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The Saint's Life and the Senses of Scripture: Hagiography as Exegesis. By Ann W. Astell. University of Notre Dame Press, 2024. Pp. xviii + 380. $70 (hb); $55.99 (eb).

Hagiography is an oft-maligned genre. It can imply fawning over individual achievement. Modernity has criticized it variously for its a-historical portraits and for distracting from Christ and the Bible. Ann Astell in her ambitious *The Saint's Life and the Senses of Scripture* paints a more complex picture. She makes her case through a careful reading of works from the eighth to the sixteenth century and touches on three nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels.

A. dismisses the critique that hagiography displaces the Bible. Indeed, the Bible itself could be seen as hagiography in the sense that it is, in part, a record of sanctity. Matthew identifies Jesus as holy (*sanctum* in the Vulgate, 27:52); Paul characterizes his audience as saints (Romans 1:7); and 1 Peter 1:16 urges all to be "*sancti*," which can be translated as "holy" or "saints." A. devotes her book's first part on hagiographies from the eighth to twelfth centuries to demonstrating how stories of saints' lives were shaped by biblical narratives and senses and how they in turn formed "a narrative commentary upon scripture and [bore] witness as its handmaid to an apostolic tradition of biblical reception in holy lives from age to age" (6).

A. also notes the similar trajectories of biblical interpretation and hagiography. She depicts the accounts of St. Francis of Assisi's life as pivotal in this regard. Bonaventure's life of Francis, his *Legenda major*, marks a development when compared with Thomas of Celano's earlier life of Francis, his *Vita prima*. Like hagiography preceding it, Celano's account celebrates "God's wondrous work" in a human life (132). It highlights that "God's invincible grace effects mysterious, sometimes instantaneous, changes within Francis's own soul and miraculously accounts for his conversion" (133). As in scholastic biblical interpretation that affirms Scripture's divine authorship while increasingly exploring the implications of inspired human authorship, Bonaventure emphasizes Francis's human agency by highlighting his preaching, virtuous living, and commitment to study.

Hagiography continues to develop in Raymond of Capua's *Life of Catherine of Siena*. While biblical references frame Raymond's *Life*, they remain "largely marginal" to it. Increasingly influential is the new "juridical process of canonization," which puts claims of sanctity on trial. The "testimony of named witnesses, . . . refutation of objections [as occurs in the scholastic questions], and . . . proof of heroic

virtue" are needed for convincing proof of sanctity on the way to canonization (150–51).

A. concludes her history of hagiography, properly understood, with Erasmus's sixteenth-century *Life of St. Jerome*. Earlier hagiography sees the primary "author of the saint's life [as] . . . the God revealed in the scriptures, in Jesus Christ, and in the saint." Erasmus, in contrast, strips his *Life* of "miracles, visions, and voices" and makes "Jerome the author of his own *Life*" (223). Similarly, the *Life of Thomas More* by Nicholas Harpsfield, called the first scholarly biography in English, "constructs the story of More's life not from the scriptures, but from More's own writings, in combination with textual evidence from other sources" (224). While biography becomes hagiography's preferred genre (and the standard against which earlier hagiography is anachronistically judged) and increasingly distances itself from the Bible, it reflects modernity's growing emphasis on the Bible as a human product and de-emphasis on the range of scriptural senses.

A. notes in her penultimate chapter how the Bible remains central to the lives and spiritualities of people generally recognized as holy. Servant of God Dorothy Day regularly prayed and meditated on Scripture and framed the "Aims and Means" of the Catholic Worker in terms of the beatitudes. In one of the book's shortest chapters that invites further development in the future, A. goes on to suggest how novels by Dostoevsky, Willa Cather, and Franz Werfel resemble hagiography in that they are history-like and portray their protagonists in terms of Scripture, which leads these characters to a scriptural perception of the world and scripturally motivated lives.

Informing A.'s work is Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. Frei charts the disassociation of literal from figural readings of the Bible. Modernity's question was no longer the priority and implications of the Bible's history-like narratives for the life of faith but the historical veracity of the Bible to the exclusion of figural readings. She agrees with Edith Wyschogrod's *Saints and Postmodernism* that speaks of hagiography as composed in the imperative not the indicative mood. It "'is informed by a will to historicity'" that discloses "'a life'. . . to be 'lived forward' in that of others" (260).

Though A.'s focus is hagiography, her aspirations extend to biblical interpretation. She "hope[s] that a renewed biblical scholarship, combining historical-critical methods with an exegetical theology conscious of a long, living history of biblical reception, will find its partner in a renewed hagiography" (13). This wide-ranging and well-documented work provides valuable resources in support of achieving that goal.

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Mysticism. By Simon Critchley. New York Review Books, 2024. Pp. ix + 325. $18.95 (ppb).

Philosophical studies of mysticism are abundant and often follow familiar patterns. Analytic approaches typically center on the epistemic validity of mystical experience, whereas continental styles emphasize the linguistic and performative dimensions of

mystical texts. In either case, it remains rare for the philosopher to be so personally disclosive in their analysis. "I think I am temperamentally a mystic," Critchley confesses in his *Mysticism*, before adding, "Maybe I'm just a bad philosopher" (69).

However one receives these and other self-reflective comments from a philosopher of C.'s stature—the present reader finds them endearing and disarming—they help account for some of the book's more eclectic features. Written in the hope that it might help lift the Hamlet-like melancholy of our times (5)—a condition he later identifies as the problem of nihilism (288)—the book's first part addresses several conceptual and terminological matters related to mysticism and its study, before transitioning into a series of expositions of mostly medieval Christian female mystics writing in the vernacular. With the notable exception of Meister Eckhart, whose mysticism of detachment intones God's abyssal "nothingness," these figures foreground the visionary, dramatic, and carnal dimensions of mystical life.

The latter part of the book turns to extended treatments of literary figures such as Anne Carson, Annie Dillard, and T. S. Eliot, who are not themselves mystics but engage deeply with mystical themes and figures in their writings. Their (perhaps surprising) prominence becomes as much a meditation on aesthetics and writing as it is on mysticism itself. The book rounds out with an excursus on music, particularly Krautrock, before concluding with a confession: that C., though an atheist and a philosopher, has sought to rethink the problem of nihilism and the central task of philosophy by plunging into religion's "fiery core and beating heart: mysticism" (288).

The effort shines brightest in its expository middle section. While the selection of figures is admittedly shaped by personal preference, with Julian of Norwich assuming a central role, recurring themes include writing, self-abnegation, ecstatic vision, devotional objects, and the coincidence of opposites: light and darkness, pain and joy, matter and spirit, the eternal and the temporal. The writing here is highly engaging, at times even incantatory.

Perhaps most surprising is C.'s extended treatment of the Incarnation and the sufferings of Christ as the source of both realism and hope. Rejecting as anemic any retreat to an inner citadel of faith, which he describes as Lutheran and Kantian in tendency (266), C. embraces Julian's "imagistic logic" and "painterly" approach to her *Showings* (147, 130). Drawing upon the scholarly work of Caroline Walker Bynum to elucidate medieval mysticism's attentiveness to bodiliness, affect, and the enchanted materiality of religious life, C. extends his exposition to Dillard's brutally beautiful *Holy the Firm* before turning to Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

If the expositional through-line is not always clear, this is largely offset by powerful reflections on the creation and "de-creation" of the self, the poetry of place, the asceticism of writing, and the metaphysical implications of the Incarnation. One gets the sense that the author, while never explicitly disavowing his atheism, has either ventriloquized, or allowed himself to be ventriloquized by, the Christian mystical tradition to such a degree that earlier, more resolute stances appear open to renegotiation (288, 291). There is a searching quality and personal honesty here that is genuinely refreshing.

Whereas the book's expository sections sing, the more conceptual first part falls somewhat flat. The choice of Bernard McGinn, Michel de Certeau, and William James

as interlocutors is sound, but readers familiar with the broader philosophical work on mysticism may be surprised by how lightly it is engaged. Discussions of consciousness, the status of experience, and mystical itinerancy at times feel thin, and occasionally inconsistent.

To take one example, C. rightly critiques the modern preoccupation with "experience" as inadequate for understanding mysticism. Treating mystical experiences as discrete, unusual, and essentially private phenomena distorts how mystical life actually unfolds: as a life within a tradition, replete with rituals, symbols, narratives, and a network of communal practices.

And yet, C. frequently invokes mysticism in experientialist terms, defining it—along with the early Evelyn Underhill—as "experience in its most intense form," even enticing the reader with the promise of special experiences: "wouldn't you like to have a taste of this intensity?" (3).

Further inquiry into the contested role of experience seems especially warranted in a text like this, as would deeper engagement with mystical traditions that critique the pursuit of ecstasy (one thinks of the *Cloud of Unknowing* author, of Saint John of the Cross, or of Meister Eckhart, who is included in the book, though without sufficient reckoning with this nettled issue). Perhaps it is sobriety, rather than ecstasy—born from the fertile soil of boredom—that offers the enduring ground for mystical life.

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The Origins of Catholic Evolutionism, 1831–1950. By Kenneth W. Kemp. The Catholic University of America Press, 2025. Pp. xxi + 540. $85 (hb/eb).

In the historiography of Catholicism and science, there are only a handful of books that attempt both a robust argument and a level of historical detail that could have you digging through stacks at 9pm on a Friday night. Kemp's abundant historical volume succeeds in both fronts, presenting a compelling case for a generous approach to the Church's eventual acceptance of evolutionary biological ideas, while offering a level of minutiae that will be an invaluable resource for those looking to do similar research far into the future.

The book is divided into five parts: 1771–1885, 1885–1900, 1898–1909, 1909–1931, and 1931–1955, followed by a conclusion and appendices. In each part, K. carefully examines scholars from that time period, then ecclesial documents and discussions, and finishes with relevant secondary literature. This approach allows him an encyclopedic breadth of historical characters, debates, ideas, documents, and controversies. He includes well-known figures like John Zahm and Teilhard de Chardin, as well as lesser known but valuable characters such as José Mendive and Pierre-Marie Perrier. His sources include an immense variety of archives, journals, periodicals, and authors discussing evolutionary theories throughout the last two centuries. Besides the encyclopedic value of so many sources in one tome, the most valuable

aspect of this book is his detailed analysis of the debates around polygenism and monogenism in the creation and aftermath of *Humani Generis*, since the archives of Pope Pius XII were only opened for critical analysis in 2020. K.'s study is the first substantial English-language analysis to date.

For a volume that contains so much excellent work, I was surprised to find several areas of study needing further investigation. First, underlying Kemp's historical arguments is a vision of Catholic epistemology and the history of evolutionary science that he outlines in detail in the appendices. This is unusual for a historical text but reveals much about his choice of sources for both studies. Both rely almost entirely on sources written before 1950, which can be passable for Catholic epistemology (ending with Newman), but ignores over half a century of advances in biological evolutionary discussions. The historical discussions of evolutionary science between Haeckel, Darwin, and Agassiz are compelling *in situ*, but have little in common with discussions in contemporary studies of human evolutionary developmental biology. If Catholic theology is to continue to meet evolution, we must meet science in its current state, in debates over symbiosis, genetics, epigenetics, quantum biology, gender, sexuality, and race. Theological debates over monogenism remain relevant, especially in conversation with creationists and *Humani Generis*, but they represent only the smallest corner of the field of evolutionary biology today.

This modern lacuna is largely forgivable in a text focusing on historical debates ending in 1950, except that some of these debates represent a historical linchpin in the development of problematic discussions around evolution. For example, missing are any substantial discussions of eugenics and racism, despite the copious amounts of contemporary research devoted to these subjects in the last two decades. Darwin's problematic views of race concretely affected his entire evolutionary system, which directly impacted the ways in which eugenics was interwoven seamlessly into evolutionary discussions over the next century. Recent works by Pavuk, Peterson, Rosen, and myself have even examined the theological impacts of eugenics, and why one cannot examine the history of evolutionary theology without talking openly about racism and eugenics. There are no footnotes about Teilhard's eugenics, Agassiz's racism, or the significant impact of the eugenics movement in American evolutionary debates in the early 20th century and how this impacted Catholic and Protestant approaches to the topic.

Despite my reservations, I would strongly recommend this text as one resource among many in historical considerations of Catholicism and evolution; it is the latest and perhaps most detailed example of the gradual acceptance theory of doctrinal development in response to evolutionary biology. The level of detail in ecclesial discussions and the sheer volume of related conversations, especially around *Humani Generis*, combine for an unparalleled addition to the continued study of the history of Catholic thought and evolutionary theory.

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Ruptured Bodies: A Theology of the Church Divided. By Eugene Schlesinger. Fortress Press, 2024. Pp. ix + 205. $39 (hb).

Eugene Schlesinger is committed to the Episcopalian (Anglican) tradition and a scholar of Catholic ecclesiology, both of which are evident in the shaping of his argument. The first line of the introduction notes, "Never has any organization been so content to act against the express wishes and instructions of its founder as the Christian church" (xiii). S.'s project is to argue that this division is a scandal that we cannot ignore. The argument unfolds in five chapters, plus a brief conclusion.

Chapter 1 dispels the notion of a golden age of unity. At the start there was a diversity of stances among the various churches that constituted the "Church." Rather than view this as problematic, S. suggests an original goodness to this diversity. Problems arise when diversity leads to enmity. "The advent of sin brings about a diversity lived as enmity" (8). As S. points out, the movement from diversity to diversity lived as enmity is a decision, through a failure to love. God's work of salvation points the way: enmity is overcome through the offer of friendship "while we were still sinners." This effects "the formation of a new community, in which the hostility between humans and God, and between different human factions, has been overcome" (14). The Church's unity "can and should encompass dissensus even on matters that are not *indifferent*" through "the conflictual process whereby these matters are adjudicated" (25, emphasis original).

Chapter 2 begins, "this work is an ecclesiology of love and love's refusal" (29). S. rejects any soteriology that portrays God as "furious and want[ing] to kill you because of your sins" (35). We must distinguish between the attitude of Jesus and those of his murderers, between "Christ crucified" and the "lynched Jesus" (32–33). Sacrifice involves a "disposition of charity" (36). "Love, not suffering, not death, constitutes the Christian meaning of sacrifice" (36). S. considers three historical examples—the Donatist crisis, the Great Schism, and the Reformation—to illustrate his point. But are there limits to this charity? Are there situations where communion must be split? S. argues that the struggle for accountability in such cases "is properly located within the communion of the church" (51).

Chapter 3 returns to the theme of crucifixion, from the side of the crucifiers. Is ecclesial unity built upon crucifying the other? Whereas Augustine's teaching about love is central in the Donatist crisis, his ultimate response is to force them to return; he has become a crucifier, failing in the very love he proclaimed. Who then are the victims of our demand for ecclesial unity? Here S. draws on his Anglican tradition to explore the ways in which the Anglican churches have struggled to maintain communion around LGBTQ issues and the ordination of women and openly gay ministers in the face of opposition from member churches. He concludes that the "immolation of the individual for the collective is not a valid ecclesiological principle" (93).

Chapter 4 considers the nature and possibility of union. S. argues that union must be a visible communion of churches. He rules out the once common "ecumenism of return" (106). The union must not be a "crucifying union" which further marginalizes or excludes, but rather one that embraces the other. Again, S. draws in the Anglican experience of a union that is incomplete and provisional as a possible way forward. He

also finds helpful elements in the teaching of Vatican II that the Church of Christ "subsists in the Catholic Church," claiming that it makes a "vital contribution to ecumenical endeavour . . . for it means that in our divisions we have not simply lost the church" (118). On the other hand, he is critical of the Uniate model of union with Rome and the establishment of an Anglican "ordinariate." One model that offers some hope is that of "uniting churches" where different ecclesial communities enter into an agreement of mutual recognition.

Chapter 5 considers the obstacles to union. The greatest is the weight of tradition, which is both indispensable and ambiguous. The ambiguity arises from the difficulty in discerning what is truly essential and what is culturally limited, illustrated in questions such as the ordination of women and the papacy. To be clear, S. regards the papacy as an "authentic development" and does not ask the Catholic Church to surrender it. But neither can Rome ask other traditions to deny their own developments in ordaining women. As a path towards a communion of churches S. suggests the minimal assent to the "Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral:" Scriptures, sacrament, creedal faith, and episcopacy (in some form). As the author notes, similar proposals have been made by Karl Rahner and Heinrich Fries. All this can only function where charity takes precedence over disagreement. The brief epilogue returns to the central theme of love.

The work is well written and clear. S. draws from Lonergan's framework on sin, grace, and redemption, but not in an intrusive manner. He grounds his analysis in the empirical reality of the churches while refusing to accept the status quo as definitive. I found it personally helpful and challenging in facing the reality of a divided church, the "ruptured body" of Christ.

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Aquinas and the Early Chinese Masters: Chinese Philosophy and Catholic Theology. By Joshua R. Brown. The Catholic University of America Press, 2024. Pp. xiii + 324. $75 (hb).

Christians have a long history of seeking divine truth in traditions other than their own. According to Scripture, these efforts go all the way back to Saint Paul, who sought to persuade a Greek audience that the unknown God they were worshipping was in fact the God who became incarnate in the person of Jesus. Such labors reached their apogee in the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who arguably did more than anyone to answer Tertullian's question: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" In *Aquinas and the Early Chinese Masters*, Joshua R. Brown invites his reader to ponder the question of what *China* has to do with Jerusalem; more precisely, he asks, "What if Aquinas had read the Chinese masters as he did Aristotle and the other Greek sources, in order to draw them into his masterful synthesis of faith and reason?" (5).

Much of B.'s project is concerned with resolving "two main problems with the theological application of Chinese philosophy: a tendency either to uncritically employ

Chinese philosophical concepts within the theological endeavor, and a tendency to fail to develop an assessment framework of sufficient sophistication for measuring the true theological limits and possibilities of Chinese philosophical concepts" (12). Regarding the former, B.'s careful and multifaceted discussions of specific Chinese philosophical terms in specific contexts—*tian* (Heaven) as it appears in the Confucian *Mengzi* and *jian ai* (universal love) as treated in the Mohist *Mozi*, among them—perform a valuable service in considering not only the complexity of such terms in themselves, but also their place in their authors' thought. Regarding the latter, B. relies on the Thomistic corpus—and his deep familiarity therewith—as his framework, arguing that Aquinas is a particularly worthy interlocutor for Chinese philosophers given his conviction that Christian grace perfects rather than replaces or destroys nature.

While the monograph's close readings are impressive, there is little to tie them together. The author makes it clear that his lack of thematic organization was calculated, for two reasons. First, he claims, "the approach is the argument, and so it must be exhibited in case studies rather than simply proposed or explained" (10). This defense works insofar as the case studies are necessary and efficacious, but it does not enlighten the reader as to why they could not have been more philosophically connected. Second, B. explains, "the episodic feel has its foundation in my wish to retain a modicum of comprehensiveness by demonstrating the theological fruitfulness of Chinese thought for several areas of Catholic theology" (10). Given that, as his own extensive footnotes show, many scholars working in English, Chinese, and French have published in each of these areas, it is not clear that such comprehensiveness requires demonstration, and, again, he declines to offer a reason for selecting the particular elements of Chinese thought that the book addresses. Further adding to the kitchen sink feel: not only does he include very different Confucian philosophers (Mencius and Xunzi), but he also moves between very different *schools of thought*—Confucianism and Mohism—in a perplexing way.

Having said this, it is only fair to note that his approach—selecting a variety of terms for analysis on the basis of their intrinsic interestingness—is very much in the spirit of Saint Thomas, who engaged freely with a multitude of authors, focusing on the usefulness and insightfulness of specific ideas rather than on the methodological classification of his source material. As to the specific type of usefulness and insightfulness: B. largely proceeds in the spirit of Leo XIII, who said in *Aeterni Patris* that philosophy is "sometimes a stepping stone to the Christian faith, sometimes the prelude and help of Christianity, sometimes the Gospel teacher" (par. 4). While B.'s inclusion of Mohism, a tradition which, as he notes, did not survive the ancient period, continues to be puzzling in this regard, he fulfills two promises in his exploration of the Confucian material. First, he consistently avoids the "tendency either to uncritically employ Chinese philosophical concepts within the theological endeavor" (12). Second, as a Thomist, he finds points of contact between Confucianism and Catholicism that can provide doorways into Christian belief and understanding for people reared in Sinitic cultures.

Finally, projects such as his are also beneficial for Western Catholics for many reasons, among them the recovery of perhaps forgotten resources in their own past. As

B. puts it in his discussion of how a Xunzean might react to Matthew 8:21–22 ("let the dead bury their dead"), "turning to Aquinas is fruitful because unlike many contemporary biblical scholars, Aquinas would seem to have deep sympathies with the kind of concerns we see in Confucianism, and takes them seriously" (261). In making the new familiar to those outside the church, and the familiar new to those within, B. has made a worthy contribution to Catholic theology.

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Enfleshed Counter-Memory: A Christian Social Ethic of Trauma. By Stephanie C. Edwards. Orbis Books, 2024. Pp. xi + 217. $40 (ppb).

For Stephanie C. Edwards, "Christian theology is tasked with cultivating 'right' attitudes, actions, and beliefs as it responds to what Christ himself asks of the faithful. To believe, act, and feel 'rightly'—orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy . . .—such that we cultivate 'right memory' is the theological backdrop of this book" (2).

E. asserts that traditional accounts of trauma have been variously interpreted as individual deficiency, one which curative medical and spiritual models purport to solve. For her, *memory* serves as the "connective tissue between trauma and theology" (xx) and is needed to build an embodied, realistic social ethic that can meet the multidimensional and interdisciplinary contours of trauma. E.'s proposal is simple: that of an "enfleshed counter-memory" that aims to provide conceptual grounding for concrete social action that engages our shared yet particular traumas, "'enfleshed,' in relation to complex and incarnational embodiment; 'counter,' as traumatic memory often runs up against structures of power; and 'memory,' as the essential category that unites trauma studies with Christian theology" (xxii).

E. cautions that when engaging with trauma, we must resist the desire to own, control, or mandate memory, or even a particular shape of remembering. Despite this, it is our responsibility as Christians to remember rightly in a violent world, belonging to a "community of memory" built upon what Johann Baptist Metz calls the dangerous memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*). To this end, it is essential to understand trauma as an existential reality, "a universal aspect of human life, defined by socially constructed impediments as well as . . . physical and/or mental limitations in themselves. Trauma is, truly and frustratingly, always a 'both/and'" (4).

E. continues by suggesting that womanist theological anthropology provides the foundation for a robust social ethic due to its emphasis on human embodiment as *incarnational* (i.e., particular), where persons in their identities are formed by and within their communities—what womanists identify as a distinctly relational existence tied to God's sharing in humanity through the person of Jesus Christ. In this vein, an enfleshed counter-memory like womanism centers lament as public prophecy; personal narrative and the power of self-definition; and intergenerational storytelling.

She further examines how the adoption of a trauma hermeneutic can serve as a method for reading liberative theologies which have the potential to respond to our current moment, helping theologians, practitioners, and laity speak to what she identifies as the conundrum of theological practice: the art of speaking the unspeakable. By marrying the work of feminist theologian Flora Keshgegian (specifically her work on the "traumatic imagination") with Metz's tripartite—memory, narrative, and solidarity—E. demonstrates the necessity to go beyond the individual into a contextually entangled enfleshment which places trauma at the forefront of theological discourse.

Finally, E. shows how an enfleshed counter-memory is co-constituted with the work of justice and can achieve the following: the empowerment of individual agency and the integrity of selfhood; community support and participation in the (re)integration of persons; and solidarity along with the preferential option for the poor. Though resisting instances of socially encouraged "forgetting," her enfleshed counter-memory does not deny the right of persons to seek treatment to alleviate their suffering. Rather, it illumines the political, religious, and historical contexts of harm *and* healing—healing encompassing incarnate persons and communities.

Though E.'s work engages in several interdisciplinary conversations, her thesis does not get lost in the weeds of extraneous sources. Instead, she deftly maneuvers through the material to construct a novel social ethic of trauma that is both grounded in praxis and steeped in deep philosophical and theological inquiry. Her engagement with womanist theology is especially to be praised. By beginning with this "new anthropological subject" (i.e., suffering Black women), E. demonstrates a truism of womanist scholarship that is often missed by those who exist adjacent to or outside of it by virtue of their social location: that, definitionally, a womanist is someone who is "committed to [the] survival and wholeness of entire people[s], male and female" (Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, [Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1983]).

E.'s book is timely and would pair nicely with scholarship by sacramental theologians who reconceive Christian salvation within the very categories and frameworks she describes (i.e., incarnational, enfleshed, communal, etc.), tying these realities to problematic narratives and practices within contemporary bioethics that limit our understanding of human flourishing, health, and healing. These include Bruce T. Morrill's *Divine Worship and Human Healing: Liturgical Theology at the Margins of Life and Death* and *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue*. The work of US Hispanic theologian Xavier M. Montecel might also prove fruitful due to its explicit linking of Roman Catholic liturgy to the work of theological ethics.

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Theology in a Post-Traumatic Church. Edited by John N. Sheveland. Foreword by Hans Zollner, SJ. Orbis Books, 2023. Pp. xii + 236. $35 (ppb).

Theology in a Post-Traumatic Church offers the kind of theological reflection the church needs at this moment: trauma-informed, victim-centered, constructive theological discourse on the horrors of clergy sexual abuse and its cover-up. To editor John Sheveland's credit, the nine essays in this volume do not provide a cohesive or definitive way forward, but rather offer multifaceted perspectives arising from the subdisciplines of liturgical, biblical, systematic, and practical theology, as well from clinical psychology.

Within this diversity of approaches, the contributors of this volume seem to share several critical starting points. Fundamentally, they share both a belief that the church has not fully attended to the lived realities and harms of victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse and its cover-up, and an acknowledgement that much more theological reflection needs to be done on this tragedy. In the introduction, S. makes the point that the church's turn to synodality is a special imperative to uplift the voices of victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse, rendering the work of these authors especially urgent. Synodality's space for truth-telling and listening is a necessary response to the egregious crimes of clergy abuse made worse by the fact that these crimes were not only ignored, but also covered up. S. also notes in the introduction that Jennifer Beste's chapter corrects a common misconception around what the book means when it refers to the trauma of the church. Beste makes the point that talk about the abuse crisis in the church often reflects a tendency present in the wider culture to use the term "trauma" broadly. Beste disagrees with this, arguing that attributing trauma to the entire church, including the hierarchy, actually undermines the severe pain of victim-survivors and runs the risk of eliminating moral responsibility from church leadership. From these starting points, each chapter unfolds with distinctive perspectives, important concerns, and trenchant questions.

Many chapters call attention to the immense harm of clergy abuse and its cover-up and identify factors that contributed to the crisis. The volume begins focused on victim-survivors with clinical psychologist Heather Banis proposing principles for victim assistance ministry that arise from her experiences as Victims Assistance Coordinator for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and her work walking with a victim-survivor, "Joe." Later, through careful scriptural exegesis of Psalms 55 and 88 in light of victim-survivors' experiences, Linda Schearing offers biblical resources for lamenting the profound harms of clergy abuse. Cristina Lledo Gomez provides insightful theological reflection on abuse in light of organizational theory's notion of the vulnerabilities imposed by a "total institution" (122). And B. Kevin Brown condemns clericalism as social sin derived from a system of domination rooted in bias.

This volume offers no easy answers. Hope for healing and institutional change, and what they may look like, take many forms. Sheveland champions not only safeguarding and prevention, but also cultivating a "culture of attunement" (23). Scott R. A. Starbuck provides an exegesis of Isaiah fitting for those survivors seeking a personal

connection with God through scriptures that speak to the possibility of healing and agency after a betrayal by a religious institution. Brown encourages a vision of the clergy-lay relationship that is nondominant. Fernando Ortiz draws out the role and impact of seminary formation and its potential to support clerical "human formation" (193): holistic formation that encourages seminarians to build emotional, spiritual, and community resources that can especially combat narcissism. Ortiz points out that abuse often occurs many years after seminary. It seems, then, that seminary formation could even be expanded to support ongoing clerical formation. And Joseph C. Mudd explores community-based ways to reimagine the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick in order to bring accountability and healing to the harms of clergy abuse.

The volume also presents practical strategies to prevent harm and center victim-survivors' stories that can be implemented now. Sheveland calls for praying for victims of clergy sexual abuse during the prayers of the faithful at mass, and even provides different types of language for doing so. For seminaries worried about the harm of narcissism mixed with clericalism, Ortiz presents risk factors for narcissism that can be identified by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). And to truly grieve in solidarity with the victim-survivors of clergy abuse, Schearing raises the possibility of "liturgies lamenting this crisis" (167).

Each author shares a commitment to theologies centered on victim-survivors and a belief that only when we raise up these voices and let their stories permeate the church can she truly respond with integrity. In his forward, Hans Zollner, SJ, articulates his hope for this work, which many readers will share: "Personally, I hope this anthology will stimulate further theological reflection and influence church leaders in their actions—especially with regard to listening to victims, even the most angry and disillusioned ones" (xi).

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Facing Race: The Gospel in an Ignatian Key. By Roger Haight, SJ. Orbis Books, 2024. Pp. xx + 203. $30 (ppb).

This, Roger Haight's last published book, originated in a request from Union Theological Seminary's academic dean: would he teach a course on the role of spirituality in the work for social justice? H. draws upon the resources of Christian spirituality as enacted in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola to nourish the struggle against racism—our nation's "original sin," as James H. Cone rightly called it.

Since racism in the US is structural sin, embedded in every aspect of our national culture, it poisons the context in which the Gospel is preached, appropriated, and lived; "to receive and interpret the revelatory message of Jesus in the United States today requires that it be absorbed into a social and cultural setting of racism" (6). In two previous books, H. had already mined the wisdom of Christian spirituality contained in the Exercises to help today's "spiritual but not religious" people. While the Exercises are a powerful means for personal transformation, they are too

individualistic in their original form to confront white supremacy effectively. The focus of the "first week" on one's own sins shapes the encounters in the following weeks with the Jesus of the Gospels but leaves the pervasive reality of racism invisible and unchallenged.

H. follows the model of Ignacio Ellacuría, who retooled the Exercises to guide Jesuits less toward deeper personal conversion and more towards awareness of the realities of Central American poverty. Likewise, H. de-privatizes and adapts "the [three-part] dynamic structure of the Exercises" (xvii) by shifting the focus of the first stage from personal sin to the racism that has shaped our national life for centuries. This immersion in the realities of white supremacy expands the exercitants' horizon dramatically, generating a reaction like Schillebeeckx's negative contrast experience ("This should not be!"; 78, 131) and teaches them to factor social context into their religious considerations. A new awareness of their entanglement in structural sin then leads them in the second stage to seek guidance for their lives and decision-making in the ministry and example of Jesus, who represents the rule of God as portrayed in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. (The Gospels of Mark and John play no role here.) As teacher, prophet, and healer, Jesus teaches them how to live anew in the racially constructed world of the US. In the third stage, they consider why Jesus called disciples to follow him and how his parables illustrate living by the rule of God. Their own discipleship becomes more authentic as they discern their own particular Christian responsibilities in our white supremacist society.

H. carefully defines key terms and repeats his main points at each step. Nonetheless, he presumes that readers have a basic grasp of the Exercises, as well as some graduate-level study of theology, since he occasionally amplifies a point by reference to other theologians. The book is not a manual for directing the Exercises but a more or less detailed sketch of their basic transformational process. The concrete particulars will be supplied by those who decide to undertake and direct the Exercises in this new anti-racist key.

H. describes his controversial Christology in the final chapter, which belongs to the core theology of Christian spirituality as carried out in this revised version of the Exercises (see, e.g., 102, 162–64, 172–75). One need not agree with his developed Christology, however, to find *Facing Race* an important resource for confronting racism. His core proposal—the revised three-stage process—deals with how disciples who are caught up in the structural sin of racism may come to know and follow the Jesus of Matthew and Luke. As H. says, such encounters precede Christology, not the reverse (98, 174–75).

In 2004, the CDF declared that "the Author [of *Jesus Symbol of God* (1999)] may not teach Catholic theology" on account of "serious doctrinal errors contrary to the divine and catholic faith of the Church." Thereafter the pastoral character of H.'s work deepened, focusing less on questions debated solely within academia and more on questions crucial for the life and mission of the Church; e.g., *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, 2012; *Spiritual and Religious: Explorations for Seekers*, 2016. *Facing Race* is a fitting capstone to H.'s fidelity to his theological vocation. In his hands, the Exercises become a powerful weapon against the dominant evil of our country.

Respected, honored, and beloved, Roger Haight died on Juneteenth, 2025, the date that commemorates black liberation from slavery in the US. This book is his parting gift to us.

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Human Rights in a Divided World: Catholicism as a Living Tradition. By David Hollenbach, SJ. Georgetown University Press, 2024. Pp. ix + 243. $89.95 (hb); $29.95 (ppb).

David Hollenbach's new book is the capstone of a scholarly career devoted to a critical exposition of the "living tradition" of Catholic social teaching (CST). His magisterial *Human Rights in a Divided World* traces the long and contentious developments that led to the Church's embrace of human rights. The first part is devoted to the foundations of human rights, underscoring what the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) calls our common "faith in fundamental human rights" and "the dignity and worth of the human person." Part two addresses the right to religious freedom and the doctrinal developments that led to its affirmation in modern magisterial social teaching. Following in part three is a critical assessment of the role social and economic rights play in fulfilling the biblical promise of a just social order.

As H. argues, CST translates the promise of covenant fidelity for the most vulnerable into the persuasive modern idiom of rights and correlative duties. For respecting the equal dignity and rights of all demands a preferential "option" for those whose equal dignity and rights are unequally threatened or denied. Such an option inspires H.'s critique of the prevailing refugee regime as he turns to the unprecedented crisis of forced displacement in part four. Part five concludes by defending the concrete universality of women's rights, with particular attention to the gendered integration of personal autonomy and cultural self-determination in Africa.

For H., the doctrinal development of CST testifies to the fecundity of a living tradition which must be critically appropriated in each generation if it is to proclaim the "gospel to the poor" (Lk 4:18). H.'s account of the Church's belated rapprochement with modernity is thus at once a prophetic summons to live the Gospel today, "in our hearing" (Lk 4:21). Of the many themes treated, let me note three: the hermeneutical significance of the primacy accorded to "dignity in solidarity," the distinctively Catholic integration of rights deriving from this recognition, and the critical role played by such Catholic "rights talk" in a world of postmodern incredulity.

First, throughout his book, H. stresses the leitmotif of human dignity in solidarity in modern CST. To be sure, dignity figures in our biblical inheritance, but only in the modern era does it become truly decisive as a leaven of solidarity—so much so that we may speak of a reversal of the hermeneutical flow. Where earlier, dignity was inscribed within a complex teleology of differing social roles and status, now "*the whole of the Church's social doctrine . . . develops from the principle that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person*" (*Compendium*, no. 107, italics in original). In the public realm, a single-status society of equal dignity and rights succeeds a multi-status

society of unequal rights and privilege. Henceforth, as H. contends, solidarity will rest in safeguarding the inviolable rights of the human person, including religious liberty, rather than in a stratified, organic order. Indeed, a *right* to religious liberty becomes now, in Pope Benedict XVI's words, the "most cherished of American freedoms." Yet as H. observes, tensions remain, especially when advocacy in the name of religious liberty becomes excessively partisan.

Second, H.'s incisive analysis of religious liberty underscores not only the Church's rapprochement with modernity, but CST's distinctive contributions to our modern "rights talk." In integrating civil liberties, including religious liberty, with socio-economic rights, CST unites what the secular regime has sundered. For Cold War politics belied the initial aspirations of the Universal Declaration by separating the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). As H. cogently argues (with a nod to both Kant and Aristotle) Catholic "rights talk" offers an integral and comprehensive interpretation of rights as universal ("catholic') in scope yet concretely mediated in our particular cultural and religious traditions. The Catholic appropriation of rights thus steers a critical *via media* between the liberal priority accorded to the rights of sovereign selves and the communitarian emphasis upon cultural self-determination.

Third, such concrete universality underwrites the Church's public prophetic voice. For our living tradition provides ultimate justification, motivation, and an interpretative repertory for our common "faith" in dignity and rights. Where a generation ago, John Courtney Murray paved the way for the Church's critical rapprochement with secular modernity's embrace of liberty, H. shows how this same rapprochement may preserve the legacy of human rights when secular critics like Stephen Hopgood proclaim the "endtimes of human rights."

Few have written so eloquently as H. on such crucial questions for both church and society. For as he reminds us, the danger in our postmodern world and the "globalization of indifference" it abets is that we betray not only the humanity of others but our own.

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Where is God? An African Theology of Suffering and Smiling. By Stan Chu Ilo. Orbis Books, 2025. Pp. xii + 299. $40 (ppb).

Fela Kuti, the Nigerian Afrobeat legend, captured something essential about the African condition in his 1978 hit song "Suffering and Smiling." Yet, in *Where is God? An African Theology of Suffering and Smiling*, Stan Chu Ilo argues that Fela's depiction, though striking, is incomplete. Africans do indeed suffer, and they do not stop smiling. But this "smiling" is not, as Fela concluded, "a false and unhelpful quietist submission to an evil and unjust social context" (2–3). Instead, I. contends, it is ordinary Africans "holding in balance a strong faith in God and hope for a better future"—what he describes as the "pains and pathos" of African life (7).

Drawing on his own life experience—including the loss of close family members—alongside ethnographic research and countless pastoral encounters, I. advances a model of theology for a wounded continent. Any methodology of African theology, he insists, must be "adequate for meeting the changing and complex problems and opportunities facing the faith and wider society, particularly in addressing the social contagion of suffering" (68). Because "Africa's vast and vibrant Christian life" cannot be captured by one approach, theology must embrace a "hermeneutic of multiplicity" and remain open to insights from other disciplines and even other faith traditions (69).

More crucial than methodology, however, is the urgency and nature of theology's task: to seek an answer to the contextual question, "Where is God?"—a question that resounds ever more pressingly in a continent ensnared in poverty, violence, and suffering (58). For theology in Africa to be truly relevant, I. insists, it must aim at "reversing the painful history of Africa, and conforming Africa to God's plan of abundant life understood as human and cosmic flourishing" (74). Since theology is at heart a reflection on God's mission in history, the task today is to narrate that mission in the "suffering and smiling" of African lives (73). And unless it is based on the lived faith of ordinary Africans, no theology can claim to understand their plight or commitment to flourishing.

One of I.'s most significant contributions in this book is his exploration of the question: Who is a theologian? More than most theological works, *Where is God?* sketches a vivid portrait of the theologian Africa needs. Because theology is about accountability, the theologian must listen to the past and remain attentive to the present, helping God's people "find hope and courage in meeting the challenges of daily life" (37). In pointing to "God's presence in all things, and God's absence in those things which do not reflect God's will," the theologian participates in the enactment of God's will in solidarity with people inside and outside the church (61).

For him, the African theologian must be at once historian, listener, and storyteller. Equipped with a decolonizing lens, such a theologian tells a different story about Africa—one that disrupts tired negative narratives. This requires leaving the comfort of academic armchairs to accompany ordinary Africans in villages, streets, and matatus—discerning God's presence in their lives, while also interrogating the claims they make about God (154, 211). At times, this interrogation will take the form of prophetic denunciation, especially where God's name is co-opted to justify distorted cultures, oppressive religions, or unjust social orders (62).

Ultimately, I. places theology's task and the theologian's vocation within the horizon of the perennial problem of theodicy. There is a distinction, he insists, between theodicy understood as an attempt to make God "look good" in the face of suffering, and theodicy understood as giving an accurate account of God. The latter includes not blaming God for evils that stem from human choices and structures. "God has no hand in the suffering and misfortune that afflict the poor and vulnerable in Africa" (10). When we stop allowing God's name to be misused to justify grievous evils, we more accurately discern Africa's condition as "the result of the sinful agency of those who hold the levers of power in Africa and globally, in politics and religious institutions" (10). What follows is the responsibility, individual and collective, to create a brighter and better future that, as I. puts it, offers the eschatological fruits of God's kingdom in the present.

While I.'s work is a laudable contribution to African theology, especially by bringing God-talk back to the center of interest among theologians, I am convinced that his discussion would have benefited from closer attentiveness to the history of theology's attentiveness to the mystery of the incomprehensibility of God and its implications, which includes indebtedness to Christian revelation regarding ways to speak correctly about God who is otherwise essentially unknowable. Such an approach is evident from Church Fathers like Augustine and Gregory of Nazianzus to contemporary theologians like Mayra Rivera and Elizabeth Johnson. The theologian's task to be alive to the presence of God and to denounce the absence of God, if it is to be truly theological, must be informed not only by immersion in African life today but also in the scriptural text, which I. rightly calls the "primary phenomenological source of theology" (23).

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Lay Eucharistic Preaching in a Synodal Catholic Church. Edited by Gregory Heile, OP. Liturgical Press, 2025. Pp. v + 241. $24.95 (ppb); 22.99 (eb)

Dominican Gregory Heile's edited volume provides a historical and theological record of a local synodal process at the service of the universal Church. In March 2024, the faculty of the Aquinas Institute of Theology (St. Louis, MO) convened the diverse voices of twenty-seven preachers and theologians in a synodal symposium on "The Pastoral Charge for Lay Catholic Eucharistic Preaching." At the conclusion of this meeting, the participants, comprised of experienced preachers and teachers and emerging scholars, submitted a formal petition to the Synod on Synodality for its October 2024 session. The collected essays unpack the logic of this formal petition through the various talks, responses, and additional papers, which work in tandem to explore the liturgical, theological, historical, and ecclesial aspects of lay preaching.

The volume and a helpful appendix offer a clear delineation of present canon law regarding lay preaching, and carefully outline the necessary amendments to canon law which would permit a layperson to preach a homily at the celebration of the Eucharist. The volume includes accounts of ministerial experiences with lay preaching in a variety of cultural contexts, rich theological discourse focusing on abundance and gift (216), and a consideration of permitted cases of lay preaching at Eucharistic celebrations (such as in Germany between 1973–1981). Importantly, the collection presents critical distinctions around orders, ministries, and charisms, underscoring that a proposal for lay eucharistic preaching calls for an "an appropriate and authentic ministry," without assuming any expansion of access to ordination (37). While the full impact of the symposium's proposal remains to be seen, one can recognize its contours in the language of the Church's final synodal document, particularly through the development of the relational ecclesiology of Yves Congar, OP, and the importance of the Church's creative response to pastoral need. While the content of the responses is consistently useful, their rehearsal of the anteceding paper can become somewhat repetitive, and may impact the ability of an individual response to stand alone. As a whole, this volume will be invaluable for future scholars of ecclesiology as a witness

of a synodal method in the faithful theological consideration of a contemporary pastoral question. Scholars and students of ecclesiology, liturgical studies, pastoral ministry, and preaching will find this collection of key scholarly voices fruitful, especially for reflection on the role of the lay faithful in fulfilling ministerial roles in the Church.

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God for All Days: The Final Monastic Chapters of Christian de Chergé. Translated by Jennifer Rushworth. Edited and with an introduction by Matthew Cheung Salisbury. Liturgical Press, 2025. Pp. xxxii + 236. $24.95 (ppb); $22.99 (eb).

God for All Days presents an English translation of the French chapter talks given by the Trappist monk and martyr Christian de Chergé to his community between 1993 and 1996. De Chergé was the abbot of Our Lady of the Atlas monastery in Tibhirine, Algeria, where seven of the nine monks were abducted and killed in 1996 during the Algerian Civil War. Their story became widely known through the 2010 French film *Des hommes et des dieux*.

De Chergé's short chapter talks, delivered three times weekly, range widely among spiritual and practical topics. They often include references to Islam and the local Muslim community. The volume is in part based on *Dieu pour tout jour* (CERF, 2006), an edition of de Chergé's talks from 1986 to 1996; in this volume Jennifer Rushworth translates the final three series: "Catechesis and the Liturgy," "In the Church, Here and Now," and "The Charism of the Martyr."

Matthew Cheung Salisbury's introduction situates de Chergé in Algeria and explains the themes of community, obedience, and stability that run through his reflections. He highlights the Benedictine elements in de Chergé's thought while also clarifying his interest in Islamic practice. For example, he compares the Benedictine "work of God" in liturgy to Islamic ritual prayer, both forms of prayer being a "work" offered to God. The book thus provides readers with insight into the monk's spirituality and shows the importance of the Algerian context for that spirituality.

The film *Des hommes et des dieux* ends with de Chergé's "Spiritual Testament," where he anticipates meeting God and seeing Muslims "shining with the glory of Christ." He even imagines meeting his killer in friendship in the afterlife. *God for All Days* allows readers to discover more of this spirit. De Chergé's talks weave references to Islam into reflections on prayer, hospitality, and monastic life.

De Chergé spent part of his childhood in French Algeria. As a military chaplain in Algeria during the War of Independence, he lived through the vigilante murder of his Muslim friend Mohamed, whose sacrifice he saw as Christ-like. De Chergé returned to Algeria as a monk in 1971; in the following years the monastic community welcomed a local brotherhood of Sufis to use a space in the monastery for *dhikr* prayer. He became abbot of Our Lady of the Atlas in 1984.

The talks translated here consistently emphasize God's love for Algeria. In April 1995, for example, he reminded the monks that they worship "a God who

LOVES Algerians . . . and who has chosen to need us, to need me, in order to tell them and show them as much" (179, emphasis original). The Benedictine vow of stability, he taught, involved the fidelity of the community to the Muslims who lived around Tibhirine. This understanding of the vow of stability explains in part the community's insistence on remaining in Algeria amid a storm of violence and threats.

For de Chergé, the monks' decision to remain in Algeria was a gift to the Church and the Algerian people, a gift they were paying back to God. In February 1996, a month before his abduction, he reminded the community that their life was "a GIFT from the Father and experienced for the glory of God" (212). De Chergé's spiritual testament makes clear that he viewed martyrdom as the completion of that gift.

R. and S.'s *God for All Days* offers readers a privileged glimpse into the spirituality of Christian de Chergé. These talks, practical yet profound, reveal a man of prayer who wrestled with daily monastic concerns while also contemplating the mystery of God's love for Muslims and Christians alike. The volume's beauty lies in this intimacy: readers come to know a monk whose love of God necessarily involved his love of neighbor. Readers will also come to appreciate de Chergé's pastoral concern for his small monastic community. It was a careful deliberation of the community that ultimately led to their collective decision to remain with their Muslim neighbors until the end.

In 2018 the seven abducted monks of Tibhirine were among the 19 Catholic martyrs of the Algerian Civil War beatified in a ceremony in Oran, Algeria.

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Killing the Messiah: The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. By Nathanael J. Andrade. Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xi + 280. $29.95 (hb); $20.99 (eb).

In *Killing the Messiah*, Nathanael J. Andrade traces the relationship between historical, religious, and political factors from the annexation of Judea as a client kingdom by Rome to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus as a seditionist, and finally into the second and third century movement inspired by Jesus. The book is divided into four parts. The first part looks at the history of Judea and Galilee under Roman occupation and the ways in which the Jewish people dissented from and resisted Roman rule. The second section looks at Jesus in the Gospels and his resistance to Herod Antipas's tetrarchy. The third section looks closely at the events of Jesus's last week in Jerusalem, including the temple disturbance, his arrest and trial, and his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate for the charge of sedition. The fourth and final section traces the effects and influence of Jesus on his followers until 250 CE. The book includes four appendices on policing/arresting practices and the date of the Gospels, the *Testimonium Flavianum*, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic names, and notes on critical editions of ancient texts.

Throughout the book, A. demonstrates thorough knowledge of recent works on the historical Jesus, the Gospels, and first-century history. He critically approaches the Gospels as sources for the trial of Jesus, working to separate historical reminiscences from later theological developments. A.'s evaluation of Roman, biblical, and Syriac sources helpfully contextualize Jesus's trial under Pontius Pilate. The book is clearly written and is beneficial for both students and scholars seeking to understand Jesus's crucifixion for sedition within the broader political climate of first-century Roman occupation.

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Growing into God: The Fathers of the Church on Christian Maturity. By John Gavin, SJ. Patristic Theology. The Catholic University of America Press, 2025. Pp. viii + 240. $29.95 (ppb/eb).

In *Growing into God*, John Gavin takes up the task of presenting a unified account of Christian maturation from the Church Fathers. G. is motivated by contemporary culture's "crisis of immaturity" and proposes the Fathers' wisdom in response to our

society's lack of adult maturity (1). To present this vision, G. systematically organizes a wide range of texts from the Fathers into three parts: definitions, means, and expressions of maturity. This structure is a feat and major asset. By it, G. takes many themes and convictions from a wide-ranging body of literature and synthesizes them into a coherent portrait of Christian maturity.

According to G., the Fathers understand Christian maturity as a gift from God received in grace by which the human person "freely assimilates the self to God through growth in virtue" (37). Drawing on the Fathers, G.'s account of maturity uses a teleological framework wherein maturity is the actualization of human nature. He considers human nature as *imago Dei.* In doing so, the process of maturation is one that both perfects human nature and grows beyond it. Maturity under this description is *theosis*, or a life of virtue ordered to union with the divine. One strength of G.'s work, especially in view of Vatican II's *Optatam Totius* §16, is its presentation of human freedom and its perfection as Christocentric: in maturing the Christian assumes in her own life the transformative narrative of the resurrection.

This book serves as a sufficient and well-ordered introduction to the topic. Theological researchers may benefit from its overview, citations, and index. At the same time, it leaves significant areas for further study. The lived reality of maturation could be further considered. For example, in the portrayal of the mature person as one who takes responsibility both for one's self and others, particular practical examples of responsibility from the Fathers could bridge the culture of the authors considered to the particularity of our cultural situation. Additionally, this is by no means a conclusive study of the Church Fathers and Mothers. Overall, I recommend G.'s presentation of the Fathers as a sufficient foundation for further study on human freedom.

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The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Past, Present, and Future. Edited by Jason E. Vickers, Steven T. Hoskins, and Laura Dahl. 1845 Books, 2025. Pp. 338. $74.99 (hb); $59.99 (ppb).

"And can it be" that we should gain from a desire, occasioned by the sixtieth anniversary of the Wesleyan Theological Society (WTS), to curate an introspective selection of field-shaping essays from the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*? The pieces selected for this volume, many of which were authored by past WTS presidents, come together into a purposive whole. The resultant two-part structure, including a pensive "Looking Back" and a horizon-shaping "Looking Forward," mirrors Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's 1975 presidential address. The task of Wesleyan "theology is not finished," she avows. "Creative opportunities—and demands—lie before us" (10). So, we "look backward to roots, but also forward toward service" (18).

The use of the term "heritage" in the title signals how traditions are defined and delineated retrospectively. Defenders and discontents wrestle with sundry pasts on a

quest for self-understanding and direction. Essays by Bassett, Stanley, Bundy, Pope-Levison, Dayton, and Strong contribute to this effort. What is John Wesley's role in Wesleyanism(s)? Outler, Maddox, Staples, Collins, Runyon, and Koskela mine Wesley and propose different orienting concepts either for his systematic study or to serve as prescriptions for his spiritual kin. Internalist critiques levied against the Wesleyan theological enterprise by Abraham, Snyder, and Leclerc are also included. They call the tradition to face its limitations and, in the process, perhaps discover new treasures. Take the use of Wesley as a "historical cipher" as critiqued by Abraham. "There are as many Wesleys as there are Wesley scholars," he decries with a rightly aimed rhetorical punch (187). But this Wesley iconoclast turns an iconodule of sorts in his proposal to recover Wesley as a "spiritual father" (and midwife) rather than a theological authority (193–96).

The editors of this volume resisted strictly periodizing the collection. Thus, certain noteworthy currents in the history of WTS are underrepresented or passed over in silence. No single disciplinary arm of the tradition gets exhaustive treatment, and not every essay will be of equal value to all readers. Read selectively or cover-to-cover, this volume remains an efficacious one-stop shop for anyone interested in the history and hope of the Wesleyan Tradition.

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A Ministry of Risk. By Philip Berrigan. Edited and with an introduction by Brad Wolf. Fordham University Press, 2024. Pp. xlii + 255. $95 (hb); $24.95 (ppb); $23.99 (eb).

Phillip Berrigan, the stalwart peace activist who spent eleven years of his life behind bars, left behind a trove of writings: journal entries, speeches, press releases, essays, and seven books. These writings have been brought together in this three-part volume: "A Catholic Trying to be a Christian, 1957–67," "Resisting the Vietnam War, 1967–73," and "Community, Plowshares, and the Bomb, 1973–2002." This is a peace movement book: foreword by Bill Wylie-Kellerman, preface by Frida Berrigan, afterword by John Dear—all of whom were involved in the Plowshares Movement that B. was instrumental in starting.

Four features stand out. First, it includes an autobiographical essay on B.'s experience in World War II, telling of his enthusiastic military service which contrasts so dramatically with his conversion to nonviolence. Second, it shows that B. spent many years combating anti-Black racism, a phase overshadowed by his later peace activism that received more notoriety. Third, it tracks his relationship with Liz McAlister, from their controversial clandestine marriage to the decades of mutual commitment not only to marriage and family but to the resistance community at Jonah House in Baltimore and to the wider anti-nuclear movement. Fourth, it shows that B.'s activism was squarely rooted in the Gospel and Catholic doctrine, which, he noted, the Church often neglected or contradicted.

One drawback of this volume is its lack of an index, making it hard to look up such figures as Dorothy Day, Malcolm X, and others. It also lacks footnotes explaining the significance of names from the past, e.g., Hughie Newton, Ralph Nader, Lt. Calley, and others. Some texts are left undated. Nevertheless, this volume testifies to B.'s consistent condemnation of injustice and violence in his characteristically direct and blunt prose—and matched by his equally direct and blunt actions. The portrait by his daughter Frida is especially vivid, with its description of B.'s desk and bookshelves—a door placed on file cabinets, wood planks held up on cinder blocks—serving as symbols of his roughly hewn words, work, and witness, all answering (as Wolf notes) one question: "What does Christ ask of me?" (xxxvi).

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On Earth as in Heaven? Liturgy, Materiality, and Economics. Edited by Melanie C. Ross. Liturgical Press Academic, 2025. Pp. xiv + 402. $49.95 (ppb).

Concluding a meticulously researched chapter on oleoculture in the early church, Nathan Chase asserts a principle impressively demonstrated across this entire volume: "sacramental symbols depend on mundane economic and material technologies, which reminds us that liturgy is always shaped by the context in which it is celebrated. Ultimately, inculturation is a historical fact of Christian ritual tradition, not an exception" (86). This collection of essays from a 2023 liturgy conference at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music is dedicated, in part, to the memory of the brilliant young scholar Chase, who succumbed to leukemia in 2025.

The book's four sections are organized thematically, while also tracking chronologically from Christian origins to the present. The first three chapters of "Part One: Bread, Oil, Water, Waste" examine the ecclesial fabrication and use of those materials amidst late antique culture, finance, and politics (imperial power and subversion), while the fourth is a rangy historical survey of the discarding and reuse of liturgical objects. Part two treats the reader to three studies on the production and possession of church manuscripts in the medieval east and west, with special attention to how their economic and cultural-status values interacted with their religious meaning and functions. One author focuses on neglected modest liturgical books from small towns and churches to yield a better, comprehensive sense of church life and society in medieval Europe. One of the four chapters in "Part Three: Reformation and Early Modern Economies" addresses a similar lacuna by studying "the musical organization of parishes in small or medium-sized towns without significant political, economic, or religious power" (302). The other three examine the costs entailed in the material reordering of Protestant churches, the subtle influence of monastic timekeeping on Reformed Swiss society's commerce and labor, and religion's role in the slave economies of British colonies. Part four rounds out the collection with two explorations of church music production, mediation, and practice, Protestant and Catholic, as well as a study of two differently conceived

enslavement museums in Alabama, expertly applying the work of leading ritual theorists to interpret "dark tourism" as pilgrimage.

Broad in scope, the volume comprises a worthy library resource for research on specific topics and relevant essays in courses.

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When Stories Wound: Responsible Living in a Polarized World. By Nathaniel Samuel. Liturgical Press, 2025. Pp. 122. $29.95 (ppb); $27.99 (eb).

Nathaniel Samuel's *When Stories Wound: Responsible Living in a Polarized World* offers a compelling Christian response to social polarization, arguing that our divisions become truly destructive not through their mere existence—which S. rightly recognizes as perennial—but through our failure to maintain empathy for and responsibility toward one another. S.'s central concept of "deep stories" provides the analytical framework: these are the foundational narratives that shape community and individual identity, operating below conscious awareness to determine how we interpret reality itself.

S.'s integration of narrative theory with Christian social ethics represents a theological appropriation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, suggesting that cultural narratives fundamentally shape human experience and behavior. This linguistic-anthropological grounding strengthens his argument that factual evidence rarely converts people, since all experience is mediated through these deeply embedded stories. Instead, S. proposes that transformation occurs through encounter with alternative narratives, particularly those emerging from marginalized and oppressed communities.

The book's accessibility constitutes both its primary strength and notable limitation. S. writes with a clarity that makes complex theoretical insights available to undergraduate students and general readers, and his framework invites personal application across diverse contexts. This broad applicability makes *When Stories Wound* particularly valuable for educators seeking to demonstrate the importance of the liberal arts and the humanities.

However, the work could have benefited from deeper engagement with specific cases of social polarization to demonstrate the theory's analytical power. More significantly, S.'s epilogue reveals a curious tension: while critiquing any "revolution in religiosity" (112) as hollow without prior commitment to the oppressed, he provides little concrete guidance for cultivating such commitment. His prescription for immersion in marginalized narratives remains somewhat abstract, leaving readers to imagine what that might look like in their own communities. From a liturgical theological perspective, downplaying religiosity could run counter to the larger argument. The ancient adage *lex orandi, lex credendi* suggests that worship practices shape belief and commitment. The arguments and examples in this book will be an

important resource for any pastor preparing to preach, or any liturgical musician considering music selections.

Overall, *When Stories Wound* succeeds as both a theoretical contribution and a pedagogical resource. S.'s insight that "wounds are sites of healing as much as they are evidence of harm" offers genuine hope for constructive engagement across difference (91). The book will serve educators well in demonstrating narrative's power while challenging readers to examine critically the stories that shape their world.

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