

The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works

Matthew Levering

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Mit dem Werk *The Theology of Augustine* bietet Matthew Levering eine flüssig lesbare und prägnante Einführung in die bedeutendsten Werke von Augustinus. Durch die Zusammenfassung der Hauptargumente von Augustins zentralen Werken stellt Levering dem Leser das große Bild seines theologischen Projektes vor; dabei vernachlässigt er aber nicht den historischen Kontext und die Feinheiten seiner besonderen Erkenntnisse. Sowohl theologisch interessierte Laien als auch theologische Experten werden beträchtlich von diesem Band profitieren und dazu ange-regt werden, erneut oder, vielleicht gar zum ersten Mal, in die Primärquellen einzutauchen.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet ouvrage consacré à la théologie de St Augustin, l'auteur produit une introduction succincte et très acces-sible aux œuvres les plus importantes de St Augustin. En résumant les arguments principaux de ces œuvres, il pré-sente au lecteur une vue d'ensemble du projet théologique de l'évêque d'Hippone, sans toutefois ignorer leur contexte historique et les nuances de leurs apports particuliers. Le laïc ayant un intérêt pour la théologie et l'expert pourront l'un et l'autre tirer un profit considérable de cet ouvrage et se trouveront encouragés à creuser encore les œuvres de St Augustin, ou, peut-être, à les lire pour la première fois.

SUMMARY

With *The Theology of Augustine* Matthew Levering offers a highly readable and succinct introduction to Augustine's most significant works. By summarising the main argu-ments of Augustine's central works, Levering introduces the reader to the big picture of his theological project, yet without ignoring Augustine's historical context and the nuances of his particular insights. Both the theologically interested lay person and the theological expert will benefit considerably from this volume and they will be stimulated to delve again, or, perhaps for the first time, into the pri-mary sources.

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Augustine of Hippo (354–430) undoubtedly remains one of the most influential figures in the history of Christianity. Roman Catholic scholar Matthew Lever-ing, professor of Theology at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake in Mundelein (Illinois, USA) offers the reader a helpful tool to access Augustine's works today. The book clearly delivers on what it promises to do in its subtitle, namely to provide 'an introduc-tory guide' to Augustine's 'most important works'. Of Augustine's significant corpus, Levering chose to focus on the following works: *On Christian Doctrine*, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, *Homilies on the First Epistle of*

John, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, and Augus-tine's three major works, *Confessions*, the *City of God* and *On the Trinity*. Given this considerable challenge one would surely expect a bulky volume to emerge. However, Levering manages to present his results on merely 224 pages. And he does so in a highly effec-tive way as he achieves a balance between attention to detail and a clear focus on the overarching elements of Augustine's theological thought. Hence the book's seven chapters are brief yet not shallow, condensed yet not cumbersome.

As Levering expounds the major building blocks of Augustine's theological thought, set against the back-drop of his life and history, the reader gets a clear picture of Augustine's big ideas, such as the virtue of interpret-ing Scripture, of discovering God's action in concrete history, of human participation in the life of the Triune God, the notion of love and of happiness, combined with his distinct God-centeredness, and, in particular, his profound Christ-centeredness. 'We are made to love the Triune God and to participate in his life', writes Levering, '[t]his is the message of these seven works of Augustine' (190). The particular advantage of a large synopsis such as this is that it clearly reveals Augustine's significant influence on subsequent generations of theo-logians. One thinks, for example, of John Calvin who quoted Augustine more than any other scholar, or of Jonathan Edwards, who has frequently been labelled the 'American Augustine'. The book's fourth chapter, 'On Predestination', is a special highlight in terms of particu-lar depth and theological reflection; apparently, Lever-ing is here able to draw on previous research, such as his *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford University Press, 2011). The last chapter, 'On the Trin-ity', is relatively complex, which, of course, is largely due to the subject matter's intrinsic complexity.

Levering offers a very helpful bibliography for fur-ther reading and he refers to a whole range of relevant (yet mostly Anglo-Saxon) secondary sources. Overall, this comprehensive yet concise presentation of Augus-tine's major works and his thought life will stimulate both the lay person interested in historical theology and the theologian alike to move into the primary sources and pick up Augustine (again): *Tolle lege!*

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