

2015

A CHRISTIAN IN TOGA: Boethius— Interpreter of Antiquity and Christian Theologian. By Claudio Moreschini

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Recommended Citation

Kolb, Robert (2015) "A CHRISTIAN IN TOGA: Boethius— Interpreter of Antiquity and Christian Theologian. By Claudio Moreschini," *Concordia Journal*: Vol. 41: No. 2, Article 21.

Available at: <http://scholar.csl.edu/cj/vol41/iss2/21>

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A CHRISTIAN IN TOGA: Boethius—Interpreter of Antiquity and Christian Theologian. By Claudio Moreschini. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014. 155 pages. Hardcover. \$90.00.

Boethius was a key figure in the transition from the ancient world and patristic presentation of the Christian faith to later scholastic expressions of theology. A consul of the city of Rome and *magister officiorum*, as well as a leading intellectual, at the court of the Gothic emperor Theodoric, Boethius is most famous for his *Consolation of Philosophy*, composed in prison as he awaited execution at Theodoric's hand. Moreschini effectively argues that his oft-overlooked earlier works, both on the quadrivium, on logic, and particularly on several topics of Christian theology, reveal how the world of thought fostered by Neoplatonists, pagan and Christian, was being integrated into theology by leading Christian thinkers of the early sixth century, among whom Boethius's works have won him high standing.

Moreschini's careful reading of and detailed engagement with the interpretations of more than fifteen modern scholars, combined with briefer examination of many other students of Boethius's thought, lead readers into the sixth-century mind and milieu of this unique lay theologian in this volume. The book is essentially an extended bibliographical essay with clear guidance from the author as to how Boethius is to be understood. Moreschini cautions against imposing on the sixth century later evaluations of the relationship, even rivalry, of philosophy and theology, thus correcting and clarifying the claims of modern historians who

viewed the period through the lens of their own times.

The core of Moreschini's argument arises out of his judicious analysis of Boethius's use of Augustine in his earlier theological opuscula, which include a catechism and four other treatises addressing the heresies of Nestorius and Eutychus, Trinitarian doctrine, and the participation of the believer in God. Augustine and others in the Neoplatonic tradition, both Christian and non-Christian, shaped much of the framework of Boethius's thought. Moreschini traces in detail where and how the works of the bishop of Hippo, Marius Victorinus, John the Deacon, Macrobius, and others influenced Boethius.

Although Moreschini is convinced that Boethius preserved the biblical sense of the personal in his doctrine of God, the marks of a contrasting Neoplatonic way of conceiving of the "*summmum bonum*"—note the neuter!—as an impersonal entity seem all too evident in this presentation of Boethius's works. To use H. Richard Niebuhr's classification, his "Christ" seems "of culture" and of a culture that at its root had no grasp of the personal nature of the emotional God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who became human as Jesus. Apologetics is a necessary part of the Christian witness to the world, and Christians inevitably translate the biblical message into the thought worlds of their own time and place. Moreschini's Boethius indeed tried that, but this study demonstrates how illusory that effort can be in view of the radical difference in fundamental presuppositions between the message of Scripture and, in this case, the Neoplatonic world of thought.

Robert Kolb