

Flannery O'Connor: Fiction Fired by Faith. By Angela Alaimo O'Donnell. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2015. Pp. xiii + 138. \$12.95.

Until recently, most American Catholic histories and anthologies treated the role of women as an afterthought. New narratives have recovered this role with respect to institutional and social facts. Few, however, give voice to fiction, and most overlook the literary imagination of Flannery O'Connor. O'Donnell addresses this lacuna with a succinct yet stunning account of O'Connor as both a brilliant storyteller and an incomparable intellectual. O'D.'s work nuances the biographies of Paul Elie and Brad Gooch through her own theological commentary, delving deeper into the faith behind O'Connor's fiction. The book leaves one wondering whether the self-described "hill-billy Thomist" merits the title theologian. To be sure, *Wise Blood* is no *Summa* or *Method in Theology*. Nevertheless, O'D.'s study crafts a compelling case for the theological acumen behind O'Connor's pen.

The book traces the development of O'Connor's theological worldview with a sympathetic yet critical eye. For instance, O'D. adeptly handles the ambiguities of O'Connor's relationship with Southern racism. Overall, the study charts two theological trajectories in O'Connor's development. The first focuses on her life as a quasi-monastic. After the storyteller's reluctant return to rural Georgia, O'D. highlights how O'Connor lived an informal "vow of stability," such that as she "was growing less capable of going out into the world, it seemed to be coming to her" (75–76). Her regimented observance of mass and her breviary framed her writing at the same time that her fame grew among her contemporaries. Her prayer became her means of an honest pilgrimage that wrestled with light and darkness in the church she loved. In a similar vein, O'D.'s second trajectory details how O'Connor's theology of the Mystical Body undergirds her works. The storyteller's employment of "freaks" and "folks" in her writing reflects what O'D. terms her "literary credo," a worldview embracing the flaws of humanity to unveil the invisible hand of grace and its transformation of evil into good (73). The book's brevity is appropriate for a figure whose short stories have left a lasting mark on American Catholic consciousness. A helpful index is included.

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The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor. Edited by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxviii + 611. \$150.

This volume, edited by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, two of the foremost scholars in early Christian and patristic studies both within Australia and abroad, is divided into six parts, each of which contains several contributions that address the saint's context, life, and writings from various angles. Bringing together an array of international scholars from various disciplines, the *Handbook* begins with the "Historical Setting" (3–124), which contains a reconstruction of Maximus's

biography and times, a new, up-to-date list of his works, and a sketching out of his immediate historical and theological context. The next part, “Theological and Philosophical Influences” (125–249), tackles the intellectual and ecclesial background to Maximus’s thought from different yet complementary standpoints, including his use of Aristotelianism and Platonism, Origenism, and the Ascetic Tradition, as well as his engagement with Pseudo-Dionysius, and the various influences on Maximus’s approach to the “will.” The third part on Maximus’s “Works and Thought” (251–435) traverses the grand landscape of the saint’s writings, including but not restricted to his exegetical techniques and use of literary genres. It must not be forgotten that Maximus’s lifestyle as a Christian monk had an impact on his interests, so this part, most importantly, emphasizes the christocentric character of the saint’s thought that permeates all of the topics he addressed, including cosmology, anthropology, eschatology, and the experience of holiness. The last part of the volume, on the “Reception” (437–580) of the Maximian legacy, delineates the saint’s influence geographically—in Georgia, Greece, Russia, Ukraine, and the West—as well as in Byzantine and modern Orthodoxy. While including chapters on his importance for ecumenism, as well as his general impact on the theology of the will, this part also explores his legacy outside of the ecclesiastical sphere by including contributions on the possible interstices between Maximus’s thought and modern psychology, and the reception of Maximian thought in modern scholarship. The editors of and contributors to this volume should be congratulated for this monumental achievement, a watershed for Maximian studies and patristic scholarship in general.

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Faith, Hope, and Charity: Benedict XVI on the Theological Virtues. Thomas P. Rausch, SJ. New York: Paulist, 2015. Pp. ix + 146. \$17.95.

Benedict XVI’s encyclicals, *Deus Caritas Est*, *Spe Salvi*, and *Lumen Fidei*, treat of love, hope, and faith respectively. The last was drafted by Benedict and completed by Francis. Rausch presents the content of these three encyclicals on the theological virtues in a thorough and lucid manner. He does not engage with Benedict’s social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), although he alludes to it occasionally (50, 53, 138). His thorough familiarity with Ratzinger’s writings enables him to highlight the presence of perennial Ratzinger themes throughout the encyclicals of Benedict. He notices shifts and developments in Benedict’s thought, for example, his move from grounding faith in eternal life in communion with God (this is Ratzinger’s “dialogical immortality” of the 1970s and 1980s) to grounding it in the requirement of justice for history’s innocent sufferers in *Spe Salvi* (56, 69, 128). R. demonstrates clearly that Ratzinger and Benedict are the same person, even if the encyclicals of