

Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint. By Sallie McFague. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013. ix + 225 pages. \$24.00 (paper).

doi: 10.1017/hor.2015.27

Taking her cue from a statement by Worldwatch Institute director Gary Gardner, who opined that “the greatest contribution the world’s religions could make to the sustainability challenge may be to take seriously their own ancient wisdom on materialism” (x), Sallie McFague examines kenosis (self-emptying) as a Christian form of restraint that challenges “the heresy of consumerism” (xi). She argues that kenosis offers the possibility of abundant life both for people and for the planet, as opposed to market capitalism, whose ethos of endless growth has brought abundance only to the few while wreaking devastation on the planet. Although in recent years more people have begun to recognize the defects of unrestrained capitalism, there is little consensus on how or even whether human beings can change course and embrace a new way of living. McFague’s book argues that change—conversion—is indeed possible, and offers the reader an analysis of the process of conversion, examples of those whose lives were marked by radical conversion, and a vision of the kind of conversion called for by the problems facing the world today.

In the opening two chapters, McFague outlines our present situation and explores the ways in which it calls for an examination of conversion. She then turns to the stories of three Western middle-class saints whose lives exemplified the process of profound change (John Woolman, Simone Weil, and Dorothy Day). Their conversions were not only about private sanctification, but also about public engagement and witness (chapter 3). Their lives disclose four moments of conversion, leading from what McFague identifies as the “consumer self” to an other-focused, compassionate “universal self” (chapters 4 and 5). In chapter 6, McFague invites us to reflect on rudimentary forms of kenosis in the evolution of the cosmos, and in most wisdom traditions, especially Christianity. Chapter 7 provides a summary of her kenotic theology and its implications for Christology, theological anthropology, and the Christian doctrine of God. Finally, in chapter 8, she reflects on the ways Western middle-class people can begin the process of deep kenotic change personally, professionally, and publicly.

McFague’s engaging writing style and in-depth analysis of the process of conversion from belief to action in Woolman, Weil, and Day are particularly compelling. However, the book would have been strengthened by a more nuanced presentation of the climate problem. McFague focuses on

overconsumption, which is certainly significant, but it is inaccurate to claim that climate change is “simply the result of too many human beings using too much energy and taking up too much space on the planet” (9). To take just one aspect of that claim: the issue is not how much energy we use, but what kind. Leading researchers maintain that with existing technology, solar and wind power in developable locations alone could power the whole world fifty times over.

On the theological front, it would have been helpful had McFague more precisely articulated the differences between her proposed kenotic theology and other influential theologies in the tradition. Her description of the theological position that she opposes and for which her kenotic theology is a corrective paints with such broad brushstrokes that it leads to misleading judgments regarding the tradition. For instance, in one of the few places where she offers some specificity as to the traditional view that she is critiquing, she maintains that “the view of God that dominated the early church, especially in the West, was heavily influenced by the Greek notion of an unmoved mover,” and that this view contradicted the idea that in Jesus Christ, God became human and lived among us (157). On the contrary, the Chalcedonian settlement, as the central enduring Christological achievement of early Christianity, affirms the transcendence and radical immanence of God in Christ.

This book is suited for library acquisition and undergraduate and graduate courses. It is recommended for its particularly good treatment of the process of conversion to a more self-giving way of life that allows for the flourishing of all beings on this planet, and is typified by consumer restraint and compassion for all of life.

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The Ethics of Interrogation: Professional Responsibility in an Age of Terror. By Paul Lauritzen. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013. x + 227 pages. \$26.95 (paper).

doi: 10.1017/hor.2015.28

This book focuses primarily on two entwined questions: the ethics of interrogation, and the role and meaning of professional responsibility in an era of terrorism. The utility of the book is in its detailed focus on a variety of professionals—psychologists, lawyers, doctors, interrogators, as well as members of the uniformed military—in the context of the various conflicts that arose over US programs of interrogation and torture after the