dismissed the effort to classify the letters as "arbitrary," a critique that obviously did not deter Cain. In classifying Jerome's letters into seventeen genres, some of which apply to only one or two texts, Cain resurrects an old editorial preoccupation, which had already anticipated elements of his "new" taxonomy. His classification is more elaborate than the twelve "distinctions" (including a gathering of sermons) that Adrian Brielis used to organize the letters in the gargantuan edition printed by Peter Schoeffer in Mainz in 1470, but it must take second place to the twenty-four "tractates" into which Teodoro de' Lelli apportioned the texts in the *editio princeps* of the letters that appeared in Rome by 1467. In his celebrated edition (1516), Erasmus contented himself with fewer and broader categories: familiar, polemical, exegetical, and spurious letters.

Rhetoric, not taxonomy, is Cain's focus, of course. He admirably succeeds not only in revealing the deliberate, rhetorical performances that Jerome's letters are but also in reviving interest in a collection of fascinating documents of ancient Christianity. Cain has emerged as an indispensible Hieronymist for his colleagues as well as for a wider readership.

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Leo the Great and the Spiritual Rebuilding of a Universal Rome. By **Susan Wessel**. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 93. Leiden: Brill, 2008. xii + 422 pp. $191.00 cloth.

"What was it about Leo that made him 'the Great'?" (1). Instead of an exploration of the relationship between Leo's actions and writings and their subsequent memorialization in which Leo was re-imagined as great, Susan Wessel simply assesses "the magnitude of Leo's greatness" (2). According to Wessel, Leo was great "because he confidently brought his model of a compassionate, feeling Christ to bear upon the anxieties that his congregations suffered in light of the barbarian invasions" (2). Leo deserves the appellation because he articulated a Christology that allowed Christians in the Roman empire to make sense of a world turned upside down. Such an argument will be deferential to its subject and so this volume may be characterized as a hagiographical analysis of Leo's letters, though his sermons will occupy their fair share of pages.

After discussing two other works which also measured the magnitude of Leo's greatness, the fifty-two-page introduction begins with an overly broad description of the later Roman Empire's political situation, from the failure

of empire to the barbarian invasions, and ends with a short biographical sketch. The lengthy first chapter, "The Relationship between Rome and the Western Churches," turns a microscopic lens on Leo's interactions with the western provinces, offering little overarching context for its analysis of a handful of letters. In these letters, Leo supposedly exercised a mildly contentious but typically accepted ecclesiastical appellate authority—despite evidence that provincial bishops recognized Roman authority when it suited their purposes, an opportunistic acceptance which Leo could use, but only in limited ways. Consequently, to suggest that western provincials adopted Leo's worldview and understanding of Church discipline to combat the political and cultural disintegration appears tenuous, especially without evidence or examples. The hagiographic bent also appears in several chains of speculative contentions—for example, the strange journey from bishop Hilary of Arles's ascetic appearance to his supposed heterodox tendencies as a way to assert that Leo had legitimate concerns about Hilary, who, Leo felt, had impinged upon Roman authority.

Turning to theology, chapter 2, "The Idea of Justice and its Bearing upon Law and Mercy," outlines Leo's vision of divine justice as true and perfect, though imperfectly realized in this most imperfect world. As ecclesiastical law, for example, deficiently reflects divine justice, it must be implemented with mercy—with compassion for frail humanity, an oft-repeated theme in Leo's sermons. Mercy, though, seems to result from submission to Rome, while strict justice awaits the recalcitrant. Nonetheless, Leo's idealism (justice) and practicality (mercy) so appealed to the provinces that they supposedly accepted Roman power. Chapter 3, "Suffering, Compassion, and the Care of the Poor," describes the allegedly practical result of Leo's view of justice, namely a purportedly uniquely Christian charity as the proper, compassionate response to misery—a pale reflection of divine mercy, but nevertheless the essential virtue. Chapter 4, "The Humanity of Christ as a Model for Compassion," sets this emphasis on charity in a broader theological context—namely Leo's image of a very human, suffering Christ, whose gratuitous acceptance of human frailty somehow offered a guide on how to live and thrive.

The next three chapters, which turn to practical politics, shrink somewhat in length, though in not in detail. Although a lengthy discussion of imperial politics in chapter 5, "Overturning the Robber Synod and Preserving Christ's Human Nature," professes to show Leo's deft negotiations—deployed to overturn the so-called Robber Synod, whose theology was anathema to Leo—luck seems to have played a more important role. Leo's gentle politicking yielded little until the emperor who had convened and supported the Robber Synod died, allowing a more congenial emperor to ascend to the throne. Even then, Leo only managed to gain acceptance for his theological position at the price of the elevation of the see of Constantinople in canon

28 of the Council of Chalcedon. Chapter 6, "The Elaboration of the Roman Primacy," provides a basic overview of Leo's articulation of Roman primacy based on apostolic succession, which serves as the backdrop for Leo's ultimately failed opposition to canon 28. In chapter 7, "Striving for Unity after Chalcedon," we learn that Leo's reluctance to accept canon 28, and so also Chalcedon, was used as an excuse for rebellion in Palestine. At the same time, after a superficially pro-Chalcedon bishop of Alexandria was murdered and replaced by an anti-Chalcedon bishop, the emperor installed a new pro-Chalcedon bishop at Leo's urging—which in turn precipitated the secession of Egyptian churches.

Though Leo's vision of universal Church unity in conformity with Roman norms failed in practice, "The idea of unity outlived the reality of separation because Leo understood that transforming the secular world into a Christian 'city' infused the suffering caused by the imperfection of human justice and the cruelty of the barbarian invasions with moral and ethical meaning" (346). Chapter 8, "The 'City of God' Unfolds in History," sketches Leo's vision of Augustine's city of God being realized in history by just humans acting mercifully and altruistically, but here as elsewhere Wessel offers no evidence that this vision had any real influence.

In sum, the analysis of discrete events or individual letters can be compelling, but as a whole the work does not cohere. Its length buries its convincing points in either a cursory historical narrative or a fastidious scrutiny of details—the gap between which bridged only by unproven claims for the social importance of Leo's theological worldview. In addition, though this volume contains a wealth of information on which to base a more multifaceted analysis, it interrogates Roman ecclesiastical authority too lightly—perhaps due to its hagiographic emphasis—and so Leo always exercises legitimate power, while others are mere usurpers.

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Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite. Edited by **Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang**. Directions in Modern Theology. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. vi + 234 pp. $30.20 paper.

The figure of Dionysius the Areopagite pervades boundless scholarship that never seems to assuage itself or its subject. *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* is a helpful tool in navigating the great tidal wave of Dionysian-inspired literature;