

through the terminology generated by such a discussion over the course of the Church's history. The finite limitations inherent in a construct such as language can prove to be enough of a barrier. However, Placher also recognizes that the relational nature of the Trinity is difficult to describe because it stands in contrast to our fallen nature as human beings. According to Placher, 'While I cannot be human except in relation to others, I am always curving in on myself and failing to be as fully open to such relations as I ought to be' (p. 135). Although difficult to understand, Placher contends that 'it is the divine three that manifest what personhood truly is' (p. 150).

In his attempt to preserve a place for mystery, Placher surrounds himself with conversation partners spanning the Church's history. In his introduction, Placher acknowledges the significant influence that the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar has had on his own work. However, Placher may draw most frequently from the work of Karl Barth. Placher may not always agree with Barth's theological assessments. Regardless, Barth offered an indication to Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and thus possibly to Placher as well, that efforts of contemporary theologians to grapple with the Trinity were in many ways insufficient. Drawing deeply from figures such as the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine, Placher is able to escape the traps inherent in the theological language left by Protestant liberalism. The work of Thomas Aquinas affords him a similar way of superseding the understanding that the best work in theology reduces its object to the most infinitesimal, if not also isolated, detail.

Overall, by drawing upon the wisdom of some of the Church's most ancient and influential voices, Placher's work reconnects theology with a form of language which seeks to appreciate God's mysterious nature. A finite construct such as language betrays us at such a point, and Placher is left to work within such a system. By comparison to many of his immediate predecessors, however, Placher is keenly aware of the possibility that the greatest contribution his work can make is that it points us to a reality which cannot be fully explained. The best he can do in *The Triune God* is to help us focus our attention and our efforts. As a result, Placher's effort to preserve a place for the mystery that is God is, in and of itself, a significant contribution worthy of our attention. In many ways, learning to describe less about God ironically allows us to understand God as being so much more.

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**THE AUGUSTINIAN PERSON** by Peter Burnell, *Catholic University Press of America, Washington, D.C., 2005 Pp. ix+ 218, \$24.95 pbk.*

When I told an Oxford tutor of mine that I was about to write a review of a book titled 'The Augustinian Person', he mentioned that two different scholars had begun essays on that topic for a collection he was editing, but neither had been able to bring their work to completion. There is good reason for this. Augustine's first and final formulation of the subject matter of philosophy is 'God and the soul' (*Soliloquia* 1.2.7). Hence, any treatment of Augustine's political, epistemological, or linguistic thought, is bound to be unsatisfactory unless the author has grasped how Augustine's view of a particular secondary subject relates to his views on this all-important primary subject, man's relation to God. This is no easy task. Undoubtedly much scholarship on Augustine continues to be produced to a very high standard. Yet the sheer quantity of Augustine's corpus added to the plague of academic overspecialisation tends to encourage two unfortunate consequences. One is that it has become possible to publish respectable books and articles that make reference to Augustine's epistemology, for instance, without a wider

understanding of Augustine's work as a whole. Confronted with shelves of Latin and stacks of English, French, Italian and German commentary, the professionally trained philosopher faces the strong temptation to ascribe certain doctrines to Augustine without necessarily knowing how those doctrines might fit within the whole of Augustine's thought, and without knowing whether the view he or she wishes to ascribe to Augustine represents Augustine's last word on the subject. The second consequence is that, except in rare instances, given a field already well tilled, the professional Augustinian scholar is bound to prefer publishing studies treating minute questions over broad but highly significant themes.

In both respects *The Augustinian Person* is a notable exception. As is clear from the absence of heavy scholarly apparatus (there are few footnotes and the bibliography is sparse at 83 entries compared with, say, Carol Harrison's *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* which has, by my count, 286) what the author aims for is a responsible exegesis of a major Augustinian theme pursuing that end without being weighed down by potentially distracting scholarly debates.

On the first page Burnell announces his goal is not simply to defend the master (though that is in fact what he spends most of the book doing) but 'to make plain Augustine's often implicit notion of person and human nature' (ix). Accordingly, each of chapters one through five examines Augustine's views on human nature and personality through the lens of a particular theme: the relationship between the body and soul (Ch. 1), the faculties of the mind (Ch. 2), the consequences of sin (Ch.3), the nature of love (Ch.4), and social and political life (Ch.5). However, because so much of modern criticism of Augustine is, on the author's view, 'gravely misdirected', Burnell's exegetical strategy includes giving sufficient space to correcting the most acute among contemporary misreadings (ix). Indeed, although the author derives his general division of topics from Augustine, most of the leading problems he attempts to solve are taken from wider contemporary philosophical debates that make use of Augustine in one way or another. Typically his chapters begin with a kind of *videtur quod*, before proceeding to his *responsio*. Chapter six draws together the positive conclusions of the study; the final chapter identifies three open questions (asked by Isaiah Berlin, Albert Camus, and E.L. Fortin) which even a reconstituted Augustinian theological anthropology, rightly understood, leaves unanswered. By leading the reader along a web of finely shaped questions the book succeeds in disentangling Augustine's theological anthropology from a number of egregious interpretations and so along the way provides a sympathetic overview of this central Augustinian theme.

In particular, the author is to be commended for his skill at manoeuvring the reader through some of the thorniest patches of Augustine's prose. Consider these examples from the author's treatment of Augustine's views on the will and on women.

Since the time of Abelard there have been 'Jansenistic' interpretations of St. Augustine: these have held that 'Augustine thought emotion to be separate from the will' (p.54). This way of interpreting Augustine's view of psychology has provided occasion for intense controversy, made manifest in several forms. Besides the disagreement surrounding Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) and his *Augustinus* one can point both to the later 17<sup>th</sup> century debate between François Fénelon and Bossuet over 'pure love' and to the 20<sup>th</sup> century debate over Andres Nygren's *Eros and Agape* as essentially reworking debates over the same theme, with variations. Because Augustine never did attempt anything comparable to a *Summa*, and because he did say things sounding much like what the Jansenists thought he said, one may be tempted to think that this debate cannot be decided on exegetical grounds alone. But that is no reason to give up the battle. And over the short span of eight pages (pp. 54–62) Burnell produces his own impressive contribution. Despite a series of triads which Augustine refers to in his

discussions of the soul's activities (e.g. being, knowing, willing; willing, understanding, memory; or, willing, understanding, emotion) (pp.55–56) Burnell shows we can reasonably infer that, for Augustine, will and intellect are, in fact, 'one faculty and are each the entire mind' (61). Against that class of modern interpreters (including readers as diverse as Gilbert Ryle and Alasdair MacIntyre) who continue to attribute to Augustine a conception of the will as naked and *prior* to intellect in ontology, Burnell concludes his exegesis with this: 'Internal mental oppositions notwithstanding, then, Augustine does not ultimately take the view that there are distinct operations of will, emotion, and intellect in the human mind. The notion of a pure, isolable will... is not in fact his view of the matter' (p. 62).

Burnell is also a careful guide when it comes to Augustine's views on the meaning of sexual difference (pp.44–50). If anything has made Augustine the object of acerbic criticism among his modern interpreters, even by those otherwise sympathetic to him, it is his writing on women (for references see E. Anne Mutter's entry 'Women' in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, pp.887–892). Focusing on a single aspect of Burnell's exposition, let us take up Augustine's notorious proposition that Eve was created for childrearing (cf. *Literal Commentary on Genesis* 9.5.9). In Burnell's view, many readers unfortunately gloss the text to mean childrearing is 'the only reason for the creation of women as distinct from man' (p.47). Augustine's text reads: 'If woman was not made to provide this assistance [*ad hoc adiutorium*] of producing children, to provide what assistance was she made?' (*ibid.* 9.5.9). As Burnell argues, Augustine's assertion is not this is the *only* purpose for Eve's creation, but rather:

that such assistance, insofar as it was intended in that creation, was intended to take the form of reproduction. In other words, Eve's purpose as providing assistance delimits what Augustine says. To the question: What assistance to Adam was purposed in Eve's creation? He concludes that the only answer is: reproductive assistance. He does not ask, though he might have, what else, outside such assistance, was the divine purpose of Eve's femaleness. That would have been another question. (p.48)

In other words, Eve's inferiority to Adam is not natural *simpliciter*; it belongs merely to a temporal dispensation. And once the practical reason for her subordination is dispensed with (at the resurrection), 'women will reflect God's glory in their uniquely womanly way, thus fulfilling the ultimate purpose of their femaleness' (p.48).

Whether or not one considers Augustine's views on women or on the will to be salvageable is, of course, beside the point. What Burnell's conscientious interpretation seeks to provide is a basis for a more meaningful discussion of these texts. As will annoy some readers, on these and other aspects of Augustine's anthropology Burnell has not tried to rescue Augustine from the clutches of our indignation by the facile appeal to historicism – that now common means of making irrelevant without argument what we find but do not like in an ancient author. He has, rather, presented to us a well-organized and sympathetic, though not wholly uncritical, overview of this central Augustinian topic. I trust it will serve as an intelligent guide.

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