

Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome. By George E. Demacopoulos. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2015. Pp. viii + 236. \$28.

Historians and theologians point to Pope Gregory I as a watershed figure in Western and Christian history. His skillful administration of the Roman papacy defined the position well into the high Middle Ages. However, most scholars have opted to examine Gregory either as a theologian or as a politician, rarely attempting to meld these two parts of his life. This dual analysis is what makes Demacopoulos's book on Gregory I such a welcome addition to historical and theological scholarship: It presents a full reading of Gregory as a shrewd administrator who attempts to use his ascetically centered theology to lead people as diverse as emperors, kings, bishops, monks, and laypersons.

The first point to note about D.'s monograph is that it is supremely readable. D. is clear, concise, and engaging without being repetitive or condescending. He summarizes and reminds the reader of the basic argument of the book, section, or chapter at key points, and he consistently recalls the arguments of earlier relevant sections. These repetitions and call-backs are a thoughtful literary choice. D.'s complex thesis requires several sub-theses, each detailed in the three sections and fourteen chapters. D.'s clear organization leads to a volume that is at once eminently understandable and deeply scholarly.

The central contention of D. is that Gregory develops a novel ascetic theology centered on engaged service to others, and then employs this theology in his pastoral approach to both his religious and civil responsibilities as bishop of the newly diminished Rome. By engaging the entire corpus of surviving Gregorian literature (including medieval biographies), D. consciously crafts a historical theology of Gregory that "supplements traditional historical-critical methods with the insights provided by discourse analysis" (164, n. 41). Developing this historical theology requires D. to compartmentalize his examination of Gregory into three areas (the three sections of the book): ascetic theology, pastoral care, and political/civil administration.

The first two sections explore Gregory's ascetic theology and his pastoral theology, two intertwined concerns. Section one evinces the novelty of Gregory's service-centered asceticism, against previous scholarship that brands Gregory as blandly derivative. Gregory's asceticism is best expressed in service to others. Section two demonstrates exactly how Gregory expresses his pastoral care as a function of his asceticism. D. argues that in Gregory's thought ascetic practice should not only influence a spiritual director's interactions with others, but also should serve as the litmus test for a leader's suitability. Asceticism serves as the background for both the leader and the direction of leadership.

While the basic argument of the first two sections is not new (D. having already covered some of this ground in an earlier monograph), D. does refresh and expand his reading of Gregory's corpus. He lets examples inform his theoretical framework, and his expanded reading of Gregory contextualizes his novel third section.

The truly innovative part of this monograph comes in section three, in which D. brings together both the ascetic-pastoral strain of Gregory's thought with his past as

praefectus urbi, creating a new picture of Gregory. Here lies a complete Gregory, one who uses his entire training and entire theology in his interactions with kings, bishops, emperors, and laity. The unified Gregory is D.'s major contribution in this book, and should not be understated. Earlier scholarship, as he notes in the introduction and at points throughout the book, prioritized Gregory either as a theologian or as an administrator and diplomat. Gregory, D. argues, is both, and it is Gregory's ascetic-pastoral theology that directs all of his administrative, episcopal, and diplomatic activities during his pontificate.

The argument is convincing, and D. supports his claim in the third section through a careful rereading of Gregory. However, D. misses a good anchor for Gregory's novel asceticism in the classical traditions of Cicero and Seneca, authors that Gregory almost certainly read. The form of Roman Stoicism advocated by Cicero and Seneca viewed asceticism (admittedly, a milder expression of asceticism than Gregory's) as a pre- and co-condition of functioning as a proper Roman civil authority. Gregory, the former *praefectus urbi*, followed a similar approach to ascetic service as his classical predecessors. This unexplored link would bolster D.'s argument.

D.'s research is a welcome addition to scholarship on papal authority and politics in general, and Gregory I in particular. Moreover, the detailed scholarship (situated in endnotes, allowing the narrative a more natural flow) makes this volume suitable for advanced readers (scholars and graduate students), while the readable prose and clear narrative structure allow educated non-specialists to follow the argument. This volume may be useful for advanced undergraduates, but only if they have a suitable amount of basic historical information. D. has created an important piece of scholarship that charts a new course in our understanding of Gregory the Great.

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Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer. By Scott H. Hendrix. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2015. Pp. xxiv + 341. \$26.25.

In the nearly five hundred years since a young theologian and professor named Martin Luther penned Ninety-five Theses for academic debate, he has been the subject of thousands of books, some celebrating him as a hero who dared to confront a corrupt and authoritarian church more interested in furthering its own wealth and power than the spiritual well-being of the faithful, and others condemning him as the rebel whose actions fragmented the Catholic Church and led to centuries of animosity and conflict. As Hendrix notes in the preface to his biography of Luther, "histories of the reformation say a lot about what Luther did but very little about who he was" (x). In this substantial monograph, H. shifts the emphasis to Luther himself.

H. divides his biography into two parts, with chapters focusing on Luther's life before and after he explicitly assumed the role of reformer of the church. Drawing extensively on Luther's own writings and a broad swath of primary documents and