

## Book Reviews

*Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies.* By Stefanos Alexopoulos and Maxwell E. Johnson. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021. xli + 430 pages. \$59.95 (paper).

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Without question this text is a must-have for every teacher and student of today's liturgy. Here is provided in one handbook what no other available text can do, which is to present a complete overview of the Eastern rites of the Christian Church by two masters in the field. Their scholarship gives this text the theological substance, clarity, and precision that make it a necessary addition to academic bookshelves everywhere.

As the authors note in the introduction, "Christianity originated as an Eastern religion" (xiv). The diversity, depth, and richness of the Eastern rites should be of no surprise to anyone, yet many of these rites remain unknown or little understood to Western Christians. This text goes a long way in supplying the necessary corrective to that lacuna. Nowhere else will students be able to read about liturgical ritual and be exposed to Armenian, Coptic, East Syrian, Byzantine, West Syrian, and Ethiopian rites all within a single chapter.

The genius of the text, which is what gives it scholarly great value, is the logic of its organization and the method of its approach. In terms of its organization, the book proceeds along the classic lines of initiation and reconciliation, eucharistic liturgies, the liturgical year and liturgy of the hours, marriage and holy orders, anointing of the sick and Christian burial, followed by a final chapter on the ethos of Eastern Christian worship and the spirituality of its liturgies. This is an organization familiar to any student of liturgy, yet within each chapter the authors have presented the rich treasures of the Eastern rites in every one of these areas. Following an explication of comparative liturgiology as their methodology, they lay out before the reader a feast of traditions and theologies through detailed texts, tables, and theological analysis. For example, the chapter on the Eucharist provides sample anaphoras and comparative ritual tables that are pedagogical gifts! Because

it is deeply sourced, uses material exposing the Western reader to the breadth of Eastern patristic sources, and draws on the finest of liturgical scholarship, this text, between prayer texts and footnotes, is a starting point for further study. In short, it is a helpmate for students who wish to delve more deeply into the subject matter and for the instructor who wishes to teach them.

At the center of Eastern Christianity is the liturgy, and this shines through especially in the chapter on worship and spirituality. The core of all liturgical rites is the theology of *mysterion* (mystery), which lies at the heart of Eastern theology, especially as it is expressed in the celebration of the Eucharist. This theology is profoundly expressed in the final chapter, which also examines numerous liturgical elements of Eastern prayer practices. It ends with a strong reality check for those of the Eastern traditions who seek to live in and with the Western world. How do these traditions continue living while meeting the challenges of migration and changing demographics, while encountering cultural shifts, dialogue, and contemporary challenges? The final gift of the text is that it has set its feet firmly in the real world, just as the communities that continue to pray the rites celebrated in its pages have done.

This book makes an excellent text for graduate classes in liturgy, the liturgical rites as listed in the table of contents, and liturgical history. It also lends itself to graduate classes in ecumenical dialogue and spirituality of liturgy.

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*Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life.* By Antonio Eduardo Alonso. New York: Fordham University Press, 2021. 188 pages. \$28.00 (paper).

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“Resist!” Alonso “propose[s] a mode of theological reflection on consumer culture and the Eucharist that sees the interrelationship in light of the unique challenges that US consumerism poses to Christian thought and practice” (3) and “attempts to open a space for myriad faithful responses to the graciousness of a God who works through us, including through our acts of everyday resistance to contemporary consumerism” (8). Said otherwise, he invites readers to consider consumeristic practices “from below” as spaces of revelation and grace. Among the four chapters, he intersperses what he calls “fragments” (7) of his *lo cotidiano*—this ethnographic and experiential move not only adds a layer of methodological richness but also betrays a humble