

There is much to commend this work, especially for its taking on the attempt to situate different theologies of martyrdom in different historical and geographical contexts and to correlate the martyr accounts with theologies of the communities. However, the project needs more clear and careful contextualization and argumentation. First, one needs to be very clear about the themes M. finds in this or that area of the Mediterranean. They are by no means characteristic of only one area. Apocalyptic themes, for example, were not limited to Carthage. Second, the comments on martyrdom that illustrate specific themes need to be set in the context of the distinctive civic life of the communities and the other Christian writings from the area in order to characterize more adequately the attitude of the communities toward their martyrs. If it happened, as M. opines, that in Rome “those not formally educated by tutors may have had some familiarity with philosophical concepts, values, and maxims even if they were not well versed in the metaphysical theories on which they were based,” why might it not have happened in Alexandria or elsewhere? Some parts of the book seem not well integrated into the argument, for example, the excursus on the short, middle, and long recensions of Ignatius’s letters. Also the arguments on the intertextuality of martyr accounts might have been more sophisticated. M. asserts, for example, that when it comes to the martyrdom of Polycarp, “numerous allusions to scriptural narratives of Jesus’s death certainly cast doubt on the texts’ status as an eyewitness report” (63). If this were so, M. would need to discount the photographic record and the eyewitness testimony of opponents of the Mexican martyr Padre Miguel Pro, S.J. (d. 1927), whose execution exhibits many parallels with the passion of Jesus and the martyrdom of Polycarp.

These caveats aside, M.’s book provides an incentive for scholars to look more carefully at the connections between hagiography and theology.

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NO RELIGION WITHOUT IDOLATRY: MENDELSSOHN’S JEWISH ENLIGHTENMENT.  
By Gideon Freudenthal. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2012.  
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The critique of idolatry is an overarching hallmark of Judaism. Aniconism is a function of biblical monotheism’s uncompromising opposition to idolatry, to wit, what in Hebrew is called *avodah zarah*, “alien worship.” Whereas in the Torah idolatry is primarily a problem that has ethical implications, the medieval philosopher Maimonides regarded it as indicative of a profound cognitive flaw. The inner linkage between false practices and thought gained new urgency in the modern period when Jews were challenged to demonstrate that Judaism is a rational religion that

holds no particularistic truths. Moses Mendelssohn, the founder of the Jewish Enlightenment and intellectual heir of Maimonides, bemoaned that his fellow Jews were caught in an anachronistic web of superstition and prejudice and in dire need of a conception of religion that is in accord with natural theology. That Judaism is a symbolic system of ceremonial law that values practice over theory or theological doctrine predisposed it to enlightenment, for religious practice in the form of ritual is cognitively less ambiguous and socially less divisive—so Mendelssohn—than language and metaphysics. It is also less prone to change and thus anchors and ensures communal stability.

Freudenthal challenges the widely held view that Mendelssohn never abandoned the framework of Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysics and interprets his growing skepticism about abstract thought as evidence of his prioritization of a “common sense” approach to epistemology that may be supported by metaphysics as a key to natural religion. What makes Mendelssohn’s philosophy compelling and lends it consistency is an original theory of religion whose offshoot is a philosophy of Judaism, at the heart of which lies the proposition that religion universally relies on symbols. This fact is attributed to the human need for representation of what is abstract; humans “need symbols to refer to invisible entities” (179). Consequently, as F. intriguingly suggests in the title of his book, a religion cleansed of its idolatrous impulse is unfeasible; a thoroughly enlightened, rational religion is impossible. The adoration of the religious symbols, including the linguistic signs, detached from their transcendent referents, is for Mendelssohn the root of idolatry. This proposition is the springboard for F.’s main thesis that invariably “religion consists in the tension between Enlightenment and myth or idolatry” (15), and that “an iconic or indexical manner of signification must also obtain” (19). Accordingly F. avers that religion cannot subsist without a measure of idolatry. It is doubtful, however, that Mendelssohn would concur with the conclusion that idolatry is a normative necessity. Although he acknowledged the human propensity to visualize religious teachings through symbols, he held that it was but a weakness that must be resisted. As “living symbols” of theological truths, religious practice enjoined by the commandments serves to focus the thought of the worshiper on these truths. Hence, symbolic ritual is the most adequate “representation” of belief because it leaves no objectified permanence that could give rise to idolatry. Religious practices are intrinsically resistant to the conflation of the sign and the signified in that they do not seek to become “real symbols” to represent the divine. Rather they are but responses, mediated by reflection and cultural sensibilities to the divine attributes of beauty, goodness, and sublimity, the latter suggesting God’s transcendence. As such, religious ceremonies serve “to revive human religious experience” (227). Emerging from this observation is the

conclusion that Mendelssohn is an abiding resource for contemporary Jewish religious renewal.

Assuming the function of a performative theology, Jewish ritual practice obviates the danger of religious symbols becoming idolatrous surrogates of transcendent truths. F. suggests that for Mendelssohn biblical language is a primordial language of action rather than a vehicle of abstract truth. Judaism exemplifies that idolatry need not be countenanced as an inevitable vice. But what seems to elude F. is the apparent inconsistency between Mendelssohn's endorsement of the principle of religious tolerance and his notion of the "mission of Judaism" to secure "pure monotheism" against idolatry (80, 200). The implied negative judgment concerning the capacity of other religions to resist the temptation of idolatry, however, remains open to discussion.

The interpretation of ritual as a "language of action" (18) anticipates the concerns of contemporary comparative religion that parts ways with the (Protestant) definition of religion as principally confessional. Yet, ironically, F. detects in Mendelssohn's criticism of "real symbols," typical of Catholicism, a "protestant aspect" (183). Whether we understand ritual as a form of communication (Mary Douglas) or as ceremonial law whereby religious symbols function to promote an "adequate human response to the divine" (227), religion indeed lives in the tension between ritual and belief. By arguing that the criterion of adequacy is the methodological presupposition of Mendelssohn's approach to religious representation, F. extends the notion of idolatry beyond its common restriction to false objects of devotion and renders it a heuristic principle to examine not only Judaism but all religions as semiotic systems.

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LA RAGIONE DELLA STORIA: PER UNA FILOSOFIA DELLA STORIA COME SCIENZA.  
By Gianluigi Pasquale. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011. Pp. 302. €18.

"What is the meaning of the events that happen (to me)?" This question is the starting point of Pasquale's inquiry, as he states in his preface. The question arises and plays itself out at a *personal* and *existential* level addressing explicitly one of the most urgent issues in one's life. Subsequently, P. provides a *philosophical* version of the initial question ("Are historical events rational?") and a *theological* version ("Is there, within history, a 'reason' for my salvation?"). Finally, P. presents a complementary epistemological side of this multilayered problem: only if history displays an *intrinsic* meaning can we have "a philosophy of history as a science," as the book's title suggests.

P. addresses this complex set of problems as he works his way through the philosophy of Hegel and the work of Hegel's interpreter Wolfhart