

Lisa Kaaren Bailey, *Christianity's Quiet Success. The Eusebius Gallicanus Sermon Collection and the Power of the Church in Late Antique Gaul*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. Pp. X – 278. ISBN 978-0-268-02224-2. \$ 34.

The 'Eusebius Gallicanus' sermon collection (EG) has received far less attention than the sermons of such famous men as Augustine or Caesarius of Arles. Bailey's book convincingly argues that the largely anonymous, low-key sermons of EG are an indispensable counterpoint to the idea that the success of the Church in the West is due to the rise of powerful bishops. The 'quiet success' referred to in the title is the result of patient community building by ordinary pastors. The orthodox tradition took root ultimately thanks to formulaic, even plagiaristic sermons like those in EG.

The introduction summarizes the book's main points: the popularity of EG from Late Antiquity to the high Middle Ages; its importance to the clergy as a preaching guide, and to monks and pious people as devotional reading; its focus on pastoral care, not on exegesis, aiming at local consensus; and the fact that the same pastoral technique is applied to laymen and monks alike. The author warns of the distorting anachronism which looms behind the term 'semi-pelagian controversy'. That these sermons are optimistic about the ability of human beings to achieve salvation, is the result of pastoral concern, not of the need to take sides in a theological debate.

Chapter 1, entitled 'Preaching in late antique Gaul', puts EG in the liturgical context of fifth-/sixth-century Gaul. The central role of sermons as teaching tools of the community was bolstered by the explosion in the number of homilies which by being used over and over again turned into conservative documents that brought about a shift towards the consolidation of orthodoxy. As the author says, they are 'least-studied ... most influential' (24).

Chapter 2, 'The Eusebius Gallicanus sermon collection', turns a problem into an opportunity: EG must be studied 'not in spite of the problems it presents, but because the problems themselves are evidence for the history and character of the late antique Church' (30). The author discusses the name of the collection (which she keeps in the interest of standardisation) and its authorship. She endorses Morin's view of an early to mid-sixth century compilation chiefly from the archives of the church of Riez. Its authors cannot be identified (certainly not Faustus alone) and Caesarius had no hand in its compilation.

Chapter 3, 'Building community', contains Bailey's central thesis that the style of leadership in EG is markedly distinct from contemporary voices such as Caesarius': egalitarian rather than hierarchical, patient rather than coercive, greatly influenced by monastic models. Salvation is conceived of as a community project rather than an individual one.

Chapter 4, 'Explaining the faith', addresses the strategies used to inculcate the faith in a not highly educated nor rhetorically skilled community. EG keeps to plain truths, avoiding controversies and uncompromising answers (unlike, again, Caesarius, or, for that matter, Augustine). Its strategies include the 'circle of faith' reasoning (it is necessary to believe in order to understand) and the 'rhetoric of paradox' (impossibility is a characteristic of

divinity). The author illustrates this by means of four case studies which concern the creed, virgin birth, the meaning of scripture, and the justice of God.

Chapter 5, 'Dealing with sin', makes it clear that EG is inclined to be compassionate towards human weakness. Whilst avoiding any rigorism, it preaches that baptism is the beginning of a lifelong struggle which requires constant expiation of small sins. There is an optimistic belief in the power of penance. However, any undue sense of security on the part of the faithful is opposed. Prayer alone will not do. Augustine's 'active passivity' is not to the taste of EG.

Chapter 6, 'Sermons to monks', underscores that these sermons are among the most examined, although they are erroneously taken out of context. The point is precisely that their vision of community and the role of individuals towards salvation is the same as in the rest of the sermons to lay communities. While the role of Lérins and elitist monk-bishops has often been made into a problem by modern scholars, EG appears to envisage an uncomplicated relationship between monastery and world.

Finally, after summarizing the results once again, Bailey elegantly manages to give an impression of the usage and audience of the collection through the centuries from a sample of the manuscripts she has studied for this purpose.

The latter is exemplary of the care with which this book has been written. Bailey goes to great lengths to cater for her readers as well as for her subject. The main text is eminently readable and easily accessible even to a general public. The scholarly debate and all the Latin have been moved to a sizeable body of endnotes. A lengthy bibliography proves how extremely well documented the author is. However, it is top-heavy compared with the essentially uncomplicated conclusions of this study. In addition, the book is somewhat repetitive, stating its central notions again and again. Generally speaking, it is more concerned with the outlines of the collection than with a detailed study of the text of the individual sermons – which is, of course, not a minus, but a choice. The author is clearly sympathetic to the 'quiet' strategy of the modest clergymen of EG. One would like to discuss with her whether notions such as 'egalitarian' and 'own responsibility', which she combines with it, do not show a modern bias. These, however, are matters of taste and personal preference. I wholeheartedly recommend this beautiful book about an underrated collection of sermons. In its straightforwardness it is a quiet success itself.

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