

whether E.'s own exposition of process theology would not have been better served if he had at least alluded to other options for thinking through the relation between philosophy and theology. As a good Whiteheadian, he might have been more consciously "relational" in his thinking about this controversial issue. The proper antidote for being perplexed, after all, is not simply to accept what others believe but to do some independent thinking and then decide for oneself what to believe.

The chapter entitled "Ethics for a Small Planet" nicely underscores my point here. E. takes up two controversial issues in bioethics (abortion and euthanasia) and several other emotionally charged topics (e.g., full gender equality, animal rights, the necessary parameters of an economic system that is both just and sustainable). He ventures into this minefield with his own views based on the thinking of notable process theologians like Cobb, but at the same time with respect for the right of others to come to different conclusions. His thinking here is admirably governed by the following judicious statement: "Process ethics is theocentric and global as well as personal in orientation. At the heart of process ethics is the recognition that rights are primarily relational and contextual, and not individualistic and absolute, and that ethical thinking must go beyond anthropocentrism to consider the well-being of nonhumans, the survival of species, and the health of the planet as a whole" (114). Every intelligent Christian, regardless of his or her religious orientation, should heed this sensible guideline for rational discussion.

Xavier University, Cincinnati

JOSEPH A. BRACKEN, S.J. (EMERITUS)

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY AND THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS RIVALRY.
By Hugh Nicholson. New York: Oxford, 2011. Pp. xxiv + 320. \$74.

Nicholson offers an insightful overview of the origins and development of comparative theology in its historical and political context, demonstrating that recent comparative theology shares more with its 19th-century namesake than is often acknowledged. N. argues convincingly for the unavoidable political dimension of the disciplines of theology, comparative theology, and comparative religion. He laments that in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion, liberal theologians such as Schleiermacher sought to depoliticize religion by identifying a nonsectarian, conflict-free common essence of religion. N. claims that this endeavor to depoliticize religion has contributed to the present-day marginalization of comparative theology.

N. draws on the thought of Nazi theorist Carl Schmitt to refute this approach as a vain, counterproductive effort to deny the essential element of conflict in identity formation. Given the problematic history of Jewish-Christian relations and the horrors of Nazism, one may question the

wisdom of shaping a comparative theology under the guidance of a leading Nazi thinker. To be sure, N. does seek to “reassure the reader here at the outset that I personally find many aspects of Schmitt’s political thought . . . repugnant” (7); but N. trusts that he can neatly separate these repugnant elements from Schmitt’s critique of liberalism, which he praises highly. He tries to soften the harshness of Schmitt’s theory by changing the opposition between “friend” and “enemy” to a kinder, gentler opposition: “I thus define the political in terms of an adversarial relation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that stops short of declaring the ‘them’ an enemy” (8–9). The result is that N. recognizes religious identity only in terms of an adversarial contrast between “us” and “them.”

This adversarial stipulation shapes what N. recognizes in the history of religious identities. In citing Daniel Boyarin’s important study of “the partition of Judeo-Christianity,” N. focuses solely on the efforts to distinguish between Judaism and Christianity (90–92); the communities studied by Boyarin and his colleagues, who for centuries practiced Judeo-Christianity, do not neatly fit N.’s criterion of religious identity and thus apparently have no importance in themselves; they serve his discussion only as the foil against which the adversarial process can be demonstrated. N. privileges the efforts of the border-makers and neglects communities that have not been so scrupulous concerning boundaries. Native Americans who participate in Catholic life and ritual while continuing to practice traditional rites are not easily assimilated into N.’s adversarial definition of religious identity. Nor do East Asian traditions, which for centuries have embraced multiple religious identities, tidily fit N.’s “us vs. them” model.

Perhaps the most important assumption of the book appears unobtrusively in N.’s contrast between traditional understandings of Christian doctrines and his view of them as “essentially relational, constructed, and contingent” (82). His endnote clarifies that this contrast is “simply a particular instance of a broader tension between an understanding of religious discourses, practices, and institutions as human constructions, on the one hand, and the traditional theological representation of these elements as grounded in eternal, transcendent, and divine reality, on the other” (233 n. 12). There is a major difference between N.’s reductionist approach to doctrines as simply human constructions and those theologies of religion and comparative theologies that continue to view Christian doctrines as human responses to divine initiative. Thus N.’s own use of the term “theology” for his own proposal remains somewhat ambiguous, involving a major shift in meaning from many of his interlocutors; many would see his proposal as belonging more to the sociology of religion than to theology.

Nonetheless, there is much of interest and importance in N.’s discussion. N. develops his historical overview into a thoughtful critique of both modern liberal theology and George Lindbeck, as well as of recent leaders in the field

of comparative theology, including Francis X. Clooney and James Fredericks. N. illustrates his own proposal in a perceptive revisiting of Rudolf Otto's classic comparison of Shankara and Meister Eckhart. In this discussion N. demonstrates his detailed knowledge of both these figures, his awareness of the medieval Hindu and Christian contexts, as well as his skill in Sanskrit and his command of the secondary literature on both figures. Both Shankara and Eckhart pose major interpretative challenges and have been the subject of extensive hermeneutical debates; N.'s interpretation of these figures in terms of a Bakhtinian "double-voiced discourse" is persuasive and insightful.

Georgetown University, Washington

LEO D. LEFEBURE

THE CRISIS OF AUTHORITY IN CATHOLIC MODERNITY. Edited by Michael J. Lacey and Francis Oakley. New York: Oxford, 2011. Pp. x + 381. \$99.

The names of the editors and authors of this book attest to the solid scholarly worth and accessibility of their reflections on an urgent topic. For the most part, the authors published here specialize in disciplines other than history, yet the impact of historical changes dominate their analyses of the crisis of authority that the Catholic Church is experiencing. Since the Enlightenment, Catholicism set its face against "modernity" (Lacey), but that stance became increasingly hollow by mid-20th century. Then Pope John XXIII invited the Second Vatican Council to reconsider that stance. Vatican II accepted the challenge, and much of previous rhetoric and practice underwent undeniable change. Puzzlement followed as well as controversy over what could or should be changed. Some people experienced traumatic shock when some church leaders questioned customary notions about the solidity and scope of hierarchical church authority itself.

The twelve essays grapple seriously with many of the issues that arise from this epochal shift *intra ecclesiam*. The authors shed new light, even while treating disparate subjects, on well-worn topics: religious freedom (Francis Sullivan on tradition); sexual ethics (Lisa Cahill on moral theology and Cathleen Kaveny on the uses of casuistry); and clerical and lay practice (Leslie Tentler on the abandonment of confession, Dean Hoge et al. on what successive surveys could tell us about American Catholic attitudes toward episcopal authority, and Katarina Schuth on seminaries). A noncanonist such as myself finds valuable contributions to ecclesiological thinking in the wide-ranging and insightfully contextualized chapter by canonist John Beal. Throughout the book readers will find many references to stimulating bibliography.

To reconfigure and restore the ability to teach with authority challenges the reader to face the facts that authoritative church teachings in the past