

Walking with the Mud Flower Collective: God's Fierce Whimsy and Dialogic Theological Method. By Stina Busman Jost. Emerging Scholars. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. Pp. viii + 265. \$49.

In this volume Jost highlights how interpersonal rapport of women theologians contributes to contemporary methodological discussion. Based on an earlier book edited by Kate Cannon about seven feminist theologians, *God's Fierce Whimsy* (1985), and using the work of these women as models, she compellingly argues that theological method is living theology in dialogue with oneself, others, and God, and that it is not merely an academic exercise triangulating revelation, doctrine, and culture (82). Looking at the work of these women theologians over several years reveals how they negotiated personal differences by underscoring and attending directly to their own individual context, and by realizing that differences build—rather than weaken—authentic, transforming relationships (179). Dialogic theological method thus becomes for this author a prescription for building human society.

Especially helpful is chapter 3 in which J. employs the work of Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin to provide a foundation for analyzing the project in Cannon's work. Acknowledging the significant differences in the theorists' approaches, she nevertheless teases out their common affirmation of interpersonal encounter and "life as fundamentally dialogic" (88). She formulates four characteristics for method as dialogue: (1) a discerned posture of openness leaving one vulnerable; (2) sensitively prioritizing the stories that partners bring to the dialogue; (3) investing in others' well-being to build solidarity through "agapic orientation" and "epistemic humility"; and (4) communicative amenability wherein partners are open to authentic transformation.

Instead of directly engaging other theorists' work in theological method (for example, Stephen Bevans's work), J. concludes by challenging the notion of an "all theology is contextual" learning model that does not actually demand dialogue with people from different cultural perspectives. She writes with refreshing directness: "[T]o do theology with an acontextual orientation perpetuates a privileged body of academic literature, which often lacks concrete effectiveness and fails to be open to critique beyond academia" (183). Thus she offers a prescription for an authentic interpersonal encounter that, if embraced, may lead to change within oneself and in the world—which, arguably, is the point of theology.

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The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology. Edited by Katie G. Cannon and Anthony B. Pinn. New York: Oxford University, 2014. Pp. 516. \$150.

As part of a new initiative by Oxford University Press to offer state-of-the-art surveys in a particular subject area from leading international figures in the discipline, this volume meets that purpose and offers much more. It is also timely in the recent US

context of persistent racial violence, the Black Lives Matter movement (founded by three African American women), and renewed interrogation of enduring white cultural dominance.

The work is well organized around five sections: sources, doctrines, internal debates, ongoing challenges, and prospects for the future. The 34 contributors include some of the most eminent African American scholars in the world. Editors Pinn and Cannon explain how the “academically informed enterprise” of African American theology emerged from churches in the midst of the struggles for Civil Rights in the 1960s, and show that this historical moment itself raises fundamental questions about the complexity and fluidity of African American culture and lives.

Stephen Finley opens a robust conversation about the contested historical context in which the formal discourse of African American theology emerged. He argues that William R. Jones, author of *Is God a White Racist?*, was critical of the triumphalist interpretation of black history and called God’s benevolence into question while Delores Williams and many other women scholars initiated a womanist approach that questioned the masculine assumptions of the first generation of black theology.

This handbook presents a full array of diverse approaches to African American theology. M. Shawn Copeland’s chapter brilliantly navigates the violent transformations of slavery through which African peoples reinterpreted African religions and even white Christianity. Willie James Jennings explores how slavery transforms African bodies into commodities always being viewed and thereby always reproducing a “callous pedagogy.” His chapter, as well as the volume overall, illuminate the multiple and fragmented “public imaginaries” through which African Americans struggle for life and freedom. I highly recommend this volume for every theological and American library.

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Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions. Edited by Claire E. Wolfteich. New York: Paulist, 2014. Pp. xi + 386. \$24.95.

This volume is an important contribution to the burgeoning discipline of practical theology. It is the first edited volume on practical theology that focuses exclusively on the voices of Catholic theologians in the United States in a field historically considered the purview of Protestant theology. Wolfteich brings together eighteen scholars from various fields, including moral, philosophical, and systematic theology. The collection is essentially dialogical: it demonstrates the symbiotic relationship of pastoral practice and theology, and it advocates for a mutual and significant relationship between Catholic practical theology and Catholic theology more generally. W. also emphasizes the need for collaboration among the academy, church, and society.

In the first section, Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bryan Froehle show the historical contexts of Catholic practical theology. This is juxtaposed with the exploration of