

On God, the Soul, and the Rise of Christianity. By John Peter Kenney. Reading Augustine. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. xi + 132 pages. \$25.95 (paper).

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The author, mostly focusing on *Confessiones* both as autobiographical sketch and as narrative of Augustine's search for truth, intends to look more closely at the patterns of Augustine's thinking itself, with an eye to his interlocutors and the influences he acknowledged. The first chapter, entitled "Christian Enlightenment," offers a concise survey of Augustine's journey toward orthodox Christianity. Given the intended readership, Kenney combines a survey of Augustine's life with ample information on religious ideas that had an impact on Augustine's intellectual journey, such as Manicheism and Platonism, the latter acting as a catalyst that brought him to Catholic Christianity. In the second chapter, Kenney pays attention to Augustine's *Soliloquia*, written in the period between conversion and baptism as an expression of Augustine's attempts to "fram[e] in theological language ... a deeper understanding that had overwhelmed him" (47). Then follows a reflection on the vision of Ostia in 387 (cf. *Confessiones* IX, written about ten years after the vision) that is a description of unmediated knowledge of God, which was experienced by both Monnica (Kenney continues to write Monica [48], while the tombstone says Monnica) and Augustine. In chapter 3, Augustine discusses the topic of the soul, an issue that will cause him trouble throughout his life.

Given the intended readership, things are offered in a (too?) simple way. Augustine was disappointed about the cultural and literary level of the biblical text of his days—its Latin was poor in comparison to that of the classical authors, less about the Catholicism of his childhood (14). Kenney neglects the impact of reading Cicero's *Hortensius* on his decision to join the Manichees. Nor does Kenney deal with the central role of Romans 13:13-14—with all the complexity of this Pauline text and of Augustine's mood when reading the text. I agree with Kenney that both love and grace are important concepts in Augustine's work (cf. pp. 60ff.), but Augustine himself links these concepts together only once in *Confessiones* (*Conf.* 10.3). The link between love and grace is not yet a determining item. The healing of fallen humanity has intrinsically to do with the love of God, revealing itself in our history through the incarnated Son. For good reasons, Augustine was also called *doctor caritatis*, something he had to discover after his conversion, *caritas* never being mentioned in the *Soliloquia* suggest that the description of the Donatist controversy is a bit superficial and does not sufficiently take into account the complex history of the

controversy: the Donatist success up to the death of Parmenian (ca. 392) had to do with good leadership of this Donatist bishop and with the absence of such leadership in the Catholic Church. Describing Origen as a Christian philosopher (19) is a bit strange, especially when one takes into account that Origen did not like the secular philosophy of his time. Mitchell and Van Nuffelen were the editors of the volume, mentioned on page 20, contributing to a book with numerous authors; they were not the authors of it.

Long quotes from Augustine's works are helpful for they illustrate and underpin the reflections of Kenney. Kenney several times speaks of pagan philosophy (4), a terminology I dislike, for Platonism and Stoicism, to mention only two, were part of the cultural heritage in which Christianity would find its way, nor should the Stoic background of Christian ethics from the time of Paul be underestimated. After one hundred years of debate about whether Augustine converted to a Christian Neo-Platonism or a Neo-Platonic Christianity, I think that such statements as "the pagan Platonism had misunderstood the human condition" are a bit exaggerated for the period discussed in this book.

The so-called Great Persecution was in Africa over in 311 (cf. p. 11).

To conclude: the great merit of this work is that it offers in a clear way a good introduction into Augustine's thoughts up to the beginning of the fifth century. The book thus will offer a good service to all who are interested in the greatest patristic thinker of the Latin West. The book well meets the aims of the series Reading Augustine.

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A Little Book for New Preachers: Why and How to Study Homiletics. By Matthew D. Kim. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020. 127 pages. \$12.00 (paper).

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The Chinese philosopher Confucius (d. 479 BCE) teaches: "He who speaks without modesty will find it difficult to make his words good." Matthew D. Kim's *A Little Book for New Preachers* is a modest book, both in length and in size (7 by 4.25 inches). It is written in a welcoming, even self-effacing style. In sum, it is a very good word for new preachers.

As a Roman Catholic preacher rooted in a lectionary tradition, I was skeptical of the personal value of such a guide published by an Evangelical publishing house that stresses the authority and teaching of the Bible. My own tradition gives equal weight to tradition and increasing the authority of