

place in the golden calf story, adopted an approach similar to that used by some of the early rabbis in order to evoke and subvert Jewish claims about the meaning of the biblical story.

In the third section of his book, “The Qur’anic Calf Episode,” Pregill provides an excellent critique of how Western scholarship has tended to read the Islamic account of the golden calf story in Qur’an 20:83–97, and he presents his own interpretation of it that proposes alternative ways of understanding all of its major elements. His analysis is too detailed and technical to discuss in any detail here, but, suffice it to say, he makes a coherent and convincing case for his reading that is based upon the Qur’anic text itself. This differs from the way Western scholars have typically approached the Qur’an’s account because they have usually relied upon medieval Muslim commentaries (*tafsīr* in Arabic) of the passage to determine its meaning. Those Islamic sources introduced many elements and ideas that are not supported by the text, and so Western scholarship related to the Qur’an’s account perpetuated and recapitulated an understanding of it that is inaccurate. This book offers a corrective to that approach through its careful rereading and reinterpretation of the Qur’an passage.

Pregill is to be commended for producing a first-rate work of scholarship on a tradition shared by the Bible and the Qur’an that has not received the attention it deserves. Along the way, he draws some important conclusions that will undoubtedly challenge certain views many have about the Bible and its relationship to the Qur’an. Among the most insightful are the following: (1) the Qur’an is best described as a “rewritten Bible”; (2) we should not think of the Bible as one fixed text, but as a set of interrelated corpora that includes the Qur’an; and (3) the Qur’an is a later stage in the ongoing development of the biblical tradition. These are provocative ideas that give a good sense of the direction that the field of Qur’anic studies is headed, and Pregill will prove to be an able guide for anyone interested in embarking on that journey.

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Godless Fictions in the Eighteenth Century: A Literary History of Atheism. By James Bryant Reeves. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. viii + 288 pages. \$70.00.
doi: 10.1017/hor.2021.96

Social media outlets frequently carry forward the most important religious and philosophical lessons in ways that professors try to compete with in

classroom settings, but as anyone who knows about the challenges of college teaching will testify, the abilities of technology and social media platforms will often reach younger generations in more effective ways. The pedagogy of yesterday cannot easily compete with the lessons that are conveyed in popular culture and technology.

The story of the origin and development of modern atheism is often reserved exclusively for the narration of theologians, historians, and philosophers of religion (see, e.g., the memorable works of Michael Buckley, Conor Cunningham, Liam Jerrold Fraser, Gavin Hyman, and Alan Charles Kors), but in recent years several contributions to this exciting field of scholarship have demonstrated that there are other ways to understand and narrate the socio-religious landscape of western Europe and how it became secularized. The rise of unbelief is not a story reserved for academic theology; it can also be narrated with the help of literature and other popular cultural means.

Currently serving as an assistant professor of English at Texas State University, James Bryant Reeves has performed an excellent service for the study of modern atheism in *Godless Fictions in the Eighteenth Century: A Literary History of Atheism*. I enthusiastically read the book with an interest to see how lessons from representative works of British literature (the chapters are dedicated to Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Sarah Fielding, Phebe Gibbes, William Cowper, and Percy Shelley) might coincide with or depart from the major contributions of fundamental theologians and historians of unbelief. Many Catholics and Christians should take a keen interest in Reeves' book, knowing that "Literary representations of atheists reflected and informed a larger cultural concern with unbelief that took root near the turn of the eighteenth century" (2). Literary works often represent the popular level of thinking within a culture. In the case of *Godless Fictions*, Reeves shows how ubiquitous the possibility of atheism had become in eighteenth-century Britain.

Atheism did not formally appear in a sustained way in Europe until the middle of the seventeenth century, but in the next hundred years, unbelief became a focal point of interest among the masses. Considering this dramatic shift, the literature of the time was not written with apologetical intent but was instead used "to interrogate emerging discourses of selfhood, sociability, tolerance, and empire, and to push literary representation into hitherto uncharted territory. A focus on imaginative atheists can, therefore, help us understand the period's fascination with and understanding of real atheism ... in ways unavailable to other studies of unbelief" (5). *Godless Fictions* therefore argues that the prevalence of atheism in British culture was highlighted in literature in negative ways to prevent additional forms of unbelief in the future. Rather than rationally arguing against atheism, the literature "rejects

it out of pure disdain" (7). Atheists not only held to fallacious viewpoints about the demonstrability of the existence of God and the immorality of the human soul, but they were also seen as immoral citizens.

For all of this book's wonderful merits, theologians and religious studies professors should be careful in deciding whether to assign *Godless Fictions* to undergraduate students. When I critically reflect about my own training and scholarship in systematic theology, I can imagine this book being used as supplementary material in a doctoral seminar on the origins and history of modern atheism. Be that as it may, the book will prove invaluable for all serious scholars whose area of academic specialization is dedicated to the development of atheism in the modern West.

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Theology and the Anthropology of Christian Life. By Joel Robbins. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xv + 189 pages. \$35.00.

doi: 10.1017/hor.2021.86

Author Joel Robbins opens *Theology and the Anthropology of Christian Life* reminding the reader that attention to Christianity within the field of anthropology is a fairly recent development in the late twentieth century. Robbins argues for furthering the engagement between theology and anthropology beyond merely a dialogue, where too often each discipline acknowledges the other but then retreats to its own disciplinary corners unchanged. Instead, he proposes an authentic transformative conversation between the two, particularly through the lens of theory. Although there is a history of theology and anthropology borrowing from each other, what the author is arguing for is a more sustained and authentic exchange. The author rightly notes that both disciplines are at a key moment to do this, for they are both addressing shifts in their intellectual landscape that invite this type of conversation.

The author is an anthropologist, not a theologian, and it is clear from his selection of authors that this book will focus on a particular intellectual and practiced expression of Christianity. This limited presentation is one of the shortcomings of the text, albeit one that the author could not avoid given the complexity and diversity within global Christian theology. Similarly, the chapters' thematic emphases: sin and salvation, prosperity gospel, and millenarianism are clearly shaped by the author's selection of very distinctive theological traditions. The book's chapter on passivity, for example, is contextualized in light of Lutheran theology. And although the book covers