
In *Augustine and Nicene Theology*, Michel Barnes seeks to re-narrate neo- and pro-Nicene accounts of Latin theology and, more prominently, the contribution of Augustine of Hippo's trinitarian thought. This book is the product of over 20 years of his written reflections and research on Augustine. First and foremost, Barnes' contribution may be quite valuable simply because of his continued role in patristic scholarship and the poignancy of his historical methodology. He claims to offer a corrective for systematic and Thomistic-scholastic readers of Augustine and presents a constructive reading of Augustine within a Latin theological narrative.

Because this book is a collection of previously published articles and new essays, I refrain from threading them all together coherently; instead, I display Barnes' aim in providing these essays. The first two essays (i.e., “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology” and “De Régnon Reconsidered”) “take the ground out from under contemporary Trinitarian systematics, and as such, since 1995 they have been boycotted by systematicians where there was no outright ban on reading them” (p. xiii). Barnes remains thoroughly convinced of their accuracy and corrective posture: “This new appearance of them, together for the first time (!), reiterates what, some think, should never have been spoken in the first place. The suffocated will not stay dead, oxygen or no oxygen, because the accuracy of these two articles cannot be disputed – cannot be disputed, at least, without reading a shelf-full of books equally defiling to the twentieth-century myth of self-definition among systematic theologians (those, at least, who still can read Latin – or French)” (p. xiii). I provide these quotes from Barnes because they give self-reflective commentary on his perceived placement of these articles in the field of study.

Barnes offers a constructive and historical-theological account of Latin trinitarian development and Augustinian trinitarian thought in the remaining chapters. His two-fold purpose is: “All the articles in this collection were written with the aim of re-narrating accepted accounts of Augustine's Trinitarian theology and the character of Latin Nicene theology in general” (p. xiii). Barnes reconstructs Latin Nicene theology and attempts to sever such reconstruction from modernist readings of Augustine. Whereas several of these articles are already available for readers, Barnes orders them in a structured manner to convey an argument about Latin theology and Augustine. Obviously, it will be left to the reader's judgment if Barnes makes his case convincingly.
Regarding the structure of the essays, an intentional flow does emerge. Chapters 1–2 critique and correct assumptions within Augustinian and theological scholarship; chapters 3–6 tour the Latin trinitarian theology before Augustine; chapters 7–12 explore the contours of Augustine’s trinitarian thought; and chapter 13 completes the reflection upon Augustine by moving toward ressourcement and discussing post-Vatican II, Catholic personalism. The book thus includes the breadth of modern Catholic and Protestant theology and is focused enough to contribute to readings of Augustinian trinitarian theology.

Barnes will leave behind two lasting features – and certainly not limited to these two – for early Christian and theological reflection: one deconstructive and one constructive. His work is markedly critical of Theodore de Régnon and Olivier Du Roy. While these works are dated 1892/98 and 1966, respectively, Barnes observes the current landscape of a patristic trinitarian narrative and the reflections of systematic scholars that still assume this misguided theoretical framework. His constructive legacy, which permeates this entire book, is his concern for a proper theological method. In the essay “Rereading Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology” (previously published in 2002), Barnes offers “a few methodological observations which I believe reflect necessary prerequisites for any credible reading of Augustine” (p. 155). His seven-fold criteria seek to avoid “the danger of a ‘historical fundamentalism’” (p. 155). Irrespective of one’s agreement with Barnes’ paradigm, his concern for method and his methodological clarity cause an introspective assessment of one’s methodological commitments. His critiques of others often involve methodological concern or evidence from primary data. In this way, the essays in Augustine and Nicene Theology are an exposé of Barnes’ methodological commitments.

One more commendation of this book rests with the chapters devoted to Latin theology and Augustinian trinitarian theology. While Augustinian literature is relatively rehearsed in modern scholarship, there is still more to uncover in his trinitarian thought. Since the publication of some of these essays, several monographs on Augustine’s trinitarian theology have been published. Thus, these newly published essays contribute to the publications on Augustinian trinitarian thought in the past 30 years. Barnes’ reading of Augustine resists the scholastic and Neoplatonist Augustine and reveals, as Barnes claims, Augustine as the “early fifth-century Latin theologian” (p. xv–xvi). So, Barnes’ readings of Hilary of Poitier, Ambrose of Milan, and Marius Victorinus situate Augustine in this fifth-century Latin setting.

How might Barnes’ book be situated with other comparable Augustinian scholarship? Because several of these chapters have appeared elsewhere, scholars have repeatedly used them, particularly “Augustine in Contemporary
Trinitarian Theology” and “De Régnon Reconsidered.” These articles have shifted Augustinian scholarship to such a degree that current monographs frequently regard Barnes’ learning as contributing to the “New Canon” of Augustine scholarship (see Floyd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church* [Oxford, 2015], Teubner, *Prayer after Augustine* [OUP, 2018], Briggman and Scully, *New Narratives for Old* [CUA, 2022]). While Lewis Ayres differs from Barnes in several places, he continues within a line of thinking concurrent with Barnes’ studies as part of this “New Canon” in *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge, 2010). In *Augustine on Memory* (Oxford, 2021), Kevin Grove attributes several of these articles as shifting Augustinian scholarship away from psychological reflection to exegesis and Trinitarian theology.

The book is not only for patristic scholars but also for systematic scholars. Barnes writes with an eye for patristic historical-theological reflection and Catholic-Protestant methods of theology. Even if one is not interested in Augustine *per se*, I foresee the value of this book to be two-fold: (1) a theological and historical scholar’s reflection near the end of their career and (2) the poignancy of thought about a historical-theological method for Catholic-Protestant theology and *ressourcement*.

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