

bishop's *Confessions*, though perhaps at times too readily trusted, necessarily serve to illuminate the young Augustine's early formation in the philosophic life and his troubled relationship with word-craft and his profession. Following his ordination as priest, however, Kolbet can effectively complement Augustine's more confident advocacy of the value of belief and scriptural study for Christian progress, especially as those claims are advanced in the *De utilitate credendi* and *De catechizandis rudibus* as well as the *De doctrina Christiana*, with the evidence provided by Augustine's homilies. Scrutinized in the context of Augustine's determination to offer his convalescing audience healing medicine, it becomes increasingly clear, as Kolbet argues, that any full understanding of the structure, exegetical strategies, and social agenda of Augustine's seemingly artless sermons must take serious account of the psychogogic aims that informed his public speaking.

Finally, well-known controversies, Pelagianism and Donatism, for example, also appear in these pages, their debates about boundaries closely keyed to Augustine's perceptions of pride and the soul's debility. So, too, do familiar tensions—between rhetoric and truth, between worldly success and spiritual fulfillment, and between the very classicism that Augustine “endeavored to qualify” (198) and his acceptance of classical rhetoric's necessity. Viewed in new perspective, these themes add further depth to a study that, although at times held down by the steady tow of texts read closely and in series, consistently yields fresh insights. In sum, Kolbet's study, gathering in multiple stands of intellectual and social history, resituates significant elements of Augustine's thought within what was then a still vital stream of ancient rumination on the healing power of words while also revealing the limits of those traditions for a bishop who remained convinced that full convalescence was reserved for another realm.

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Intrepid Lover of Perfect Grace: The Life and Thought of Prosper of Aquitaine. By **Alexander Y. Hwang.** Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 2009. xiv + 267 pp. \$36.95 paper.

One encounters Prosper in a variety of scholarly contexts and from a number of angles—as eyewitness to the western barbarian invasions, notable figure in the Provençal literary scene, stalwart defender of Augustine, critic of Cassian,

adviser to Leo the Great—but catching him almost always at one stage in an otherwise eventful but murky career and overshadowed by those more famous associates. So it is easy to agree with Alexander Hwang that considering Prosper's career as a whole in its own right is worthwhile. Hwang offers this book as the first English-language "historical biography of Prosper that presents his life and theological development within his historical context" (1). Simply having an up-to-date synthesis of Prosper studies between covers is appealing and in this regard Hwang has done commendable service; the book can aptly be treated as a handbook or companion to Prosper. Yet Hwang also contends that this biographical study reveals something new. "Prosper's theological development is marked by his evolving understanding of the Church," culminating in his "full conviction that . . . it was the Roman Church—the pronouncements of its popes and its liturgical practices—that determined the catholic view on grace. It was Prosper's evolving ecclesiology that informed and determined his evolving doctrine of grace" (1–2). The faint repetition evident in this thesis statement unfortunately marks the prose throughout the book. Still Hwang always makes his points clearly and offers a concise three-page summary of his entire book's argument in the conclusion (235–38). The bibliography is current so far as literature on Prosper goes, while for a wide range of historical and contextual matters Hwang is content to rely mostly upon Ralph Mathisen's *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), and some may appreciate the discussion of sources and scholarship that constitutes the first chapter.

To some extent the biographical approach undermines Hwang's thesis, and the pursuit of his thesis does not make for good biography. The problem for the thesis is that in order to discern what Prosper thought about "the Church" in the early part of his life, when he was writing about other topics, Hwang may argue from silence—Prosper did not use the word *ecclesia* in his *De providentia Dei*, therefore he had "no sense of belonging to or appreciating the Church and its role in theology" (63–65)—or assert "Prosper's poor ecclesiology" as fact and attribute causation to it (92). Meanwhile, the proper ecclesiology toward which Hwang sees Prosper heading never emerges as clearly as one expects. It is not surprising to find that an immigrant to Rome, likely employed by its bishop, developed a "greater appreciation of catholicity, embodied in the Roman Church" (220). Whether and exactly in what way "the pronouncements of its popes and its liturgical practices" came to dominate Prosper's conception of grace, however, would require more detailed treatment than what is offered in the short section on Prosper's compilation of papal pronouncements (220–28) and still shorter summary of his final edition of the *Chronicon* (228–32),

especially when Hwang concludes in his treatment of *De vocatione omnium gentium* (208–20) that “Prosper’s doctrine of grace . . . owes more to Cassian than to anyone else” (218). Hwang in fact devotes more attention in this last chapter and throughout the book to charting the distance Prosper put between himself and Augustine: this attention is fruitful, for Hwang is at his best and most convincing when analyzing texts in juxtaposition (as at 111–21). Perhaps more thorough investigation could establish that Prosper’s attraction to Rome caused him to draw away from Augustine, though one might as well consider a reverse causation. But it seems a finer point than the evidence is likely to support, as is whether Prosper was born around 390 or no later than 388 (38–41).

As for biography, Hwang’s effort deserves the warm reception it has found among other reviewers. Prosper’s literary corpus is small but not homogenous and deserves sensitive treatment as a whole. Whether a biographical approach is appropriate to Hwang’s argument about his subject’s ecclesiological conception of grace is in some ways a separate matter. The “stages” or “periods” Hwang establishes for Prosper’s intellectual or spiritual progression are far less absolute than the chapter divisions and chronology (xi) suggest. For these often depend upon issues of contested dating that Hwang does not convincingly resolve (for example, 23–25, 38–41, 53–54, 183–86, 189–91, 220–21). One may worry when Hwang declares that periods to which no extant writing is securely attributed were actual periods of “literary inactivity” given to “reflection and reevaluation of convictions” (138, 183–86), or when he concludes that Prosper must have been a prominent adviser to Leo or else “a simple layman” to whom the noblewoman Demetrias never would have written (198, 205, 208). What prevents this book from being a satisfying biography, however, is that Hwang, no different from many of the scholars who precede him, seems predisposed to think little or poorly of Prosper, at least before he mellowed under the allegedly “peaceful theological sky of Rome” (186). In a single paragraph, for example, which seems both to misread and disregard the rhetoric of a prefatory passage by Prosper, Hwang claims that the author showed “little tact and much condescension,” offered “unwarranted and unprovoked attack,” was “obnoxious, even by Prosper’s standards,” and twice more condescended to his opponents, who for their part are said to have shown him “courtesy” (139). There are many such examples of unsympathetic inferences concerning Prosper’s motives and temperament, which others may find to be perfectly sound and justified. But one begins to wonder then whether Prosper needs a biography, especially when so often in this book other writers and texts, above all Augustine, occupy the foreground. It remains to be seen whether other scholars will follow Hwang’s lead in adopting the term “*doctores Gallicani*” instead of the

familiar and flawed “semi-Pelagians” (2–6). The decision not to translate some French (for example, 30, 189) as well as Latin text (112–15, 118–19, 122, 128, 143, 168), sometimes where the meaning is important to the argument, somewhat limits the book’s accessibility. Yet Hwang has provided an original and useful introduction for readers first encountering Prosper.

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Christians and Pagans: The Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede. By **Malcolm Lambert.** New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010. xx + 329 pp. \$50.00 cloth.

I was delighted to open this book and read Malcolm Lambert’s rueful confession of a conversion experience in the National Library of Wales. Lambert suddenly realized that the history of “British” Christianity must include the converts of Wales, Cornwall, and Scotland, and that even the Irish had helped with Britain’s proselytization; further, that Britain’s Christian traditions continued on the island’s fringes while they seemed to disappear for a century or more in Anglo-Saxon territory, and that they contributed to the Christian revival of the seventh century. The problem of Britain’s first Christians has puzzled English historians for centuries since there is little explicit evidence about their practices, beliefs, or communities. Although Lambert’s new narrative of British Christianization tackles that undocumented period and graciously includes the Celts, I was disappointed to realize that this is still a very old-fashioned history. Lambert relies on Bede’s eighth-century *Historia Ecclesiastica* for his teleology, using recent archaeological work only to substantiate and enhance Bede’s account rather than challenge it. He also shares two of the monk’s most medieval sensibilities: a reductive view of non-Christian religions and an assumption that Christianization was inevitable.

Lambert was further inspired to write by meditation on the work of his fellow medievalist, R. I. Moore. With Moore (*The Origins of European Dissent* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983]), he ponders the “crucial questions” of religious change, that is, “when, how, and even whether Christianity became the consolation of the simple in their misery, the source and frame of all their thoughts as the familiar picture of the age of faith would have us believe” (xviii). Lambert suggests that Christianity brought “consolation” to