

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,

as ways in which Muslims and Christians have come to experience God. His comparison between Muhammad and Mary is particularly important.

Chapter 3 introduces Islamic ethics and discusses what it means for Muslims to live in the presence of God. H. counters the stereotype that for Muslims Allah is understood as a wrathful God removed from humanity. He writes: “Muslims do not know God as distant or merely transcendent but, through his names, tangibly close—a face at once majestic and beautiful” (85).

H.’s erudition is most illuminating in chapter 4. He begins with the observation that Arabic translations of the New Testament use the term *jihad* to describe Paul’s struggle to make known the word of God (e.g., 2 Cor 10:3; Phil 1:29–30). Most Christians will be surprised to learn this (as would most Muslims), given that the word *jihad* is almost always mistranslated in the media as “holy war.” H. examines how the struggle to make God known has been manifested in both Christianity and Islam, often through peaceful means, but sometimes through violence. The connection between religion and politics in both traditions is explored in the final two chapters that deal with democracy and human rights.

This is a superb book. Extensively researched, the endnotes are kept to a minimum; those who want further information may consult them, but non-specialists will not be put off. Although not a textbook, the book is readable enough to assign as supplementary reading for undergraduates, but rich enough to engage them as a primary text. It is required reading for all of us interested in the future of Muslims and Christians, who together make up over half of the world’s population.

*Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles*

AMIR HUSSAIN

L’ETICA ORTODOSSA: STORIA, FONTI, IDENTITÀ. By Basilio Petrà. Questioni di etica teologica. Assisi, Italy: Cittadella, 2010. Pp. 327. €28.50.

Ethics is often thought of as a Western discipline. Handbooks of Orthodox theology, such as the recent Cambridge Companion (2008), do not as a rule include a chapter on the topic. This important book by Basilio Petrà, one of Italy’s leading moral theologians, thus fills a conspicuous gap. Building on his earlier introductory work, *Tra cielo e terra* (1992), P. discusses Orthodox moral theology comprehensively and in considerable detail, showing how it belongs as a whole to an ethos that differs in certain fundamental respects from the Western approach. His concern is not only to tell us what Orthodox moral theologians have to say on various issues, but also, more importantly, to explore how they arrive at their decisions and what principles guide them.

The book begins with a useful outline of the development of Orthodox thinking on moral issues from the Fathers, for whom morality is simply living according to Christ, right up to the engagement of theologians such as Stanley Harakas, Tristram Engelhardt, and John Breck with current