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Review of "Quodlibeta septem by William of Ockham" ed. Joseph C. Wey, C.S.B.

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Quodlibeta septem by William of Ockham; Joseph C. Wey

Review by: R. James Long

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WILLIAM OF OCKHAM, *Quodlibeta septem*, ed. Joseph C. Wey, C.S.B. (Guillelmi de Ockham Opera theologica, 9.) St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: St. Bonaventure University, Franciscan Institute, 1980. Pp. 43*, 838. \$50.

THE *Quodlibeta septem* of William of Ockham has long been recognized as one of the principal sources of his theological and philosophical teaching. Representing his most mature thought on issues ranging from the unicity of God to the intuitive knowledge of nonexistent objects, the 170 questions in this work are at once more focused (or more radical, in Gilson's words) and less prolix than the parallel questions in his earlier *Sentence Commentary*.

Despite its importance the *Quodlibeta septem* has not been edited since 1491 (reissued in facsimile at Louvain in 1962), an edition incidentally that was under the care either of Gabriel Biel himself or a companion of his. All the more welcome then is Father Joseph Wey's edition, the ninth volume in the Opera theologica series emanating from the Franciscan Institute and a worthy companion to its predecessors. And a near flawless piece of work it is — a first reading turned up but a single typographical error (*igitnr* for *igitur* on p. 500, line 9).

Wey's introduction is complete and informative. Following the listing and description of the thirteen manuscripts that contain the text (only four completely) and the three fifteenth-century editions, the editor draws up the *stemma codicum*, noting the proximate relationship of his Codex A (Paris, B.N., lat. 16,398) to the archetype. Though more recent than most (*recentior, non deterior*), A is accorded the place of preeminence in Wey's recension.

Wey has assiduously tracked down the sources and parallel texts in Ockham's predecessors and contemporaries. Especially prominent among these latter is the little-known Franciscan Walter of Chatton, whose connection with the *Quodlibeta* is intimate and multiform. Although mentioned by name but once, there are clear references to Chatton's *Reportatio* in sixty-eight of the questions, ranging over all the quodlibets; and Wey admits that there are probably other texts that escaped his notice. At times Ockham responds to arguments articulated by Chatton, at other times defends himself against attacks by his confrere, and at yet other times employs Chatton's arguments in support of his own positions.

On the question as to whether the quodlibets were merely literary exercises or the fruits of *viva voce* disputation, Wey argues convincingly for the latter. To the objection that the Oxford statutes specified that only a master could preside at a disputation (Ockham, for reasons unknown, had never obtained his degree), Wey answers that the disputation could have taken place, not in the university, but in a religious house — a not uncommon practice.

The house Wey has in mind is the Franciscan convent in London. In the absence of more solid information, he conjectures that Ockham resided in the London convent from 1321, after completing his studies at Oxford, until he departed for Avignon in 1324. Chatton is known to have been in residence during the same period and Wey thinks it probable that he was present at the disputations and even participated as a *respondens*.

Several questions of the sixth and seventh quodlibets (specifically 6.1–7 and 7.9) contain references to the first report of the papal examining commission and were therefore composed at Avignon, this time without the oral disputation having taken place. The entire work, Wey concludes, was redacted at Avignon, at which time Ockham would have had before him a copy of Chatton's *Reportatio*.

For the rest, the apparatus conforms with the high editorial standards set by earlier volumes in the series, and the indices, especially those dealing with authors and works and with doctrine, are highly useful. Finally, not the least among the virtues of this book is its layout: the print eminently readable, the variant readings and notes conveniently placed at the bottom of each page, and the binding handsome. This particular product of the Inceptor's labors has never been so accessible.

Virtually my only reservation is that Wey does not cite the more recent and critical editions of the *Corpus Christianorum* and the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* for a number of Augustine's writings. This inexplicable preference for Migne's *Patrologia* in the case of the Augustinian corpus does not obtain for other writers (Anselm, for example, is cited according to the Schmitt edition). Also, and unaccountably, *sancti* in all of its cases is capitalized, whereas *philosophi* (except where the reference is clearly to Aristotle) receives no such special treatment. Is this practice intended to reflect Ockham's bias? The reader is left guessing.

"Whatever the modifications still to come as his works are properly edited," Gordon Leff wrote recently, "it is inconceivable that they will alter the configuration of Ockham's thought." As accurate as this judgment may be, it by no means detracts from Father Wey's accomplishment. Scholars, translators, and students at long last have a reliable text of a major work of a philosopher now more than ever in vogue. As a wise old professor of mine was wont to say: studies come and go, but an edition well done is forever. This edition surely has a long life ahead of it.

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