθιστάνει) all beings, is far-fetched and syntactically extremely unlikely. That Elijah restores all things simply alludes to Mal 3:23 LXX, which text she does not take into account. On the basis of the Harklean (Syriac) translation and the Bohairic version of Matt 17:11 she reconstructs a Greek variant reading, "and all beings will be restored" – by God –, but if this has ever existed, it only testifies to the reception history of this saying, not to the original text. In her discussion of the Revelation of John, Ramelli again proposes that the lake of fire is meant for purification, as after the description of judgment and punishment the gentile nations will still share in the new Jerusalem, being healed by the tree of life (20:15; 21:24-22:2). To be sure, this suggests an eventual *apokatastasis*. She does not take Rev 21:27 into consideration, however, which excludes those who practise abomination or falsehood, and limits salvation to those who are written in the book of life.

For patristic works, Ramelli provides her own translations of the Greek, Latin, and Syriac sources, but sometimes her renderings are rather free, apparently to make them fit her subject. For instance, in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses* 5,20,1, *homines* is translated as "all human beings", as an example of his universalism. Yet this passage does not deal with universal salvation, but with the message of salvation of human beings that has been entrusted to Irenaeus' church. *Adv. Haereses* 5,36,2 deals with the new heaven and the new earth, *in quibus novus perseverabit homo*, which is translated as "in which the new humanity will remain forever". Perhaps the purport of this translation is correct, since Irenaeus' theology of recapitulation certainly has universalistic overtones, but he may also rather have pointed to the person who believes the Gospel and is renewed by Christ (the *novus homo* of Eph 4:24). In more cases *homo* is translated as "humanity", but often Irenaeus then deals with the human being who believes in Christ. It comes as a surprise that, notwithstanding her biased translations, Ramelli rightly concludes that "Irenaeus does not formulate a doctrine of universal salvation nor a theory of universal *apokatastasis*".

Her lengthy discussion of Origen's view of the *apokatastasis* is generally sound, barring erroneous or missing references, but one aspect is in need of clarification. She rightly does not side with those scholars who neglect Origen's hypothesis about several ages that may come after the end of the present age or world, but she does not explain why Origen was accused of teaching new falls in the subsequent ages, falls due to the free will of the creatures who might therefore fall away from God again. After a quotation from Origen about the universal restoration Ramelli correctly writes that in the final *apokatastasis* no further falls will take place, but if *further* falls will not take place then, the question remains – and is not properly discussed – what Origen, in his "zetetic" theology, thought about possible new falls in the coming ages preceding the ultimate *apokatastasis*. His hypothesis of repeated falls in a succession of aeons reappears in Evagrius, and there again Ramelli avoids to discuss the reason of such new falls.

Concerning Methodius of Olympus, Ramelli is convinced that he was an origenian and believed in the universal restoration, but as with Irenaeus, the respective contexts of seemingly universalistic texts about the human being demonstrate that Methodius usually refers to the salvation of Christians. It is perplexing to read that in Methodius' dialogue *De resurrectione*

Origen is never mentioned or rejected, whereas in this work he is regularly referred to – both positively and critically – and sometimes even quoted at length.

Ramelli is aware that universal salvation is not overtly taught by a goodly number of the authors she studies, and she may be right in surmising that in their writings this doctrine was not explicated for pastoral reasons, because it might create lazy believers if they knew that they could count on universal salvation anyway, though the authors themselves were still personally inclined to it. But sometimes she detects an inclination for a limited *apokatastasis* comprehending all Christians. This holds, among others, for Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Jerome, and Maximus of Turin. This raises the question how far this should still be called *apokatastasis* in the sense of universal restoration; in any case it causes a semantic confusion.

As I wrote, this book is voluminous, and it testifies to a tremendous erudition. However, there is also much repetition in it. The same patristic passages are referred to or quoted time and again in order to show that certain authors are in line with Origen or Gregory of Nyssa. A good teacher knows that repetition is important, but in this book a more selective repetition of arguments and quotations would have been preferable. Moreover, often Ramelli's method is to discuss and quote as many relevant passages as possible of the respective authors who adhere to the doctrine of universal *apokatastasis*, instead of discussing a few fundamental texts at length and referring to all the other testimonies briefly or in footnotes. She seems to aim at completeness, but this endeavour can be counterproductive.

In spite of all the critical remarks which do cause a certain reservation toward this book, the author deserves praise for her impressive effort from which very much can still be learned.

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