

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works*, by Matthew Levering. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013. xviii + 204 pp. \$24.95.

Without question Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430) was one of most important theologians of the early church. His writings have been influential on both the Roman Catholic and Protestant theological traditions, and he remains an important figure in the realm of Christian philosophy as well. For students of Christian history, theology, and philosophy, Augustine is someone who simply cannot be ignored. However, becoming familiar with Augustine's thought can be a daunting task, especially when considering the vastness of his written corpus (the ongoing translation project by New City Press has so far produced 35 volumes of a planned 46-volume set containing Augustine's complete works). Understanding Augustine is further complicated by the fact that the context in which he wrote is often foreign to modern readers. Upon taking up virtually any of Augustine's works, the reader will quickly find himself immersed in an intellectual environment filled with the likes of Plato, Plotinus, Cicero, Faustus, Pelagius, and Donatus—just to name a few. Thus, accurately understanding his works involves a basic understanding of church history, secular history, and the history of philosophy.

Thankfully, there are tools available that will help make Augustine's writings and thought more manageable. One recent example is Matthew Levering's book *The Theology of Augustine*, which provides the reader with, as the subtitle suggests, a guide to some of Augustine's more important works. Considered in this book are Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, *Confessions*, *City of God*, and *On the Trinity*. The selection of works treated, in the main, makes good sense. Obviously, the *Confessions*, *City of God*, and *On the Trinity* are Augustine's most famous and significant writings. The other works treated in this volume expose the reader to aspects of Augustine's most important controversies, namely, his battles with the Manicheans, the Donatists, and Pelagius. *On Christian Doctrine* is included to help the reader understand and appreciate Augustine's understanding of Scripture. A case could be made that either *The Spirit and the Letter* or *On Nature and Grace* should have been included as part of the anti-Pelagian sample, but some of the same ideas resurface in the work on predestination, so we should not quibble too much over their omission.

Before proceeding any farther, it is important to point out the exact nature of Levering's book to any prospective reader. This book is a

guide, more accurately a summary of the aforementioned works of Augustine. This book is not a systematic evaluation or arrangement of Augustine's theology. As such, the subtitle more accurately reflects the contents of the book than does the title itself. I personally found this approach to be one of the book's major shortcomings. The book would be far more useful had the author done more in terms of systematizing Augustine's general theological perspective, perhaps with a chapter dedicated to this goal at the end of the book (in fairness, there is a 4-page summary of the main ideas found in the works considered, but it is not likely to satisfy the curious theologian). That said, the book's chief value lies in Levering's ability to carry the reader through the basic flow of thought of the books under discussion in a clear and understandable way. Augustine's writing style is often characterized by extensive attention to detail, verbosity, and repetitiveness, and these writing traits can easily cause the modern reader to miss the overall argument. Levering's book-by-book (or section-by-section) summaries keep one's eye trained on the main themes in Augustine's writings.

Such an approach is extremely valuable when dealing with a work like the *City of God*, which in my Cambridge edition consists of 1179 pages of actual text. During his lifetime, Augustine noted that the *City of God* could be divided structurally into either two parts or five. Levering follows the second way of dividing the book, and structures his chapter on the *City of God* around a five-fold arrangement. Thus, "the work consists in five books against pagan worship as beneficial for this life, five books against pagan worship (including that of the Platonists) as beneficial for the life to come; four books on the origin of the City of God; four books on its progress; and four books on its end" (113). What Levering does in this chapter is give a big picture summary of the contents of these five sections of the *City of God*, enabling the reader to get the gist of a work that goes over 1,100 pages in just 37 pages. It would serve any reader of Augustine's *City of God* well to read Levering's chapter first, because doing so would give the reader a framework in which to process the massive amount of information he will encounter in the actual work. For this review, I have chosen to provide the example of Levering's handling of the *City of God* rather than treat every chapter, but the reader should expect the same type of thing for the other works of Augustine treated in this book.

It is difficult to evaluate a book like this because it is not really a book in which the author is advancing his own ideas *per se*. As I have mentioned above, the bulk of this book is a summary or a retelling of Augustine's writings. For most technical issues the reader is referred to other sources in the footnotes. As an aside, the footnotes in this book are an excellent source for additional reading on various issues related to Augustine's thought. The author does not spend much time dealing with Greek and Roman philosophy or historical background issues unless they come up in the course of one the writings. People interested in those kinds of issues will need to look elsewhere. The reader will encounter various aspects of Augustine's theology, but not in a systematic

way. Again, readers will need to look elsewhere for this kind of information. What the book does well is that it acts as a helpful companion for those who are reading Augustine's corpus. It will help keep people from getting lost in Augustine's minutia, and it will help them identify and follow key themes in his writings.

Timothy Warren Scott

*The Hole in Our Holiness*, by Kevin DeYoung. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012. 146 pp. \$14.99.

Through the years I have read many books and articles on sanctification. I have even written a dissertation on the subject. However, Kevin DeYoung's book, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, now ranks as my personal favorite. How he is able to discuss such a significant topic in only 146 very readable and accessible pages is amazing.

So what does DeYoung imply when he states that there is a "hole" in our holiness? He means that most Christians today don't really care much about holiness at all. While evangelical Christianity champions the gospel of grace, emphasizing all that Christ has saved us *from*, it has given little thought and given little effort concerning all that Christ has saved us *to*. "Shouldn't those most passionate about the Gospel and God's glory also be those most dedicated to the pursuit of godliness?" (11). Indeed, DeYoung continues his first chapter by providing eight reasons why holiness has become seemingly passé among present-day believers and then closes the chapter with these challenging words: "There is a gap between our love for the gospel and our love for godliness. This must change. It's not pietism, legalism, or fundamentalism to take holiness seriously. It's the way of all those who have been called to a holy calling by a holy God" (21).

In chapter 2 ("The Reason for Redemption") DeYoung shows that Christians were redeemed in order to be holy (Eph 1:3–4). And "not only is holiness the goal of your redemption, it is *necessary* for your redemption" (26). There are "literally hundreds of verses" (27) that substantiate this point (e.g., Matt 7:21; Jas 2:14; 1 John 2:3–4; Heb 12:14). Chapter 3 ("Piety's Pattern") explains the meaning of holiness and the reality of both the positional and progressive nature of growth in holiness (i.e., sanctification). But what motivates our sanctification? Why should we seek to obey the imperatives of the Bible? Chapter 4 ("The Impetus for the Imperatives") provides the answer, or rather, answers. While some accuse preachers of being legalistic to call upon their hearers to do something, DeYoung advises us that, rather than placing believers under the burden of the law, the Bible actually calls Christians to obey God's commands as an evidence of grace. And it provides many reasons for doing so. In fact DeYoung provides 40 scriptural reasons that should prompt Christians to obey (57–60).