

Henrik Otto. *Vor und frühreformatorische Tauler-Rezeption. Annotationen in Drucken des späten 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts.* Göttersloh: Göttersloher Verlagshaus, 2003. 358 pp. No price listed, cloth, ISBN 978-3-579-01648-1.

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One of the many sub-specialties within Luther research is the examination of the reformer's early theology in the context of late medieval thought. This 2000 Göttingen dissertation was inspired by Luther's early enthusiasm for the ideas of the fourteenth-century Dominican mystic Johannes Tauler. Henrik Otto has two goals for his study: the more general one of describing how late medieval readers understood Tauler's ideas, and the specific one of comparing this "typical" reception of Tauler with that of Luther and his associates in Wittenberg in the years preceding and immediately following the posting of the ninety-five theses. His method for determining how Tauler was understood is a careful analysis of marginalia found in the earliest printed editions of Tauler's German sermons, including the lengthy annotations made by Luther himself in 1515-16. His results illustrate both the insights to be gained from and the limitations of the use of marginalia as a historical source.

The preparatory work that must be done for a study of this nature is significant. Otto lays the foundation for his analysis of the marginalia in two introductory chapters. In the first he describes the manuscript preservation and propagation of Tauler's sermons through the fifteenth century, leading up to the two pre-Reformation printed editions, published in 1498 and 1508. Almost all of the identifiable owners of the extant copies

were monastic libraries. Otto makes a plausible case for Tauler's attractiveness to an audience comprised chiefly of clergy, both secular and especially regular, and he argues that the marginalia in the extant copies are therefore representative of the work's late medieval readership. In the second chapter, Otto discusses the marginalia and their authors. In order to prevent "contamination" of his study of late medieval marginalia, he excludes from consideration any annotations that cannot be identified on paleographic grounds as having been written in the early sixteenth century. Comments on or interactions with the passage at hand are relatively infrequent in the books; most marginalia consist of ways of drawing a reader's attention to a particular passage, such as underlining or a "nota bene." For Otto's purposes these markings are sufficient, because they highlight the portions of Tauler's thought that resonated with late medieval readers. Otto identifies thirty-seven different readers from the appropriate time period who left marginalia of some kind on a significant proportion of Tauler's sermons. The marginalia in turn range from as few as nineteen comments to well over two thousand, these last from the hand of Luther's colleague and later opponent Andreas Karlstadt. Karlstadt is one of the few readers who can be identified, and the majority of the authors of the marginalia remain unknown. Otto includes, as an appendix, a descrip-

tion of the 107 extant copies of the two pre-Reformation editions of Tauler's sermons, along with sample reproductions of the marginalia.

The heart of Otto's study is his analysis of those elements of Tauler's sermons highlighted by the marginalia. These fall into two groups: central themes in Tauler's work, and aspects less important to Tauler but that are particularly emphasized by his late medieval readers. In every case, Otto provides a broader context for understanding both Tauler and his readers by comparing their ideas to the German sermons of Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg as well as to the popular late medieval devotional work, *Hortulus animae*. Otto argues that by the end of the Middle Ages there was very little interest in the speculative and mystical features of Tauler's theology. He notes that Tauler's readers were drawn to passages discussing humility and self-abnegation, the necessity of suffering and especially his "passion piety," and his discussion of *Anfechtung* or trials. They interpreted Tauler's ideas, however, not as stages in the soul's mystical ascent to God but rather as elements of late medieval piety more generally. Other key aspects of Tauler's mysticism, such as the mystical union of the soul with God, received very little attention from his late medieval readers. Instead, they were drawn to "side issues" discussed by Tauler that did not pertain directly to his mystical theology, for example his Eucharistic piety or, particularly important for a monastic audience, the relationship between external actions and internal motivation.

After establishing this "baseline" of Tauler's reception in the early sixteenth century, Otto turns specifically to Luther and his circle in Wittenberg. Both Luther and his later colleague Justus Jonas left annotations in a copy of Tauler's sermons owned by Johann Lang, Luther's fellow Augustinian and the reformer of Erfurt. Luther's marginalia differ significantly from those of his contemporaries because they are detailed interactions with Tauler's theology. Luther's comments

demonstrate that he was reading Tauler not simply for devotional purposes but also for theological content, a fact reinforced by the Reformer's later references to Tauler in his lectures on Romans and the Psalms. Although he was not interested in Tauler's mysticism, Luther was attracted to Tauler's understanding of *Anfechtung* and more generally his emphasis on the internalization of prayer and repentance. Otto therefore sees a connection between Luther's study of Tauler and the theology underlying the Ninety-five Theses of 1517. Karlstadt was more influenced by the mystical aspects of Tauler's sermons, particularly his concepts of *Gelassenheit* and suffering, while both Jonas and Lang were more typical in their devotional approach to Tauler. Otto also examines the marginalia of Johann Eck, Luther's earliest Catholic opponent. Luther's praise of Tauler prejudiced Eck against the late medieval mystic, but after finally reading Tauler's sermons in the early 1520s Eck apparently moved to a more neutral position.

Otto's conclusions about Tauler's reception, either by late medieval readers generally or Luther specifically, are neither surprising nor entirely new. However, his examination of marginalia give a new perspective on late medieval religious thought that complements other more traditional methodologies. Otto has done everything in his power to ensure a trustworthy interpretation of the markings left by readers of Tauler's sermons. His discussion of the early editions and of the books themselves are fascinating side trips into the areas of manuscript transmission, publishing history, book ownership, and paleography. Ultimately, though, the question arises whether the number of surviving copies is large enough to support the conclusions that Otto draws from studying them. Simple survival of a small proportion of the total copies does not guarantee that this sample is representative of the whole, and in fact it may skew the results in a certain direction. It is not surprising, for instance, that most extant copies of Tauler's sermons belonged to monaster-

ies. One wonders if the marginalia made by the thirty-some mostly anonymous monastic readers can bear the weight of determining the typical late medieval understanding of Tauler. But beggars cannot be choosers, and late medieval and early modern historians must find creative ways to exploit the sources that they have. Otto's study is a textbook example of how one ought to go about examining and interpreting marginalia as a means of both moving attention away from key figures and for placing the thought of those figures into a broader context.

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