Church History 79:2 (June 2010), 422–515.


# BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES

doi:10.1017/S0009640710000107

***Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism***. By **Paula Fredriksen**. New York: Doubleday, 2008. xxiv+488 pp. $35.00 cloth.

*Augustine and the Jews* is a work of great subtlety, richness, and finally almost equal lucidity. Augustine came to find the Jews indispensable. The Church would need their continuing witness until the end of time. Meanwhile, he himself needed them to help him resolve his sharpest dilemmas. "Where Augustine's thought is most characteristically 'augustinian,'" Fredriksen avers, "we finding him thinking with 'Jews'" (353). "Jews," not Jews. Whatever real Jewish company he may occasionally have kept, the Jews Augustine thought with were not of the flesh-and-blood variety that shared Torah scrolls and rabbinic exegesis with his rival Jerome. (Jerome's familiarity with Jews, his strident appeals to the pristine Hebrew of their scriptures, and his matching nervousness about Christian Judaizing supply an intermittent but vital counterpoint to Fredriksen's discussion of Augustine.) The fleshliness of Augustine's Jews was that of an ideal but evolving type. Their manner of existence in former times, disclosed in the books of the Church's Old Testament, prophesied the Incarnation. In the present "sixth age" announced by Jesus' birth, scattered as they then were after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jews were ubiquitous pledges of the authenticity of those books, and hence of the validity of the Christian view of history deduced from them. The subtitle of *Augustine and the Jews* is perhaps slightly over-emphatic. Augustine, master dialectician and rhetorician, never mounted a formal Christian defense of the Jews, let alone of Judaism, against their actual attackers; such projects lay in the future that his writings partly prepared. At best, he kept silent when he might have joined a common cry against certain Jews of his time. What he did offer was more in the nature of a demonstration of the Jews, of an entirely different temper from Eusebius of Caesarea's *Demonstration of the Gospel*, a work in the central tradition of Christian anti-Jewish polemic that Augustine inherited, transmitted, and, as we can now see as never before, daringly outdistanced.

In an afterword, the author tells a story of herself preparing to give a paper on Christian anti-Judaism at a conference in Jerusalem, looking to ransack

Augustine's blockbuster *Against Faustus the Manichean* for anti-Jewish polemic, only to find in it compelling arguments for respecting both Judaism as a historical phenomenon and the practices of contemporary Jews. The core demonstration of her book concerns the discovery of those arguments, from Augustine's point of view. Faustus was an old conversation-partner of Augustine's from his Manichean days, who later produced a series of *Capitula* impugning catholic Christianity, faulting it not least for its "Jewish" carnality. Augustine began a detailed response to the work in about 399, just as he was finishing (?) his *Confessions*. Faustus had "blasphemed against the law and the prophets, and against their god, and against the incarnation of Christ, claiming that the texts of the New Testament that attested it were forgeries" (*Retractationes*, 2.7). Such blasphemies had a long history in Christian sectarian polemic but Faustus raised the stakes by casting his anti-catholicism in the terms of mainstream Christian anti-Judaism. Faced with the charge that catholic Christians were too like Jews, Augustine did something that no other bishop of his time would have done: he rejoiced in the affinity. The history of ancient ("biblical") Israel as an incarnation of God's will, living under the Law, was continuous with the life of the Christian church, because Christ as founder of that church had been God in Jewish flesh, living—as did his apostles, including Paul—by the Law. The literal record of the New Testament was there to prove the continuity of "practical Jewishness" (254). The literal record of the Old Testament vouched for it too, prefiguring Christ in a narrative of events that did not cease to be historical by being prophetic. Typology did not evacuate history, nor the spirit the flesh. God would protect the Jews until the end of time because they were co-owners of the biblical text on which Christians relied for their understanding of past, present, and future.

Although Augustine would make significant modifications to this scheme of thought in later works such as the *City of God*, its main elements were in place by ca. 400, in *Against Faustus*. It was a scheme of interpretation, a style of reading—crucially, of reading literally and historically (*ad litteram*). Reading salvation history, reading the Bible, reading Paul: each was an aspect of Augustine's reading with "Jews" and at his most "Augustinian." In Fredriksen's meticulous and captivating account, Augustine arrives at this hermeneutic in the course of 390s, by difficult stages and through a series of more or less "live" exchanges that at once extend for us and underpinned for him the narrative of his *Confessions*. In the summer of 392, a public debate with the Manichean priest Fortunatus forced him to reckon seriously, perhaps for the first time since his Milanese conversion in the "high philosophical" company of his Platonist friends, with "the biblical culture of the average North African Christian" (150). At that moment, he was launched on the defining quest of his Christian intellectual life: to save the

unity of the scriptures, for the sake of two other entities most precious and problematic to an ex-Manichean reader of Paul, namely God's justice and human free will. By the time he embarked on his *Notes on Romans* two years later, the *Book of Rules* of the Donatist Tyconius had revealed to him how the scriptural canon could be read as a "continuous and consistent record of God's saving acts in history" (163). Herein lay the key to a release from the "writer's block" once diagnosed by James J. O'Donnell in Augustine of the early mid-390s. But there was still work to do before this Augustine could fully live up to the role of "Christian 'public intellectual'" (173) that he had lately assumed. He did that work in the *To Simplicianus* of 396, by submitting his uncertainties on the workings of the divine will to the arbitration of the literal and historical Paul, "Paul the Jew" (185), who kept the Law both before and after his conversion and who—as was clear from the text, if it was read properly—had done nothing to merit God's grace in his regard. Paul the Jew and preacher of Christ abolished the binaries that otherwise threatened to rend asunder Augustine's sense of himself and of all human history. The *Confessions* would unfold on the other side of this mental "landslide" (182, 196–210).

*Augustine and the Jews* is the most important contribution to the intellectual biography of Augustine since R. A. Markus's *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Like Markus, Fredriksen not only tracks her subject's discourse, she also situates it in the thought-world and society of the late ancient Mediterranean and anticipates its impact in aftertimes. The central biographical section of the book ("The Prodigal Son") has for prelude a *tour de force* of synoptic religio-cultural history ("The Legacy of Alexander") and for sequel a description of the "Augustinian" grid of salvation history as it fell into place by the time Augustine composed the later books of the *City of God* ("God and Israel"). Fifty closely printed pages of discursive endnotes brief the reader on prior scholarship and give pointers to Fredriksen's own more detailed treatments of key issues. Those interested in the modern debates on Christian–Jewish relations in late antiquity and the roots of Western anti- and philo-Judaism will quickly find their way into the arguments. Students of Augustine, for their part, will appreciate the lively dialogue kept up by Fredriksen with those other biographers of his, Peter Brown and James J. O'Donnell. Inevitably, in a work of this compass not all possible encounters can be made: John David Dawson's *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (2002) shares many of Fredriksen's concerns, and each of their books will gain by being read in the light of the other. Above all, however, it is Augustine who now appears in a new light, assuming a figure more congruent with the literal-historical sense of his own texts. Seeking to account for Hannah Arendt's abhorrence of what she called the

"Jewish type," Bernard Wasserstein recently referred to that philosopher's early work on Augustine and to the influence upon her of late nineteenth-century versions of *Heilsgeschichte* according to which "Jewish history, in the proper sense of the term, came to an end . . . upon the defeat of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE) and with the spread of early Christianity" (*Times Literary Supplement* [October 9, 2009]: 15). Against imputations to him of such a view, Augustine has been gloriously defended.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640710000119

***Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria***. By **Rosemary A. Arthur**. Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies Series. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. xii+218 pp. $99.95 cloth.

Rosemary Arthur's *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist* looks at the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (*CD*) in its sixth century milieu, with an interest in Dionysius's place in the Monophysite movement. Arthur's book will be appreciated by those interested in the question of the historical Dionysius, particularly the relationship between concerns of the sixth-century Church and Dionysius's theology. There are few full studies in English which discuss the question of the historical Dionysius, while keeping in mind the sociology of the sixth-century Church, in such an accessible, creative manner.

The first three chapters of the book, "The Christian and Non-Christian Sources," "The Angelic Hierarchy," and the "Unknowability of God," provide an overview for sources of Dionysius's *CD*. Arthur argues in these chapters that Christological problems were the single most important cause of disunity of the Church in the sixth century. She suggests that Dionysius had to look to apostolic authority, hence he took the pseudonym Dionysius in order to be accepted by Chalcedonians and Monophysites. Thus, in order to breed unity, Arthur argues, the author of the *CD* omitted discussions of the Incarnation, Cross, and Atonement, all of which were divisive topics of the day. Arthur argues that Dionysius tried to unify the Church through the ecclesiastical hierarchy; by showing how the ecclesiastical hierarchy mirrors the angelic hierarchy, she says, Dionysius provided authority for the ecclesiastical hierarchy as something embedded in the universe by God. The angelic hierarchy, Arthur argues, thus functioned to protect the ecclesiastical structure.