

Jeremias Drexel's 'Christian Zodiac,' ed. and trans. Nicholas J. Crowe. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013. viii + 153 pp. + 16 illus. \$119.95. Review by P. G. STANWOOD, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Jeremias Drexel, or Drexelius (1581–1638) was once an astonishingly well-known preacher and devotional writer, the author of thirty-four principal works which reached, according to his present editor, 158,700 copies printed during his life, with continuing popularity long after his death. Born to Lutheran parents, he converted to Roman Catholicism while a pupil at his Jesuit school, St. Salvator in Augsburg, later studying at Ingolstadt, and finally becoming a novice in the Society of Jesus in 1598. He was priested in 1610 at St. Michael's, the monastery church of the Jesuits in Munich. He remained in Munich for the rest of his life, becoming also in 1615 *Hofprediger* at the court of Maximilian I, Elector of Bavaria in the Holy Roman Empire.

Drexel's custom was to preach in German, then translate his sermons into Latin, and then turn them again into German; meanwhile, translations from the vernacular or Latin appeared in most European languages, the first Latin-English translation of the *Christian Zodiac* in 1633 (STC 7234.5), and this version seems to have been widely known in England. But the falling off of Drexel's popularity was precipitous, and he is hardly known today. The time has come when Drexel should be recognized again for his achievement, according to Nicholas Crowe, who provides a new translation and a substantial and highly sympathetic introduction to this "Seventeenth-Century Publishing Sensation."

The *Zodiacus Christianus*, we learn, "can be seen as a quintessential Drexel production in form and content, manner and matter, ethos and pathos" (23). Each one of the twelve "signs" is prefaced by an image, an emblem designed by Raphael Sadeler I, a significant Munich engraver who regularly collaborated with Drexel. The twelve parts are loosely linked, together forming various devotional exhortations but without a single sustained theme or argument. One is able to reflect on any one of the sections without regard to its situation or placement in the whole work. Drexel's organization seems arbitrary, his plan being to present twelve signs, which might occur in any sequence. He opens with "The First Sign of Predestination," with an engraving, or

sign, of a lighted candle, which provides a theme for what follows, on *Internal Light* (62). This sign is followed by “The Second Sign of Predestination,” with the engraving of a death’s head, again acting as a kind of frontispiece that offers a theme for the discussion that follows, on mortality, of the *ever-needful preparation of all souls for death* (67). There follows “The Third Sign of Predestination,” this time with an engraving of the Host suspended over a chalice, with putti hovering at each side, which signifies the *frequent observance of the holy sacraments of confession and communion* (73). And so continue the signs of “Divine Predestination”: on poverty, patience, importance of sermons, charity, pride, love of enemies, repentance, the will to do good, and moderation of the passions. Texts interpret the engravings, pictures and words reinforcing each other. Drexel reminds the reader of his overarching purpose in this disparate work in a concluding section, the Crown “Of the Signs of Predestination and The Scarcity of the Predestined” (138–46).

Drexel’s *Christian Zodiac* is a devotional and admonitory work of discrete parts intended for a sympathetic audience of believers. Drexel skillfully weaves scriptural citations, patristic and other, later authorities, and *sententiae* into his moral commentary, by which he speaks directly to his auditors in a compelling yet simple, easily understood fashion. His twelve chapters represent different homiletic directions but all tending in the same way. Drexel avoids theological discourse or philosophical analysis, and the signs of predestination that make up his Zodiac are convenient signposts of a worthy and active faith. By “predestination” Drexel probably assumes the Augustinian sense that grace is limited by human consent, to those who are “elected,” even though the Divine will wishes that all persons should be saved. The theological difficulties inherent in the doctrine of predestination and election are ignored, or at best implied, though Drexel must certainly have been aware of the raging disputes over these deeply worrisome concepts—living and writing in the midst of the ‘Thirty Years’ War.

Crowe’s long and informative introduction, which is followed by a substantial bibliography, mostly of Neo-Latin and Continental works, occupies about one-third of the book. Of special interest is the discussion of Drexel’s use of emblems. They are, as already noted, associated with his homiletic commentaries, and they often become

important to their rhetorical development. Drexel is responding to the long classical and medieval habit of showing a symbolic picture with a motto or exposition. The coming together of emblem and word is well known to English readers, from Alciati's famous collection (1531), and particularly from Francis Quarles' *Argalus and Parthenia* (1629), which used plates from a number of Jesuit emblem books. While Crowe is well aware of this European wide practice, he offers only a brief glance to its influence in his introduction, with only a few details in his notes and bibliography. He might profitably have displayed more fully this general cultural interest; one wishes for an enriched discussion of this feature of comparative literature.

Drexel belongs not only to the emblem tradition, but also to the broad genre of devotional literature. That he was once so popularly read is a reminder again of European influence and connection. Drexel was a large figure in the German Baroque, and so one reads him while asking after other writers of the "baroque" mode in the earlier seventeenth-century far beyond Munich. Did Drexel influence others, or in what way might he have been influenced by such figures as St. Francis de Sales? Again, one wants to know more about the European Baroque, and about the opportunities offered for comparative study. In England, for example, there is Jeremy Taylor, whose celebrated *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, and much else by him, acts elegantly within a similar genre; and similarly, one remarks the devotional writing of John Donne, and surely also Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety* (ca. 1612), which achieved fifty reprints during the seventeenth century, including a French edition.

The best feature of this book is its reminder of the vast literature to which *Christian Zodiac* belongs, to which it responds and may have helped to stimulate. In his introduction, Crowe is excited by Drexel's supposed achievement; but this devotional work, though fluently translated, by no means reaches the heights claimed for it. Nevertheless, one wishes that his modern editor and advocate is correct in asserting Drexel's powerful influence: "It is largely due to [him] that the culture of emblem books itself was able to develop to the extent that it did, this particular mode of symbology soon rising into special aesthetic prominence" (10). This is a bold assertion that awaits further evidence and discussion. Meanwhile, Nicholas Crowe has provided us with a splendid edition of a remarkable figure.