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# Review of Saint Augustine and the Conversion of England, edited by R. Gameson

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*Ecclesia* with its concern for sacerdotal formation (Lizzi). The large number of letters from Augustine indicates that he often wrote of personal issues that he mentioned in order to sway his correspondents (Rebillard).

As a rule the episcopal office in cities was in flux, not yet the urban power base that it would later become. The fourth and fifth centuries were a seminal period in the development of bishops' roles within city life. In the third century Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, had been a rich, established Roman procurator when he became bishop. The council that deposed him worried about his christology, but the clearest information concerns his filling his role as bishop with the trappings and power of his Roman office. Disciples of Christ were not to act that way.

Wealthy, well-connected men became candidates for bishoprics, occasionally almost shanghaied into office. Sometimes they used their resources not only to help the poor and work for justice but also to pay for church structures and, in the case of lesser towns like Cyrus in which Theodoret served, even an important local bridge. Their web of authority depended on the status of their families, but also upon their personal character. The tracks already had been laid down, however, over which a much more authoritarian, politically self-interested bishop could travel.

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***St. Augustine and the Conversion of England.*** Edited by Richard Gameson. Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 1999. xii + 436 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

This volume contains essays first given at a 1997 convocation held at the University of Kent, Canterbury to commemorate the 1400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mission of Augustine of Canterbury to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons.

The essays range widely, but a central theme unites them: the achievement of Augustine. This alone makes the volume welcome. As many contributors point out, the main source for the mission is the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, and Bede makes Gregory the Great, who sent the mission, more important than Augustine, who actually did the converting. Getting there "firstest with the mostest" often wins, and generations of scholars have followed Bede's lead. Since he is the primary source, in both senses of the word, Bede will remain a major influence, but after this volume Augustine will not be in the background again. Finally, too, scholars have begun to look for the biases in Bede's almost legendary prowess. Bede was a monk, and even as pope, Gregory considered himself a monk, while Augustine (he himself also a monk) established a strong episcopal organization in Kent. Furthermore, Bede was the leading light of a Northumbrian learned tradition and may not have wished to focus too much on Canterbury, the only potential rival to Northumbria.

Richard Gameson starts the volume with "Augustine of Canterbury: Context and Achievement" and sets the tone for the volume, reviewing Bede's evidence and Gregory's western policies as pope—stressing the "Frankish context" (7) of Gregory's initiative. Gameson traces Augustine's route through Francia and debates the role of the Frankish princess Bertha, bride of the pagan king Æthelbert of Kent who admitted Augustine to England. He argues

strongly for a successful mission that must be judged in the context of England rather than in light of Gregory's instructions to Augustine, "given the idea that [the pope's] scheme was idealistic rather than realistic" (39)—a sensible and fair historical approach. (Recall that Thomas Jefferson asked Lewis and Clark to search for the Lost Tribes of Israel!)

Since scholars have placed much emphasis on Bertha and her chaplain (the Frankish bishop Liudhard) in the conversion of Kent, Ian Wood examines "Augustine and Gaul," showing that Bertha was a minor figure in Frankish royal circles and her English husband Æthelbert "a minor prince in the world of Frankish politics" (71). Wood believes that the queen Brunhilda provided the main Frankish support for Augustine's mission because of her own political designs. This is a particularly good contribution to the discussion.

Clare Stancliffe offers a fine treatment of the other non-English, non-Gregorian figures in the drama, the British (in "The British Church and the Mission of Augustine"). Bede loathed the British because they refused to evangelize the English, but Stancliffe claims this loathing derived from his misunderstanding of a letter of Gregory the Great. From this inference, she builds the case that Gregory knew little about the British church and so "knew nothing against the British church and, indeed, regarded its members as holy" (114). But there is more: "We must avoid the trap of assuming that, because we have so little evidence about the British church at this period, it necessarily follows that that church was unremarkable" (116). She stands on firmer ground here than in claiming that Bede's hostility toward the British derived from a misreading of Gregory. She also gives a good treatment to the story of Augustine's oak, where Bede presents the British as holy and the Romans as arrogant, as symbolic of the real problem: the British were willing to convert the Anglo-Saxons but as Rome's partners, not subordinates, especially if the expansion of Roman Christianity meant the expansion of Anglo-Saxon political power.

Gregory's particular influence gets its due in Anton Scharer's "The Gregorian Tradition in Early England," which highlights Northumbria's role in establishing the cult of the pope and, more importantly, of fitting the conversion into a Gregorian framework.

Bede tells us that Augustine brought books with him, and since the mission in Kent was in contact with both Francia and Rome, books kept arriving. These stimulated book production in Kent, and several essays discuss both foreign and native books. Gameson, in a second essay ("The Earliest Books of Christian Kent"), surveys continental books that would have been similar to those brought to or produced in Kent, as well as Irish texts and English books from after this period but of which he believes provide a witness to a Kentish tradition. He concludes that the Kentish church specialized in high quality uncials, including luxury volumes. Richard Marsden reviews "The Gospels of St Augustine," the oldest manuscript in England, possibly arriving with the great missionary himself, but definitely initiating an Italian textual tradition for the Latin gospels in England.

Attempts to reconstruct the *realia* of the mission simply do not have enough information. Simon Burnell and Edward Jones ("The Archaeology of Conversion on the Continent in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries: Some Observations and Comparisons with Anglo-Saxon England") mention England so little and use "probably" and "may have been" so often that the reader wonders why

this essay appears in the volume. Eric Cambridge ("The Architecture of the Augustinian Mission") also relies primarily on speculation but provides a solid view of the extant evidence and is best read with Richard Emms's "The Early History of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury."

Since history consists not just of what happened but also of how later generations understand it, Alan Thacker's "In Gregory's Shadow? The Pre-Conquest Cult of St Augustine" and Fiona Gameson's "Goscelin's *Life* of Augustine of Canterbury" demonstrate that in the post-Bedan world Augustine came into his own and by the eleventh century "he had usurped from Gregory the Great the title *apostolus anglorum* . . ." (385).

This is an important and useful volume. It will be a basic tool for understanding the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons for some time to come.

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***Britain and Ireland, 900–1300: Insular Responses to Medieval European Change.*** Edited by **Brendan Smith**. Cambridge: University Press, 1999. xvi + 283 pp. \$59.95 cloth.

In a collection of ten essays, the authors address ways in which the peoples of "the Irish Sea zone" (that is, the area at one time called the British Isles) both interacted and responded to historical developments in continental Europe. Hardly confined to issues touching church history, the papers nonetheless discuss matters of great importance to students of Christian history. The underlying thesis of the volume is that study in the larger geopolitical context often yields insights not gained by nationally delimited research.

Among contributions particularly germane to the interests of readers of this journal is Alfred P. Smyth's "The Effect of Scandinavian Raiders on the English and Irish Churches: A preliminary assessment." Smyth attacks the " 'pro-Viking' lobby" (38), which argues that the Vikings were not so culturally and socially destructive as Christian apologists have always supposed and that they were welcomed by an anti-Christian element in Anglo-Saxon society. His argument is on the whole convincing, although I am uncomfortable with its tone. Robert Bartlett discusses the widespread interest in "Cults of Irish, Scottish and Welsh saints in twelfth-century England," an interesting reversal of what one would imagine to be the interests of the English church, dominated as it was by Norman prelates and representatives of the new monastic orders. Marie Therese Flanagan deals extensively with the concurrent and complementary roles of the Irish clergy and of Anglo-Norman ecclesiastical reform policies in John de Courcy's tenure as lord of Ulster.

At a time when interest in the sources of the culture of Europe as a whole sometimes conflicts with a rising demand for the recognition of the particularities of peoples and regions within the old nations of Europe, these essays point to the historic interrelatedness of the peoples whose lands bordered the Irish Sea.

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