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St. Augustine

*Tractates on the Gospel of John, 28–54*

Translated by John W. Rettig

Fathers of the Church, 88

Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1993

Pp. 326. \$34.95.

This volume is the third installment in Rettig's ongoing translation of Augustine's 124 sermons on the gospel of John for the Fathers of the Church Series (vol. 78 contains translations of sermons 1–10 on Jn. 1.1–2.21, and vol. 79 contains sermons 11–27 on Jn. 2.23–6.72). In the sermons translated in this volume, Augustine treats the gospel of John from 7.13 to 12.50. Rettig's translation is based on the critical text edited by R. Willems, found in volume 36 of the Latin series of the *Corpus Christianorum*.

While each volume contains a bibliography (basically the same in all three volumes) and two indices (of general terms and scripture references), only the first volume contains Rettig's full introduction (there is also a much briefer introduction to the second volume). The main introduction addresses the following topics: the setting in which the sermons were delivered, their literary style, allegorical exegesis, christology, christological and trinitarian heresies, the dates of the sermons, the term "tractate," and the critical text of the sermons. Aimed at a broad audience ranging from the religiously interested layperson to the scholar of Augustine, Rettig's introduction alternates between homily-like summaries of Augustine's theological views and more technical discussions of scholarly issues such as the problem of dating the sermons. By means of his own homiletical tone and style, Rettig seems to be trying to prepare lay readers to attend to and appreciate the highly rhetorical style of the sermons they are about to read.

Rettig contends that "Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, is the major theme that runs through all these Tractates" (vol. 78, p. 13). He observes further that Augustine's sermons on John were intended to counter the influence of various heresies. He notes in particular that Manichaeism (which, he adds, was really another religion, though heavily "christianized" in North Africa) was not a grave danger for Augustine, given the evidence of the tractates. Rettig offers a fairly lengthy discussion of Donatism, though he does not tie it to the tractates in any specific way. He also notes Augustine's concern with Pelagianism. As for Arianism, Rettig observes that Augustine wrote *de Trinitate* during the period in which he delivered the sermons on John, but suggests that Arianism was a modest threat at best, and that Augustine's treatment in the tractates is only occasional and rather academic. Arianism was not the live threat that the other three movements were.

Rettig offers a detailed and lengthy discussion of the dating of the sermons. He notes that the Maurist Benedictine edition places the 124 tractates (and 10 tractates on the Epistles) in or shortly after 416. He then describes in considerable detail a new proposal for dating that splits the 124 tractates into two groups. Sermons 1–54 (with 10 tractates on the Epistles intervening between 12 and 13) were delivered before Augustine's congregation in Hippo Regius. Debates con-

tinue regarding the dating and character of sermons 55–124. Rettig offers a lengthy and detailed summary of these debates. Surprisingly, he does not offer the reader his own conclusions or explain what important differences the various dating options would make for the interpretation and analysis of the sermons.

Rettig acknowledges the difficulty of translating the highly rhetorical language of Augustine's sermons into English: "... Augustine created a new homiletic style of high aesthetic impact. The translator is not altogether confident that his translation even adequately captures the alluring beauty of Augustinian Latinity" (vol. 78, p. 8). He empathizes with the 1913 lament of E. Pope (vol. 78, p. 8, n.25): "Many . . . find it impossible to read these *Tractates* in the original, but if they are obliged to make use of a translation, they lose much of the beauty and force of the original. For Augustine's power and charm lie very often in the exquisite Latin he employs." Prior to Rettig's translation, the most widely used English translation of the tractates was by John Gibb (tractates 1–37) and James Innes (tractates 38–124), originally published in 1873 and now included in vol. 8 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by Philip Schaff.

Selective comparisons suggest that Rettig's translation is consistently superior to the Gibb/Innes effort in both substance and style. I hope the following example will convey at least something of Rettig's accomplishment. In tractate 40.10, Augustine says, in the midst of the sermon's ornate peroration: "[Erit tibi nummus] instrumentum peregrinationis, non irritamentum cupiditatis; quo utaris ad necessitatem, non quo fruaris ad delectationem." Rettig gives the Latin text of this particular sentence in a footnote in order to remind readers of the difficulty of conveying in English the rhetorical techniques of Augustine's Latin and to give readers without the Latin text a sense of what kind of English language surrogates might be found for Latin stylistic techniques. Rettig gives the text as follows, highlighting the internal assonance and structural symmetry of Augustine's Latin phrases: "[Erit tibi nummus] *instrumentum peregrinationis, non irritamentum cupiditatis, quo utaris ad necessitatem, non quo fruaris ad delectationem.*" Innes renders this sentence as follows: "Money then will be thy means of pilgrimage, not the stimulant of lust; something to use for necessity, not to joy over as a means of delight" (p. 229). Rettig gives us the following version: "Money will be for you fare for a voyage, not an incitement to greed, a thing which you employ for a need, not which you enjoy for delight."

Although the absence of a "one" in the phrase "not which" undermines the potential parallelism that the "thing" in the preceding phrase "a thing which" sets up, Rettig's translation is superior in a number of respects. "Means" for *instrumentum* and "stimulant" for *irritamentum* are acceptable but vague; "fare" is just the sort of *instrumentum* Augustine refers to—money for a voyage. "Incitement" also seems better than "stimulant" because the latter, with its connotations of "drugged" and its suggestion of passivity seems to lack the moral connotations of "temptation"—connotations of intentional temptation (as in "he incited the crowd to riot") and of willed complicity (as in "the crowd answered his inflammatory remarks by roaring its approval"). Augustine is clearly concerned with the moral issue, not simply with a cause-and-effect relation. "Greed"

seems far better than "lust" as a rendering of that misdirected desire called *cupiditas*. "Lust" simply has far too sexual a connotation for use when talking about the specific character of the desire that money incites; "greed" seems to be precisely the mode of misplaced desire that Augustine is concerned with here. "Greed" then gives Rettig a basis for assonance with "need," and, avoiding Innes's awkward and somewhat archaic "joys over," he achieves further assonance with the pair "employ"/"joy." This pair not only provides a thoroughly comparable surrogate for Augustine's *utaris/fruaris*, it draws the reader's attention to these two key terms of Augustinian ethics, the governing contrast between "use" and "enjoyment," which is just the distinction on which the entire passage turns. Rettig provides further analogies to Augustine's balanced phrase constructions by playing off two forms with an article ("a voyage"/"a need") against two forms with prepositions ("to greed"/"for delight"). This seems better than Innes's seemingly arbitrary progression: "of pilgrimage"/"of lust"/"for necessity"/"of delight."

In short, Rettig's translation consistently presses beyond mere accuracy, making significant efforts to convey some sense of the rhetorical fruits of Augustine's classical education. This volume and the series of which it is part are directed primarily at the educated lay reader who has little or no knowledge of the ancient languages in which the texts were written. Lay readers will appreciate Rettig's straightforward prose, which adequately conveys Augustine's meanings, and they will benefit from his judiciously chosen footnotes, which concisely supply necessary historical or theological background or point out especially significant peculiarities of Augustine's rhetorical style. Scholars of Augustine will, of course, have the Latin text at hand, but they also are likely to learn from Rettig's translation decisions, especially since those decisions are based on considerable knowledge of the relevant classical contexts for Augustine's Latin usage.

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Paul Rorem

*Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*

New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993

Pp. xiii + 267. \$39.95.

This volume offers "a sweeping, interpretive summary of the course of the argument within a chapter or a treatise—indeed, within the entire (Dionysian) corpus" in order to complement, rather than substitute, a reading of the full corpus itself (4). As Rorem explains:

A major purpose of this book is to invite others to undertake the task of interpreting the Dionysian writings and evaluating their influence. This double task demands fresh perspectives and approaches to the original texts in order to challenge and supplement the current state of various questions, including the answers presumed in the Paulist Press edition and presented in this commentary. A translation of the complete works, a comprehensive