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J. Ebbeler, *DISCIPLINING CHRISTIANS: CORRECTION AND COMMUNITY IN AUGUSTINE'S LETTERS*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 254. isbn 9780195372564. £45.00.

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the use in argumentation about ‘the fulcrum of human responsibility’ of *inde* and *tunc*. In Prudentius’ *felix qui ... potuit* (line 330), where we detect both the above-mentioned authors, we have a kind of ‘scratch-card poetics’ (183; perhaps as felicitous as any description of this feature). Ostensibly pastoral passages are put under the microscope, in the contention that Prudentian pastoral settings are deliberately flawed, like the world itself. ‘Landscape is revelatory’ (40). Allusions to the Bible’s component books are treated with similar detail: multiple allusion may not only point to the unity of the Bible which Marcion had sought to divide but also provide a kind of ‘security’, parallel, perhaps, to the safety in numbers (of references) so common in contemporary exegetes and homilists. But here too there is the ‘disorientation’ which helps to create the ‘responsible reader’ (for example in the words *animum castrata recisum*, l. 957). D. boldly faces the apparent breakdown of typology in Prudentius’ text: why is reference made to the walls of Jericho (which famously fell) in the context of building the Church? Why, when explaining that King David’s children included one bad apple, do we find the ‘blatantly eroticized and blankly explicit’ description of the copulation and parturition of snakes, where the ‘bride’ kills the father and is in turn killed by the ‘puppy-snakes’ (*catuli*)?

And so to genre, in ch. 4, though its centrality has been anticipated many times already. ‘*Irrequietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in genere*’, as D. says, having asked, briefly, ‘Is genre essential?’ After a fine discussion of the contribution of satire and didactic to the poem, and an analysis of the *seges scelerum* passage (ll. 258–97: cf. Juvenal 1.87 *vitiorum copia?*) with its allusions to Lucretius, Vergil, Manilius, Ovid and Catullus, D. concludes ‘we could zigzag forever, while still remaining within the text’ (244). The yearning for certainty is frustrated, just as the yearning for the bucolic idyll is; ‘the world of this text is a world *post peccatum*’, and the responsible reader is called to acknowledge this.

Two final points. ‘The effect of sin on the world’, mentioned above, is indeed a major theme, but to illustrate its effect on the world in various places D. puts great weight on one line of Prudentius: *exemplum dat vita hominum, quo cetera peccent* (l. 250: the Loeb translation ‘for the life of man sets an example for all else to sin’ seems very acceptable). One wonders exactly how the storms and floods and other dysfunctions of the *mundana ... machina* follow the example of human bellicosity, sexual *libido* (D. concentrates on this), and monetary greed, the vices that Prudentius singles out. Secondly, on a different plane, the index is unexpectedly thin: there could, and should, be many more entries, and many more page-references for some of the existing ones. Many themes of this stimulating book are difficult to find and return to. Not that this should deter anyone, and I would be irresponsible not to end by clearly signalling my fascination with this subtle and sensitive study.

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J. EBBELER, *DISCIPLINING CHRISTIANS: CORRECTION AND COMMUNITY IN AUGUSTINE’S LETTERS*. New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 254. ISBN 9780195372564. £45.00.

Jennifer Ebbeler has written an important book on the letters of Augustine of Hippo. It propounds a clear and convincing thesis: Augustine adopted a novel approach to the writing of letters, a form of ‘corrective correspondence’. Ancient letters, as expressions of *amicitia*, tended to avoid open criticism. Augustine, however, wrote letters which highlighted the error of his addressee in a manner which invited, indeed required a response. E.’s book traces the consequences of this unconventional approach for Augustine’s interactions with Christian contemporaries. Unsurprisingly, his correspondents rarely took kindly to it.

After an extended preface (vii–xii), the introduction (3–26) offers a concise summary of this main argument (3–13), the transmission and editions of Augustine’s letters (13–20), and the state of research into Latin letters in general and Augustine’s in particular (20–5). A final note (25–6) explains the (understandable) decision to use Caecilianist instead of Catholic for Augustine’s Christian faction — though to call this replacement ‘neutral’ (26 n. 88) is somewhat misleading. The first chapter, ‘Rebuke, Friendship, and Community’ (27–62), provides the context for Augustine’s ideas about communal literary correction. It considers his ideal of lovingly critical Christian friendship (as portrayed in the *Confessions*) and its scriptural and philosophical

influences (most notably, Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2:11–14). E. notes that previous letter-writers had also delivered literary admonishments. The key difference was that, unlike the authors of those polemical *libri*, Augustine expected his addressee both to respond and to admit fault (50–6).

Chs 2 and 3 provide close readings of Augustine's first attempts at corrective correspondence (63–75) and of his epistolary relationships with two notable Christian contemporaries, Paulinus of Nola (81–99) and Jerome (75–81, 101–50). Comparison of these varied exchanges highlights the acute specificity of the circumstances required for Augustine to initiate such a correspondence, and for it to be effective. More than any other contemporary Christian, Paulinus was open to epistolary experimentation and Augustine's spiritual guidance. And yet Augustine did not openly correct him; Paulinus' error did not threaten the community (81–2, 98) and, it is implied, he was too useful a friend to risk alienating (91, 97). Jerome was not so fortunate. E. gives a masterful analysis of this infamously 'star-crossed' (113) letter exchange, with all its mishaps, mixed messages and (sometimes wilful) misunderstandings. Prudently trading psychological speculation for literary analysis, she sets out what both of these artful rhetorical operators might have known and sought to achieve at each stage of the correspondence. It ended in something of a stalemate; Augustine then reverted to a more traditional epistolary mode in their dealings (147–50).

Chs 4 and 5 show how Augustine adapted his letter-writing to individuals less straightforwardly part of his Christian community: the Donatists (151–89) and Pelagius (191–225). To deal with the former required considerable creativity on his part. Attempts at corrective exchanges with Donatist laymen (at least in the years preceding Honorius' anti-Donatist edict of A.D. 405) were complemented by disingenuously epistolary responses to missives by Donatist bishops not addressed to him, and letters cataloguing transgressions of imperial law. These latter laid the groundwork for a more robust form of correction: state coercion. Pelagius posed different problems. E. argues, contrary to general scholarly opinion, that Augustine did not realize that Pelagius supported the doctrines (and had even written some of the treatises) on grace he himself had attacked in the years A.D. 410–416. Once Augustine *did* realize, Pelagius had already proven himself an unreliable correspondent. He thus skipped straight to more polemical and coercive forms of correction, but had to justify this move by retrojecting a corrective colouring to his earlier, blandly amicable correspondence with Pelagius. E.'s suggestion of *post facto* rationalization is convincing (211–21); her argument that simple ignorance was the real reason for Augustine's inaction seems more problematic — and unnecessary given the variety of circumstances which led him to avoid epistolary correction of known error.

The conclusion (227–34) recapitulates the overarching argument and sets out its implications for future study. E. restates that Augustine's novel approach to the exchange of letters was an 'unmitigated failure' (231). This appears unsurprising given the precise conditions required for success. It might be wondered why Augustine persisted with his experiments — or suggested that his motives were rather less charitable. It is the great merit of this book that its author consistently presents the range of possible goals Augustine could have pursued in each of these literary exchanges. E. rightly gives the bishop the benefit of the doubt: 'we have no real cause to question the sincerity of Augustine's claims that he cared deeply about ... the salvation of his fellow Christians' (229, cf. 8–9). But she shows how this was not incompatible with polemical strategizing and personal ambition, and wryly arches an eyebrow at some of Augustine's more breathtaking manoeuvres. Fittingly, there is a real sense that E. has herself engaged in an extended dialogue with Augustine and come to know his epistolary eccentricities just as well as a Jerome or Paulinus. She treats these letters and their writer in the spirit of charitable criticism with which they were composed. Her book is an important contribution to the study of Augustine, late antique Christianity and ancient epistolography.

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