

Disciplines and Identities, Divine and Spiritual in Late Antiquity, by N Kamimura

Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Research: Grant-in Aid for Scientific Research JP26370077. 2017. x + pp. 115. No price quoted.
<https://kaken.nii.ac.jp/grant/KAKENHI-PROJECT-26370077/>

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This slim volume is a collection of six papers emanating from workshops, conferences and seminars held globally. In the author's words, the focus shifts "from dealing with questions concerning Christian/pagan identity/ies, spiritual training and the perfection of human beings to studies dedicated to the Church Fathers in the Western and Eastern Mediterranean: from the beginning to the climax of North African Christianity and its relation to the Eastern Christianity in the fourth century" (p. vii). The theological writings considered include those of Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius and Augustine of Hippo (in the West), and John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa (in the East).

Spiritual training has become, like spirituality in general, a subject which attracts significant attention these days, as opposed to a purely intellectual approach. Cyprian emphasises the spiritual value of being imitators of Christ, while Lactantius reflects on human emotions as "motions of the soul" (p.18) and focuses on "living rightly" and "speaking well"; both of which are reflections of divine love.

Augustine's concern regarding Christian identity does not discern difference within the faith community. His concern is to form a common Christian identity through spiritual training within a broader pagan community, in which Christians discern and fulfil their social obligations as and when the occasion requires. Part of this was to adopt an ascetic lifestyle and submit to discipline, including the reading and study of scripture. For Augustine, spiritual training and communal solidarity enabled the formation of Christian identity. A primary source here is Augustine's correspondence, which the author analyses through the lens of the love of God and neighbour.



Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/index>
Volume 46 | Number 1 | 2020 | #7528 | 2 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/7528>
ISSN 2412-4265 (Online) | ISSN 1017-0499
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John Chrysostom's formation of identity is closely linked to the development and expression of deification—union with God—through a clear understanding of humans created in the “image” of God. This concept is related to the notion of power and authority. Virtue becomes the source of human power as expressed in the potential to become like God.

This small offering takes us back to our Christian beginnings in antiquity and invites us to reassess the value of the Church Fathers as a reasonable guide to our present context; where nominal Christianity is normative and under threat in a society where faith is abused often for crude political purposes, and hence, we need to go backwards in order to promote a new Christian identity.