This very useful volume comprises a selection of key papers presented at the third international Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church conference held in Melbourne in 2003. This series of conferences, held under the auspices of the Centre for Early Christian Studies at the Brisbane campus of ACU, is a major event in the Australian patristic calendar. These papers, selected from those presented at the latest conference in the series (another was held in Melbourne in July 2005), are witness to the high quality of presentations at the conference and a valuable resource for specialist patristic scholars and those others interested in the life and the world of the early church.

It is not easy to review such a volume (I thought that I would get my own special pleading in early!), and what will emerge will indeed be a series of mini-reviews. The structure of the volume is appropriate and the editors have generally done a competent, even valiant job in arranging the material in useful blocks (themes). The papers offered in the volume will serve a mixed readership with varied tastes and interests (myself included), but even if only one or two of the offerings particularly engage the interest of an individual reader, then the enterprise as a whole has served a more than useful purpose. My own interests do not run the gamut of the papers on offer, but there are more than enough here even to satisfy my own interest. In fairness to all the contributors, however, I will not confine my comments to my own area of interest but will seek to offer some comment on all the papers within the context of the collection theme, without, I trust, fear or favour (but probably in some cases with a certain degree of simple ignorance!). Such reviews can, of course, only be in the most general terms, given that there are 25 separate papers with no formal connections other than the general theme of the series (but not, as I will argue, that of the theme of this particular collection).

The editors have properly chosen to begin with Charles Kannengiesser’s paper, ‘Scripture and Spirituality in Ancient Christianity’. Professor Kannengiesser never comes to these shores (and I remain forever apologetic, Professor, that my car broke down on our outing some years ago on the slopes of Mt Coot-tha in Brisbane!) without leaving something of value behind to the benefit of scholarship here. This occasion is no different, and we are in his debt yet again. His reflections on relevance are helpful, given that all of us engaged in patristic studies constantly find ourselves challenged on these grounds. His comment, towards the end of his paper, that ‘[t]oday’s gospel-believers have to account for themselves in a new non-biblical environment. They need a new language capable of carrying their message in terms appropriate for a “global” culture-in-the-making’ (p 15), though by no means particularly original, provides a timely warning (and, if necessary, corrective) for and to the papers which follow.¹

¹ This, of course, applies to the whole patristic community in all our endeavours.
The first section of the collection, ‘Jewish Influences’, comprises contributions from three fine scholars. Esler, who looks here at the ‘The Character of Early Christianity in Rome’, provides a useful introduction to much of what follows in the collection, with particular respect to the engagement of the Christian faith with ‘Judean’ culture and community in Rome. McLaren, ‘The Jerusalem Temple in the Life of the Early Christian Community’, provides a switch of geographic focus to the actual birthplace of the nascent movement and demonstrates the importance of Jerusalem to early Christian identity, particularly in light of the attempts of New Testament writers to play this down. Sim, ‘The Defensibility of Christian Judaism’, argues for the legitimacy of ‘Christian Judaism’ (an important switch from the concept of ‘Jewish Christianity’) and the defensibility of the claim by Paul’s Judean opponents that their version of the faith was probably even more defensible than that of Paul himself.

In Section 2, ‘Homilies’, Demura, ‘“Sursum Cor” in the Sermons of St Augustine’, opens proceedings with a detailed and closely argued statement of the connection between liturgy and the Christian life in the use of the singular *sursum cor* in the liturgy. In this he provides some valuable research material for further exploration. Dunn, ‘Mary in the Presbyteral Homilies of Augustine of Hippo’, offers a well-written piece which, however, provides the somewhat interesting conclusion that these homilies tell us that Mary, from a liturgical perspective at least, did not figure significantly in the life of the North African church. This is honest, if disappointing perhaps; I would like to see more work done on those early homilies where there is something of significance in the presentation of Mary and on the relationship of this to Augustine’s more theologically based reflections. Youssef’s piece, ‘Severus of Antioch in the Coptic Theotokia’, is an interesting piece but contributes very little, in my view, to the actual theme of the collection. (This is not a criticism of the piece itself, which is well done, but a comment on a recurring problem with a number of the pieces on offer.)

In Section 3, ‘Eucharist’, Winkler, ‘The Sanctus: Some Observations with Regard to its origins and Theological Significance’, presents a paper useful for its technical detail but does not, like the previous paper, necessarily contribute much to the actual theme of the conference and this volume. Craig’s paper, ‘The Breaking of Bread and the Eucharistic Prayer’, I regard likewise. It is a very good paper in its own terms, but how it contributes to the conference and therefore collection theme of ‘Liturgy and Life’ is not clear. It highlights one of the weaknesses of the collection in that the giving of a theme to the conference and therefore to the collection leads one not unreasonably to the expectation that the papers will contribute, even indirectly, to that theme. Does the theme raise the question of how the liturgy reflects the life of the church of the time? or how participation in the liturgy helps to shape or form the Christian life? or how the liturgy reflects the teaching of the church which in its turn reflects and/or shapes the Christian life? I suspect that the brevity of the editors’ introductory comments may itself reflect an implicit admission that many of the offerings, however valuable in their own terms, simply pay at best lip-service to the theme. Do the conferences themselves and the collections emanating from them require specific sub-themes beyond the general one of ‘Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church’? Casey’s paper ‘Irenaeus: Touchstone of Catholicity’, the third in this section, is both a very fine paper and one also which very explicitly addresses the theme of the relationship of the liturgy to the Christian life with an
exploration of Irenaeus’s theology of the eucharist as a sacramental expression of his theology of the economy of salvation and its provision of a genuine catholicity (p 153f).

In Section 4 (‘Baptism’) Kelly’s paper, ‘Baptism – Sacrament of the Birth of the Church’, offers a helpful reflection on one aspect of the relationship between liturgy and the Christian life where he argues that we can ‘learn something of the sacramental quality of the church from a consideration of baptism…[and]…that to speak of the church as sacrament is to speak of its life and witness as the visible body of Christ’ (p 165). In ‘Of Water and Spirit: An Ecclesial Spirituality’ Farrell argues for the rediscovery of a ‘specifically ecclesial spirituality’ (p175), one essentially communal and intrinsically relational, to act as a corrective for an ‘excessive “institutionalization”’ (ibid). In Bright’s paper, ‘The First Day of Creation in the Baptismal Discourse of the Early Church’, we see, in a reflection primarily on the thought of Augustine, a presentation of baptism as a ‘life-long process’ (p 186), a notion drawn from a rich tradition of baptismal discourse in the early centuries.

In Section 5, ‘Shaping the Liturgy’, Volp, ‘Liturgical Authority Reconsidered: Remarks on the Bishop’s Role in Pre-Constantinian Worship’, argues, *inter alia*, that there is no evidence, apart from Ignatius, that bishops before 200 CE enjoyed a primary authority in the liturgy and that, rather, their chief responsibilities were in the areas of the administration, management and finances of the early communities. Di Berardino, ‘Liturgical Celebrations and Imperial Legislation in the Fourth Century’, argues, with much detail, that from the Constantinian period onwards imperial legislation made possible a new calendar system, gradually replacing the old pagan one, which became ‘a privileged instrument for the Christianisation of the population’ (p 232). Giannarelli, ‘Egeria: A Journey through Liturgy, Exegesis and Devotion’, writes of the late-fourth-century pilgrim Egeria, well known to all undergraduate students of the history of Christian liturgy and an inveterate observer (for which we are all grateful!) of the liturgical practices in the holy places she visits, and employs her as an example of how ‘[t]he link between travel, prayer and liturgy was and is...a metaphor of life according to Christian doctrine’ (p 248).

In Section 6, ‘The Influence of Augustine of Hippo’, Kato, ‘Comments on Augustine’s Concept of the Two Cities in *De civitate Dei*’, offers no particular new insights, while Neil, ‘Two Views on Vice and Virtue: Augustine of Hippo and Maximus the Confessor’, offers some refreshing reflections in her comparison of the insights of Augustine and Maximus ‘into the fundamental tragedy of the human condition’ (p 271). Kelly, ‘Augustine’s Trinitarian Interiority: The Truth in the Heart’, offers a timely rehabilitation of the standing of Augustine’s contribution to development of Trinitarian theology, with particular emphasis on the *De Trinitate*. My problem with all three offerings, however, and this remains for me (see above) a major problem with the collection, is not the offerings *per se* but the fact that they seem unconnected to the conference and collection theme of ‘Liturgy and Life’.²

In Section 7, ‘Eastern Theology’, Harrison, ‘Eve in Greek Patristic and Byzantine Theology’, offers a very serviceable paper but, again, apart from the use as texts of a hymn from John of Damascus and one from the Byzantine period from the pen of the nun

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² I regret having to harp on this point, but it seems to me a crucial one.
Kassia, there is nothing here truly to link with the set theme. Hill, ‘How Thomas of Harkel Read St Luke’, writes on a subject about which I know but little, yet enough to ask again, ‘But what of the theme?’ Osborn, ‘Perfection as Son of God in Clement of Alexandria’, writes on a subject about which he knows as much as anyone else but, again, I have to say (though with more reticence than previously!) that I do not see the theme. These are all fine papers and worthy of the time spent reading them, but a review of the collection must either be just that (as a review of the theme) or a collection of reviews. Space does not permit.

For Section 8, ‘Spirituality’, the editors have, I suspect, simply chosen a title that is a catch-all under which those that don’t fit elsewhere—regardless of their individual qualities (which I question not at all)—might well be placed. Any number of other papers in the collection could be placed here. Dupuche, ‘Sufism and Hesychasm’, provides for one largely ignorant of the subject area a number of valuable insights and does touch, however, lightly on the theme of this collection and the conference series. Jakab, ‘Religiosity and Spirituality in Origen’s Time’, presents some useful reflections. Ginsburg, “The neshamah is always praying”: Towards a Typology of Prayer in Jewish Mystical Tradition (a first offering), offers the first part of what he calls ‘an extended meditation on types of Jewish mystical prayer’ (p 392). It is the longest of the papers in the collection and well worth the read for students of Christian prayer and liturgy (it would be useful to make some comparison’s with Origen’s thought in Peri Euches). The subject matter does not fit directly into the major theme of the conference series but still adds great value to reflections on questions of prayer and spirituality in the early church. The editors have chosen well this final piece.

The Indices are a valuable part of this collection, and the editing is of a high quality. My criticisms of the collection, particularly with respect to the relationship between paper and theme, are not criticisms of the editors. They have sought to give some shape to an at times disparate set of offerings. Nor is it a criticism of the quality of the papers themselves. They are, almost without exception, offerings of the highest quality and reason enough to encourage the continuation of the conferences and of the collections of conference papers. It seems to me rather that the sub-themes need either to be even further expanded or, preferably, done away with altogether, leaving the major ongoing theme as that of each succeeding conference.