

William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (eds.), *The Limits of Ancient Christianity. Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honour of R.A. Markus*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999. xxv + 348 pp. ISBN 0 472 10997 9.

Robert A. Markus is well known to both scholars and students for his outstanding work on late antique and early medieval cultural and religious history. For more than five decades Markus has written with sustained intelligence, opening up new subjects and contributing lucid and comprehensive analysis to our understanding of early Christian thought and perception. The sixteen papers collected in the volume under review here, while giving an up-to-date view of work in progress and in prospect on Markus' chosen topics, were designed as a tribute to the inspirational lead given for such work by the scholarship, teaching and wise counsel of Robert Markus.

The volume is divided into five sections, each of which takes its inspiration from different works of Robert Markus. In the first section, inspired by Markus' *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of Saint Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970; rev. ed. 1988) and entitled 'Sacred Histories', Oliver Nicholson, Paula Fredriksen and Robert L. Wilken analyse Lactantius' attitudes towards the city of Rome, the historical role played by Israel in the theology of Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria's *Contra Iulianum*, respectively. The second section — 'Constructing Orthodoxy' — follows Markus' interest in early Christian self-definition and controversies. It includes papers by Gerald Bonner on the ideas of schism and heresy in the post-Nicene age, Virginia Burrus on the performance of Orthodoxy in Late Antiquity, Sidney H. Griffith on Saint Ephrem's hymns against heresies, and Frederick H. Russell on Augustine's notion of 'coercion by words'. The third and fourth sections, entitled 'Ascetic identities' and 'From Augustine to Bede', take their cue from a wide range of studies published by Markus in the last three decades. While the former revolves around issues of late antique asceticism (with papers by David G. Hunter on consecrated virgins and celibate priests, Elizabeth A. Clark on the exegesis of divorce in the later Latin fathers, Philip Rousseau on the treatments of the parable of the prodigal son by Jerome, Augustine and Paulinus of Nola, and Conrad Leyser on the Lerinian monasticism), the latter examines particular issues in the thought of major late antique and early medieval theologians: J. O'Donnell reflects on the life of Augustine, John C. Cavadini discusses Ambrose's and Augustine's views of death, Carole Straw refers to issues of martyrdom and self-identity in the writings of Augustine and Gregory the Great, and Paul Meyvaert analyses Bede's exegesis on the Book of Kings. The fifth and final section concludes the volume with Peter Brown's paper '*Gloriosus Obitus: The End of the Ancient Other World*'. This, as Peter Brown notes, is just one more piece to fit into the grand jigsaw puzzle which Robert Markus has so masterfully put together in his book *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990).

This is a magnificent collection of essays. William Klingshirn and Mark Vessey should be congratulated for their choice of papers, and for producing such a coherent and thought-provoking volume. They have arranged the papers with care by theme, and have prefaced each section with a short introduction which points to the major issues discussed and places them in the context of Robert Markus' work. In this sense, *The Limits of Ancient Christianity* is definitely not an ordinary *Festschrift*. It is a remarkable book in honour of a remarkable scholar.

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