Of the chapters that follow, the next three contextualise early Christian apologies in terms of their historical setting, their contribution to Christian self-definition and the legal context of early Christianity. The remaining thirteen chapters consist of critical introductions to those works Williams identifies as apologies. Some of those identifications may surprise readers familiar with previous studies – the *Apology* of Aristides does not make the cut, Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel* and *Demonstration of the Gospel* do – but Williams' reasoning is sound. His discussion of each apology typically covers the historical occasion of the text, a few doctrinal points made in the text, points of philosophical engagement, as well as matters that provide the reader with a sense of a given text's significance within the apologetic tradition of the early church.

Every chapter includes a robust engagement with secondary literature that serves as an excellent introduction to many of the scholarly concerns surrounding the text under consideration. Nevertheless, there are times when Williams' analysis of a text does not take into consideration pertinent aspects of previous scholarship. So, for instance, in his insistence that Theophilus of Antioch does not attribute a hypostatic reality to the Holy Spirit he seems to overlook J. A. Robinson's important comments (in his translation of Irenaeus' *Demonstration*) that, at the very least, highlight the challenges of such a reading. Nor, for that matter, does Williams provide an adequate discussion of some of the chief passages in Theophilus concerned with this subject. Readers in general, but especially those new to this material, should keep in mind the limits entailed in a study presenting critical surveys of so many writings. Perhaps the issue that most besets this text is the number of typographical and copy-editing errors marking its pages. An error does not appear on every page, but it is close – especially as the work progresses. There has clearly been a significant breakdown in Oxford's copy-editing process; one that I hope will be set right post haste.

Williams begins this book noting the desperate need for a critical survey of the apologetic literature of early Christianity, especially one suited to academic coursework. *Defending and Defining the Faith* fills that need admirably. It will occupy an important place in libraries and private collections for years to come.

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J. Warren Smith, *Ambrose, Augustine, and the Pursuit of Greatness*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. xiii + 293. $99.99.

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This book follows an earlier study by the same author on Ambrose's ethics, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011). There Smith appraised Ambrose's teaching on virtue as inseparable from his soteriology. Here he considers an important expression of the Christian reconstruction of Graeco-Roman moral

reasoning: representation of the magnanimous or 'great-souled' person. He looks again at Ambrose, but also at Augustine. Both construe Christian vocation with pointed reference to inherited ideas of excellence in virtue. Magnanimity remains a tantalising theme. Both also underscore distinctions between classical and Christian notions of greatness. Their critiques are not just the same. Ambrose sees persisting scope for adaptation of traditional language; Augustine senses it is often to be adduced only in irony. Either way, the distinctive manner in which Christians are said to envisage, pursue and attain greatness is emblematic of the difference the gospel effects in moral culture.

The book has three parts. The first offers a genealogy of magnanimity 'from Plato to Plutarch'. One way of looking at that history is to view it as a conversation on an immense legacy. 'Perhaps Whitehead is wrong', Smith suggests: 'all debates about greatness and the perfection of virtue are a footnote on Homer, not Plato' (p. 15). Smith sketches Aristotle's efforts to redefine Homeric ideals in line with a shift of emphasis from honour to virtue; the pre-emptive critique of that move in Plato; representations of greatness, power, glory, mercy and liberality in Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch. Should Homeric virtue be rehabilitated and reformed, or regarded as essentially flawed? The question was of lingering importance for Hellenistic and Roman philosophy's appraisals of greatness. Early Christian thought was heir to a basic tension, and its implications – for virtue's ends; for psychological and moral autarky; for self-interest and love of neighbour; for forgiveness, generosity, humility and fortitude as evidences of greatness within.

The second part surveys aspects of *magnanimitas* in Ambrose, particularly in *On Duties* (a text treated fairly minimally in Smith's previous study). It duly rehearses his deployment of biblical and Christian exemplars in place of Greek and Roman ones; the theological hermeneutics that underwrite the approach; the endeavours to out-narrate Ciceronian-Stoic depiction of perfect duty with homage to mercy; some examples of Ambrose's advice to clergy on ways to endure humiliation without shame or resentment.

The last section turns to Augustine. Smith concentrates chiefly on two texts: *Confessions* 1.9.15 and *City of God* 1. The first is taken to be a repudiation of pretension to self-mastery and, at the same time, a signpost to the nature of true greatness, as limned in *Confessions* at large. *Pace* Arendt's critique (and its variants), Augustine's reasoning on love of neighbour and love for God does not frame greatness as sublime indifference to this-worldly suffering, or instrumentalise others as means towards personal blessedness. In the second text, self-willed death is, for Augustine, not greatness of soul but an implosion of Stoic logic on courage; it is, moreover, an expression of the falsehood of autonomy. The faithful Christian alternative – endurance of suffering unto death – rests upon knowledge of self as known by God, and thus possessed of hope of true glory. Greatness as measured in the earthly city is transcended and recast. An Epilogue offers brief reflections on magnanimity in eschatological perspective. Ambrose discerns a certain happiness in the arduous life of virtue *in via*; Augustine's mature vision centres on rest in God – and thus freedom from the vanity of self-consciousness and the relentless vigilance it obligates in this world – primarily at the end.

Smith offers a generally lucid synthesis, though there are some limitations procedurally. The classical background is surveyed quite well, albeit to my mind a little reductively in its bid to identify a single 'problem' generative of the essential meta-ethical issues with which Christian theologians reckoned. Some of the presentation of Ambrose is, in conceptual terms, heavily redolent of existing work in the field, but the ways of characterising Ambrose's aims and methods in transformation of his philosophical inheritance are not always set out optimally, or as transparently as they might be. The proportions and *lacunae* seem to me odd at times; a bit less on exegetical methods and *exempla*, important as they

are, might well have left room for more on crucial aspects of Ambrose's substantive handling of justice, courage, glory, humility, temperance, self-denial, contentment, happiness and other themes; the articulation of perfection and mercy deserves a lot more nuance. Certainly, the relevant material in *On Duties* and elsewhere is potentially much richer and subtler than is here adduced. Smith might well usefully also have underscored the links between moral theorising, formation and social image in Ambrose's annexation of Cicero. The treatment of Augustine's ethics – two chapters to Ambrose's three – is clearly limited in its textual and thematic scope, and makes too much of side-issues. It could have been significantly enriched by a conceptual approach less preoccupied with the language of *magnus animus* or greatness as such. At the same time, it manages to push in slightly too many directions at once in reference to modern debates on Augustine's eudaimonism, love ethics or accounts of moral judgement.

An exercise in 'historical theology', the work explores the evolution of an idea (p. 1) yet eschews extended historical narrative (p. 5). It ventures no sustained case in comparison or contrast of its two figures, or on their possible intellectual relationship (p. 16). Nor does it much consider how Ambrose or Augustine – in reframing things theologically as they respectively did – may have influenced Christian teaching on greatness after them. As such, Smith's approach offers important soundings rather than a fully integrated analysis. Perceptive as the interpretation is at many points, the argument at large does not entirely succeed in portraying Ambrose and Augustine as both heirs and contributors to a persistent – and enduringly ramified – moral theme. The book accordingly does not realise its ambition as a theological project: of gesturing towards and critiquing 'the Classical tradition of honor and the competitive pursuit of excellence in modern Western culture' (p. 16). The *fundamental* interests of the research, and the constructive conclusions of the case it might generate on moral theology's relations to ancient philosophy, are never quite pinned down. Still, Smith has made a useful contribution in a complex field. His book will be read with profit by students of Latin patristic ethics and its hinterlands.

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Iain Provan, *Seeking What is Right: The Old Testament and the Good Life*

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Provan's *Seeking What is Right: The Old Testament and the Good Life* – as one might expect – pursues the task its title articulates: namely, discerning how the Old Testament contributes to human flourishing (i.e. 'the good life'). The title does not necessarily prepare readers for its heavy engagement with church history in the pursuit of answering this question. The book is less a book about the Old Testament itself and more a collection of case studies on biblical hermeneutics broadly, though Provan does consistently