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Rexer, Jochen: Sakrament und Schrift bei Augustinus. *Ad inquisitiones Ianuarii* und Augustins Deutung von Liturgie und Bibel. – Paderborn: Schöningh 2020. (VI) 382 S. (Augustinus – Werk und Wirkung, 9), brosch. € 99,00 ISBN: 978-3-506-73914-8

Few letters stand apart as their own separate treatise, but in or around the year 400, Augustine of Hippo composed two epistles to a Catholic layman Januarius who first reached out in order to ask about how to navigate local differences in various religious doctrinal and liturgical practices. Augustine looked back at this epistolary exchange and named it *Ad Inquisitiones Ianuarii Libri Duo* (*retr.* II.20[47]). In these pages, Augustine addresses how to keep doctrine constant while allowing for variation in disciplines: when and how to fast, whether or not to receive eucharist daily, when to celebrate Easter, and even how to address certain pagan beliefs when confronted with their madness. In 4 chaps., as lengthy as they are illuminating, Jochen Rexer takes the reader through Augustine's concerns and his pastoral responses to Januarius.

Chap. 1 (9–81) treats the liturgical practices of Easter in late antique Christianity. While a question as early as the 1st century (*viz.*, *First Epistle of Clement*), Augustine treats this issue in terms of what exactly constitutes a sacrament. R. is sagaciously adroit in lifting out Augustine's sensitivity for local ecclesial customs. From the liturgical use of "Alleluia" to various forms of fasting, to the dating of Easter itself, R.'s Augustine shows a sympathy with geographical differences, personal temperaments, as well as with a Church confident enough in her own unity to allow for fruitful divergences. Regardless how one prepares for as well as celebrates this holiest of feasts, the essential gift of Easter is a Christian faith which can gaze upon the empty tomb knowing that this is the sign of a reality which is *Schon-jetzt und Noch-nicht* (65).

This "already but not yet" is our own passage over from death into life, a passage effected by the sacraments of Christ's Church. That is why chap. 2 (82–166) takes up the issue of sacramental performance and efficacy (*Sacramenta facienda/celebranda*). R. takes the reader carefully through the *Triduum sacrum* showing how each day liturgically represents some element of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. The 40 days of Lent are crowned in these 3 days which recapitulate all that the Lord does for our salvation, culminating in the Easter Vigil ("Mutter aller Nachtwachen") which itself is celebrated for an octave and then even 50 more days until the Ascension and Pentecost. The purpose of leading us through the many movements of this liturgical season is to show the reader the importance Augustine places on the uniqueness of Easter: its lunar dating is not a nod to the Manichean worship of the moon's phases, its required sermons are to be efficacious in illuminating the Christian mind to see all history through the resurrection event, and how all the rites, movements

and symbols involved during this season are for nothing other than lifting the Christian soul to its eternal life in heaven.

That is why chap. 3 (167–240) moves to the “*Sacramenta intellegenda – Transitus noster oportet in sacramento celebrari*,” where R. lays out how Augustine’s paschal preaching was aimed mainly at the newly-baptized, and stressed their new life in the *sacramentum mensae dominicae*. At this table to which they were now invited, the neophytes were exhorted to see the Lord’s body not only on the altar but throughout his Church as well (e. g. 227; 272): “Folglich bezeichnet für Augustinus die Eucharistie mit Brot und Kelch erstens den Leib und das Blut Christi, das Brot dabei aber zugleich zweitens die Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen mit dem Leib Christi, die Kirche als Leib Christi mit seinen vielen Gliedern.” (209) Here love of God and love of neighbor coalesce, an extension of the Son’s humanity, stressing one of Augustine’s major themes—namely, one cannot love God without loving those whom God himself loves. That is precisely why, R. shows, Augustine is insistent that *unitas*, *veritas*, *pietas*, and *caritas* must all be understood as synonymous for the Christian (226). While these pages are among the most illuminating of all of R.’s work, more could certainly have been done by taking up Augustine’s ecclesiology as both the *Christus totus* as well as the deified Church as the *unus Christus amans se ipsum* (*ep. Jo. 10.3*).

The fourth and final chap. (241–317) analyzes Augustine’s treatment of the relationship between sacrament and scripture in his responses to Januarius, focusing our attention on the performative theology of *similitudo*, a term that appears 18 times in this exchange. This term emerges as pivotal because in both scripture as well as the sacramental celebration of the Church, the visible is to lift the faithful to the invisible, and to bring the otherwise inaudible and insensible into the realm of the perceptible and tangible: “And in this way the Holy Spirit, in taking a likeness from visible things for invisible ones and from bodily things for spiritual ones, wanted that passage (Wis 5:3–4) from one life to another, which is called Pasch [...]” (*ep. 55.5.9*). R. outlines how Augustine, like many bishops in late antiquity, was trained in pagan oratory (concentrating on Cicero and Quintilian) in order to be able to raise the Christian mind and heart in his preaching and through his celebrating the manifestation of the Church’s sacraments. In this way Augustine uses a theory of *similitudo* both to criticize the Manichaean hermeneutic and their erroneous understanding of visible signs, as well as to make real the presence of the one true God here and now.

R. currently serves as both a minister of the Württembergische Landeskirche as well as a Privatdozent at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at Tübingen Univ. His writing reflects not only a clear grasp of Augustine’s overall theological themes but an even more important concern for those who desire union with Christ in the most robust and reasonable way possible. For this Augustine spent his life, and in his two answers to Januarius we receive a look of the great Bishop of Hippo’s desire to bring others into the fullness of the Christian faith. Accordingly, R. is to be thanked for lifting this important exchange from Augustine’s overall corpus so as to provide a glimpse of a loving pastor caring for those seeking answers.

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