century. In a ‘Final Consideration’ he himself notes that he has deliberately
avoided claims of this kind.

Through detailed studies of this kind the Hellenistic religious world can be
made much clearer for us. Petzke could now add to his extensive bibliography a
more general work on the same and related ground as his, D.L. Tiede, The
Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation
Series, 1; Missoula, Mont., 1973); Tiede has also reviewed Petzke’s book in

Robert Barnes


The twentieth-century ferment in philosophical theology has prompted
renewed attention to St Augustine. His brilliant and restless mind had seized
upon virtually all the disputed questions which now beset us. We may judge
some of his theses to be mistaken, even reprobate; yet in the act of so judging we
are led to a deeper understanding of fundamental issues.

In the last few decades, studies of this or that aspect of St Augustine are
legion. (Having completely eclipsed attention to the Angelic Doctor). The
present collection is representative. There are fifteen papers in all, some written
especially for this volume, the majority collected from journals. The editor has
grouped them under the headings of Christian Platonism, Language and Meaning,
Mind and Knowledge, God and Free Will, Time, Society: thus giving scope for
most departments of learned interest. The accent is on ‘learned’, for after the
opening paper by Armstrong, who succeeds splendidly in being both learned and
humane, the rest of the collection is more for scholars talking to scholars.

It would be inappropriate in this notice, to examine all the articles. Let
Armstrong’s be representative. Professor Armstrong, a doyen of Augustine
scholars in the English-speaking world, takes up three topics in the field of
Augustine and Christian Platonism.

First, on the status of the human soul: whether the gift of God is such that
the soul is by nature divine and immortal, incapable of sin and ignorance, as held
by Plotinus (but not by Plato). Augustine here rejects the pagan Platonism of
Plotinus: ‘God wills to make you a god; not by nature, as his Son is, but by his
gift and adoption’. On this point, Augustine is properly a Christian Platonist.

The second topic is Augustine’s attitude to the body and the material
universe. Christians and Platonists join together in declaring the material world
to be good, and made by a good divine power — thus combatting Gnostics and Manichees. Augustine concurs: the cause of sin lies in the will, not in the body. The Platonists, including Plotinus, go a step further as regards the material world. They declare that the cosmos is religiously relevant; that it is, or will be, holy; and as a corollary that our daily activities may be holy. Augustine turned away from this cosmic dimension of religion, and directed his gaze exclusively into the soul. The Augustinian contraction of view has worked ever since for the impoverishment of theology. (The civil order debased to the status of something merely utilitarian and penal; the full meaning of the Eucharist obscured; to mention only two instances of the baleful influence of Augustine.)

The third topic is the doctrine of election. As Armstrong points out, for Plato and the Platonists God is good; he radiates his beneficence to all men; God is not the author of evil. But according to Augustine, God is an arbitrary tyrant, a capricious God, who shows mercy only to some, the elect — and this to the flouting of the N.T. passages which teach otherwise. Was a more cruel doctrine ever conceived? : multitudes of men struggling hopelessly; this world a vast penal colony. Such could never be Christian orthodoxy. Like Augustine’s exclusion of the material cosmos, so his exclusion of most men from redemption, is an astounding narrowing, an impoverishment of religion. ‘Churchiness’, as Armstrong puts it, in its most virulent form.

Armstrong’s survey of these three topics is both masterly and highly readable. A similar happy conjunction of attributes informs O’Connell’s paper on Action and Contemplation, Rist’s on Free Will and Predestination, and the contributions of Brown and Cranz on social ideas. Other papers are more technical, some severely so.

‘Few thinkers have left as deep a mark on Western intellectual history as Augustine of Hippo’, remarks the editor in his Introduction. This is a bland phrase to conciliate readers, but we may have doubts about the kind of mark. Is the Augustinian legacy not as much baneful as wholesome? Most of the authors of this collection, in their several topics, agree that Augustine’s zeal far outran his prudence of judgement. Was not Augustine an enthusiast of astonishing brilliance, and as such, an equivocal ally of the Christian dispensation? St Thomas, when it came to his turn, had the task of rectifying Augustine at almost every point: a task which he performs tactfully but firmly. We may wonder if the present Augustinian revival is quite as salutary as the Thomistic revival which it has superseded.

G.W.R. Ardley