

of the living dynamism of the God of Israel should result just in the confession of *Trinity* rather than the non-triune Unity of Islamic *tawhid* or, for that matter, a Duality or a Quaternity. Sonderegger is worried that, if we concede that it is solely under the pressure of the confession of Jesus as Lord that we know God as triune (i.e. only because of the divine decision to refract or project the divine processions into history as the human life of Jesus, lived in relation to the Father and the Spirit), then the novelty of speech that is introduced on our side by that event must also 'pick out something New' in God (p. 533). She prefers to see the revelation of the Son and Spirit in the New Testament as a completion of what is taught in the Old Testament rather than 'the amending of the unfinished' (p. 536). Yet it is not clear how in this context amendment is different from completion, or why either should be taken to imply that what we are taught of God in the Old Testament are 'half-truths' needing 'correction' (p. 536). To learn (as we do) that the life of Israel's God is that of a Son who enjoyed glory with the Father before the foundation of the world is not to impugn the truth of what was known before the Son dwelt among us, any more than my learning something new about a person over time necessarily reduces what I knew before to the status of half-truths. When Sonderegger concedes in discussing the vision to the shepherds in Luke 2 that the immanent Trinity 'is being taught ... in the manifestation of the Child of Bethlehem' (p. 542), she seems to give the game away: no birth in Bethlehem, no doctrine of the Trinity. Would that admission affect Sonderegger's analysis of the logical priority of God's eternal life over the economy? Or her deft recovery of *vestigia Trinitatis*? I can't see that it would. Indeed, in what seems to me a supreme irony, in Sonderegger's (admirable) desire to avoid methodological throat-clearing, she seems to me rather too taken up with methodological questions, albeit in a negative register, in that her concern to oppose christocentrism causes her to stake out methodological commitments she could leave aside with no loss to her substantive theological vision.

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David L. Eastman, *Early North African Christianity: Turning Points in the Development of the Church*

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The subtitle of David Eastman's 2021 book *Early North African Christianity* has, it seems to me, a dual meaning. 'Turning Points in the Development of the Church' certainly applies in a narrow sense to the North African theologians, martyrs and 'heretics' that populate the book, each of whom represents a distinct turning point in the region's history. More broadly, however, the subtitle reflects Eastman's own goal for his project: 'Africa was at the center of the action, not an afterthought or a secondary region' (p. 4). In other words, the story of Christianity in North Africa *itself* constitutes

a crucial inflection point in Christian belief and practice. Many of our modern theological debates have their origin in intra-Christian disputes and developments that first occurred here, in what is now Tunisia and Algeria.

Early North African Christianity is based on a course Eastman taught in Cairo during the summer months of 2014 and 2015 titled 'Readings in Early North African Christianity', and based on its contents, one can only conclude that it would be a privilege to have him as a professor. The book is both well-written and very clear. Eastman has a unique way of applying just the right amount of nuance and succinctness to complex theological issues that allows the reader to firmly grasp their essential outlines without falling into superficiality.

It is also deeply confessional. In his conclusion, for instance, Eastman argues that, by reacquainting ourselves with the ancient North African church, we are reminded that the communion of saints is broader than our own era. We are also advised that, despite the failures of the past and our fears for the present, 'the church is God's work ... I am confident that God is going to sustain the church through the various challenges and trials that we face today' (pp. 166–7). Such explicitly confessional language can sometimes raise hackles in academic circles, not least because of its implication that the author is taking a 'side' in the historical narrative. Eastman's purpose, however, is more nuanced: 'My goal has not been to convince you of *what* you should think about these issues, but I do want to convince you *that* you should think about these issues' (p. 165).

True to form, the book is careful to avoid arguments in favour of one side or the other when navigating the (many) theological debates that rocked the North African church. This extends to nomenclature: in his discussion of the Donatist schism, for instance, Eastman conspicuously declines to label the party of Augustine and Aurelius 'Catholic', noting that it was precisely this title that was up for debate; instead, he opts to call them 'Caecilianists' (p. 116). Similarly, the dispute between Pelagius and Augustine is described without assuming the correctness of the latter's views; rather, Eastman simply traces the future course of their debate to the present, reminding his readers that the fundamental issues involved are not as simplistic as they have often been portrayed (p. 161).

I should note, however, that sometimes Eastman appears to have a particular audience in mind: namely, the Orthodox students of his 2014–15 Cairo courses who, he states, tended to undervalue the contributions of their Latin-speaking counterparts. This emphasis is most noticeable in the chapters on Tertullian and Augustine. For example, Eastman admits that 'when I taught in Egypt and had some Orthodox students, it was initially a challenge to get them to read Augustine with an open mind because they dislike him so much' (p. 161). Sometimes this can lead to a certain overstating of his case. Tertullian's contribution to trinitarian thought, for instance, is well-established, but I wonder if it is really fair to say that 'we can only wonder how the history of Christianity and theology would have been different if the bishops at Nicaea and Constantinople had read and listened to Tertullian. How many third- and fourth-century heresies could have been avoided?' (p. 65) While Tertullian's trinitarian theology is rightly considered innovative for its time, it was certainly not identical to the mature Nicene formulation at the 381 Council of Constantinople.

The book itself is divided into five chronological sections, each representing a particular character or movement within the story of North African Christianity: Perpetua and Felicity, Tertullian, Cyprian, the Donatists and Augustine. Each of these sections is subdivided into three short chapters (usually 8–10 pages), which are individually

introduced by a bulleted set of three 'Key Ideas' designed to orient the reader to the chapter's purpose. The first chapter in each section usually provides relevant historical background, while the next two focus on specific theological disputes or contributions emphasised by the person or movement. So, for instance, the first chapter in the Augustine section borrows heavily from *Confessions* in order to reconstruct the contours of Augustine's life, the next outlines his major contributions to the doctrines of original sin, the relational Trinity and the two cities, and the third focuses on the Pelagian controversy. The book concludes with a list of recommended authors for readers who wish to dive deeper into the world of early North African Christianity – a valuable resource for Eastman's targeted audience of undergraduate and seminary students.

The only real quibble I had with the work is its rather abrupt ending. Eastman concludes with Augustine, which is certainly a classic way to close the book on North African Christianity. However, the book itself contains tantalising hints of a longer story: we are told, for instance, that the schism between Donatists and Caecilianists faded into the background 'when all Christians in Africa faced a more serious and common threat' (p. 130). That threat, of course, was the Vandal invasion of 430, and it would have been fascinating to see what 'turning points' Eastman might have noticed in the abrupt reversal of Nicene Christianity's fortunes in North Africa as represented by Quodvultdeus, Victor of Vita or Fulgentius. Themes emphasised throughout the book, such as constancy under persecution and relations with secular authorities, could have been profitably extended into the Vandal era and even the 'Three Chapters' controversy that erupted once North Africa was absorbed into the Byzantine world. Perhaps the story, in other words, has ended too early.

Nevertheless, I want to emphasise what a welcome addition this book is to the rather narrow list of introductory texts that focus on North African Christianity. Eastman's balanced treatment of all sides and nuanced articulation of the issues involved is much appreciated, and it is my hope that *Early North African Christianity* becomes a standard textbook in college and seminary libraries.

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Paul J. DeHart, *Unspeakable Cults: An Essay in Christology*

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It is tempting to view christological reflection in the twentieth century through Martin Kähler's distinction of the 'historical Jesus' and the 'historic, biblical Christ'. On one side, we have doughty historical-critical specialists, some number of whom aspire to ascertain who Jesus 'really' was and what Jesus 'really' did; on the other, we have pious theologians who view the explication of Christ's person and work as ingredients of the age-old project of faith seeking understanding. But we should resist this either/or,