

correction to neo-Calvinist thought, and Michael Allen presents a crisp, informed discussion of Aquinas' understanding of the beatific vision and of the active and contemplative life, which should be of great help also for Reformed theologians.

The essays are all of a high quality, in every case authored by an expert on the topic under investigation. To be sure, not every aspect of each essay is equally convincing. To describe the magisterial Reformation as "a diverse group of variants within an even larger and more diverse landscape of the Second Scholasticism" (Ballor, 43) surely exaggerates the Scholastic element in Reformation theology. And while it may be fair to suggest that the positive engagement with Aquinas nuances the common argument that modern secularism derives, via the Reformation, from the late medieval nominalism, Kilcrease writes off the Radical Orthodoxy perspective far too quickly (119).

These (and perhaps other) criticisms are minor quibbles, however, in a volume that accomplishes what it sets out to do, and that both informs and delights in the process. Moreover, the result is an ecumenically promising engagement between Catholic and Reformed thought. This is not to say that differences between Catholic and Reformed thought are ignored. J. V. Fesko, for example, deftly weaves an argument that combines Thomas' notion of an infused habit of faith with the Reformation understanding of imputed righteousness. Differences between Aquinas and Protestant thought are not simply elided. But every one of the authors does take a stance of openness to Thomas Aquinas' theology, in recognition of the usefulness of his Scholastic thought for an articulation of Reformed theology.

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*All the Fullness of God: The Christ of Colossians.* By Bonnie Bowman Thurston. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017. 149 pages. \$21.00 (paper).

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A pivotal chapter in *All the Fullness of God: The Christ of Colossians* begins with a series of "what if" questions: "What if Paul were *not* viewed as a rather pugilistic and argumentative theologian, but as a spiritual master? What if the Church had presented him not so much as a shaper of Christian doctrine and ecclesial practice, but as a person of remarkably wide experience of and wisdom in the life of prayer, say as a really wise spiritual director? What if the Pauline letters were read primarily as spiritual documents?" (64). This accessible, insightful volume provides the reader not only with a succinct,

clearly written understanding of the Letter to the Colossians but also with a rich feast of spiritual wisdom mined from that letter by an author who is herself a spiritual master, a woman who lives a life of prayer, and is a wise spiritual director.

Thurston's exegetical approach to Colossians is clearly articulated in the first few pages of the book. Recognizing the letter as a canonical text received by the faith community, she seeks to downplay some of the traditional questions found in commentaries, questions about authorship and opponents, and instead attends to questions about the meaning of the text for first-century Christians as well as for those seeking to live as Christians today. The book is laid out in two parts. Part 1 is a detailed study of the letter culminating in a chapter on the spirituality of the letter. Part 2 builds upon part 1, drawing insights into spirituality emerging from close study of the letter. Part 2 addresses topics such as prayer, Christology, baptism, discernment, resurrection, and community.

While there are many reasons to recommend this book to readers, I will limit myself to three. First, the tone of the book is "consciously conversational" (ix). Thurston has an ease with language that warmly welcomes the reader. The simplicity of her expression has a rich quality because it is rooted in and springs from her deep knowledge of the letter as well as her familiarity with and understanding of current academic scholarship on the letter. While she does not let the traditional questions of commentaries weigh down her treatment of the letter, she nevertheless addresses these issues clearly and succinctly.

Second, Thurston openly admits her love for the Letter to the Colossians. In addition to previously writing about Colossians in relationship to Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians, and teaching the letter in various settings for over twenty years, the letter was the focus of her *lectio divina* when she lived in extended residence at a Cistercian community of nuns, Our Lady of the Angels Monastery, in Virginia (x). The combination of erudite scholarship with contemplative prayerful consideration of the text is a rare but treasured find in studies of a Pauline letter.

Most importantly, Thurston stays focused on Christology as the central concern of the Letter to the Colossians throughout this volume. This focus on Christology draws readers toward a deeper understanding of Christology and its implications for their spiritual lives: "The great paradox of the Colossian letter which should inform any truly Christian spirituality is that the all-encompassing immensity of Christ in which Christians dwell, also *dwells in us*" (76). Thurston's reflections on the cosmic and yet personal Christ invite believers to a deeper participation in the mystery of a love that

is both beyond us and yet heard within us. It is as near as our own heartbeat (80).

*All the Fullness of God* is a book that can serve in many capacities: as a textbook in undergraduate classrooms, as a source for study groups in churches, or as a resource for preaching. Thurston's approach to the Colossian letter, recognizing the letter as a spiritual document written by a spiritual master, opens up a way to read and understand a Pauline letter that is rooted in tradition, yet undervalued in contemporary scholarship. It is a valuable approach, not only because it provides a deeper understanding and appreciation of Colossians, but also because it inspires us to read all of Paul's letters through this lens.

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*Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies: Moral Pollution, Black Lives, and the Struggle for Justice.* By Rima Vesely-Flad. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017. 272 pages. \$34.00 (paper).

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In this book, Rima Vesely-Flad provides a deep and comprehensive account of one facet of US-American antiblackness: the social construction of blackness as a "social pollutant," which endangers "the moral foundations of [our] white, Christian, democratic, and capitalist nation" from within (3). Vesely-Flad believes that we "cannot hope to comprehensively understand the emergence and perpetuation of disproportionately black imprisonment in contemporary U.S. society" unless we grasp "the salience of [this] symbolic construct." In highlighting the role that this symbolic construct has played in establishing and upholding antiblackness, Vesely-Flad helps us understand how antiblackness has taken on a life of its own.

She marks the start of antiblackness earlier than other scholars do. For her, racialized notions of leadership and servitude date back to the thirteenth century and persist still to this day. According to Vesely-Flad, antiblackness fueled "nineteenth-century nation building" campaigns by portraying "dark-skinned people as intellectually and morally degraded, and thus in need of authority figures who could assert control" (31). It similarly helps to explain the rise of "southern penal systems and northern penitentiaries" in that same century (69). Despite other significant differences, both southern and northern forms of discipline and punishment "relied on religious interpretations of black immorality to buttress their advocating for restraining