

*Morality: Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations.* By Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2014. Pp. xii + 371. \$40.

In this book, Odozor analyzes African Christian theological ethics by simultaneously taking into account both the whole Christian moral tradition and African moral traditions (4). He is therefore in continuity with the preceding generations of African theologians who advocated for a fruitful engagement of both traditions. He, however, takes a middle ground between those who exalt African moral tradition (mainline churches) and those who would simply discard it (Pentecostal and Evangelical churches).

The book is divided into three parts. The first part (chap. 1) introduces African Christian theology's main themes and recent evolutions and reminds us that theology is not merely an academic activity but also encompasses the insights of "local catechists and teachers" that inform the faith of the faithful (25). O. demonstrates the vital influence of Vatican II in promoting the development of African theology, particularly in three areas: inculturation, liturgy, and Bible study.

Part 2 (chapters 2–4) tackles "the question of tradition, the response of African theologians to African tradition, and the Christian responses to the reality of non-Christian religions" (4). Here O. assiduously engages African as well as European and North American theologians. Unlike some African theologians, he does not limit his understanding of tradition to African culture. For him, tradition "includes the church as an 'embodied' and living entity" (71). In particular, while he discusses African traditional religions (ATR), he stresses their sense of an ordered and hierarchical universe, the principle of abundant life, and a "deep sense of the divine presence in human life and history, and as part of reality in general" (114). O. recognizes ATR as "channels of God's grace" and "avenues of salvation" (132), but he rejects any attempt to relativize the meaning of Jesus Christ and Christian revelation.

Part 3 (chapters 5–9) specifically lays down "the foundational bases for engaging in an ethical discourse that is both Christian and African" (5). For O. the bases of African moral theology are theological inculturation, the Christian and biblical concept of God, and an African- and Christian-inspired anthropology. Christian faith, the structuring principle of this inquiry, enriches cultural African perspectives.

In his last chapter, O. discusses how the African Church practices a distinctly African Christian moral theology (271). He focuses on the 2009 second special synod of bishops on Africa and its 2011 postsynodal apostolic exhortation "to show how a fully inculturated moral theology works" (271); this is not surprising since the ecclesial dimension is important for ethical reflection. Moral theology in Africa must be "a collaborative venture, a critical enterprise and a discipline with big ears" (298).

The book is well written, and its argument is straightforward. Stories and narratives ground readers in the African context, helping them understand the issues at stake. O.'s perspective on African Christian moral theology is refreshing; most African theologians overvalue biblical revelation and downplay (Western) theological tradition, but O. takes seriously both revelation and (Western) theological tradition. It comes as no surprise that O. displays a mastery both of one particular African ethnic group and

culture, the Nigerian Igbo, and of the whole Christian theological tradition. Moreover, unlike many African authors who refer to their traditions in an ahistorical way and without reference to the present, O. contends that the current pluralistic African context must be taken into account. Hence he rejects uncritical ways of approaching African traditions.

Surprising, however, is the absence of the liberation theology perspective, as it plays a great role in African moral discourse. (Authors like Engelbert Mveng and Jean-Marc Ela believe that, since the 19th century, liberation is the defining feature of African theology.) One would have expected from O.'s illustration greater attention to nonacademic and lay voices as producers of theology that deserve to be heard. Instead, he privileges a magisterial perspective by focusing on papal and African episcopal teaching.

I recommend this book to readers interested in becoming acquainted with the present status of African Christian theology and ethics; and moral theologians who want to engage the growing contributions of current African Christian theological ethics will find this volume a valuable resource.

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*Beauty, Spirit, Matter: Icons in the Modern World.* By Aidan Hart. Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2014. Pp. vii + 214. \$53.99.

Hart's critical framework of the spiritual role of matter as explored through the theology of the sacred icon takes on a renewed relevance and perhaps even a sense of urgency within a 21st-century cultural context. In a time when critical studies of the material cultures of religion have become increasingly important across disciplines, H. contributes to this turn by addressing the grace-bearing capacity of matter through the lens of liturgical art and "the broader implications of the icon's theology for our lives in the twenty-first century" (3).

H. describes himself as a painter of icons with over 30 years of experience, committed to elucidating the complexities of the theology of liturgical art through lectures and published essays over the past several years. The book's theological focus follows his previous work on praxis in the form of a magisterial technical painting manual (*Techniques of Icon and Wall Painting*, 2011) by underscoring the role of sacred art as striving to show the world transfigured as on Mount Tabor. H.'s overarching purpose is to "awaken our spiritual vision" (47), compatible with the theories of philosopher, theologian, and mystical writer Hugh of St. Victor (ca. 1096–1141), who taught that one is invited to "see" by the "eye within." The inner eye perceives the essence of time, which possesses and sheds its own light, illuminating various spiritual complexities. H. likewise contends that we can strengthen our relationship to God, creation, and human beings through a closer understanding of sacred icons and, more broadly, the spiritual role of the material world today in light of issues of ecology, human nature, beauty, and abstract art.