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*Augustine's Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to
"Non-free Free Will" by Kenneth M. Wilson (review)*

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by a certain reading of 1 Corinthians and the examples of Timothy and Titus in which the younger could have equal rights with the older. With the help of his mother, this son overthrows the father/overseer. Other sons in other house churches do likewise, and the Corinthian church falls into chaos. The letter is necessary, because “Among a group of young men and women at Corinth in the late first or early second century, there was a brief revival of the Pauline vision of a polity in which age was not a qualification for leadership, inspiring a movement that was both youthful and democratic” (206).

In the Epilogue Welborn suggests that evidence from the Letter of Dionysius, Hegesippus, and Irenaeus indicates that 1 Clement was successful in putting down the uprising. He concludes by agreeing with Harnack’s assertion that the letter contributed to the ecclesiastical destruction of the “primitive democracy of Jesus and Paul” (226).

1 Clement is critical for our understanding and reconstruction of the social and ecclesial context of the late first or perhaps early second century. Therefore, this book is valuable for its close examination of the circumstances of the letter. Welborn’s approach is methodical and meticulous, and he provides an impressive body of comparative Greco-Roman material. He also expeditiously brings in evidence from 1 Corinthians and the Pastoral Epistles.

I am left pondering, however, the closing reference to Harnack’s theory concerning the ecclesiastical impact of 1 Clement. Harnack had postulated that 1 Clement undermined “pneumatischen Demokratie,” yet Welborn recognizes that “the instigators of the revolt are *nowhere described as ‘pneumatics’*” (5), and that the leadership consisted of “a college of presbyter-bishops *appointed with the consent of the whole church*” (7, my emphasis). Thus, 1 Clement is neither attacking “pneumatics” nor undermining a communal process of selecting leaders—indeed, the rebels are those working against this communal process, and with their defeat the communal process is presumably restored. Thus, Welborn’s insightful work appears to me to be more a repudiation of Harnack’s theory than a confirmation of it.

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Augustine’s Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to “Non-free Free Will”

Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 111

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Pp. 388. €94.

In this substantive and sweeping work Wilson questions the traditional and consensus views of Augustine’s development of his theologies of free will, divine providence, and original sin and finds them deficient, at least in terms of recognizing Augustine’s sources and dating his developments. Wilson begins by noting

four commonplace assertions in the general scholarly consensus (though there are dissenting voices): 1.) Augustine changed his theology in 396 C.E., 2.) while he was writing the letter to Bishop Simplicianus, 3.) with his transition occurring through reading scripture (Romans 7 and 9–11, and 1 Corinthians 15), 4.) which he developed through merely modifying prevalent doctrines (1, *passim*). For Wilson, the primary root of the inadequacy of these assertions is methodological. His claim is that only reading systematically, chronologically, and comprehensively through Augustine's entire corpus can legitimately demonstrate changes in his thought and when those changes do or do not occur (2). He proceeds to follow through with investigating not only Augustine's corpus spanning 386–430 C.E., but all previous Christian tradition's perspective on human free will and divine providence (along with inherited ideas from contemporary philosophy and Judaism) in the span of about 300 pages.

Through this comprehensive approach, Wilson concludes that previous Christian tradition unanimously taught that humans had free will to choose God's salvation or not and that God's predestination was based upon foreknowledge of what people would choose (it should be noted that those termed "gnostic" are excluded from this conclusion). It is only in pagan philosophical tradition, particularly in Stoicism, Manichaeism, and Neoplatonism, that accounts of human will being entirely unable to choose the good, and divine unilateral predestination or determinism can be found. There are of course various understandings and uses of the concept of freedom in philosophical tradition, from ancient philosophy to today, but if we accept Wilson's use of free will here as self-determining free choice, he puts forward a strong case. We might question if at times Wilson builds up the boundaries of philosophical systems too far. It is not possible to speak of a pure Stoicism or Neoplatonic system at the time of Augustine, for instance, as if they had not been influenced by each other, nor is it possible to speak of a Christianity in which the ideas of these systems were not in many ways assimilated. Because Augustine took from these philosophies, it does not necessarily mean that he took from them *instead of* Christian tradition (for example, reference to "*the Christian view of free will*" [129, author's italics], as opposed to philosophical ones; or: "Augustine appears unaware that his Stoic/Ciceronian definition of omnipotence has carved a non-Christian caricature of God" [189]). Nevertheless, at least as a heuristic tool to trace the foundations of Augustine's ideas, Wilson persuasively demonstrates the philosophical background of Augustinian providence and free will.

One formal issue in the work is that non-English quotations are not translated, in footnotes or the body of the text, and sometimes these quotations take up as much as half of a page. This will inevitably be frustrating to some readers, and unfortunately means it probably cannot be recommended to students below the doctoral level.

The main impact of Wilson's work is surely in his assessment of the received scholarly opinion that Augustine's view was first set out in 396/7 at *Simpl.* 2. In this passage Augustine lays out his first systematic treatment of what Wilson terms "Divine Unilateral Predetermination of Individuals's Eternal Destinies," and introduces his view of inherited guilt from Adam's sin. Augustine here uses

language such as *traduce peccati* and *originali reatu* (replacing the traditional *originale peccatum*). The claim in scholarship is often that Augustine continues in relentless continuity with these opinions for the rest of his life, indicating that prior to his interaction in the Pelagian controversy he already held these views, which were taken from his reading of scripture, traditional Christian doctrines, or both. However, Wilson's methodology of tracing these ideas through the entirety of Augustine's corpus demonstrates that throughout his works, sermons, and letters (as far as they can confidently be dated) between 396 and 412 C.E., Augustine is not only silent in explicating these doctrines introduced at *Simpl. 2*, but actually persisted in teaching traditional free will theology. The phrases mentioned above, for instance, do not occur again for another fifteen years. Further, Wilson shows that in writings of 412 and 413 C.E. Augustine seems to explain these doctrines as if he were saying something new rather than appealing to his earlier writing in *Simpl.* Wilson argues that this anomaly of *Simpl. 2*, along with *De libero arbitrio* 3.47–3.54, is a later interpolation during Augustine's revision of the work and that he in fact did not establish his later doctrines of divine providence and human “non-free free will” due to inherited guilt (*reatus*) until the Pelagian controversy in 412 and that there is no clear precedent in previous Christian tradition for these doctrines.

Wilson's argument is well-structured and persuasive. It is a contentious topic and all Augustine scholars may not be convinced, but this work cannot be ignored. The aim of scholarship should never be to close doors, but rather to open them—to lead us further into the matter at hand. There is no doubt that Wilson has achieved this, and his work will remain an important contribution to ongoing discussions for a long time to come. Its specific achievements lie in reassessing Augustine's chronology and development of ideas central to his thought, demonstrating clear lines of development of these ideas through Augustine's philosophical syncretization, and helping us to rethink the place of polemic in this development. But more importantly, it will spur scholarship on in important discussions and debates that some may have assumed to have been resolved. Good (and invigorating) scholarship draws us deeper into questions and makes us think again, often even when we may have thought we long had the answers. This Wilson has most surely accomplished in a most erudite work.

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Virginia Burrus

Ancient Christian Ecopoetics: Cosmologies, Saints, Things

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019

Pp. 296. \$65.00.

We are living in the midst of an ecological crisis. Every day, dozens of species die as earth's temperature slowly rises. While ancient Christianity may seem like an odd lens through which to investigate this pressing phenomenon, Christianity