

objective would be not only to secure the proper role of theology but also to rescue the faltering teaching authority of the entire church.

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THE LAST JUDGMENT: CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN A LEGAL CULTURE. By Andrew Skotnicki. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. xiii + 197. \$99.95.

Skotnicki's book draws the reader into a frequently overlooked problem by opposing inconsistent realities. On the one hand, the United States incarcerates a greater percentage of its population than any other Western country. On the other hand, the United States proclaims its deeply religious roots and professes that it is imbued with Christian values. S. insists that Jesus was executed as a "lawbreaker . . . [whose] death was neither accidental nor a theological construct." Therefore "Christians, in particular, must consider these things in seeking to construct a proper approach to law and judgment" (27). S. explores the Western theological canon and its accompanying history to locate where Christianity's roots in covenant relationship and forgiveness are supplanted by a deference to, and even defense of, violent acts of the state.

The book's opening chapters ground the reader in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and the way these testaments use personal morality and cultic practice as roots of a legal system. These chapters are among the strongest in the book and provide a clean and defensible baseline from which the rest of S.'s argument flows. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the reality of God is instilled by law into the very fabric of life. Their word for judgment, *mishpat*, "implies a 'measured and balanced relatedness . . . to the whole of life'" (13). God is revealed as one who gives the law and who is made manifest in adherence to the law (16).

In the person of Christ, the NT underscores the tension that emerges between the one who proclaims a new commandment to "love one another as I have loved you" and his execution at the hands of legal authorities (30). Jesus continually breaks rules to underscore values of forgiveness and acceptance that permeate his message (31). That said, sin and repentance are part of Christ's message; the damage sin inflicts on relationships must be healed through repentance, so that the sinner can experience forgiveness from God, from community, and from self (38–39).

This message of forgiveness originally found a home in the early church, which refused "to see sin, no matter how grave, as a final rupture of the sinner or lawbreaker either from God or from the community of faith." But as the church developed political power, it began to rely on, and then defend "repressive measures of social control by secular power" (43). After outlining how Augustine permitted heretics to be punished by civil

authorities, S. observes that this reliance on civil force undermined the centrality of Christ's law of love. Eventually religious authorities lost focus by treating the goals of order and repression of the lawless as being of prime importance (45).

S. then maps out the uneven and contentious development of law in the Western world and its occasionally rancorous relationship with religious authorities. By underscoring particular historical events as emblematic of what he ultimately sees as Christianity's critical disengagement with matters of law, and especially with criminal punishment, S. advances his argument that we "must remember, finally, that judgment, law, and the desire to inflict pain simply are not the way of Jesus" (172).

There is much to praise in the book's historical approach, which rightly avers that our ethical categories emerge as we reflect on concrete events in our shared past. Because the narrative arc of this work draws from particular incidents in Western Christianity, its sound conclusions carry the weight of the examples on which the author draws. S. indicates that were Christians faithful to their tradition, they would surely subject oppressive government action to withering criticism.

Where the book falls short is in its attempt to do too much. Some places in the text would have benefitted from a closer read of contemporary commentators. For example, S. seems to hint that freedom of conscience really emerged in Suárez, ignoring Aquinas's defense of the primacy of conscience in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (91). The characterization of the Investiture Controversy as effectively ushering in the rise of states and secularism surely tracks Harold Berman's thesis, but in the light of Brian Tierney's research, that seems a stretch. Further, the book ignores social ethics rooted in statements of national bishops' conferences and lay Catholic groups protesting prison conditions. The book is a valuable addition to this area of scholarship, but it leaves room for much more work on this important topic.

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SCANDAL: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PUBLIC LIFE. By Angela Senander. Introduction by James A. Coriden. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012. Pp. xvi + 134. \$14.95.

In this brief but helpful book, Senander uses "scandal" as a touchstone to analyze Catholic engagement in public life. Drawing a sharp contrast between a Vatican II approach and the approach of many lay Catholic groups and bishops today, S. presents a compelling argument for the church to return to a posture of engagement, "mov[ing] beyond the scandal of sin . . . [to] challenge the scandal of poverty and injustice" (103).