These observations are not meant as criticisms that detract from the worth of this book. Rather, they point to places where the work Coon has undertaken here invites more. And that, too, is a contribution for which we can be glad. Read this book and think about your favorite saint’s *vita*: you will see it anew and think again.

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*The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus.* Edited by William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey. Recentiores: Later Latin Texts and Contexts. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999. xxvi + 348 pp. $54.50 cloth.

This is a distinguished volume of essays, conceived to honor a scholar whose work over half a century has defined a whole field of religious and cultural history. Robert Markus’s range has embraced the Christian Latin west from ancient to medieval times, with a particular concentration on Augustine and on Gregory the Great, and this is reflected in the present collection. As the two editors explain, the main divisions of the book also reflect themes clearly apparent in Markus’s work: historical analysis, issues of orthodoxy and church order, the development of the ascetic ideal in late antiquity, and the transition from the late ancient thought of Augustine to the medieval world of Bede, with a final essay by Peter Brown that reflects on the contrast between east and west and Markus’s conception of the ‘end’ of late ancient Christianity. Each of the main sections is preceded by a short reflective essay by the editors, placing what follows both in the context of recent developments in scholarship and in relation to Markus’s own work. Such careful arrangement, as well as the choice of contributors, who include many of the leading scholars in the various fields represented, mean that this book is as much a meditation on the themes raised by Robert Markus himself as it is a collection of individual contributions. The editors should be congratulated on having done far more than producing a *Festschrift*; they have given us a volume that is in itself an important contribution to the understanding of the Christian Latin west.

One of the most prominent recurring issues in the volume, relating to Markus’s own work, is provided by Markus’s long preoccupation with the thought of Augustine, represented here in several contributions, such as Paula Fredriksen on Augustine’s understanding of Old Testament history, Frederick H. Russell on his arguments directed towards the Donatists, or James J. O’Donnell on “The next life of Augustine,” in which he effectively deconstructs the biographical approach to Augustine’s thought, raising the important issue of “the very centrality of biography to our notion of historical study, the subject of no satisfactory recent discussion known to me” (222). But Augustine also makes an appearance in several other contributions, for example Elizabeth Clark’s striking exposition of the various attempts made by Augustine and others to reconcile the differing scriptural passages dealing with marriage and divorce.

Augustine raises a further theme central to Markus’s own thought, that of interpretation, whether relating to scriptural exegesis or to the question of hermeneutics in general; both are addressed in Philip Rousseau’s exemplary
analysis of the use made at several levels by Jerome, Augustine and Paulinus of Nola of the language and imagery of the parable of the prodigal son. The role of signs and figures in conveying meaning is a puzzle to which Markus has been drawn since his own philosophical and theological training, as is now shown in his *Signs and Meaning: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (1996). This too is a theme that recurs in one essay after another in the present book, a fact that in itself reflects Markus’s considerable achievement in helping other scholars to realize that this is a fundamental issue for anyone trying to understand late antique Christianity.

In their introduction the editors raise a further issue suggested by Markus’s work and present it as “the overarching theme” of the volume (viii). This is the idea of “limits,” as indeed is recognized by the book’s title, *The Limits of Ancient Christianity*, with its clear reference to Markus’s own book, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). One way of understanding an end or limit is of course to take it as referring to death itself, as John C. Cavadini does in comparing the views of Ambrose and Augustine on death (see especially 247–49). Peter Brown likewise takes as his starting point the imaginative structures associated with death and the other world. But Brown also raises a broader conception of limit raised in Markus’s work, that is, limit as discontinuity—discontinuity with the east or discontinuity with the post-sixth-century world in the west. In this scenario, Gregory the Great can seem to mark “the turning of an age” (296); he can be seen as “a Latin Byzantine” (299), still part of the shared culture of the late antique world, but conscious, too, as other scholars have also noted, of a new and sharper awareness of the other world (302). “Somewhere between Augustine and Gregory, the ‘birth of purgatory’ began” (310), a process from which, as Brown notes, the Byzantine contemporaries of Gregory significantly stood aside.

It is appropriate that this conception of “end” or limit, which is strongly present in Markus’s work, should also find its expression in this book, and deliberately so, as its editors make clear. It is a book that is very much concerned with defining identity, also a characteristic of Robert Markus’s approach to late antique Christian thought and a strong feature of his 1993 book. This notion of the “end” of ancient Christianity is a western view, shaped perhaps partly by the consciousness of what was to come, as indeed is made clear in the last main section of the present book. Shaped so significantly by Augustine, one should perhaps point out that it does not sit quite comfortably with the rival and more generous and elastic view of late antiquity as embracing the Christian east, the beginnings of Islam, and more. It places Augustine and Gregory in the context of Latin writers, such as Ambrose and Jerome, but largely separates them from their contemporaries in the east (though Ephraem and Cyril of Alexandria are represented here). Indeed, the difficulty implicit in writing history is that the very process imposes closure, as James O’Donnell also shows to be true of biography. But in the contemporary intellectual world that O’Donnell describes, closure will be impossible (230–31) and with it, if he is right, the idea of Augustine or Gregory as men of their time. These are issues that need to be addressed and on which both Markus’s work and the present book invite us to reflect.

The fact that this book raises such fundamental historiographical issues makes it most unusual for a volume conceived as a *Festschrift*. It is in fact
Ambrose: Church and Society in the Late Roman World. By John Moorhead.
The Medieval World series. Longman: London and New York, 1999. x + 235 pp. $66.95 cloth.

Moorhead provides a suitable introduction to Ambrose, considering both his major texts and the context of his episcopal ministry in Milan. The first chapter traces his early life and career. While it would be fit to explain Ambrose’s exegesis in chapter 2, since it informed his thinking on other subjects, Moorhead begins instead with the bishop’s views on women, given their position as one of his earliest and most persistent topics. His attitude toward wives and virgins reenters discussions in subsequent chapters on exegesis, civil relationships, clerical duties, and his later years. The book delivers on its title, examining Ambrose’s varied roles as a defender of orthodoxy in the Arian debate, a leader in the civic affairs of Milan, a polemicist against paganism, and a champion of the church against imperial encroachments. Though these themes are important, the author impresses his readers with the overwhelming impact of the prelate’s biblical interpretation as his legacy to the western church. His interpretations drew upon eastern influences but also nuanced them in ways often overlooked.

While Moorhead overturns older views of Ambrose (as have other recent studies), he also engages recent Ambrosian studies in footnotes, distinguishing his conclusions on various points. Description gives way to analysis, particularly regarding the bishop’s often-wooden exegesis. There is much valuable knowledge here, leaving the reader able to make informed assessments of Ambrose. Some typographical errors spoil an otherwise good read.

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L’Évêque dans la Cité du IVe au Ve Siècle: Image et Autorité. Edited by Éric Rebillard and Claire Sotinel. Collection de l’Ecole française de Rome 248. Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1998. 158 pp. n.p.

This set of essays, Actes de la table ronde organisée par l’Instituto patristico Augustinianum et l’Ecole française de Rome (Rome, 1 et 2 décembre 1995), carefully offers details about its topic. Together these articles emphasize that the largest influence of bishops during the period depended upon their dignity and honor. That was true even of the titles given bishops in The Theodosian Code (di Berardino). They were viewed as the mediators between God and man (Cracco Ruggini) and were expected to help the poor as well as the downtrodden and push for justice (Martin). In doing that they adopted some aspects of civil patrons (Lapelley), yet lines were drawn between a bishop’s prerogative and those of civil authorities (Barone-Adesi). Their place was also distinguished from that of the monks (Wipszycka). The prosopography of Christians in Italy shows their restraint in spending on themselves, their assistants, and their communities (Soteriel), something that doubtless had moral weight. There was a marked development of the sense of rector