Doctrine and Power: Theological Controversy and Christian Leadership in the Later Roman Empire by Carlos R. Galvão-Sobrinho (review)

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Carlos R. Galvão-Sobrinho
Doctrine and Power: Theological Controversy and Christian Leadership in the Later Roman Empire
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013
Pp. x + 310. $75.00.

Galvão-Sobrinho's recent monograph proves again that the so-called Arian controversy, despite numerous studies dedicated to the topic, has lost nothing of its fascination and intrigue. In the last two hundred years or so, it has attracted some of the most inquisitive, meticulous, and imaginative historians of the early church. The book under review is an invigorating and stimulating approach to the tempestuous first fifty years of the fourth-century theological confrontation. This period marked a watershed in Christian theology, spirituality, and, as the author claims, especially in ecclesiastical politics of disagreement and debate, with large-scale implications for the church's social standing and internal power structures. The author's expressed intent, however, is not to untangle the theological intricacies of the debate but to use its dramatic historical trajectory to highlight what he identifies as a major shift in the power structures of the church, particularly in how episcopal power was exercised in late antiquity.

The study's argument is helpfully summarized in the Introduction (3–9) and Conclusion (155–59). While the thesis is shaped on the classic "before-and-after-model" to highlight the revolution in episcopal leadership, which the author diagnoses as emerging out of the Arian controversy, there is a vexing imbalance between the level of detail allocated to the reconstruction of the two contrasting "patterns of conduct" (14). The former pattern of episcopal authority (ca. pre-300 C.E.)—which is characterized as having emphasized compromise, reconciliation, and solidarity when it came to doctrinal divergences within Christian communities—is covered in two short chapters (One and Two). However, the rise and consolidation of the "new" pattern, defined as "aggressive, bold, and militant" (157), is covered in six chapters (Three through Eight). Thus, the bulk of the book is dedicated to a dense narrative of the seemingly never-ending ramifications of the "Arian controversy" up to the death of Constantius II. The detailed index at the end of the book is handy as a useful navigational instrument. The book also contains nine appendices, the first two of which are extremely relevant for the author's overall argument. The first is a list of the small number of bishops (the author lists ten cases) who, based upon the extent sources, have suffered investigations of their teachings on suspicion of heresy (or have been accused thereof) *before* the Arian controversy. From this already small number, only two suffered public deposition: Privatus of Lambaesis (North Africa) and Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch (Syria).

There are many aspects that commend the book, such as Galvão-Sobrinho's engaging narrative and detailed knowledge of the primary sources of one of the perhaps most convoluted episodes of the ancient church. The author's methodological approach is a welcome provocation to re-think the most basic assumptions of the traditional explanation models for the emergence of the post-Nicene church (e.g. the imperial involvement in the politics of the church; the prelates'

struggle for imperial patronage, wealth, and civic support; regional and cultural rivalries; the completion of the canonization process; the role of liturgy; cultural democratization, etc.). However, the author's construction of his argument raises three primary concerns for this reviewer. First, it is difficult to prove the ultimately Weberian assumption of a causal relationship between religious ideas (in this case a diagnosed shift toward greater precision in theological discourse) and social change (i.e. "the emergence of a new type of church leader" [33]). Second, the author appeals to an artificial differentiation between doctrinal and disciplinary debates inside the early church. And third, the author attempts to downplay the imperial factor in the shaping of the new "assertive model of episcopal authority" (157).

Also, while the argument of the book has certainly profited from the gestation period of the manuscript, which goes back to a Yale dissertation (1999), there has regrettably been only a partial reception of important more recent publications and newer editions of cited books published after 1999. Finally, a minor issue is the consistent use of two different citation methods: one that includes explicit page numbers, and the other that makes use of the less reader-friendly "f./ff."

Galvão-Sobrinho's ambitious book proves once again that the "Arian controversy" remains a challenge for even the most experienced historians who dare to dive into its muddy waters (to use Gibbon's stirring metaphor for the debate and its sources). The book's importance lies in the author's insight that it is only by shifting the controversy's ideological, political, and social framework that one avoids ending up in "pursuit of a phantom" (Gibbon's even more perceptive metaphor for the controversy), notwithstanding the risk of exchanging the mirage of one phantom for that of another.

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John Peter Kenney
Contemplation and Classical Christianity: A Study in Augustine
Oxford Early Christian Studies
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013
Pp. xi + 191. $74.00.

John Peter Kenney has contributed this incisive monograph with a twofold aim: "to retrieve conceptions of contemplation found in the early texts of St Augustine and then to consider them in reference to Augustine's classic depiction in the *Confessions*" (viii). As in his previous work, Kenney here eschews "common-core theories" from psychological models constructed to describe the vast array of reported mystical experience in the world's religions. Instead, he seeks to read Augustine on his own terms. In so doing, Kenney pays attention to how Augustine debates with opponents, such as the Manichaeans, the "*contradictores*" within the Christian fold who rejected Augustine's "transcendentalism," and most