

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.

Michael L. Cook, SJ
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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