

## Book Reviews

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*Empire Baptized: How the Church Embraced What Jesus Rejected (2nd–5th Centuries).*  
By Wes Howard-Brook. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016. Pp. xxv + 342. \$35.

In the introduction, Howard-Brook summarizes his previous work “*Come Out, My People!*” *God’s Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond* (2010) as the foundational insight for the present work. In three convenient tables he affirms a “battle” (xiii) between the religion of “Creation” and the religion of “Empire,” first in the Hebrew biblical tradition, then in the gospels, and finally for the purposes of this book some contrasts between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and “catholic” Christianity. The above distinction between the two “religions” has merit as we do recognize texts of terror as well as texts of grace in the biblical account of God’s relation with the people. The Bible as well as subsequent history clearly reflects the human struggle to remain faithful to God in and despite many failures and wrong turns. However, the present work studies the actions and teachings of subsequent church leaders as generating “a ‘Christianity’ that almost completely inverted the gospel of Jesus” (27).

To accomplish this aim, he studies principally the urban center of Alexandria (representing the “Greek East”) and the urban center of Carthage (representing the “Latin West”). He treats the economic, political, and social context of these centers but his focus is on the intellectual leaders: principally Clement, Origen, and Athanasius in the East, and Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine in the West. There are others, of course, but these authors get the major attention. They all represent the betrayal of empire. His treatment from the mid-second century up to Augustine is well-written and interesting. He has a number of citations from other authors who are more or less contemporary and generally agree with his basic thesis, though he relies perhaps too much on Peter Brown (cf. “index of modern authors quoted,” 341–2). The major problem is that he denigrates the patristic authors treated as, in effect, lackeys of the empire. For example, he accuses Athanasius of creating the “Arian controversy” and avers, “It is time to discover who this late-antique city boss was and how his machinations shaped the development of imperial Christianity” (223). The other authors fare no better, though he sees Augustine as a voice of moderation that ultimately fails. One may disagree with Athanasius on some of his methods and ideas but it is tendentious to judge his motives as if he were not concerned with the key affirmations of

Nicene orthodoxy. H-B. affirms the priority of *orthopraxis* over *orthodoxy* but correct belief is still necessary particularly if we are to be united in worship. If we pray to Jesus as God and he is not God, we are practicing idolatry. There is no mention of Jesus's divinity in this book. Nicene orthodoxy is simply a matter of imperial decree (the emperor Theodosius declared it the official religion of the empire ca. 381). But it is also a matter of theological discussion and discernment under the ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who "will guide you to all truth" (John 16:13) which is also the main theme of the Acts of the Apostles, which could better be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. According to Luke, the Spirit guides the church to the "ends of the earth" to proclaim the Gospel to all people. The only reference to the Holy Spirit that I see in this book is the call to reclaim "the anti-imperial power of the Spirit-fueled Good News" (xix).

Two other issues that should be considered are the nature of history and the Bible as revelatory. The one thing about history that is constant is real change that involves zigs and zags, regressions, insights lost, lapses, reversals, rediscoveries, new departures. We are engaged in a continuing process of interpretation that recognizes both successes and failures. Also, the Bible reveals "all those truths and only those truths that are necessary for salvation" (*Dei Verbum* 10). Salvation can be interpreted as hope for eternal life and hope for the transformation of this world. Both are valid and need not be opposed to one another. H-B. associates himself "with what is sometimes called the 'radical discipleship' movement within Christianity" (xxv) in order to discover his true identity as a follower of Jesus. I recommend this book as a rather trenchant view of what that means today in the light of Christian history and its possibilities for the future.

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*The Mestizo Augustine: A Theologian between Two Cultures.* By Justo L. González. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. Pp. 175. \$14.96.

Whether we realize it or not, we are born into and develop amidst a mixture of more than one culture, language, race and sociopolitical entity, a reality which can be expressed by the Spanish word "*mestizaje*," a term whose roots are biological, that is, the fruit of an Indigenous and European union, yet one which can also apply to the cultures which result from such cultural blends. The perspective of *mestizaje* characterizes the life and intellectual legacy of Augustine, one of the most influential theologians and pastors in the history of Christianity. In his most recent work, first published in Spanish in 2013, Justo González looks at Augustine's life and his significant contributions not only through the lens of a historian but also through the experiences of Latino people struggling with their own *mestizo* identity. The work's unique contribution is that in it, G. desires not just to chronicle the biography of Augustine, whose racial origins we would describe today as mixed, but to explicitly explore his struggle as a *mestizo*. G. then draws a concrete pastoral outcome from this study.