

Book Reviews

Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives by Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI (*New York: Doubleday, 2012*), xii + 132 pp.

SINCE THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY, the magisterium of the Catholic Church has insisted that historical-critical methods are indispensable. Joseph Ratzinger is one of the few dogmatic theologians who has done his best to remain conversant with historical scholarship, and he has repeatedly expressed his admiration for it. At the same time, Ratzinger has repeatedly defended *Dei Verbum*'s claim that historical-critical approaches do not "exhaust the interpretive task for someone who sees the biblical writings as a single corpus of Holy Scripture inspired by God."¹ The books of the Bible can be read as individual artifacts from the ancient near east, but exegesis of these texts qua Scripture requires one to read in light of the entire canon and the unfolding tradition of the Church. Each of the three *Jesus of Nazareth* books begins with a brief *relecture* of this essential grammar of Catholic exegesis, and the books themselves are attempts to draw together historical and canonical-theological modes of exegesis. This slender volume, the third installment of the series, appeared in December 2012, only two months before Ratzinger announced his abdication of the chair of Peter. We may presume, then, that it shall remain Ratzinger's final sustained attempt to re-propose and put into practice the directives of *Dei Verbum*.

This book is very brief—a mere "antechamber" to the earlier volumes (xi). Chapter 1 uses Pilate's question to Jesus, "Where are you from?" (Jn 19:9), and the genealogies (Mt 1:2–17; Lk 3:23–38) to frame the birth narratives as explorations of Jesus's identity. Chapter 2 covers

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xvi.

the annunciations of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus (Lk 1:5–38; Mt 1:18–25). In chapter 3, Jesus's birth and presentation in the temple are discussed (Lk 2:1–40), and chapter 4 is devoted to the Magi (Mt 2:1–23). An epilogue reflects on the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:41–52).

Matthew and Luke's birth narratives contain some of the most notorious historical difficulties in the New Testament as well as some of its richest theology. One would expect that the gulf between history and theology to appear wider here than ever, but in fact Ratzinger comes closer to a synthesis of history and canonical-theological exegesis than in the previous volumes. The first two volumes had a tendency to lurch from extended arguments with contemporary biblical scholarship to quiet theological reflections. In this final installment, Ratzinger veers more toward the latter and keeps historical debate to a minimum. This is not to say that Ratzinger ignores historical questions, but that he does not attempt to provide definitive answers, preferring instead to state his own position with a minimum of argumentation. He quotes Klaus Berger to describe his own approach: "Even when there is only a single attestation . . . one must suppose, until the contrary is proven, that the evangelists did not intend to deceive their readers, but rather to inform them concerning historical events . . . to contest the historicity of this account on mere suspicion exceeds every imaginable competence of historians" (119). Matthew and Luke wrote "real history that actually happened (*wirkliche, geschehene Geschichte*)" not fables (*Geschichten*; 17). Following Joachim Gnilka, he proposes that the birth narratives draw on family traditions, with Mary herself singled out as one of Luke's sources. He defends the historicity of the virgin birth and the census under Quirinius (Lk 2:1–5), as well as the birth in Bethlehem. Many scholars will be frustrated by the near-absence of arguments in favor of this high view of the historicity of the infancy narratives, but in the opinion of the present reviewer Ratzinger plays to his strengths by keeping his historical arguments brief.

Though Ratzinger takes a high view of the accuracy of the infancy narratives, his understanding of historicity is capacious, leaving room for Matthew and Luke's creative theological work. For instance, interpreters over the centuries have struggled to explain why Matthew and Luke do not agree on the name of Joseph's father. Matthew says Joseph's

father was named Jacob, whereas Luke calls him Eli. Since the third century, some have suggested that Jacob and Eli were brothers who had the same wife according to the stipulations in Deuteronomy 25:5–10, a proposal that causes more problems than it solves. Since the sixteenth century, some commentators have argued—in bold defiance of what Luke actually says—that Luke provides the genealogy of Mary. In contrast, Ratzinger eschews overly clever solutions, allowing himself to be led by the text. He writes, “Matthew and Luke agree on only a handful of names; not even the name of Joseph’s father is common to the two. How can this be?” (8). He concludes, “Neither evangelist is concerned so much with the individual names as with the symbolic structure within which Jesus’ place in history is set before us” (8). Ratzinger does not draw attention to the fact that he diverges from a long tradition of attempts to reconcile the two, preferring instead quietly to take his cues from Scripture itself.

Ratzinger’s treatment of the genealogies is indicative of his modesty—or perhaps it would be better to say docility—as an interpreter. He receives the biblical accounts with a hermeneutic of trust, but he is also willing to be challenged by them on what sort of information they provide. For instance, he notes that Luke seems to lack precise knowledge of Old Testament legislation (81), and he critiques the traditional interpretation of Mary’s response to Gabriel as referring to a vow of virginity on the grounds that such a vow would be “quite foreign to the world of the Judaism of Jesus’ time” (34–35). Ratzinger also refrains from attempting to harmonize the details of Matthew and Luke’s accounts of Jesus’s birth. In Matthew, the Holy Family goes to Nazareth to escape the threat of Herod’s son Archelaus. In Luke, however, the Holy Family comes originally from Nazareth and goes to Bethlehem only to participate in the census. Ratzinger’s response is straightforward: “Matthew apparently did not know that Joseph and Mary were both originally from Nazareth” (65). Following Jean Cardinal Daniélou, Ratzinger also entertains the possibility that Matthew invented the story of the Magi to foreshadow the preaching of the Gospel to all the nations, though he concludes that the story is “real history, theologically thought through and interpreted” (119).

Over the centuries, pious imagination has filled in the gaps of the birth narratives, providing names and nationalities for the Magi, specifying animals beside the manger, and so on. Ratzinger is always careful

to distinguish between such ornamentation and what the narratives actually say, not to condemn the former as lamentable accretions, but to show how the text has led over the centuries to ever-deepening reflection on the *res significata*. For instance, he notes that Luke does not mention any animals beside the manger. In the weeks following the book's release, media outlets gleefully reported that the pope had exposed the ox and ass as spurious myths ("Killjoy Pope Crushes Christmas Nativity Traditions" was the headline in the *Daily Mail*). In reality, he shows how prayerful reflection on Luke led to passages such as Isaiah 1:3 ("The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's manger") and Habakkuk 3:2 LXX ("In the midst of two living creatures you will be recognized"; 69). The manger thus becomes the Ark of the Covenant, where God resides between the two creatures. Similarly, Ratzinger sees the "mystery of the Triune God" evoked by Gabriel's words in Luke 1:35, but is careful to show that the doctrine is not developed in the text itself (29–30). Jesus's status as "first-born" (Lk 2:7) leads Ratzinger to draw in Colossians 1:15–20, which refers to Christ as the "first born of all creation," and "firstborn of the dead." Luke himself does not describe this cosmic primogeniture, but "reading his Gospel with the benefit of hindsight, this cosmic glory is already present in the lowly manger" (71). Ratzinger also draws in scribal alterations in the manuscript tradition, such as the old Latin variant that applies John 1:13 to Jesus, "who was not born (*qui non . . . natus est*) from the will of a husband but from God" (12). Ratzinger notes that the better manuscripts do not contain this variant, but this does not stop him from drawing out the theology of this instance of John's *Wirkungsgeschichte*.

The book contains the sort of shortcomings one would expect in a brief volume from a scholar who had nearly run out of time. There are surprising omissions. For instance, the Visitation (Lk 1:39–45), the Magnificat (Lk 1:46–55), the Benedictus (Lk 1:68–79), and the Nunc Dimittis (Lk 2:29–32) are not discussed. Differing viewpoints hardly appear, even when Ratzinger advocates a minority position. When other views are mentioned, Ratzinger is uncharacteristically brusque, at one point dismissing the exegetical mainstream that would hesitate to accept Mary as one of Luke's sources as "modern 'critical' exegesis" (16). There are also a few notable missteps, such as the elision of the difference between the Hebrew and Greek texts of Isaiah 7:14 and confusion

about which part of the Annunciation to Mary echoes the words of the prophet Zephaniah (28).

The English translation is a bit misleading at times, showing perhaps that the translator's knowledge of Scripture and theology is not so advanced as his knowledge of German. For instance, Luke is said to "indicate" that Mary is one of his sources (16). This is a possible translation of *andeuten*, but in this context it misleadingly suggests that Luke explicitly names Mary as a source, when of course he does no such thing. "Hints" or "suggests" would have better captured the sense of Ratzinger's proposal. *Wort Gottes* is always translated as "word of God" even when Ratzinger is clearly referring to Christ (e.g., 85).

While its weaknesses are obvious, the notable contribution of Ratzinger's final volume on Jesus is the way it models exegesis that is a search for the face of the Lord, the one source of revelation who is known in Scripture and tradition. This twofold search requires careful historical exegesis and attention to the Church's continual reflection on the reality signified by Scripture, without equating divine revelation and the biblical texts. If, as Ratzinger has argued, this is a "task that has scarcely been attempted thus far" then these quiet reflections on the birth of Jesus are required reading.² 

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The Prudence of Love: How Possessing the Virtue of Love Benefits the Lover by Eric J. Silverman (*New York: Lexington Books, 2010*), x + 211 pp.

HOW SHOULD WE SPEAK about the benefits of loving? If such benefits exist, should lovers seek them out? If these benefits redound to the lover, how should we describe this phenomenon? Seeking to liberate descriptions of loving from reductive and counterintuitive accounts of egoism, emotivism, and agapaic altruism, Eric J. Silverman's first monograph, *The Prudence of Love*, brings Aquinas's treatise on charity

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth—Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), xv.

into conversation with various philosophical descriptions of love. The structure of Silverman's argument is straightforward. First, he counters various contemporary philosophical accounts of loving and its benefits. Second, he describes a "Neo-Thomistic virtue of love." Third, he elaborates five distinct benefits enjoyed by lovers who love virtuously and reinforces his account by examining the "harmful consequences" that come from possessing "unloving dispositions." Silverman advances three claims: (1) the five benefits contribute to the well-being of the lover; (2) these benefits provide the lover with a "net increase in . . . overall well-being"; and (3) cultivating the virtue of love is a "more prudent strategy" for the increase of well-being than is cultivation of alternative vices (cf. ix). Though Silverman relies on Aquinas for his description of the virtue of love and its benefits, Silverman's arguments do "not rely upon any other Thomistic philosophical commitments" (ix). Despite several peculiarities that weaken the argument, and despite prose that often lacks grace, the book will remain of interest to anyone interested in the theology of charity, the philosophy of love and human passions, and the ongoing conversation within analytic philosophy regarding *eu-daimonism*.

In chapter 1, Silverman demonstrates that his account of loving's benefits could appeal to those who espouse a hedonist and/or a desire-fulfillment vision of well-being. His account is also compatible with those who would look to objective lists of goods or perfections of the person's capacities for their vision of human well-being. Furthermore, Silverman suggests his description of virtue is compatible with a variety of contemporary philosophical accounts of virtue. Silverman defines moral virtue as a set of "excellent, desirable, ethically valuable human character dispositions," acquired in order to "actualize innate human potential for excellence" (11). Given this definition of virtue, Silverman clarifies that his naming *love* as a virtue is not a conflation of virtue and passion (*pace* Robert Solomon). Rather, Silverman contends that naming *love* as a virtue is a way of acknowledging that one might develop a disposition "to love the right people in the right way for the right reasons."

In chapter 2, Silverman contends with contemporary philosophical accounts of love in his search for a description of loving that holds together impartial and partial loves and that is not limited to overly narrow sectors of human relations (romance, adult friendships, etc.). Silverman dispenses with several contemporary accounts of love be-

cause of a lack of differentiation between love and brute urge, a lack of descriptive power regarding love for actual, individual persons, and a preoccupation with attributes rather than the person who bears the attributes. Niko Kolodny's account of loving provides Silverman with an intuitive, nuanced account of loving that respects the weight personal relationships carry for us.

Chapter 3 transitions to the constructive piece of Silverman's argument. The author describes Aquinas's account of love as follows: "a disposition towards relationally appropriate acts of the will, consisting of a disinterested desire for the good of the beloved and a disinterested desire for unity with the beloved, held as final ends" (43). By Silverman's own admission, his "Neo-Thomistic" philosophical account of the virtue of love is dependent on Aquinas's theological account of *caritas*. Silverman notes that Aquinas uses the words *amicitia*, *amor*, *caritas*, and *dilectio* at different points, but that *caritas* is Aquinas's "most important account." But Silverman remains silent on what difference this fact could make to his argument. Despite relying on Aquinas's treatise on charity, Silverman often makes only passing reference to the treatise's theological weight. Silverman uses Aquinas to address the following issues: disinterested desire for the beloved's good; the distinction between various modes of union with the beloved; the role of intellect, will, and the passions in loving; and the relationship between love's universal scope and the lover's particular relationships. Silverman notes that these features of Aquinas's account of charity (some of which are also present in Aquinas's discussion of love as a passion) present some difficulties of their own. Among these difficulties are the notion of an "ultimate union" enjoyed by humanity in the afterlife, enemy love, and impartial morality's compatibility with partial relationships.

In chapter 4, Silverman develops a "Neo-Thomistic account of the virtue of love" based on Aquinas's treatise on charity but not dependent on "other controversial aspects of Aquinas's philosophy such as the existence of objective final ends for humans, the existence of God, or the four types of Aristotelian causation" (59). After thickening his description of how love is a virtue and an activity of the will, Silverman addresses the lover's desires for all those goods that contribute to the beloved's flourishing. But what of the word *relationship* in describing the love shared between the two? How does a relationship shape the lover's de-

sires for the good of the beloved? Silverman defines the term “relationship” as “an ongoing, historical connection between particular people constituting either a historical or a culturally recognized role one plays in the other’s life that can be represented by a two-place predicate” (73). This definition allows Silverman to address a broad range of voluntary and involuntary relationships, issues of proximity and reciprocity, and love of self. The lover’s many relationships are capable of shaping the desires of the lover for the good of the beloved, whether the beloved is self, close kin, fellow citizen, or fellow human. Virtuous loving will be the lover’s ability to desire in a relationally appropriate way depending on the connection between the lover and a given beloved. Silverman then proceeds to address chapter 2’s philosophical interlocutors concerning impersonal relationships, the role played by the beloved’s attributes, and the possibility of having objective, defensible reasons for loving. After once again demonstrating that these issues are insufficiently addressed in contemporary philosophical accounts of love, Silverman provides the reader with his criteria for an “ideal account of love” and the way his Neo-Thomistic account meets the requirements. Silverman’s ideal account must: be a flexible concept of love that can accommodate various relationships; give an account of love that accords with “normative psychological phenomena of love;” attend to partiality and impartiality; and be construable in terms of virtue.

In chapter 5, Silverman describes the five benefits of loving and how they increase the pleasure, desire fulfillment, and well-being of the lover. Throughout his discussion of the five benefits, he provides rich supporting examples from a variety of human relationships and scenarios. First, loving provides the lover with final ends, inserting the lover into a matrix of instrumental actions oriented toward goods—the very stuff of human fulfillment. Second, loving provides the lover with psychic integration, facilitating the ordering of desires and the elimination of contradictions between ethical values, desired goods, and the demands of loving. Third, loving provides the lover with a motivation for self-improvement, encouraging him to develop the virtues appropriate for making him a relationally appropriate lover. Fourth, loving improves the lover’s relationships in a variety of ways, including improvement in types of relationships, increase in likelihood of nourishing relationships, and enhanced peace/harmony in existing relationships. Fifth,

loving increases the lover's "epistemic goods," which Silverman suggests are goods that can increase pleasure and desire fulfillment in their own right. These epistemic goods include increased knowledge of others, self-knowledge, empathic knowledge, and "knowledge concerning what benefits humans" (128). In addition to these five benefits, Silverman addresses the possibility of an inherent pleasure that comes with love. The chapter culminates in the claim that love is "the only advisable disposition" and that the harms that come with an unloving disposition far outweigh the risks that come with loving virtuously.

Chapter 6 is Silverman's description of "paradigmatic examples of nonloving dispositions," which include hatred, apathy, inappropriate loving, and incomplete loving. In some ways, Silverman's description of the benefits of loving is most poignantly stated here as he investigates the terrible contradictions and deep unhappiness of the vicious alternatives to love. As a pair, then, the two final chapters provide the reader with an often rich portrait of the human person in relationship. Whether it is Silverman's insightful analysis of the self-hater's necessarily arduous navigation and valuation of goods and relationships with which she may not dispense, or it is his economical discussion of the many ways persons can be inappropriately bonded to one another, Silverman provides the reader with a persuasive and useful philosophical account of vicious dispositions. Arguably, his greatest success here is giving a fair account of the ways in which viciously disposed persons may still attain certain measures of happiness in this life. In this way, Silverman avoids chimeric descriptions of self-hating apathetic persons and allows for an important measure of realism as he applies his moral psychology to the unloving person.

Silverman's book suffers from peculiarities that give one pause. The first is Silverman's inattention to Aquinas's treatise on charity as a piece of *sacra doctrina*. In the treatise, Aquinas has much to teach us about the gift of friendship that is the Father's Son, the creation of charity via the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the charitable community—the Church—in which these gifts are received. These are not incidental topics that can be removed from the treatise in order to arrive at philosophical material palatable to a contemporary audience. Some effort to address this reality seems necessary in a book like this. Second, Silverman's argument may be made clearer by showing more deliberately how he can provide his

“Neo-Thomistic” account of the virtue of love without relying on Aquinas’s various “controversial” positions regarding final ends, the existence of God, causality, etc. Whether and how this is possible seems a fitting issue to treat explicitly and early on in the project rather than in passing along the way.

The book is a success in a number of ways, however. First, Silverman must be applauded for his effort to bring the vital resource of Aquinas’s theology and philosophy into conversation with contemporary voices. Second, his sensitivity to the complexity of loving relationships is itself a resource to those who want to illuminate the mysteries of human action and relationship. Third, Silverman’s broad-ranging research in contemporary analytic philosophy is a trove for both students and scholars of the philosophy of love. Silverman has done us a service in contributing to a variety of conversations and pointing to many venues of fruitful dialogue.



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Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach (Oxford Early Christian Studies) by Hans Boersma
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), ix + 284 pp.

WHEN THE JESUIT EDITORS of *Sources Chrétiennes* began their series during World War II, they chose to produce Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Moses* as their first volume. By that time, Gregory had assumed a position comparable to his brother Basil of Caesarea (the Great) and the one who claimed Basil as his best friend, Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian). In modern times, these three have been grouped as “the Cappadocian Fathers,” but tradition had not smiled so favorably on Gregory of Nyssa, despite the exalted title of “Father of Fathers” bestowed on him. The Byzantines came to venerate “the Three Holy Hierarchs” by honoring Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and ... John Chrysostom. In the West, Gregory of Nyssa has not been declared a Doctor of the universal Church, and his feast does not appear, even as an optional memorial, on the Roman calendar. Yet, in no small part owing to the work of classicist Werner Jaeger and of *Ressourcement* theologians in the twentieth century,

Gregory of Nyssa surpassed his fellow Cappadocians in terms of scholarly fascination and popular appeal. Recognizing this privileged place for Gregory in theology today, largely created by the *nouvelle théologie* that placed him after Origen as a leading inspiration, can serve as a prompt to return to him and ask what his theology is really all about.

“Nothing was more important to Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 334 to ca. 395) than to make progress in the spiritual life in order to participate more deeply in the being of God” (1). This is how Hans Boersma, J. I. Packer Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, begins the introduction to his insightful new book on Gregory. An author of both a scholarly study on sacramental ontology in the *nouvelle théologie* and a more popular follow-up account, Boersma turned his sights on Gregory. This evangelical theologian acknowledges that he gladly follows in the footsteps of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Jean Daniélou. Not unlike those theologians who inspired him, Boersma came to the study of Gregory with a certain agenda. By focusing on this Cappadocian, Boersma wanted to test his hunch “that the premodern Platonist-Christian synthesis does not require us to abandon the goodness of matter and of history, but that instead such an affirmation of this-worldly realities is dependent on the participatory or sacramental ontology of premodernity” (vi–vii). Boersma found that his “hunch has been only partially validated” (vii). Gregory does not affirm the goodness of matter and history as much as Boersma wanted him to do. Boersma writes, “It has become clear to me that Gregory is really quite reticent in affirming that the entire created order—including embodied existence—participates sacramentally in eternal realities” (vii). Boersma thus has discovered that Gregory, although occasionally affirming this world, really has a driving force expressed throughout his writings to go up, leaving all things behind, into God.

For Boersma, Gregory is best described as a “theologian of ascent” or “an ‘anagogical’ theologian” (vii). But what does anagogy mean? Gregory’s understanding of anagogy is more inclusive than many later classifications. Anagogy is not merely eschatological; it is something that could also be called tropology, allegory, or other names. Boersma helpfully summarizes: “anagogy has to do with Scripture giving insight into *higher* realities (that are spiritual in character), not just *future* realities” (2). Moreover, anagogy reaches beyond the page of Scripture to characterize

what life is meant to be. In part inspired by Morwenna Ludlow's important work on recent ways of interpreting Gregory, Boersma demonstrates that some significant scholarship has missed this anagogical turn in Gregory's thought. On one side, Boersma writes of Mark Hart, John Behr, and Rowan Williams. These scholars, in various ways, argue for Gregory deeply appreciating bodily aspects of human existence, such as sex, gender, and the passions. Hart, for this reason, claims that Gregory has a higher regard for the married life than the virginal life. On the other side, Boersma places Elizabeth Clark and Virginia Burrus as scholars who force a contemporary grid upon Gregory's thought to argue that he suppresses gender. Both sets of scholars, for Boersma, do not adequately appreciate that, although Gregory writes much on bodiliness, that concern is aimed beyond the confines of this world for the life on high.

After his introduction and before his epilogue, Boersma's arguments unfold through the course of seven chapters, each with a focus on a particular form of embodiment: Measured Body, Textual Body, Gendered Body, Dead Body, Oppressed Body, Ecclesial Body, and Virtuous Body. This last chapter expresses something of how Gregory's thought holds together in Boersma's analysis. Boersma explains: "embodiment serves anagogical transposition, while this anagogical transposition, in turn, means growth in virtue. Furthermore, since Gregory identifies virtue with Christ and with God, we may also say that for Gregory embodiment serves the purpose of participation in the life of God" (18). Boersma offers a persuasive reading of many of Gregory's works through this concentration on the meaning of the body in the upward call to God. It is a fine achievement. The following now briefly focuses on the difficulty of understanding Gregory on *diastēma* (the extension of created time and space) and *epektasis* (progress), issues that appear at the beginning of Boersma's book and run throughout the study.

Against his opponent Eunomius, Gregory clearly denies *diastēma*, temporal or spatial distance, in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For example, there is no time or space that separates the Father and the Son; the Trinity is completely beyond the confines of measurement. But Boersma raises an immediate question in his first chapter when he considers creation: "does Gregory unequivocally affirm the measurements of created time and space . . . or does he insist that in some ways they are obstacles to be overcome?" In other words, is the lack of any *diastē-*

ma precisely a distinguishing aspect of the Creator from all creatures? Against some interpreters, Boersma forcefully concludes that Gregory “cannot accept that the temporal and spatial characteristics of this life would belong also to our final destiny. The anagogical journey into a significantly other mode of existence—the infinite life of God—is the ultimate goal that Gregory asks us to pursue” (52).

This pursuit can be considered with attention on the word *epektasis*, associated with Daniélou’s devotion to Gregory and taken up by many others. Boersma writes, “This doctrine of *epektasis* is central to the treatise [*De vita Moysis*] as a whole” (232), and he discusses *epektasis* on nearly thirty pages of the book. I want to add a bit of caution in continuing this emphasis on the term. It is true that Gregory quotes *epekteinomenos* from Philippians 3:13 in his introduction to the *De vita Moysis*, but never again does he use *epektasis*, including participial and verbal forms, in that text. In fact, Gregory uses *epektasis* once in the nominative and once in the genitive in all his writings (nearly eighty works), and he includes forms of the participle and verb only a handful of times. What does preoccupy Gregory is the end/perfect/perfection (*telos/teleios/teleiôtês*), terms he uses in their various parts of speech dozens of times in *De vita Moysis* and hundreds of times throughout his writings. For Gregory, our perfection is never-ending. Boersma rightly asks how Gregory could hold an infinite progress (*epektasis*) while denying *diastêma* in the hereafter. Boersma writes, “We may feel that the former ought to lead to the latter, but for Gregory this is simply not the case. Instead, he holds to a paradoxical tension” (23). Gregory is a master of tensions such as sober inebriation, luminous darkness, watchful sleep, learned ignorance, and stationary movement (52n145). Some readers will love how Boersma exposes Gregory’s paradox; others will scratch their heads.

By highlighting *diastêma* and *epektasis*, this review has engaged briefly in key elements at work across Boersma’s chapters. Each chapter is a rich account that can surprise and illuminate on such varied issues as slavery, death, virginity, and sacraments. If I were to recommend an additional chapter to Boersma’s exploration of Gregory’s anagogy, it would be God’s Body, on the Incarnation. Gregory’s thinking, as Boersma knows, is quite Christological, and Boersma elucidates interesting aspects of Gregory’s Christology here and there throughout the book. For example, Boersma brings out the creativity of Gregory’s understanding that on Holy

Thursday night, for the Lord to give the disciples his body, already Christ's "body had been ineffably and invisibly sacrificed and his soul was in those regions in which the authority of the ordainer had stored it" (quoting *De tridui inter mortem et resurrectionem domini nostri Iesu Christi spatio* 36). Boersma also shows how Gregory hints that not just the Church, but "the entire creation" will be the body of Christ in the eschaton (196). Still, a more systematic exploration of the Incarnation would have assisted the reader to witness Gregory's remarkable analogical force. For example, Gregory's fight against Apollinarius of Laodicea, who is not mentioned in Boersma's book, would be helpful for establishing more the distinctive contours of Gregory's teaching on the Incarnation and what happens to Christ's body, and ours, in the resurrection.

At the end of his book, implicitly distancing himself from the very *ressourcement* theologians who inspired him to focus on Gregory of Nyssa, Boersma does not disguise his concern about Gregory's theology: "It has not been my primary purpose to hold up Nyssen as the guiding light by which to pursue our own theological endeavors. I have too many reservations with regard to aspects of his theology to be able to do so in an unqualified fashion" (249). Yet Boersma still finds this Cappadocian useful for theology today. He ends his study with these words: "[Gregory of Nyssa] rightly reminds us that it is through embodied lives of virtue that we are led upward in continuous participation in the eternal life of God" (250). Although not as much as Boersma hoped him to be, Gregory can still be a theological guide. Does Gregory really deserve the preeminent status in theological insight among the Cappadocians frequently accorded him these past seventy years? Boersma certainly does not broach such a question, and it would require those fascinated by Gregory of Nyssa to look at Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus with similar attention. What Boersma's study skillfully does is to expose how Gregory of Nyssa's theology, so mystical and mystifying, is really all about an upward path in our various bodily concerns. In order to approach Gregory rightly, we can decide whether we even want to lay aside all earthly cares. 

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Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Christian Social Thought edited by Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and Johan Verstraeten (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011*), v + 272 pp.

POPE BENEDICT XVI, in a general audience from his weekly catechesis devoted to the Church fathers in 2007, identifies Basil of Caesarea as one of the fathers of the Church's social doctrine. Although from a different period of history, Basil speaks to us today about important aspects of Christian life such as social responsibility.³ *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics* considers what Church fathers such as Basil might have to contribute to contemporary Christian social ethics. This volume is a collection of essays from a seminar held in Leuven in 2007, and the second of four publications from a research project exploring the potential for "dialogue" between patristic texts and contemporary ethics. The essays demonstrate that such a dialogue, although at times vexed and not without its challenges, yields a fruitful conversation that will benefit scholars in the fields of patristics and Christian social ethics alike.

The work is divided into four parts: (I) "Approaching Patristic Socio-Ethical Texts," (II) "Contexts for Patristic Socio-Ethical Texts," (III) "Issues in Patristic and Catholic Social Thought, and (IV) "Reflections on the Theme." In Part I, Reimund Bieringer considers some of the hermeneutical difficulties in the application of patristic teaching to the contemporary period. Bieringer asserts that a simple "retrieval" of patristic texts is impossible. Nevertheless, by appealing to certain hermeneutical approaches—including those of Gadamer, Heidegger, and Ricoeur—Bieringer suggests that patristic texts are not "locked up" hopelessly in their own time, but rather may be engaged in such a way as to go beyond a mere "reconstruction" of the past by "respecting the irreducible otherness" of the texts and their "future dimension" (18). Pauline Allen is perhaps less optimistic about the extent to which patristic texts might inform contemporary ethics. While describing distinctive patristic positions on issues such as private property and slavery, Allen warns against the oversimplification of patristic socio-ethical teaching that is likely to occur if one does not take into

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 75–76.

account cultural and geographical differences (34). To give another example of contextual difficulties, Allen points out that the majority of audiences who heard patristic homilies were poor. Without acute awareness of historical background, the danger of anachronistic interpretation persists. Allen's essay is a helpful caution against an uncritical, decontextualized appropriation of patristic thought.

Part II of the volume provides case studies with regard to the contexts of patristic texts. In his discussion of social ethics and moral discourse in late antiquity, Peter Van Nuffelen rightly observes that patristic teaching cannot be easily systematized. Too often, patristic scholarship fails to offer nuanced interpretations of history. For instance, Van Nuffelen asserts that it is too simplistic to say that the ancient ideal of *liberalitas* was replaced by Christian *caritas*. Rather, from a "diachronic" perspective, "Christian charity became more important with the progressive Christianisation of the empire," and *liberalitas* never disappeared, as "Christians were able to draw on it" (53). Furthermore, even as *caritas* had a transformative impact upon public discourse and ancient society, "care for the poor" came to be seen as a specifically Christian virtue and the task of the church. Helen Rhee considers the tension between wealth and poverty in the context of a Christian community with a particular eschatology that fosters "dualistic" vision, both with respect to the Christian's true wealth and home (65). Turning to the issue of audience, Wendy Mayer seeks to identify multiple targets of patristic preaching and teaching, including the emperor and the government. Mayer's learned article contains a wealth of resources, even if some of the points are rudimentary.

Part III is perhaps the most fruitful and constructive, as evident above all in the work of Susan Holman and Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen. Holman provides an illuminating examination of the meaning of the "common good" (κοινωφελής) in Greek patristic literature. Looking at Basil in particular, Holman uncovers the Aristotelian influence upon the definition of civic identity in patristic texts, while effectively showing how the "common good" as "that which is good for all within a divinely created order" is predicated upon a "divinely ordered social harmony" inseparable from mercy (123). Holman does well to note the differences between patristic and modern approaches to the common good while arguing that, in the end, the similarities are significant and warrant fur-

ther attention. Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen reveals the salvific implications of usury in Greek Fathers such as Clement, John Chrysostom, and Basil, leading to the conclusion that in general, none of the fathers considered usury beneficial, with Ambrose as a possible exception. Ihssen illustrates the significance of patristic texts for contemporary social ethics by identifying the underlying principles of patristic teaching on wealth, greed, and the nature of the relationship between the members of the body of Christ.

Brian Matz and Thomas Hughson supply focused studies on the themes of detachment and social justice respectively. The strength of Matz's essay lies in the exploration of how detachment, as it functions in the thought of Basil and other fathers, may serve as a resource for the renewal of Catholic social teaching. Hughson gives a penetrating treatment of Lactantius, whose critique of imperial society and the status quo in *The Divine Institutes* remains relevant, even if it stands as a minority report. Hughson also gives good reason to hope for the possibility of "postcritical application of patristic texts in contemporary church life and thought" (204).

In Part IV, Richard Schenk, O.P., reflects upon the seminar as a whole and addresses the "ambivalence" about the potential retrieval of patristic thought for Christian social teaching. Schenk delivers a tour de force that explores, among other themes, memory as subject to scrutiny and self-examination in the thought of Ricoeur. Schenk illuminates Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval, with reference to Heidegger, a hermeneutic that "cuts both ways" insofar as certain kinds of "selective amnesia" may lead to "revisionist histories" without inquiring into possibilities for a better future. Schenk considers the possibility that the predominant methodologies of the seminar, namely finding the "texts behind the texts" and stressing the "particularity" and "incommensurability" of each, might lead to a "productive noncontemporaneity," to borrow a phrase from J. B. Metz (214). Schenk's essay adds another dimension to this volume that grants it instant appeal. In the final analysis by Johan Leemans and Johan Verstraeten, the editors recognize challenges that persist when placing patristic texts in dialogue with contemporary Christian social ethics, yet there is reason to remain hopeful that fruitfulness may be found in the fusion of hermeneutical horizons (231).

Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics gives witness to the perils and the benefits of engaging patristic texts for contemporary application. It provides a solid foundation for the appropriation of early Christian thought, and it is a step forward in terms of a deeper, more historically informed Christian social ethic. As the second of four proceedings, this volume leaves scholars in eager anticipation of the next. 

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