

is a key point to the chapter, for Blum uses the notion of revelation taken up by one of Lull's followers, Sabundus, who sees religious belief as that which 'dignifies' humanity. Montaigne appears soon after, for in his *Essays*, the French skeptic writes an 'Apology for Raymond Sebond' which, as Blum argues, is laced with irony and vivid critique. Blum concludes the chapter, by describing how Montaigne stands against both Sabundus and Lull, for Montaigne is convinced that the world is ultimately unintelligible, and that natural theology will ultimately leave the spiritual pilgrim in a cataclysm of faith and doubt.

Coluccio Salutati is the subject of Chapter Four, and the reader is exposed to some wonderful ideas from this 14th Century Italian philosopher. We read one of Salutati's letters where he debates action and inaction, and comes to the somewhat tenuous conclusion that a person is torn in life between planning for a future that may never come and surrendering to Providence for whatever shall be, the latter tending almost to pious indolence. As the chapter progresses, Boccaccio and Petrarca are included in the discussion to assess the role of poetry in theology with the conclusion that Salutati envisages literature as having a theological dignity, something that is inherent to linguistic form. This concept is important for, taken to another level, one could argue that the pagan fables of the Ancient World could have an almost Christian application, a return to what Cusa calls different Rites of religious revelation.

In Chapter Five, we see Blum extend the notion of religion and language through the writings of Lorenzo Valla. Blum opens the chapter powerfully with what he perceives as the crux of Valla's thought: piety through grammar. As Blum states in the conclusion of this chapter, Valla's approach was 'to penetrate each word for the sake of reaching the referent, the meaning itself, the truth' (p. 92). If Shakespeare questioned what was in a name Valla's question was far broader – what power is held in the word? According to a sliding scale of importance as to what the word denotes, 'God' is the most powerful of all possible names, and all words refer back to that highest Word, in order to establish their place in the genealogy of language.

So what can be said in sum of Blum's text? There are many aspects of this text to like but they all relate to the wonderful ideas it contains from so many great minds. Blum should be congratulated for this. It is a joy to read through these ideas and to be exposed to such a treasure. However the book is thoroughly undermined by its brevity, which forces so much that must be said into such a confined space. The text is also constrained by a convoluted style of communication. This being said, *Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance* should find a respected place in academic libraries as a useful source book which points toward other avenues for future research.

ANDREW THOMAS KANIA

**THE ANNALS OF THE FOUR MASTERS: IRISH HISTORY, KINGSHIP AND SOCIETY IN THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY** by Bernadette Cunningham, *Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2010, pp. 348, £45*

The *Annals of the Four Masters*, compiled in the early seventeenth century, were established two hundred years later as the text which perhaps best encapsulated the vitality and precociousness of the indigenous civilization swept away by English conquest. Bernadette Cunningham in her meticulous study shows why the later reputation was acquired. It owed much, she suggests, to cursory – or even no – reading of the work. This is not a failing of which she can be accused. Better than any previous scholar, she uncovers the complex processes through which the *Annals* emerged and the multiplicity of sources on which they were

based. Moreover, the compilation is set assuredly in the ideological, confessional, and political contexts of its time. The result is an analysis which, if occasional details may subsequently be amplified or modified, is likely in all essentials to prove definitive.

The contribution of one of the quartet of 'masters', Michéal Ó Cleirigh, overshadows that of the other three. Cunningham patiently establishes the nature of the collaboration between compilers and scribes, and indeed between the annalists and the custodians of the documents on which they relied. Ó Cleirigh combined several of the characteristics that underpinned the entire enterprise. He belonged to a dynasty of scholars and so inherited a familiarity with the materials from which any authoritative history of Gaelic Ireland was to be constructed. In addition, the family, although its branches stretched across much of the island, was rooted in the North West. And, indeed it was to that region, in the friary of Bundrowes (County Donegal), that the compilers headed by Ó Cleirigh returned to complete their history. As a consequence of these connections, the dominant family of the area, Uí Domhnaill (O'Donnell), featured prominently, notably in the sixteenth-century sections, with their struggles against their nearest rivals, the O'Neills.

Ó Cleirigh's position within the hereditary learned caste helped his researches. Cunningham offers a detailed account of the manuscripts used by Ó Cleirigh, their owners, and the contemporary scholars whose expertise was enlisted. What emerges is an interest shared across the deepening confessional fissures in Ireland. Scholars committed to the promotion of Protestantism, such as Archbishop James Ussher and Sir James Ware, assisted. On their side, the Four Masters eschewed the aggressive polemics that marked other literary efforts to rehabilitate an earlier Ireland. Nevertheless, the Counter-Reformation, with its redefinitions and revitalization of Catholicism, is seen as important to the conception and writing of the *Annals*. The Ó Cleirighs had long-standing links with the Franciscan order. Michéal Ó Cleirigh himself became a lay brother, in which capacity not only could he tap into the network of Franciscan houses within Ireland, but benefit from the dynamism pulsing through its continental institutions. Among the latter, the most important was St Anthony's College, founded at Louvain in 1607. The college was intended to energize Catholic Ireland. To that end, it sponsored a programme of instruction, which included the composition and publishing of devotional helps. More ambitious still was the intention to create an authoritative account of Christianity in Ireland, with appropriate stress on its many saints and scholars. Cunningham demonstrates that the *Annals* belonged to this project being overseen by John Colgan.

As well as deploying formidable technical and linguistic skills, Cunningham has a sure grasp of the secular and cultural politics of the seventeenth century. In the face of a more assertive and effective Protestant state in Ireland, the older worlds of Gaelic lordship were shrinking. Yet, throughout much of Europe, including the Spanish Netherlands, Protestantism lost ground and worshippers were recovered for Catholicism. If one function of the completed *Annals* would be to celebrate a vanishing order, another was to engage not just the sympathy but the active support of Catholics across Europe. For this reason, it is probable that the *Annals of the Four Masters* were intended for publication at Louvain. Indeed, one of the two surviving original manuscripts may have been meant for the printer's copy. However, the scale of the edition and the intervention of other priorities delayed any printing. Only in the nineteenth century, thanks to the foundation in Dublin of learned societies and the urgency in some quarters to work through an avowedly nationalist agenda, was an edition published: an edition, by John O'Donovan, which, as Cunningham gently hints, is ripe for replacing.

So, with exact scholarship and speculative brio, the minutely local, the resonantly national, and the international dimensions of the Four Masters' work are set out. As in her earlier study of another leading Catholic historian in seventeenth-century Ireland, Seathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating), Cunningham has cut away the thickets of luxuriant verbiage that have grown up to obscure these influential but complex histories. Now, thanks to her efforts, anachronism and nationalist mythologizing are banished. In the clearer light, the achievements of the Four Masters, so far from being diminished, are enhanced, as is Cunningham's reputation as the foremost expositor of these Irish historical traditions.

TOBY BARNARD

**ANALYTIC THEOLOGY: NEW ESSAYS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF THEOLOGY**  
 edited by Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, *Oxford University Press*, 2009,  
 pp. x + 316, £50 hbk

This is a challenging, rich and stimulating book. Michael Rea's 'Introduction' clarifies the meaning of analytic theology and offers an extended meditation on possible objections to it, objections addressed by later contributions. The book divides into four sections. The first presents the project of analytic theology, the second examines historical cases relevant to this project, the third discusses data for theology (scripture, reason and experience), while the final section returns to addressing objections.

Rea notes that much contemporary theology, insofar as it engages with philosophy, uses philosophy from the continental tradition. He also notes that philosophers of religion in the analytical tradition have turned their attention to theological topics. Indeed, 'analytical theology is just the activity of approaching theological topics with the ambitions of an analytical philosopher' (p. 7). He wants the collection to stimulate an interdisciplinary discussion about the value of such an approach. He charts the typical features of analytical style – write in a manner that is formalizable, prioritize clarity and coherence, avoid metaphor, use well understood primitive concepts and concepts analyzable in terms of these, and think of conceptual analysis as having an evidential function (p. 5). He notes that many think analytical philosophers are substantively committed to the epistemological position of foundationalism and the metaphysical position of metaphysical realism. While this is not so, it is true that the tasks of clarifying the scope and nature of knowledge and of providing true explanatory theories of phenomena are generally shared. But there are no substantive philosophical theses which separate analytical philosophers from their rivals. Objections to an analytical approach include the charge that it is ahistorical, is committed to ontotheology (which makes God an explanatory posit and removes any sense of mystery), undermines the life of faith with its rationalism, treats issues only amenable to this style, and avoids richer, messier topics, producing mere simulacra (intellectual creations which mimic the true theological topics).

Rea believes these objections can be answered, but that they deserve sympathetic attention. Oliver Crisp's chapter 'On Analytic Theology' covers much of the same territory and he is sympathetic to the view that the kind of work done by the great theologians of the past is now being done by philosophers. William J. Abraham's 'Systematic Theology as Analytic Theology' is punchier in its criticisms of contemporary theology. The most provocative essay in this respect is Randall Rauser's 'Theology as a Bull Session'. This employs Harry Frankfurt's celebrated conceptual analysis of bullshit as a kind of discourse which doesn't care about truth, further distinguishing between kinds which are intentionally