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P. G. Walsh, *Augustine: De civitate Dei Books VIII and IX. Aris and Phillips classical texts.* Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2013. Pp. vi, 193. ISBN 9780856688539. \$38.00 (pb).

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Preview

Augustine's *City of God* (*De civitate dei*) is a classic that hardly needs further introduction. It is one of the Church Father's major writings, both in terms of historical influence and of sheer quantity. Comprising no fewer than 22 books, it is a work that seems rather difficult to approach, and it certainly cannot count as a favourite among editors, translators, and commentators. In fact, the only existing edition in Latin and English is the seven-volume Loeb edition, published by six different scholars between 1957 and 1972. Useful as the Loeb edition may be, there is obviously room for more, if only because the Loeb editions do not have much room for commentary.

P.G. Walsh has been working on a full scale bilingual edition of *City of God* for Aris and Phillips Classical Texts for a number of years, and recently the fifth volume has appeared, dealing with books 8 and 9. In January of this year, the academic community received the sad news that Professor Walsh had died at the age of 89. As BMCR has never published a review of any of the earlier four volumes (Books 1 and 2: 2005; books 3 and 4: 2007; book 5: 2009; books 6 and 7: 2010), it seems justified to briefly discuss the latest one as a model of the series.

Each volume is structured along the same clear pattern. After a preface and introduction (with notes) comes the text with facing translation, followed by a commentary and an index section.

The same procedure has been followed here in the case of books 8 and 9. The introduction is short, counting just seven pages. It shows the place of books 8 and 9 within the larger structure of the work, summarizes the main themes discussed by Augustine, and briefly deals with the various source texts that have been used.

The Latin text is useful, but not innovative in any sense. Walsh has printed the Teubner text of Dombart-Kalb (Stuttgart-Leipzig 1913) without further changes. The Aris and Phillips series does not aim to provide scholars with new Latin texts, the focus being on translation and helpful commentary. Still, one cannot help wondering whether a Latin text as it was edited as much as 100 years ago is still entirely satisfactory for readers today. Surely, some textual discussion (apart from occasional issues in the notes) would have been possible at least.

Walsh' translations do not need further recommendation, as they are known to be both reliable and legible. Here too, the English reads fluently and provides readers with easy access to Augustine's often difficult Latin. Particularly in his treatises (unlike his sermons) Augustine's style is marked by long and complex periodical constructions, and it is a great help that in the translation these are generally split up into shorter sentences.

The commentary, on the other hand, does not give much more than notes, and so can hardly be called 'detailed', as the publisher's website wants to have it. In this volume, 18 pages of commentary deal with book 8, while only 10 explain issues in book 9. The indices (index of scripture texts and general index) are equally short.

Walsh' edition of the *City of God* is, therefore, a good basic tool for students and scholars who wish to read and study Augustine's text in English with the possibility of consulting the Latin original. Scholars with more specific interests, either in the Latin text itself or in historical, philosophical, and theological themes discussed by the Church Father, will have to look elsewhere. And evidently, much work on this text remains to be done, particularly for commentators.

The present volume is of particular interest to specialists of Apuleius, since a large part of both books 8 and 9 of the *City of God* is devoted to an elaborate polemic of Augustine against Apuleius' middle-Platonic ideas on demonology.

On a personal note, rereading these sections, I felt some regret that the highly intelligent thinker that was Augustine spent so much of his time and energy on fighting ideas that in modern eyes hardly seem to merit such lengthy and harsh treatment. Historically, it is certainly easy to see that Apuleius' notion of demons as intermediates between man and gods seemed difficult to reconcile with the Christian notion of Christ as the unique connection between God and (fallen) man. And of course, Augustine would be naturally inclined to regard the Apuleian 'demons' as evil spirits and to oppose them. But in doing so, he perhaps did not do justice to Apuleius and his system of demonology. For one thing, Apuleius refers to demons as helpful spirits who assist men in choosing what is good and beneficial and avoiding what is harmful; here the daimonion of Socrates probably is the best example. Augustine seems to ignore this and to fight Platonic demonology as if it posed a serious threat to Christian orthodoxy. Could he not have argued that the good 'demons' were, for instance, the spirits of saints?

According to press publications, professor Walsh has completed 16 of the 22 books of the *City of God*, and Aris and Phillips has announced three more forthcoming volumes (book 10: 2014; books 11 and 12: 2015; books 13-14: 2016). It is to be hoped that this final translation project of P.G. Walsh will be completed in his spirit by someone else.

As things are, readers may be thankful for the volumes that are presently available, while regretting the loss of an eminent scholar and translator.