

instance, Xiao's use of *shen*, the experiencing body, offers a way of thinking about the body after death that not only avoids dualism but also preserves the body's individuality and intersubjectivity. Reading the stories of the resurrection of Jesus and Teilhard's portrayal of the Cosmic Christ side by side with Xiao's *Mountain Diagram* as well as his depiction of the tripartite body definitely stimulates new ways of thinking about resurrection and Teilhard's Cosmic Christ. Possibly Teilhard saw this too but was unable to articulate it because of the paucity of language to convey this concept.

For those unfamiliar with the complexities of Chinese thought, B.'s book is challenging, especially chapters 3 and 4, where he presents Daoist concepts of the body in elaborate detail. On the other hand, for anyone interested in delving more deeply into Xiao's thought, B. makes available several resources: a translation of Xiao's commentary on internal alchemical practice, *Inner Meaning of the Scripture of Salvation*, a comprehensive analysis of each element of the *Mountain Diagram*, a glossary of Chinese terms, and a 15-page bibliography. Fifteen illustrations as well as Chinese characters for titles and key expressions create an appropriate atmosphere for the dialogue.

This book definitely contributes to Teilhard scholarship. The connections B. makes between the Daoist body and the Teilhardian body are brilliantly mined giving a depth and richness to Teilhard's Cosmic Christ. This work encourages further activity in comparative theology and illustrates the power of constructive interfaith dialogue to broaden our theological categories.

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*Zen and the Unspeakable God.* By Jason N. Blum. Comparative Interpretations of Mystical Experience. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University, 2015. Pp. x + 190. \$74.95.

In this volume Blum challenges scholars to reevaluate how they think about mystical experience, encouraging them to forsake hermeneutical strategies that privilege methodology over content, and proposing an alternative account that foregrounds the mystical experience of the individual. The title may lead potential readers to believe that this is one more contribution to the thriving field of Buddhist–Christian dialogue, perhaps exploring Zen's notion of *satori* and the limits of Christian discourse about the divine. What B. sets out to accomplish, however, is even more ambitious: he highlights the limitations of the contextualist approach to the study of mysticism and calls us to pay closer attention to the mystic's own claim about mystical experience. The actual thrust of the book's argument might have been illustrated better by a different title, such as *Beyond Contextualism: Towards a New Hermeneutic of Mystical Phenomena*.

B. starts chapter 1 by outlining the contested role that context plays in contemporary debates about mystical experience (13–15) and focuses on the work of Steven Katz, whose writings on mystical phenomena “largely initiated the epistemological

trajectory” of contemporary scholarly work on mysticism (6). Katz adopts a neo-Kantian paradigm where mystical experience is shaped entirely by its context, with the implication that mystical experiential accounts are assumed to be compatible with the basic doctrine of the religious tradition from which they emerge (28). B. claims that this inference is mistaken, as one can easily trace significant similarities between experiential accounts of different traditions. In chapter 2, B. proposes an alternative hermeneutical paradigm that does not start with a theory about the nature of consciousness, but calls for a close reading of mystical literature so as to uncover the mystic’s own assumptions and beliefs. Building on Wayne Proudfoot’s *Religious Experience*, B. suggests a conceptual “bifurcation” between explanation and interpretation (35): the former seeks to determine what causes a mystical experience, whereas the latter sets out to produce an account of the phenomenon that begins with the assumptions of the individual mystic. B.’s notion of “semantic holism—not unlike Bernard Lonergan’s “perspectivism” in *Method in Theology*—views meaning as emerging not just from individual sentences and terms, but from the interrelationship of the latter with non-discursive attitudes and emotions (8). Together with the “principle of charity”—the assumption that a mystical text has a minimal degree of internal consistency, so as to have interpretable meaning—“semantic holism” serves as an interpretive guide to a text describing a mystical experience, without importing any assumptions from extrinsic theoretical frameworks (47).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 apply this method to three mystics from three different religious traditions: Ibn al-’Arabi, Meister Eckhart, and Hui-Neng. As he focuses on a text where each author explores the nature of mystical experience, B. adopts a phenomenological *epoché* that relies on emic assumptions about the nature of mystical experience (8). Chapter 3 begins with a passage from *The Meccan Revelations* in which Ibn al-’Arabi describes the culmination of his own mystical journey (57). Chapter 4 engages a passage from Meister Eckhart’s sermons, where the Dominican mystic asserts that “God’s ground is my ground, and my ground is God’s ground” (93). The focus of chapter 5 is the tradition of Chinese Buddhism and the writings of Hui-Neng, a Zen patriarch and a supporter of “sudden enlightenment.” B. chooses to interpret the master’s account of his own spiritual life (124), while also bringing it into conversation with *The Diamond Sutra*, a text which Hui-Neng claims actually inspired his awakening (129–30). B. claims that “a significant structural similarity obtains in all three traditions.” On one hand, all three mystics concur that the mystical experience in itself surpasses discursive reflection about ultimacy. On the other hand, they all claim a profound “ontological resonance” between ultimacy and themselves: no matter how ultimacy is described using metaphysical concepts and terms, its ontological nature is always connected with, and is effectively identical to, the fundamental nature of the mystic (10).

The theoretical sophistication of B.’s research makes it a major contribution to the academic conversation on the interpretation of mystical phenomena. The volume can help move the discussion beyond the often sterile opposition between essentialism and contextualism, inviting scholars to focus on the perspective of the mystic without postulating an unbridgeable gap between individuals experiencing mystical phenomena

and readers of mystical texts. This work will appeal to anyone interested in the theoretical study of mysticism, while also offering new and original insights on the work of the three mystics explored by the author.

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*Jewish Liturgy: A Guide to Research.* By Ruth Langer. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. Pp. xiii + 265. \$89.

Few scholars have made the field of Jewish liturgy their central area of research, and among them Langer stands out. Among other things, she holds a unique position of regularly teaching Jewish liturgy to Christians, among them seminarians. She is an expert, therefore, at comparing, defining, and explaining Jewish worship and its attendant scholarship not just to Jews but to Christians as well. She points out the paucity of Jewish scholarship in liturgical *theology* relative to liturgical *history*, for example, calling it “one of the most significant cultural and intellectual differences between Judaism and Christianity” (233)—just one example of her expertise.

Above all, however, L. is a scholar of international repute, well known for such publications as *To Worship God Properly: Tensions between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism* (1998), and, more recently, *Cursing the Christians: A History of Birkat Minim* (2012). She is indeed a master of her field, with a reputation for thorough research as well as precise and plain wording in presenting it. We are fortunate therefore to see that she has compiled an annotated bibliography of the most important books and articles published in English in the field of Jewish liturgical research up to 2015—a worthy successor to the earlier work by Joseph Tabory (*Jewish Prayer and the Yearly Cycle. A List of Articles*. Supplement to *Kiryat Sefer* [1992–1993]).

Unlike Tabory’s prototype, L.’s bibliography is geared primarily to a Christian and seminary context, so it carefully introduces Jewish liturgical research to readers unfamiliar with the field of Jewish studies. It therefore begins with introductions to rabbinic Judaism and Jewish liturgy in general, lists trends and earlier bibliographies of Jewish liturgical scholarship, and only then continues with the literature on Judaism’s central liturgical prayers. Within the first nine of fourteen chapters, the bibliography covers the historical development of Jewish liturgy: its emergence in late antiquity and its historical development through the Middle Ages until contemporary times. It also provides literature on the origins, history, and functions of the synagogue, the variety of rites and streams within Judaism, and an overview of Judaism’s main rubrics and prayers for weekday, Shabbat and festival liturgies, as well as lifecycle rituals and liturgical poetry, known as *piyyutim*.

With the second part of the book, chapters 10 to 14, L. expands her focus to include questions of embodiment, music, liturgical vestments, and objects—although she omits synagogue art and architecture; she then turns to elitist and popular spiritual practice, contemporary challenges, and a particularly welcome and comprehensive