

*Faith as an Option: Possible Futures for Christianity.* By Hans Joas. Translated from the German by Alex Skinner. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2014. Pp. xiii + 184. \$63; \$22.95.

Joas's timely and interrogative volume is essentially "an attempt to help open up a space for dialogue" (6) in which believers' and nonbelievers' assumptions about both the modern world and one another might give way to deeper understanding and mutual respect. The book's timeliness is a function of each camp's key taken-for-granted certainties recently becoming untenable. Nonbelievers and critics of religion have long maintained that modernization inevitably leads to the demise of religion. But looking beyond (and, in some cases, more deeply into) the Western European context, J. argues that the world is becoming more religious. On the other hand, religiously overconfident claims that faith is indispensable to morality and social cohesion often do not stand up to scrutiny. The actual lives of nonbelievers and the reality of well-functioning secularized societies in Europe and elsewhere tell a different story.

While the time is right for the kind of dialogue J. envisions, conceptualizations that have outlived their usefulness too often stymie it. He interrogates these to great effect. He makes subtle and important points about interreligious dialogue, connections between religion and violence, and the "globalization of Christianity" (120–23). Most central to his project, though, is his rethinking of two sociological shibboleths—secularization and modernization—in terms of contingency. The one does not necessarily entail the other, he contends in defiance of a commonplace presumption. Moreover, rather than being framed in monolithic terms, J. demonstrates that these processes, when they do occur, are contextually variable. And, critically, he divests these processes of a widely presumed inevitability by casting them as unfailingly contingent upon historical trends and events. For example, instead of being inexorable, he describes emergent secularizing tendencies in various nations as being partly contingent upon the manner in which religious institutions have pursued their economic and political interests. The "myth" of a unilinear modernization process is treated similarly. Here he points to the "contingent relationships" (71) among such processes as economization, bureaucratization, and democratization, the outcomes of which are both unpredictable and different from one localized context to the next.

If the watchword for sociocultural change is contingency, the same is true for the self. Ours is an "age of contingency," J. claims, because modernity presents people with: a "massive increase in individual action options" (73); a plethora of new experiences as a result of these expanding options; and a reflexive sensitivity to the "happstance nature of what we go through in our lives" (83). In other words, not only are modern people increasingly attuned to the contingency of historical events, but their recognition of the unscripted nature of their everyday choices makes them at least tacitly aware of the contingency of who they have become as persons.

This is true particularly of their religious lives. That believers are faced with myriad religious and nonreligious options—and thus a felt sense of the contingency of what they have chosen—does not, J. insists, weaken their faith. This is because, generally speaking, these believers have increasingly honed a capacity for "flexible internalization and creative

articulation” (87), whereby they adapt their faith in ways that maintain its resonance and plausibility amidst a religiously pluralistic context. Such people face challenges, of course. And J. does well in discussing the challenges that emerge from both social changes (e.g., the dissolution of tightly bound religious enclaves) and cultural changes (e.g., hegemonic values related to individualism).

My single caveat here, however, is that J. portrays these (and other) challenges as being considerably less challenging than they really are, often concluding his complex discussions with assertions that are too simple. For instance, he discusses the shortcomings of individualism and rationalist approaches to morality with respect to their prospects for undergirding a just social order. Counterpoised with this, though, is his assertion, “The Christian belief in a God who loves human beings unconditionally certainly has the potential to liberate our own capacity to love unconditionally” (129). This may be true, but simply asserting it gives short shrift to the reality that, for many nonbelievers, the cultural frameworks underwritten by individualism and rationalism are often deemed to be credible substitutes for religious convictions and reliable guides in attempting to live ethical and socially responsible lives. In other words, J. sees in religious faith a source of deep experiences of interpersonal connection (as well as of human dignity, spirituality, and transcendence). But, despite his aforementioned wariness about overconfident religious claims, he still tends to downplay the possibility that alternative cultural narratives and tropes can engender similar experiences and sensibilities among the nonreligious. We are learning more about the effectiveness of these alternatives from recent empirical studies of atheists, agnostics, and the ever-increasing religious “nones.” As this research is conducted more broadly, one hopes it will also be done with the depth and nuance that J. displays in this excellent book.

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*Shadows of Doubt: Language and Truth in Post-Reformation Catholic Culture.* By Stefania Tutino. New York: Oxford University, 2014. Pp. xiv + 278. \$74.

This dense but fascinating work argues that post-Reformation Catholicism helped create not only modernity but postmodernity as well. And by postmodernity Tutino means above all doubt about accessibility, knowledge of, or expression of, truths or the Truth. She explores these doubts and epistemological anxieties through case studies of the works of several intellectual figures from the two centuries or so after the Council of Trent. Most of these figures are Jesuits or ex-Jesuits (such as Jesuits Pedro Juan Perpiñán, Famiano Strada, Francisco Suárez, Leonardo Lessius; and ex-Jesuits Agostino Mascardi and Paolo Beni).

T. carefully examines both well-known, well-published authors such as Suárez and Lessius and more obscure authors like Mascardi and Beni, whose work may remain in manuscript form or in little-known published editions. T. shows Mascardi to have