

I agree with M.'s stance on the need to take African spiritual and religious heritage seriously in religious dialogue. Anyone who has even a faint idea of the African reality can attest to M.'s claims about the richness of the African tradition and about its vibrancy and relevance to Africans and to the rest of humanity. As the late Kwame Bediako pointed out, African primal religions constitute an asset to African theologians that theologians in the West do not have: it provides a living source of rich and alternative insights about what it means to be human. M.'s work is thus important as a source of insights into the richness of the African spiritual and religious patrimony. What I find unacceptable is the somewhat uncritical approach to aspects of this tradition. Like all other traditions, African spiritual and religious traditions have their flaws that need to be noted and critiqued. M. does very little of that here. Speaking as an African theologian myself, I would give pride of place to the gospel's power to enculturate and transform, not to the African traditions, no matter how lofty their insights.

My critical remarks are in no way intended to diminish the importance of this book from one of Africa's foremost theologians currently writing on the issue of the intersection between Christianity and African religions and spiritualities. With this book M. continues to educate us about Africa, religion in general, and how attention to the African religious and spiritual heritage can help restore life and enhance spiritual health, about which Pope Benedict XVI spoke in his homily at the Second African Synod (2009).

*Paulinus I. Odozor, C.S.Sp.  
University of Notre Dame*

*Gospel of the Family.* By Cardinal Walter Kasper. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014. Pp. 64. \$9.95.

*Gospel of the Family: Going Beyond Cardinal Kasper's Proposal in the Debate on Marriage, Civil Re-Marriage, and Communion in the Church.* By J. J. Perez-Soba and Stephen Kampowski. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2014. Pp. 255. \$17.95.

Cardinal Kasper's proposal for admitting some divorced and remarried Catholics to the sacraments has touched a nerve. He first introduced his ideas in a speech on February 21, 2014, the first day of the extraordinary consistory for the synod on the family. Soon after, the speech was published in a little book, *The Gospel of the Family*. Just months later, Perez-Soba and Kampowski, both of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Rome, published a much longer book by the same title. In a remarkably small window of time, other cardinals and theologians criticized K. in journal articles and edited volumes. At the heart of the debate, which seems unlikely to be resolved in the near future, is the question of mercy.

It may seem that the core question to be resolved is what Scripture and church tradition allows. In fact, K. assumes the official Catholic position on NT divorce texts. Sidestepping significant scholarly debate, he holds that indissolubility is a reality rather than a command or ideal. His opponents agree on the nature of Jesus' teaching.

They disagree with his characterization of early church practice as “pastoral tolerance, clemency, and forbearance after a period of penance” (37). Where K. finds “the Church repeatedly sought a way beyond both rigorism and laxity” (31), his opponents find a “very severe penitential approach” (123). Historical theologians will be needed to provide a more definitive account of traditional practices.

However, it is doubtful that historical scholarship will resolve much. The authors of the rival gospels have fundamentally different starting points. For P.-S. and S.K., the problem is a culture where sexual pleasure is a need and fidelity an impossibility. K. sees instead remarried Catholics who desire full participation in the sacraments enough to be deeply pained by exclusionary rules. The Church must respond as a “field hospital” and “bind many wounds” (14). For P.-S. and S.K., the Church must oppose the culture and hold to the truth that married love is forever, which means that remarriage can only be adultery. Their solution is not readmission to the sacraments but abstinence (38).

What would be a truly merciful response to remarriage? This question is at the heart of the matter. For K., “however far a human being may fall, he or she never falls deeper than God’s mercy can reach” (26). When marriages fail, we must find ways to acknowledge the dignity and pain of the persons involved and readmit them to the Eucharist (32). For P.-S. and S.K., remarriage is “persistent infidelity” (87). To show mercy is to call sinners to “true repentance that alters the sinful situation” (87). Even in cases in which spouses are separated, the possibility of reconciling and returning to their marriage must remain (159).

K.’s version of mercy bears all the marks of a certain kind of Catholic moral theology. He agrees not to question the official teaching and says he just wants to place indissolubility in the context of Jesus’ whole teaching, historical development in the tradition, and the hierarchy of truths (43–44). His reasoning is similar to post-Vatican II arguments for pastoral sensitivity for married couples using contraception or gay and men and women struggling with celibacy. Eventually, many moral theologians find even these compromise solutions to be inadequate. Instead, they argue for the morality of both contraception and same-sex relationships and divorce and remarriage. Conservatives advocate fidelity to what they see as a truly merciful and largely consistent tradition. The divisions that plague moral theology as a whole are evident in the most recent debates over remarriage.

The strength of K.’s proposal lies in his attentiveness to the pain of faithful Catholics living in second marriages and in his sensitivity to how the tradition has developed and found ways to uphold the sanctity of marriage while making room for imperfection. He emphasizes that both the Church and those who marry “stand under the law of gradual development—of growing into the mystery of Christ in a repeatedly new and deeper way” (18). The strength of the rival *Gospel of the Family* is its insistence that the coming of Jesus brings new possibilities and calls for faithfulness even in the face of great difficulty. The authors underscore the beauty of a fidelity that “corresponds to the deepest yearnings of the human heart” and the pain of children who often suffer when their parents part (29, 36–37).

Despite the excitement over K.’s original proposal, it did not dominate the recent synod. The final report indicated continuing disagreement among the prelates. It seems

likely that mercy will come in the form of streamlined annulment procedures rather than through exceptions to current pastoral practice. Though this solution has its merits, it does not solve the fundamental problems raised by these texts. Ongoing conversation is needed on increasing adult capacity for fidelity in imperfect marriages, considering the costs children bear in divorce, and recognizing both the reality of sin and the possibility of redemption in the lives of the divorced and remarried.

*Julie Hanlon Rubio*  
*St. Louis University*

*Beyond the Text: Franciscan Art and the Construction of Religion.* Edited by Xavier Seubert and Oleg Bychkov. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2013. Pp. vii + 252. \$65.

This text represents, perhaps, the most creative of a series sponsored by the Franciscan Institute's May Bonfils Stanton Memorial Fund. The projects benefiting from this endowment gather scholars around a Franciscan theme, meet in Denver to discuss and design the proposed volume, and then work together as a scholarly team. The resulting volumes have been uneven, as these types of projects tend to be, but it is clear that this volume benefitted from a unique and effective collaborative effort.

William Cook's introductory essay, unfortunately not accompanied by any reproductions, examines early images of Saint Francis. His discussion of the importance of art both in the early Franciscan community and in Francis's own life is a scholarly and contemplative treatment, uniting both careful scholarship and lived experience. Marilyn Aronberb Lavin studies Bellini's painting of Francis's stigmata in the Frick Collection. Set on the island of San Francesco del Deserto, five kilometers northeast across the lagoon from Venice, the painting ponders Francis's little-noted excursion to this island, even though the stigmata was historically set on Mount La Verna. Theresa Flanigan's essay on the Church of San Marco in Florence offers an interesting and again little-pondered reflection on ocular prohibitions and the construction of sacred space. Rather than tempt the Dominican friars with human attractions, the architecture of San Marco's was designed to focus the friars' gaze on spiritual mysteries. Although a worthy essay, it is a little odd to find this Dominican study in an otherwise Franciscan volume.

Local studies in Franciscan history are often valuable in that they pinpoint particular trends in regional piety. William Barcham's article on the Man of Sorrows paintings in 15th-century Padua is a case in point. The use of iconography not only as distinguishing treasures in local churches but also as emotion-laden presences appearing in annual street processions is an interesting study in renaissance ecclesial culture. Art historians who wish to introduce students to the Giotto cycle in the upper church of San Francesco in Assisi may wish to consult Beth Mulvaney's essay on the subject. Her quite readable chapter focuses on the theological dynamism between the frescos, offering plenty of material for further development.