Christian Monastic Life in Early Islam by Bradley Bowman (review)

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theological—and often polemical—concern to solidify that practice's place in Christian life as essential. This involved constructing an image of the catechumenate as inherently temporary.

Chapter Four, "From *catechumenus* to *fidelis*: The Lenten Preparation for Baptism in Hippo," treats the most widely covered aspect of the catechumenate. Focusing not on the well-trod themes of catechesis, Pignot instead analyzes "the 'scrutinies' and the significance of exorcism, the *disciplina arcani*, the role of sponsors, and the dating of the rites of transmission of the creed and the Lord's prayer" (179). The upshot is a vision of diverse practices that evade easy anachronistic systematization.

Chapter Five, "Councils, Preaching and the Catechumenate in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Africa," moves beyond Augustinian sources to consider the relationship of his texts to that of wider evidence from the same region in roughly the same period. While he is not afraid to acknowledge diversity, Pignot makes clear the larger lines of continuity within the African tradition. Nevertheless, as in Augustine, this common tradition becomes weaponized in specific ways for the sake of anti-Pelagian, anti-Arian, and other polemics.

Finally, Chapter Six, "From Carthage to Rome: Debating the Catechumenate in the Sixth-Century West," focuses on two sets of epistolary exchanges: one between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe and another between John the Deacon and Senarius. These texts represent the reception of Augustine both in North Africa and in Italy in a way that points not only to some sort of standardization of practice but also, and more importantly, to the continued polemical context of ritual practice and discourse.

The Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa is a gift to the scholarly community. The analysis is precise and convincing, leaving no stone unturned in its goal of establishing the shape and significance of the extended catechumenate in one late antique context. It is a volume that will be invaluable to scholars of a variety of sub-disciplines for years to come. Historical theologians will find a helpful reconsideration of the relationship of catechetical instruction to polemical concerns. Scholars of late antique Christian culture will come away with more nuanced appreciation for the liminal space occupied by catechumens within the plurality of Christianity. And all readers will benefit from Pignot's keen command of a wide variety of evidence, both from the Augustinian corpus and beyond.

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Bradley Bowman
Christian Monastic Life in Early Islam
Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2021
Pp. 256. $105.00.

This book, a revision of Bowman's doctoral dissertation, takes as its starting point the thesis of his advisor Fred Donner that Islam during its early phases was an inclusive "Believers' movement" embracing Jews and Christians receptive

to Muhammad's insistence on monotheism and piety. Bowman aims to expand this thesis by exploring one manifestation of this "ecumenical" drive, Muslim appreciation for Christian monasticism, arguing that it was elicited primarily by "pietistic" emphasis on common practices such as fasting and prayer.

The book is clearly structured in six chapters, in addition to the introduction. The first presents a sampling of elements to be analyzed in more detail later, such as the late antique context of fluid confessional identity among Christians in which Islam emerged, the characteristics of early monasticism, and the tale of Salman al-Farisi, a Persian led to acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad by previous discipleship to Christian holy men. Chapters Two and Three then present the political and economic circumstances of monasteries before and after the Muslim conquests, respectively. Drawing mainly on Christian sources here, Bowman argues that Muslim rule was generally beneficial for monasteries because it brought security after the violence and disorder of the last great Roman-Persian war, and that, furthermore, Muslim rulers actively favored monks and monasteries, in continuity with Roman and Persian policy, and that oppression of monks, and Christians more generally, was the exception rather than the rule during most of the Umayyad period. The fourth chapter draws primarily on Arabic literary evidence for the mingling of Christians and Muslims at monasteries. These accounts evoke the aesthetic qualities of monasteries and the opportunities they offered for wine drinking and love making by elite Muslims, away from the eyes of their more puritanical brethren (they do not seem to have been concerned about what the monks thought). Toward the chapter's conclusion evidence is presented that at least some Muslims had more pious intentions in their excursions to monasteries. Chapter Five examines various Muslim views toward monasticism (in the Qur'an, Hadith, and other writings), acknowledging the negative ones but arguing that a positive, "ecumenical" view prevailed in the early period. The sixth and concluding chapter presents in more detail the kind of pious practices characteristic of monks that Muslims did find or might have found inspiring, due to a common "pietistic" ground.

The main merit of the book is that it is the first monograph-length study of the Muslim-Christian interaction at monasteries for purposes other than revelry. Bowman draws on a range of sources in three languages, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, including at least one important work that has not been fully published, a *Book of Monks* by the ninth-century Muslim moralist Ibn Abi al-Dunya, preserved in a manuscript in Rampur, India.

Bowman offers vivid vignettes showing that some Muslims did indeed appreciate Christian asceticism and even seek spiritual advice from monks. Yet his overarching thesis that this is evidence for a "residual, ecumenical *īmān* [faith]" (5) does not quite convince. Like Donner's "Believers' movement" thesis on which it is based (unquestioningly: only one critical article is cited, without discussion, at 61n126), it tends to read modern ideas or ideals back into early Islamic sources. The terms "ecumenical" and "pietistic," in particular, are employed frequently without clarification and without any acknowledgment of their specialized meaning in theological and historical literature.

Two examples may serve to show the perils of this approach. In Chapter Five, in a more detailed analysis of the aforementioned narrative of Salman al-Farsi's

geographical and spiritual movement from Zoroastrianism, through ascetic Christianity, finally to fulfillment in Islam, Bowman characterizes the tale as ecumenical because of its positive portrayal of most of Salman's Christian masters. But the story is clearly supersessionist in intent: monks are good insofar as they point beyond Christianity toward Islam. This is not "ecumenism" in the usual sense.

Then in the final chapter the discussion of common ground between monastic and Muslim piety does not go beyond outwardly similar practices to a thick description that would take into account the different theological principles informing them. In the final paragraph of the book (233–34), Bowman cites the "crucifying" of themselves to the world required of monks in a Syriac text as "a powerful symbol for demarcating a life of purity against an existence in the physical realm," which, hypothetically, might have inspired the aforementioned Ibn Abi al-Dunya in collecting wisdom from Christian monks. But it is precisely such an integral component of Christian faith and asceticism as the Cross of Christ, which Muslims rejected both as a historical occurrence and an object of veneration, that marks the limits of the interest even sympathetic Muslims could show in Christian monasticism. Similarly, Bowman focuses on the physical isolation, admired by some Muslims, that is denoted by the very term "monk" (Gk. *monachos* / Syr. *ihidaya*). Though citing (at 220 and 236n22) Sidney Griffith's "The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism" (in Wimbush and Valantasis, eds., *Asceticism* [Oxford University Press, 1995]) for this meaning, he neglects the same article's point that *ihidaya* is also the scriptural word for the "single" or "only" Son of God (as in the Gospel of John), and that this semantical identity was used by Syriac writers to urge monks toward realizing a mystical identification with him. Such a christological resonance in the very fibers of monastic piety cannot easily be squared with the anti-Trinitarian monotheism espoused by Islam from very early in its history.

Though to my mind Bowman does not succeed in explaining Muslim interest in monastic piety as a manifestation of a "Believers' movement," his portrayal of the manifold interactions of Christian monks and monasteries with Muslims on an official as well as private level is vivid and suggestive, and could serve as an introduction to this rich field for research into a more comprehensive history of the medieval Middle East.

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Daniel Caner
The Rich and the Pure: Philanthropy and the Making of Christian Society in Early Byzantium
Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021
Pp. xix + 410. $34.95.

Daniel Caner, in *The Rich and the Pure: Philanthropy and the Making of Christian Society in Early Byzantium*, distinguishes among five religious gift categories that developed in the Eastern Roman Empire between the fourth and seventh