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Christian Missionary Activity in the Early Middle Ages (Book Review)

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issue in the debate about human rights. The American Bill of Rights equivocates in exactly the same fashion as the 1983 Code when it specifies the “subject” of its rights. Some clauses use the word “person,” others “citizen.” Do the rights enumerated in the Bill of Rights only apply to those who have entered our country by legal means? Or do they apply to all persons residing in the territory governed by the Constitution? Our courts have not seen the equivocation and have most often opted for the former meaning of “person” while remaining blind and oblivious to the latter.

The hallmark of Gaudemet’s work has been an attention to detail that illuminates large issues. The essays in this book continue that great intellectual tradition.

KENNETH PENNINGTON

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Christian Missionary Activity in the Early Middle Ages. By Richard E. Sullivan. [Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS 431.] (Brookfield, Vermont: Variorum, Ashgate Publishing Company. 1994. Pp. x, 265.)

The missionary work of the early Church certainly has not gone unnoticed as a topic worthy of investigation; indeed the lives and activities of some key figures, such as Saint Gregory the Great and St. Boniface, have been of especial interest, particularly in the role each is considered to have played in the formation of the theological underpinnings of the medieval western Church. Nonetheless, this collection of, admittedly, older articles should still claim a place on the bookshelf of any scholar of the medieval Church or of the culture of the Carolingian world; the comprehensive depth of the articles and their wealth of textual scholarship make for compelling reading, and their examination of, particularly, the methodologies of conversion within the early medieval Church affords the reader an opportunity to explore some of the seminal work in the field.

First, a caveat: These six articles are, indeed, *familiar*—but not antiquated. The earliest does date from some forty-two years ago, and the most recent, from sixteen years ago. There is a single-page bibliography of more “contemporary” (1967?) work in the area of conversion and missionary studies; however, it does not seem very inclusive of works concerned exclusively with missionary studies. Yet, like others in the *Variorum* series, this collection of essays serves like a personal *Festschrift* to the career of Richard E. Sullivan, and one cannot help but be grateful that such cogent work has been gathered into one volume for easy availability.

As Richard Sullivan indicates in the preface to the text, when he first embarked upon his own scholarly study of the conversion of the Graeco-Roman culture from a pagan to the Christian system of belief, historians at that time

generally considered the expansion of Christianity among the western nations (in particular) during the early Middle Ages to have been, as it were, foreordained, in fact, *well-nigh divined*. There could be no doubt for such historians, but that the success of Christianity had been assured because its champions enjoyed a superior morality, manifested by their political victories, economic resources, and cultural wealth. However, through thoughtful analysis of records and documents dating from A.D. 500 to 900, Dr. Sullivan determined that the conversion of the ancient world to Christianity was not as elementary as had been previously thought, and that any "success" was due as much to the individual vigor and enthusiastic adaptability of each missionary monk as to any predetermination of historical processes.

Each article thoroughly emphasizes the bold initiative that was missionary work, and the final article, "The Medieval Monk as Frontiersman," serves well as an articulate counterpoint to all others. Although the article discusses monasticism in general, and not merely in its evangelical function, it does assert that the point (literally and figuratively) at which the Christian monk met the pagan native was as unknown and quixotic a "frontier society" (VI, 36) as any other; indeed, such an environment and circumstance demanded of the monks so prodigious a reserve of self-reliance and spontaneity, that only the most resolute and innovative would be able to survive. Article II, "The Carolingian and the Pagan," article III, "The Papacy and Missionary Activity in the Early Middle Ages," and article V, "Early Medieval Missionary Activity: A Comparative Study of Eastern and Western Methods," in fact demonstrate with ample detail that the western missionary, unlike his eastern counterpart, was left fairly isolated, in uncharted lands, to introduce, to preach, to impart, and to persuade elements of Scripture and conditions of new ritual. The evangelical representative of Byzantium had the practical advantage of being able to perform his duties not under the shadow of a political and social vacuum, but usually under the protection of both the aristocracy of the native citizenry and the economic (as well as spiritual) resources of the emperor in Constantinople. His brother in the West was essentially a pioneer in territory and in souls, and was thus personally responsible for his own physical livelihood, his continual access to individual villages and tribes, and his unique status as the only significant emblem of his faith and his civilization.

Given such social and cultural parameters, then, it is quite understandable that the theological dimensions of the mission work in the East and in the West should have differed. The East professed a complete, profound, and mature faith of a superior civilization. The West, as article I "Carolingian Missionary Theories" examines, had to move swiftly, independently, baptizing and then instructing the converts in a faith that seemed diffuse, mobile, fresh of a culture not as readily apparent. An investigation in contrast (and comparison) between eastern and western missionary activity is provided in article IV, "Khan Boris and the Conversion of Bulgaria: A Case Study of the Impact of Christianity on a Barbarian Society," an exhaustively documented look at

the machinations and maneuvers within the conversion paradigm; more importantly, the article also considers (dated 1966, ahead of its time!) the serious effects of conversion upon the later development and stability of native societies.

Church historians, medieval historians, and all medieval scholars, especially those of the early Middle Ages, take note: this is a volume of well-written, expertly documented, and perceptive scholarship, well worth a close read from cover to cover.

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Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours, volume 4: *Évêques, moines, et empereurs (610–1054)*. Edited by Gilbert Dagron, Pierre Riché, and André Vauchez. (Paris: Desclée. 1993. Pp. 1049. FF 420.)

The publication of this volume brings to a completion the medieval trilogy in the ambitious series *Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours*. The loose chronological boundaries of the present volume are provided by the death of Gregory the Great and the final schism of the western and eastern Christian churches. It is complemented by a volume, published at the same time, on the period from the schism to the Council of Lyon (*Apogée de la papauté et expansion de la chrétienté [1054–1274]* [1993]) and by a previously published volume on the period down to the Council of Florence (*Un temps d'épreuves [1274–1449]* [1990]). Similar trilogies will eventually appear on the development of Christianity and on the reformations of the early modern period, as well as a four-volume set on the modern period. The series is marked by a self-conscious and laudable intent—indicated in a sense by the use of *christianisme* rather than *chrétienté*—to include all of the varied strands of Christian churches and practice.

The present volume is perhaps most notable in its dedication to the geographical aspect of that ideal. The book is divided into four parts. The first, written (except for the section on Greek churches in Italy) by Gilbert Dagron, devotes 364 pages to Byzantine Christianity. The second consists of 228 pages on the “Oriental” churches, divided into chapters on the Islamic-dominated Near East, Armenia, and Georgia. The third, largely the work of Pierre Riché, includes 260 pages on the Latin west. Finally there are 70 pages concerning the “new Christianities” of northern and eastern Europe. The text is supplemented by an impressive apparatus: ample footnotes are included, in contrast to many works of a synthetic nature; useful bibliographies (divided between sources and studies) are placed at the end of every subsection and chapter; material appended at the end of the volume includes an excellent timeline,