

accounts. Still, this is a valuable historical resource that is well suited to libraries, and the suggestions for further reading and bibliographies that conclude each chapter offer helpful points of reference for research. Individual chapters may be suitable to undergraduate and graduate teaching and can provide foundations for further inquiry—but this book must, in my view, be supplemented and critically engaged if one is seeking a full and accurate portrait of Catholic theology.

PAUL J. SCHUTZ
Santa Clara University

The Book of Exodus: A Biography. By Joel S. Baden. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. xv + 237 pages. \$26.95.

doi: 10.1017/hor.2021.43

Written for general readers, *The Book of Exodus* is part of the Lives of Great Religious Books series. Although the series and its title suggest a biographical treatment of the biblical *book* of Exodus, Baden distinguishes the Exodus story from the biblical book that is the combination of three different Exodus stories (J, E, and P) among the story's traditions. In contrast, the Exodus *story* follows a general plot of oppression, departure, wilderness, and revelation common to all biblical sources. This grand narrative moves from Egypt to Canaan and oppression to freedom, which has been variously appropriated as an event, a tradition, a cultural memory, and a metaphor.

This story emerges from the assimilation, accretion, and exaggeration of the personal stories from a “steady trickle” of slaves who escaped from Egypt and intermarried with inhabitants of Canaan, thereby embodying a fictive kinship. Common narratives akin to a collective cultural memory emerge that combine various traditions, stories, and characters. The author deftly details the distinctiveness between the Pentateuchal sources and their accessibility to the common narrative. The hermeneutical payoff underscores the Exodus story is not, strictly speaking, history, but is rather a story “susceptible to framing and shaping, reinterpretation and reapplication across space and time” (28).

Working with a foundational story behind both the biblical book and its historical sources, Baden traces and elucidates variegated appropriations anchored in the story and evidenced in surprisingly flexible interpretive traditions. His treatment is sweeping, judicious, and illuminating.

Throughout, Baden introduces his readers to important scholarly perspectives, including ritualized history, textual multivalence, reception history, and reader-response criticism. Each of these academic contributions is presented as contributing voices, as storytellers themselves. Baden clearly delineates

how various communities appropriated the Exodus story increasingly unmoored from its historical and cultural genesis. Philo and Josephus use the story to convince their audience that Hellenistic values were anachronistically embodied in Moses. Similar hermeneutical moves are pointed out in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John where the evangelist urges an abandonment of the traditional Exodus story in order to view Jesus as the true Moses. The Commandments' surprising importance in a burgeoning, but otherwise antinomian, Christianity and the Talmudic reaction to underplay the reading of the Ten Commandments as a Jewish response is particularly enlightening: "It would be a remarkable irony: Judaism abandoning a ritual practice in response to a Christian argument intended to eliminate traditional Jewish ritual practices" (114). Baden details twists and turns that appropriations of the Exodus story take during the Protestant Reformation: each separate group identifying themselves with the enslaved Hebrews and others as the theological embodiment of Pharaoh. Baden notes, "The exodus story is not only flexible but capacious ... [it is] available to be used and interpreted in light of contemporary events" (154). Even so, it remains identifiable, even in contradictory and conflicting applications.

For Baden, the fact that "various appropriations of Exodus are not always neat and tidy" is a reminder for his readers "to use the biblical narrative with care, to read it and [them]selves with a critical eye—not to undermine the story's power but to recognize how [they] are using it for [their] own purposes and to use it responsibly" (215). This metacognitive urgency is hauntingly illustrated in Baden's recounting of its use by both the North and South during the Civil War. Rather than being the determining factor, the Exodus story was a narrative "that both sides wielded with equal passion and dexterity." Ominously, Baden notes that "had the South won the Civil War, the Exodus story would have been held up as divine justification for their success" (179).

Baden is to be commended for a remarkable account of the unfolding of the Exodus tradition before, within, and beyond the scriptural text. Beyond the Exodus story itself, this "biography" is also a glimpse into the use of common religious thought-narrative to organize community into the recipients of divine rescue and blessing, often by stretching the written narrative to its barest arc. As a text winsomely appropriate for undergraduate and graduate religion courses, *The Book of Exodus: A Biography* ultimately makes the metacognitive appeal for ethically responsible engagements with a story that "contains the crystallization of humanity's deepest desires: for justice, for freedom, for self-determination" (215).

SCOTT R. A. STARBUCK
Gonzaga University