

writing to you about what God has done and is still doing, because there is no language or pen up to the task' (p.114), but rather rests his commentary on the interface of 'what can be said' and 'what cannot be said'. Catherine, through Professor Murray's pen, makes manifest the divine healing love of God that, as I stated at the outset, the world sorely needs right now. A book to treasure and return to.

PETER TYLER

*St Mary's University, Twickenham*

**COMPANIONS IN THE BETWEEN: AUGUSTINE, DESMOND, AND THEIR COMMUNITIES OF LOVE** by Renée Köhler-Ryan, *Pickwick/Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR, 2019, pp. xxii + 159, £18.00, pbk*

In *Desire, Dialectic, and Otherness* (1987), William Desmond describes his philosophy as 'an Augustinian odyssey, embarked on in the wake of Hegel'. More than a dozen books later, the odyssey continues. Widely recognized as a metaphysician and philosopher of religion, Desmond's engagement with Hegel receives much attention in the secondary literature. His relationship to Saint Augustine receives significantly less. Yet, as the quote from his early study suggests, Desmond views Augustine as a key guide in his thinking. In *Companions in the Between*, Renée Köhler-Ryan explores this relationship.

According to Köhler-Ryan, Desmond affirms two major 'Augustinian' positions. He affirms that the restlessness of human desire finds rest in God. God does not offer static repose, though, but dynamic release, a gift of love that exceeds whatever we lack. Desmond also agrees with Augustine that 'our elemental worth issues from the intrinsically good gift of being, and we experience this in a fundamentally life-affirming incarnational manner' (p.11). Creation is a *metaxu* or between, a community of intricately singular but also intricately related creatures. We are part of this community, yet we can never fully grasp any other creature within it, let alone the community as a whole or the divine origin that sustains it. Sights, smells, tastes, and textures continually impress on our 'porous' inner depths. Constantly inundated by the exorbitance of creation, we easily become inured. Nevertheless, it can always strike us anew with astonished wonder, a wonder that entails implicit affirmation of being's goodness. This strike can leave us wondering not only at creation but also its creator.

As these glosses suggest, Desmond develops Augustine's insights in his own way. Köhler-Ryan provocatively claims, then, that we can actually pursue 'an Augustinian odyssey in the wake of Desmond', where the 'ground...continually reverberates, throughout the whole of creation, stable in its dynamism, constant in its eternally issuing agapeic love' (p.17).

She discerns how the relationship between the two thinkers is about shared sensibility as much as shared positions or concerns. ‘In Desmond’s work’, she notes, ‘one can discern Augustinian ways of questioning—prayerful, perplexed, passionate, and personally engaged’ (p.xvi). Köhler-Ryan is a sure guide to the Doctor of Grace’s influence on Desmond’s thought, but she also continually makes this second move: offering readings of Augustine that are influenced by Desmond. It makes for a rich study.

The first chapter in *Companions in the Between* concerns Desmond’s ‘archaeological ethics’. It examines how Desmond reworks Plato’s famous philosophical image of the cave. Desmond argues that we cannot simply ascend out of the cave to the Good/God. We must also delve down into the cave of our interiority, searching for the wellsprings of (our) being, for God, in the inner abyss. This is, of course, an Augustinian trajectory. ‘If we see the origin as solely above’, Köhler-Ryan explains, ‘we risk severing ourselves from it, so that it becomes irrelevant to the way we experience the world and live our lives. However, in digging to find our roots, we allow ourselves to see that the origin is already ingrained within us, in our very marrow. Through our seeking to find it, it incorporates itself more and more fully into ourselves’ (p.7). While she does not dwell on it, Köhler-Ryan notes that this ‘archaeological’ descent is especially important for Desmond given the ‘spelunking’ of moderns like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Freud, who go digging down into the cave in their own ways, finding only the murky, unsettling wellsprings of desire there. Desmond aims to show that this is not the deepest truth of our porous depths.

Köhler-Ryan goes on to cover a wide range of topics in *Companions in the Between*. The second chapter explores Augustine and Desmond on the ‘elemental appreciation of creation’ (p.19). The third considers how Desmond draws on Plato and Augustine in his account of the ‘agapeic’ potential within erotic desire. The fourth chapter turns to Desmond, Augustine, and Aquinas; the fifth to Desmond, Augustine, and Shakespeare, juxtaposing Desmond’s account of porosity and Augustine’s of prayerful soliloquy with the ‘amen’ stuck in Macbeth’s throat. The sixth chapter compares Augustine’s *City of God* to Desmond’s ‘agapeic community’.

The final chapter considers Augustine’s attempt to strike up a friendship with Saint Jerome via correspondence, an attempt hindered by Jerome’s wariness. Smarting from his recent conflict with Rufinus, Jerome ‘does not think that a friendship can occur where one friend complains about something in the other. In contrast, Augustine thinks without this kind of openness there can be no friendship at all; for the very space of freedom in which *caritas* thrives is thereby being denied’ (p.129). Köhler-Ryan goes on to interpret this correspondence in light of Desmond’s account of ‘companions’. She claims this fraught relationship between the two great Church Fathers is timely for contemporary Christian scholars, who must frequently forge relationships over email. She concludes, ‘In an age where discussions between scholars are increasingly in writing, at a speed that

militates against reflection on the demands of *caritas*, there is perhaps an even greater need to act with the virtues proper to friends on pilgrimage to the eternal city. These are only some of the demands for companions in the *metaxu*' (p.143). This surprising turn to the contemporary suggests yet another great merit in Köhler-Ryan's study. It is a work of rich exegesis and comparison, but Köhler-Ryan's own insights enliven it. As Desmond points out in the foreword to *Companions in the Between*, Köhler-Ryan companions himself and Augustine, speaking 'intelligently, engagingly, lucidly, communicatively, and wisely' (p.xiii).

STEVEN E. KNEPPER  
*Virginia Military Institute, USA*