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Melodie Harris Eichbauer, *Law in a Culture of Theology. The Use of Canon Law by Parisian Theologians, ca. 1120– ca. 1220*, Routledge, London-New York, 2025.

*Law in a Culture of Theology*, Melodie Eichbauer's latest monograph, examines the relationship between theological and canonistic culture in northern France during the formative phase of canonical collections and the diffusion of Gratian's *Decretum*.

Renowned not only for her scholarly output but also for her editorial and organizational activities—including major collective volumes, her involvement with the *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law*, and her role within the *Iuris Canonici Medii Aevi Consociatio*—Eichbauer in this work extends and deepens a research trajectory already articulated in earlier projects. In particular, the book builds on the collaborative project “Codes, Communities, and Church: The Cultural Contexts of Medieval Law”, directed with Abigail Firey, as well as on the collected volume *The Use of Canon Law in Ecclesiastical Administration, 1000–1234*, co-edited with Danica Sumerlin. In the introduction to that collection, the editors emphasized that «While law and theology were once viewed separately, recent research has instead demonstrated the close connections between the two disciplines», drawing attention to the pivotal role of northern France, where «the boundaries between law and theology were blurred throughout the long twelfth century» (p. 16). These are the chronological and geographical coordinates that set the stage for the present study.

Building on the well-established historiographical insight into the close connections between law and theology, Eichbauer adopts a distinctive methodological perspective. Rather than concentrating on jurists' engagement with theological thought—as recently done, for Gratian, by Atria Larson and Ian Wei—she subjects the relationship between law and theology to a kind of “stress test” by turning to the pastoral and penitential writings of major twelfth-century theologians. Her aim is to determine if and how these thinkers addressed legal questions and categories: which aspects of law attracted their attention, what strategies they employed in deploying legal arguments, what citation practices they adopted, and to which audiences their legal discourse was ultimately addressed.

The chronological scope of the book is, as indicated in the subtitle, approximately spanning 1120 to 1220. In practice, however, the first chapter (“Setting the Stage: Sharing and Producing Legal Collections in Northern France, ca. 1050–ca. 1130”) reaches further back in time. Drawing on a careful

synthesis of the existing scholarship—particularly the works of Kuttner, Lefebvre-Teillard, and Weigand—while also offering several original insights, Eichbauer reconstructs the emergence of the Parisian canonistic milieu from the early formation of the University of Paris onward. While the *terminus a quo* is set around 1050, the *terminus ad quem* is marked by a decisive turning point in the institutional history of the university: Honorius III's bull *Super speculam*, that led to a gradual impoverishment of juridical debate in Paris. This chronological horizon acquires particular significance as it immediately precedes both the "Great Dispersion" of 1229–1231 and the arrival of the mendicant orders at the University.

After the opening chapter, devoted—as noted—to the preceding eight decades, the following one ("Theologians and Their Engagement with Legal Knowledge") lays out the central themes of the book and clarifies its methodological approach. Eichbauer argues that «at the heart of theologians' use of legal sources was a common intellectual tradition in which they engaged, a tradition in which the lines between theology and law blurred as they occupied the same academic space» (p. 50). Within this shared milieu, figures such as «Hugh of St. Victor, Ivo, the compiler of the *Panormia*, Peter Lombard, and Gratian travelled in the same intellectual circles, drawing on similar sources and arguments» (p. 59).

Clarified the general perspective, the five chapters that follow develop the analysis through a series of carefully constructed case studies. These address, respectively, marriage—examined through the writings of Hugh of Saint Victor and Peter Lombard alongside northern French canonical collections; excommunication, through the *Summa de sacramentis et animae conciliis* of Peter the Chanter; the crusades and the struggle against heresy, as reflected in the penitential writings of Robert of Courçon; homicide, as treated in the *Liber Poenitentialis* of Robert of Flamborough; and finally avarice (theft, usury, and simony), analyzed through the *Summa confessorum* of Thomas of Chobham.

The decision to focus on a limited number of authors and to devote a chapter to each of them allows Eichbauer to reconstruct in detail the intellectual and institutional environments in which they operated. Attention is paid to their diverse roles—as university masters, priests, judge-delegates, confessors, papal legates, etc.—and to the ways in which their administrative, pastoral, and teaching responsibilities interacted with their legal interests. In this sense, the empirical chapters confirm the book's initial methodological premises, emphasizing the need to situate legal knowledge within the concrete activities of individual authors and showing how expertise in canon law served as a key intellectual and professional asset.

Across these case studies, a consistent pattern emerges. As Eichbauer notes with regard to marriage, «theology and law asked similar questions about the sacraments and they drew upon similar, if not the same, material sources» (p. 63) and, more fundamentally, that «theologians thought about

these topics [...] not simply through a singular disciplinary framework, but within an intellectual climate that brought the disciplines together, which they then adapted, as needed, to their working environment» (p. 111).

Theologians, therefore, «were not walled off from, but rather immersed in, legal thought», sharing with jurists a “same intellectual space” that fostered cross-pollination (pp. 225–227). Within this environment, the different authors are distinguished less by the presence or absence of legal interest than by the nature of their activities: «while there was a uniform interest in law, there was not a uniform use of the law» (p. 232).

The book’s concluding pages inevitably recall the legendary tradition that portrayed Gratian and Peter Lombard as twins (with Peter Comestor sometimes added, in later medieval lore, as a third brother), a narrative emblematic of the perceived kinship between canon law and theology. Eichbauer’s study effectively reaffirms this “genetic” bond between the two disciplines. The importance of this perspective lies in its capacity to move beyond abstract claims of disciplinary interaction and to anchor the relationship between law and theology in concrete practices, institutional settings, and lived forms of expertise. Her principal merit, therefore, lies in its ability to combine high-level reflection on conceptual categories with a careful reconstruction of books and authors, professional trajectories, and the practical dimensions of bureaucratic activity. In doing so, the volume succeeds in situating canon law within what Eichbauer aptly terms the «human context of the law» (p. 27)—a context in which canon law emerges, to borrow Hostiensis’ well-known formulation, as a «scientia non pure theologica sive civilis, sed utrique participans», a form of knowledge «humana, quasi communis ex spiritu et corpore constituta».

Faced with the *homo viator*, theologians and canonists encountered the same problems and drew on the same doctrinal authorities: the *cura animarum*—whether concerning the legitimacy of the sacraments or the classification of penalties and sins—required a shared vocabulary and a common conceptual toolkit, whose development is excellently reconstructed in this study.