

Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World. By Larry W. Hurtado. Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2016. Pp. xiv + 290. \$29.95.

“This book addresses our cultural amnesia” (1). Through a historical study of the first three centuries of early Christianity, Hurtado emphasizes how distinctive, indeed unusual, bizarre, and offensive the early Jesus movement was to the sensibilities of the Roman era as contrasted to how commonplace the Christian religion has become for our contemporary religious understanding. The most striking feature was the accusation of atheism because Christians refused to worship the traditional gods. The Jewish tradition was exceptional because it was considered to have its own ethnic identity with its own god. However, the Jesus movement especially in the Pauline communities was Gentile and they were expected to observe traditional piety, “a readiness to show appropriate reverence for the gods, any and all the gods” (48). Refusing to do so was socially offensive especially among friends, families, and other associations. It could also lead to martyrdom.

The most distinctive feature of Christianity, however, was the inclusion of Jesus in the worship of the God of Israel. God who created the world so loved the world that he gave his only Son that we might have eternal life and might live “an answering ‘love ethic’ characterizing Christian conduct” (65). The Jesus movement quickly became “translocal and transethnic” (67), including women, slaves, and children. It shared the traditional Jewish exclusivity regarding the one God but it reached out to include all, even the most humble, as recipients of God’s love. Given the diversity of movements within early Christianity, the catholic or orthodox tradition also had to establish unity within a legitimate diversity, for example the various letters and the four Gospels. H. develops many other related themes, such as the importance of “textuality” (141) and the “novel social project” of ethical behavior for the ordinary person reflected in the “household codes” (181), especially regarding sexuality.

The book is not a “technical monograph” but is intended for a wide readership (xiii). The abundant notes will help those who want to pursue the issues further. I highly recommend it.

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St. Dominic: The Story of a Preaching Friar. Donald J. Goergen, OP. New York: Paulist, 2016. Pp. xviii + 141. \$15.95.

In 2016, the Dominicans marked 800 years of papally sanctioned existence. Their founder, however, remains less well known than his contemporary, Francis of Assisi, or his junior by about 300 years, Ignatius Loyola. Still, Dominic Guzman and Francis shared a charismatic outlook on Christian life, whereas Loyola the Basque possessed the same fiery passion for souls that inflamed the preaching friar from Old Castile. Dominic discovered his mission in the Church while traveling through the Occitanian

region of France. There at the start of the thirteenth century, an untoward expression of religious syncretism threatened the overall well-being of the area. The Cathars had developed an alternative narrative that distorted both the Christian worldview and its value system. Neither piety nor authority had succeeded in countering the malevolent influences exercised by Catharism. Dominic the priest produced another tool from the Christian armory. He corrected errors by speaking the truth. And he did so persuasively, as the rapid development of his band of preaching brothers illustrates.

Dominic enacted a revolution in clerical life. Earlier, monks and canons stayed home. Dominic's preachers, while maintaining a form of life, moved about. The Order of Preachers, confirmed on December 22, 1216, welcomed clerics who would preach the truth across diocesan limits. The preaching of the Gospel rarely proceeds without opposition. Preachers need support. Dominic, probably with the assistance of a bishop who had been his superior in Spain, established a contemplative convent for women. Inclusiveness marked the Dominican spirit from the start. Once the Order of Preachers enjoyed standing in the church, Dominic spent the last five years of his life tending to its growth and development. He died outside Bologna on August 6, 1221.

The author has provided a readable account of St. Dominic's life. One does not have to be a Dominican to profit from it. For those who wish to discover more about Dominic, the author usefully provides information about the major resources in English. Who would presume to have written the definitive study of Francis of Assisi? Or Ignatius Loyola? Likewise no one account captures everything edifying about Dominic Guzman.

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Ernest turned Arnos: Ernst Hanxleden, Linguist par Excellence. By Abraham Adappur, SJ. Bengaluru, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 2015. Pp. 172. Rs 199.

This short volume is the latest work by Abraham Adappur, SJ, an Indian Jesuit from Kerala who in his long career has published 15 volumes in Malayalam exploring the history and culture of his native region, as well as numerous articles in English on the relationship between religion and culture. Kerala is the historic home of the Thomas Christians, one of the world's most ancient Christian communities, but also one whose history, following the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries, was characterized by painful divisions and schism. While the existent literature often focuses on the difficult relationship between the local Christian communities and the Latin church, A. chooses to focus on a figure who is hardly known in the West: the German Jesuit John Ernest Hanxleden (1680–ca. 1732), who in the early eighteenth century came to Kerala as a missionary, learned Malayalam as well as Sanskrit, and authored a number of treatises on comparative linguistics, as well as a slew of devotional poems that continue to be read and chanted throughout Kerala during the Holy Week