

conservative theology with right-of-center politics. But those categories deserve a lot more unpacking and this book was a chance to do it, say, by contrasting the theology of the LCMS with that of mainstream evangelical views at *Christianity Today*, or by looking at the ways that holiness teaching in the black church differs from the mainstream liberal theology of *Christian Century*. The same goes for politics where *conservative* and *liberal* do not adequately capture the dynamics that may fuel assessments of a figure like Nixon. Aside from the immorality of his involvement in the Watergate scandal, Nixon's critics and supporters may have had different ideas about the privileges of the presidency, the Vietnam War, the escalation of homegrown terrorism (e.g., the Weather Underground), or even his economic policies. As it stands, Protestants in Settje's rendering either tried to explain away Nixon's lapses or used Watergate to confirm existing biases. The last nine words of the book are "they put morality first and politics a distant second."

That is a fair conclusion but it also deserves elaboration. For well-educated Christians who were not some odd sect but fully carrying on their lives and churches in the normal channels of American society, to let morality set the course for their political analysis is to highlight American Protestant myopia. Instead of learning any lesson in Christian realism, whether from Augustine or Reinhold Niebuhr, American Protestants into the 1970s, as Settje makes clear, continued to judge their nation and its leader according to Christian categories. That sort of finding should render contemporary versions of white Christian nationalism in America unsurprising. At the same time, the pervasiveness of such nationalism should qualify as amazing for anyone who thinks it is a problem only for the Religious Right.

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***Sting and Religion: The Catholic-Shaped Imagination of a Rock Icon.* By Evyatar Marienberg. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021. ix + 215 pp. \$29.00 paper.**

The best thing about this book may be its cover. That is not meant as a putdown; it's just difficult to imagine a more perfectly evocative image for a book about the Catholic sensibility of the artist known as Sting. Taken during a recording session at Montserrat the day of his mother's death and used as the back cover of his album *Nothing Like the Sun*, the photograph shows him standing next to a statue of the Virgin Mary, her hands clasped in prayer. Sting looks as though his thoughts are a million miles away.

*Sting and Religion* is not part of the Religion Around book series, which now includes volumes on Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, John Donne, Virginia Woolf, Billie Holiday, and Bono. But it easily could be. Marienberg's argument is that Sting's songwriting was profoundly shaped by the religious heritage of his family and community. Born in 1951 and christened Gordon Matthew Sumner, he grew up at a pivotal moment for Roman Catholics. He was entering puberty when Vatican II

commenced, significantly altering the experience of worship for Catholics worldwide. Sumner was just seventeen, finishing grammar school, when Pope Paul VI released the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which prohibited all methods of contraception except for the “rhythm method.” The decade also witnessed stirrings of the ecumenical impulse that slowly lowered the barriers between the Church of England and Catholics.

The book juxtaposes long chapters describing and analyzing lyrics from Sting’s forty-five-year career with chapters on the religion around him as he grew up working-class in Wallsend, a small town in northeast England. We get a sense of the dynamics of Catholic parish life in a majority Protestant nation whose history included centuries of persecution and discrimination against Catholics; the complications of “mixed marriage” between an Anglican mother and a Catholic father; and the choices mixed families faced in raising their children, in this case opting for a Catholic upbringing. Marienberg reconstructs the teachings and practices Sumner experienced as a child and a student at the family’s parish school, St. Columba’s, followed by the regional Catholic grammar school some distance away in Newcastle. He recounts Sumner’s early encounters with the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, and how certain doctrines and customs, namely corporal punishment, led Sumner (and likely a large segment of fellow baby boomers) to grow up ambivalent and drift away from the church. We learn something, too, about the community of Wallsend, drenched in history back to the Roman fortress and wall that still runs through the town, particularly the economic travails it faced during Sumner’s years there, when the shipbuilding that anchored the community went into steep postindustrial decline.

Not all the spiritual influence on Sting flowed from Catholicism. After leaving Wallsend, Sting was also impacted by the Jewish writer Arthur Koestler and by G. I. Gurdjieff. He has long practiced yoga and partaken of the hallucinogenic ayahuasca, which he called “the only genuine religious experience I have ever had” (192).

Marienberg has done impressive research for this book. More than the average academic, to his credit, he draws on numerous interviews he conducted. He was able to interview Sting, along with a number of old friends, bandmates, and acquaintances from childhood on. Of course, he seems to be well acquainted with Sting’s recordings and song lyrics, going back to 1975, when he made his first cassette recordings in London with his band, No Exit, and finds numerous explicit and implicit religious themes in them. His research is thorough and well presented.

He is also a cautious scholar. Marienberg developed a careful coding system for preserving the anonymity of his interview subjects. When he cites a published interview not conducted by himself, he is careful to include caveats: Sting was *reported* to have said, or, *If* the interview was transcribed accurately. Sometimes he is overly fastidious. Do readers need to know that the official name of Highway 61 from the famous Dylan song is actually “US Route 61”? (79 n.16). Caution occasionally produces convoluted prose: “Personal prayer however is, or was, not unknown to him,” he explains. “I do not have proof that Gordon ever participated in non-obligatory events such as those that took place at school, but he admits liking, very much in fact, the Rosary, as a youngster.” (128–129) Regarding the book’s architecture, I longed for more structure within the long chapters, which can read like a chronological march through Sting’s milieu and corpus. A few signposts in the form of subchapters would have helped.

At the end of his introduction, Marienberg makes a curious statement. After citing Andrew Greeley’s assertion that “Troubadours always have more impact than theologians or bishops,” he writes, “I have no opinion on the matter” (xv). This signals that the monograph will not be concerned with audience reception, how listeners

receive the music, or even with the complex social work of “musicking” that is always integral to the production and meaning of music. Fair enough. To include those perspectives would result in a much larger book. But to have no opinion on such an important question seems odd.

The largest lacuna in *Sting and Religion* is its lack of attention to the sonic as opposed to lyrical content of Sting’s music. Were there any musical influences from the Catholic hymns that Sting was so fond of? What might Sting have learned from other kinds of religious music, say African American music, in the musical features of his songs, or in the grain of the voice he fashioned? To include those perspectives would have produced a different and longer book, and a reviewer shouldn’t criticize an author for writing a different book than the one they did. But these gaps leave room for future scholars to contribute to our understanding of this historically important musician.

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***Open Hearts, Closed Doors: Immigration Reform and the Waning of Mainline Protestantism.* By Nicholas T. Pruitt. New York: New York University Press, 2021. Vii-279 pp. Notes, illustrations, index. \$45.00 hardcover.**

Discussion, debate, concerns, and realities when it comes to the topic of immigration have been a constant in the American news cycle for much of the past few years. From talk of border walls to migrant caravans to discussion of root causes, not to mention refugees, politicians and journalists have devoted much ink and screen time to the topic. The irony for the historian is that such stories are nothing new, and that with a few exceptions as to particular actors and locations, the exact same stories can be found dominating American news outlets a century ago with almost identical arguments being made on the topics at hand. Discussion of immigration is hardly a recent topic for Americans to consider, whether in the halls of Congress or in the nation’s pews.

However, despite the ubiquity of the immigration debate, we still have much to learn. Helping lead that educational effort is Nicholas T. Pruitt’s excellent monograph, *Open Hearts, Closed Doors: Immigration Reform and the Waning of Mainline Protestantism*. Pruitt, a professor at Eastern Nazarene College, expertly navigates how the vaunted Mainline Protestant denominations came to understand, shape, and deal with immigration-related issues and the very real people caught up in them. In doing so, he also offers a new perspective on the eventual decline of those very same denominations by the second half of the twentieth century, placing their evolving stance on what to do about the newest Americans into the oft-told tale of how the Seven Sisters went from hegemonic “gatekeepers” (7) in American society to a lesser part of the national story.