

A. also carefully distinguishes taking diversity seriously from an indifferent pluralism; “diversity,” he writes, “can cover a multitude of sins” (24), and the history of the ecumenical movement demonstrates that glossing over or ignoring real differences is as dangerous to real unity as are mutual condemnation and excommunication. Adapting Bonhoeffer, A. argues that “we should not be satisfied with ‘cheap communion’”. But if it is not cheap it must be costly” (152). And “costly communion” requires real judgments of one’s own positions and those of the other with whom one is in dialogue, whether that other is another church or another member or party in one’s own community. A. turns here to the advantages of the method of “differentiated consensus” in judging the possibilities of differentiated mutual recognition in matters of faith, order, and morals.

A. moves beyond simply restating communion ecclesiology, however, in his explorations of the methodological implications for ecclesiology of the reality that irreducible diversity, sometimes to the point of division, is a constant of ecclesial existence. If ecclesiology is the reflection of the church on its own reality, then the fact that “Christians are chronically prone to fall out with each other” (141) should caution both theologians and the churches in their attempts to outline definitive ecclesiologies. A. calls for “intellectual and moral humility” (148) on the part of the churches as a constitutive part of our theorizing and our praxis. Such humility need not shy away from taking positions, making arguments, and being serious about disagreements, but requires that we pursue those conversations with charity and courage. What makes communion “costly” and not “cheap” is the need to struggle to restore and maintain communion with our fellow Christians even in the face of seemingly intractable differences. While this effort has obvious existential significance for the author, given his location within the Anglican communion, his thought and prose also attempt to revive awareness that all Christians, in every church, ought to be as troubled by our divided churches as some of us are in churches currently threatened by division.

A.’s work is written with style and wit. It has the limitations and the advantages of a volume collected from previous essays. A. returns to the same themes in many of the chapters, and not all topics discussed will be of the same interest to the general reader. However, an advantage of this format is the ability to draw upon most of the chapters as discrete treatments, either for research purposes or for use in the classroom, adult education programs, or practical ecumenical encounter as a starting point for discussion of these issues.

Marymount University, Arlington, Va.

BRIAN P. FLANAGAN

THE EMBRACE OF EROS: BODIES, DESIRES, AND SEXUALITY IN CHRISTIANITY.
Edited by Margaret D. Kamitsuka. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. Pp. xi + 356.
\$35.

This multiauthor volume had its genesis in a 2006 conference sponsored by the Workgroup on Constructive Theology. Its 17 chapters are

methodologically diverse, many notably interdisciplinary. Yet the assumptions, preoccupations, and aspirations that lend it coherence are earnestly theological in a “progressive” and also highly rhetorical mode; its voice is public, political, hortatory. Collectively the authors embody a hope that getting sexuality “right” theologically might heal lives and transform worlds. They also write responsively to and from their own contexts, occasionally even personally. Pitched broadly, the book takes a teaching tone, most chapters including introductory material for the uninitiated, few heavily burdened by scholarly references or extended textual engagement.

The volume is in three parts. “History: Engaging Eros in the Tradition” includes chapters on Scripture, Augustine, Aquinas, and the legacies of Roman Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation. Part 2, “Culture: Bodies, Desires, and Sexual Identities,” ranges eclectically across diverse contexts, from the academy to the church and popular evangelical culture, to AIDS in Africa and the ambivalent attractions of hip-hop for white U.S. males. This is the most richly textured section of the book, working at the intersections of sexual, religious, and racial identities at the point where the rubber of discourse hits the road of embodiment. It is also the least directly theological. Part 3, “Reconstruction: Erotic Theology,” revisits and revises, from the perspective of the erotic, doctrines of creation, incarnation, ecclesiology, eschatology, and Pneumatology. Each part coheres, yet chapters resonate across parts; to take one unexpected example, the second and the last chapters both engage Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*.

One less happy irony is the suppression of certain differences. As Serene Jones notes in her afterword, the attendees of the original conference gravitated toward ethical questions, agreeing on three basic points: (1) “that consent should be the nonnegotiable starting point for any form of faithful sexual intimacy”; (2) “that throughout history, religious understandings of sexuality have been shot full of exclusions, repressions, silences, and eccentricities”; (3) “that sexual orientation and identity have been socially constructed across the centuries in ways both destructive and compelling” (298). A normative model of “faithful sexual intimacy” does indeed seem to haunt many of pages of this book; covenant, commitment, and faithfulness, implicitly or explicitly dyadic, are repeatedly affirmed as defining the proper context for the sexual desires, acts, and pleasures of Christians. Such quasimarital assumptions are disrupted at moments, for example, by James Perkinson’s invocation of the subversively enlivening potential of “hip-hop creativity” (213), Laurel Schneider’s broad invocation of “promiscuous incarnation” (231), and Joy Bostic’s call for a Morrison-inspired “mutual, interanimating, participatory dance of radical relationality” (293). Yet there might have been other (possibly even more profound) disruptions and fewer assertions of what is natural, inevitable, real, or good, had the authors not taken such a monolithically negative view of prior Christian understandings of sexuality, and had there been more attention to productive “eccentricities” (Jones, 298).

In the introduction, Kamitsuka suggests that history provides a view of “the persistent anxiety in Christianity regarding eros” (8). Lodging particular blame with Jesus, Paul, and Augustine, Mark Wallace asserts more starkly that “much of early Christianity is a sustained polemic against bodily instincts, sexual desire, and even the institution of marriage itself” (34, 37). Laurie Jungling references “the extreme regulation and suppression of erotic life throughout much of the Western Christian tradition” (218), while Schneider faults Constantine and Nicea for the imposition of an overly narrow doctrine of incarnation that has sexually repressive implications: “to insist upon a solitary incarnate moment is to betray the very fleshiness of flesh” (232).

As a historian, I might nip at the edges of any of these claims, but then again the truths of history are not so easily sorted. However, I do wonder why theological truths should be any less elusive than historical ones, why theologians should be less humble in their historical assertions than historians. Some of the strangest and most distinctive aspects of Christian eroticism, such as the ascetical and mystical, are ignored or dismissed by the authors, and at least one of its most challengingly complex theorists, Augustine of Hippo, is misread with remarkable consistency. I confess that I also worry when a scholar evokes “heaven,” in Augustine’s name or anyone else’s, as if it, well, simply existed.

Despite such reservations, I suspect and indeed hope that this book will be effective in many classroom contexts and also among interested readers beyond the academy. It conveys a message that needs to be heard.

Drew University, Madison, N.J.

VIRGINIA BURRUS

COMMON GROUND: ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY, AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM. By Paul L. Heck. Washington: Georgetown University, 2009. Pp. x + 240. \$24.95.

Paul Heck has written that rare book suffused with learning, scholarship, and lived experiences that is accessible to the specialist and nonspecialist alike. It is an excellent way to introduce both the study of Islam and Christian-Muslim dialogue. The book consists of six chapters (as well as a short introduction and conclusion) dealing with the Qur’an and prophet-hood, ethics and evil, and democracy and human rights. Throughout the book, H. demonstrates that he is not “arguing for the creation of a common ground but instead suggesting its long-standing existence” (5).

Given current negative attitudes to Islam and Muslims, H.’s book provides the appropriate corrections without ever becoming an apology. He begins chapter 1 with an internal Muslim debate about the contradictions between Muslim and Christian understandings of Jesus. This debate highlights the diversity within the House of Islam, illustrating the different ways of being Muslim. In that chapter he introduces the proper comparisons between the Qur’an and the Bible, but also between the Qur’an and Jesus,