

Women in Pastoral Office: The Story of Santa Prassede, Rome. By Mary M. Schaefer. New York: Oxford University, 2013. Pp. xxi + 469. \$74.

Pope Paschal I (r. 817–824) desired to recover the bones of martyrs from the Roman catacombs and move them to new churches he was building. His memorial chapel for his mother, Theodora Episcopa, is the crown jewel of the church of Santa Prassede, in the shadow of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, but as the late Mary Schaefer demonstrates, there is far more to note in this ninth-century church. In a wealth of historical and archeological study, she documents the reliable historical sources and the legends surrounding the sisters Praxedes and Pudentiana, whose names adorn this church and another a few blocks away.

These heroines of first- and later second-century persecutions—according to the Roman martyrology both were buried in the catacomb of Priscilla on the Via Salaria—by the ninth century were part of the legendary family of senator Pudens (2 Tim 4:21), sometimes associated with Peter in Rome. The name of Pudentiana is even less sure than that of Praxedes: the inscription in the apse mosaic of Santa Pudentiana, *Dominus conservator ecclesiae pudentianae* (ca. 402 if original but later if restored), probably refers to the *titulus Pudentis* rather than to the female saint. The identification of the two female figures in the mosaic holding crowns over the heads of Peter and Paul is disputed. Are they two sister saints, or do they represent the *ecclesia ex circumcissione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, which are clearly identified in the surviving dedicatory inscription in the church of Santa Sabina, completed just a few years later?

One long chapter of the book is devoted to tracing the many aspects of these traditions. Also involved are the *Acta* of the two saints, also known as the Acts of Pastor and Timothy, a legendary text probably arising in the fifth or sixth century and placed in the third generation under Antoninus Pius (138–161); the Pastor of the title is possibly meant to be the author of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, dated to this period by reference in the *Muratorian Canon*. All of this is to say that there are many legendary features to take into account.

Another long chapter of the book studies the decorative motifs of the splendid mosaics of Paschal's church, inspired principally by scenes from Revelation and Hebrews. The two sisters and Paschal himself appear prominently in the apse mosaic with Peter, Paul, and the enthroned Christ. Only after this detailed study of the literary and art history of the church is the question of women in pastoral ministry addressed, using both literary sources and imagery from Rome and elsewhere. The problem, as always, is interpretation. Scholars differ on how seriously they should take all the elements of this history and imagery. At the same time, it takes a leap of imagination to arrive at the conclusions that some would desire. For example, a 17th-century writer asserts, seemingly for the first time, that Pope Pius I (r. ca. 140–ca. 154) made Praxedes a *presbytera* of the church that bears her name. What did a presbyter do in a Roman worshipping community at that time, and what is the value of such a late testimony?

Taken together, the various aspects of the chapters, from history to legend to art, lead in the direction of a contribution to understanding women's ministry in the early church. Each chapter has a discrete topic. When all are combined, an overall impression is

conveyed. The chapters on women's pastoral ministry are a helpful continuation of such studies as Ute E. Eisen's *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies* (2000); Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek's *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (2005); and Gary Macy's *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (2008).

A disappointing aspect of this expensive book is the poor quality of most of the images. This shortcoming is most apparent, for instance, with the absence of a reproduction or even transcription of the dedication plaque of about 1450, not readily available elsewhere, and now on a column near the modern entrance. This plaque is a valuable source for medieval understanding of the traditions surrounding the church, thereby all the more accentuating its omission.

Sadly, Mary Schaefer died as this book was in final proofs. Completed by editorial collaboration, it is a worthy tribute to a life spent in pursuit of richer appreciation of Christian history.

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The Quest for the Absolute: Birth and Decline of European Romanticism. By Louis Dupré. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2013. Pp. x+387. \$36.

The volume offers the historical complement to Dupré's previous studies, *Passage to Modernity* (1993) and *The Enlightenment and the Foundations of Modern Culture* (2005). More than a historian of ideas, D. endeavors to find new ontological insights of perduring value in the diverse and passing movements of Western culture. He grounds his project in the claim that modernity, emerging in the 14th-century Italian humanists, asserts the mind's spiritual dominance over its mere reception of the finite world's material forms. This dominance leads in turn to an ever-increasing imposition of the will on reality. In Romanticism (1789–1848), art, social theory, and philosophy embody a drive to overcome the fixed limitations of the human condition. Existential unrest, stemming from a loss of an ideal, primitive state of being, replaces Enlightenment harmony, even as this erodes the Baroque's mediated synthesis of nature and grace.

The first of the volume's three parts offers a typology of English, German, and French poetry. Included are analyses of selected works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, Hölderlin, Lamartine, de Vigny, and Hugo. Throughout, D. underscores insights about life and death that direct modern thought to previously unexplored existential depths. Keats approaches the Romantic ideal as few others do. *Hyperion* and his five great odes place symbolization at reality's core. In the greatest ode, "On a Grecian Urn," the poet reminds us that at no point does the spiritual ever leave sensation completely behind. Readers of D.'s first volume will thus find a common link between Romanticism and the Baroque.

Part II undertakes four "systematic discussions." In aesthetics, the tension between any finite image and its spiritual significance emphasizes that creativity decisively