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McLarney's "St. Augustine's Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent" (Book Review)

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the author writes allows the reader to imagine being in the classroom with him. This book contributes to the field by being extremely beneficial to pastors. The book would be helpful to pastors because the author maneuvers the reader through pastor's sanctification along with understanding anointing in preaching. Overall this would be a highly recommended book in an academic setting or in a pastor's study. The book is concise and it is easy to follow the author's thought throughout.

St. Augustine's Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent,

by Gerald McLarney. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014. 244 pp. \$65.00. ISBN 9780813227030

Reviewed by Stefana Dan Laing, Assistant librarian, Harvard School for Theological Studies, Southwestern Baptist Theological Library, Houston, TX

The idea of continuity with the past holds increasing interest for Evangelicals who appreciate and seek to appropriate the legacy of the ancient church. This particular volume focuses on how early Christians read and understood Israel's songbook and appropriated it for themselves as Christians. Gerald McLarney, Adjunct Professor of Theology at St. Joseph's College in Alberta, Canada, examines Augustine of Hippo's "exegetical strategy" in the Psalms and "how Augustine interprets the Psalms for his audience" (p. 3). The author delimits his topic by choosing the sermons on the Songs of Ascents (Ps. 120-134), thereby treating a logical unit in the Psalms as well as a sermon unit in Augustine's own ministry (p. 89), as it appears he preached them successively in a relatively brief span in the years AD 406-7 or 410-11 (p. 95).

Reading the Bible and using it in worship provided an integrated life of devotion and doctrine. McLarney boldly offers Augustine as a model preacher who held strongly to the idea of historical continuity, and who deftly marshalled a "hermeneutic of alignment" in his preaching in order to bring the listener into contact with the text in all its richness (pp. 33-38). Augustine's main task through his *Expositions on the Songs of Ascent* was to help his listeners interact with the text and to hear all the "voices" there present: Christ, the prophets, the Apostle Paul, and the North African martyrs. In this re-worked version of his dissertation, McLarney examines Augustine's hermeneutical movement from homiletical exegesis and exposition, to application to the congregation's life of faith centering "on the figure of Jesus Christ" (p. 5). This approach represents the fruit of the preacher's labor and possibly the most beneficial part (for the congregation) of the homiletical task. As he preached these spiritually uplifting psalms, Augustine never forgot his pastoral task, so that his exposition is not pure intellectual endeavor but, in McLarney's words, "the text itself gives voice to the innermost desires of a soul longing for the divine, and in singing the psalter,

the audience confirms their attempt to ascend” (p. 25). The union of a focus on the individual soul’s ascent with the historical “alignment” hermeneutic does not allow ascent to be a purely individualistic (and Platonic) action, nor an ahistorical movement: individual souls striving toward Zion travel there in the company of other believers – long past as well as present – together approaching the divine.

In five substantive chapters, McLarney first sets out patristic hermeneutical principles to contextualize Augustine’s approach (chapter 1), proceeding next to a literary-rhetorical contextualization (chapter 2), before turning to social, cultural, and liturgical aspects (chapter 3). More detailed attention is given to the specifics of Augustine’s hermeneutic as McLarney draws out Augustine’s method in Psalm 120 (chapter 4) and continues through Psalms 121-126 (Chapter 5).

While beautifully-written and richly informative, McLarney treats only these few Ascent Psalms, explaining that Augustine’s hermeneutic of alignment is not as evident in his exegesis of later psalms. This limitation is somewhat disappointing, but at least the author refrains from forcing the text. The reader should also be aware that this book is a tool to use alongside the Scripture and Augustine’s sermons, neither of which are actually contained in the volume (although copiously cited). Beneficiaries of this dense and specific monograph include students of Patristics, hermeneutics, and homiletics. This volume is appropriate and recommended for doctoral seminars as well as upper-level Master’s electives. It could also benefit pastors willing to wade through the more technical material in order to learn from a master preacher how to align the “text and audience within the common framework of redemptive history” (p. 21).

Starting with Character: Activities for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos,
by Cathy Waggoner and Martha Herndon. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2015.
134 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 9781605544472

*Reviewed by Cathie L. Chatmon, Library Director,
Piedmont International University, Winston-Salem, NC*

Character education is becoming increasingly important. Waggoner and Herndon have taken it into the nursery, apparently believing that the first three years are foundational to child development. The character traits in view are caring, integrity, honesty, respect, self-discipline, and responsibility. Many good and educationally sound ideas are presented. One of the most intriguing is that of teaching preverbal babies sign language for “please,” “thank you” and other terms that are considered polite communication. They also address adult behaviors which are counter-