

would be worth exploring how in many countries persecution of Christians is by religious people and that even in the West secular philosophies hostile to Christianity are not without religious commitments. Another aspect of Roman culture is the prevalence of courage in the face of violence and suffering. This is reflected in the story of Perpetua and Tertullian's argument that "the martyrs' deaths are as noble as pagan examples" (pp. 121–22).

To appropriate these early martyr stories, one has to consider their diversity. The theme of the burial of martyrs highlighted in the introduction (pp. 11–16) illustrates this diversity and the potential for further reflections. In the *Acts of Peter*, Peter is indifferent to his own burial, showing a distorted view of Christianity (p. 35). By contrast, Polycarp's bones were treasured by his followers (p. 63). At times, persecutors desecrated the martyrs' bodies, like those of the martyrs of Gauls (pp. 85–86). The Peace of Constantine also addressed the question of Christian cemeteries (p. 165). While reverence for the martyrs' bodies could unhealthily be turned into a cult, this respect teaches about the Christian's hope of the resurrection and union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The various views and experiences of early Christian martyrs can thus assist in addressing current issues.

Both works provide a better understanding of early Christian martyrs. Matthews focuses on Stephen, but also deals with John the Baptist and James, the brother of Jesus. She includes a discussion of extracanonical and patristic texts. One could consider other New Testament texts to provide a more comprehensive picture of early persecution; for instance, a discussion of Hebrews, which has been compared with Acts 7, would be worthwhile. Litfin's work documenting Christianity's acceptance in the Empire after severe opposition from the Romans complements Matthews's focus on Christianity's parting from Judaism and her comment (p. 173, n. 22) that "the notion that evangelical witness concerning Jesus leads to death is clearly expressed" in Acts 22:20 encapsulates the witness/martyrdom theme.

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Robert Bartlett. *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pp. xviii + 788.

The saint industry may be on the wane in the Western world, with Christianity under the cosh of secularism, and in the Muslim world images and other monuments being wiped out wherever extremism is in control. The

Baalshamim Temple at Palmyra is the latest victim. Elsewhere in the developing world, however, it is very much alive and active, which is perhaps why, in his pontificate, John Paul II made more saints than his predecessors for several centuries. The martyr theme gets our attention for another reason, because of militant Islam, marking those who die in armed struggle, which is just the opposite of Christian martyrdom and its submission to violence. So although it may seem quirky to consecrate so many pages to this subject, it is certainly relevant.

The author teaches at St. Andrews University in Scotland and is a specialist on the Middle Ages, as demonstrated by his previous publications such as *The Medieval World Complete* and *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages*. This is an impressive book, readable, well documented, and admirably illustrated, with all you would want to know about the subject of saints, martyrs, and the miraculous from the time of the early church onwards. It comes with a glossary, a multilingual bibliography of almost a hundred pages, and an index of fifty. As such it is an excellent source book, a sort of encyclopedia on the subject. And what stories it recounts—everything from the wonderful to the bizarre to the grotesque, showing that history can rival fiction any day. If you hadn't heard about St. Guinefort, the greyhound dog-saint, here is the place to go! (p. 185).

Two major sections are presented by Bartlett. Firstly, he describes the “developments” of the subject until the time of the Reformation; and, second, he deals with “dynamics,” the main themes and practices woven around saints and martyrs. Like Paul Tillich's symbols, saints are either dead or alive, and the real life of dead saints is when they are active, commemorated and expected to do great things, particularly in the realm of healing and other privileges, or of obtaining forgiveness. The book includes a vast range of subjects: canonization, devotion, relics, images, shrines, miracles, saints' days, church dedications, hagiography, and sermons. The research is meticulous. It concludes with some evaluation, a critical step-back from the subject and limited comparisons with other religions, including Judaism and Islam. The tone of the author is moderate, occasionally humorous or tongue in cheek, and, commendably, mockery is not part of his narrative, nor does he stray into the somber regions of psychoanalytical interpretation of saintly activity, a great temptation when anything sexual is involved.

Bartlett's title refers rather imprecisely to Augustine (*The City of God* 22.9), who asks the question: “Why do the martyrs who were slain for this faith which proclaims the resurrection possess such power?” Miracles and other wonders done by saints and martyrs are cloaked in mystery, as Augustine

recognizes, and we cannot comprehend them (p. 3). Whether power comes from their prayers, or from some other operation, is a profound mystery. Precisely at that point arises the problem for the Reformation: Are these manifestations any more than superstition, or worse, as something that defects from the unique mediation of the *solus Christus*?

The development of this problem is described in the first chapter “Origins (100–500),” with the growth of regular ceremonies for the dead, allied with expectations of help. To begin with, all Christians were “saints” (p. 15). The Roman persecutions produced martyrs, who received hallowed status and were commemorated. When martyrdom stopped, saints grew apace and the martyr saints were joined by “confessor saints,” exemplars who had lived in a heroic way, for example, St. Antony of Egypt and St. Martin of Tours (p. 17). Saints were generally masculine, but female saints increased over time until the end of the Middle Ages. Many were clergy, and virginity was a plus for sainthood, but not a necessity. More cynically, we could say that saints were often monks and were promoted by monks, which might not be the whole truth but is not far from it.

Relics play a crucial role in the development of the cult of saints. Particularly from the turning point in the fourth century when Christianity became an official religion, remains of martyrs and artifacts began to be transferred from cemeteries outside towns, where churches were erected (including in Rome St. Peter’s or St. Paul “outside the walls”), to edifices in town. The presence of relics became generalized through “contact relics”—objects associated in some way with saints or martyrs, the most celebrated of these at present being the Turin shroud or the blood of Christ exhibited at Bruges in Belgium. To the celebration of the martyrs was added the expectation of extraordinary help, and healing became their work. Out of this popular piety, encouraged by the church institution, grew hagiography of the lives of the saints, with miracle episodes of various hue. The literature embodied the lives of the saints and made good publicity.

Considering the importance of this foundational chapter for the rest, “the head of an enormous stream” as the author puts it (p. 26), the contours of the development from the origins could have been drawn with greater precision. For instance, we are told that the origins of the cult of the saints lie in the early centuries of Christianity (p. 3), but how early? What is the evidence? Where are the texts? Again, “Christians prayed *for* their (ordinary) dead, but they prayed *to* the martyrs” (p. 3). But from when on? From “at least the second century” some were regarded in a class of their own, we are told. The lines are not clearly drawn between the apostolic witness and what followed, or how soon such practices arose, even though it is

recognized that the fourth century was a “religious revolution” in this domain. In spite of the detail, this is rather imprecise history. It is interesting to note that Philip Schaff’s classic text on the worship of martyrs and saints in the old *History of the Christian Church* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity, III § 84, to which the author makes no reference), is much more precise in drawing the contours of development, but no doubt this is no longer considered “history” in academia.

Following the first “religious revolution” of the fourth century, and leaving aside the Byzantine iconoclastic parenthesis in the East (pp. 475–480), the major opposition against saintly intervention in human affairs, before the Enlightenment, was the counter revolution of the Protestant Reformation (chap. 4). Bartlett’s presentation is brief, seven pages, considering the amount of artillery the Reformers lined up on this subject, and the result, that more or less ridded northern Europe of the practice, and divided the north and the south (p. 90). Theological motives are hardly developed here, as elsewhere. Quoting Calvin’s *Treatise on Relics*, that “the greedy desire to have relics is scarcely ever without superstition, and, what is worse, it is the mother of idolatry,” Bartlett correctly comments “so this kind of worship is superstitious, that is, fatuous and foolish, and it is idolatrous, turning us away from God to inappropriate objects” (p. 89). The genuineness of relics may be open to historical criticism, but the main concern is that saint and relic worship is essentially pagan, a theme that became prominent in later secular criticism (pp. 609–18).

The Reformers, who were in some sense biblical humanists, thought that the corruption of the worship of God could only be harmful for man, his salvation, and humanity. The problem with the medieval syndrome of saint worship was theological, but also anthropological, making sainthood an inverted humanity, with extreme suffering and powers of resistance in the face of horrendous torture achieving transfigured magnificence. At the same time, saints were proximity figures, “being like us” (p. 609). The abuses embraced, for example, by the virgin martyrs (pp. 535–41), make saints superhumans, capable of resisting the unthinkable, at the same time macabre and radiant. The grotesque reliquaries and the shining statues stand side by side. For the Reformers, this freak show had little to do with biblical spirituality, and was part of the merit system of works salvation, “the treasure of the church,” which was their major enemy. The chief matter, says Calvin, concerns Christ as mediator (*Institutes* 3.20.19–20), “how we should call on God in prayer ... and George and Hippolytus and such spectors leave nothing for Christ to do” (*Institutes* 3.20.27). Without this context, any analysis of the Reformers, albeit a historic one, remains incomplete.

The concluding reflections of the book are in a way the most engaging. Bartlett draws comparisons and contrasts between saints and martyrs in Christianity and various religious traditions. “The functional equivalences between polytheistic pagan religion and the cult of the saints were many” (p. 614)—a theme taken up by David Hume, who, prefiguring Nietzsche perhaps, considered Christian saints rather wimpish alongside heroic pagan deities. The Christian cult of the saints has been “adaptable and malleable,” and “it is only the Protestants of Europe and their overseas descendants who have ever really turned their backs on the saints” (p. 637). Bartlett does not reflect on whether this is a good or a bad thing, but simply concludes that saints “have shaped the lives and imaginations of millions, and still do.” True, but the sad reality is that these practices have kept those millions in the thrall of superstition, false religion, and the ignorance of God and, as Karl Barth would have said, in the grip of idolatrous natural religion. Only where the five *solas* of the Reformation have held sway has there been the freedom to meet God as he met us, in the man Christ Jesus.

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Martin I. Klauber, ed. *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*. Reformation Historical-Theological Studies. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014. Pp. viii + 414.*

The contributors to this collection of essays, with a few European exceptions, come largely from a North American Reformed background, and the seminal influence of the re-evaluation of post-Reformation scholasticism by Richard A. Muller is much in evidence in this volume. Edited by Martin I. Klauber of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, it is valuable for anyone interested in Reformed theology in the 17th century, particularly in France and in Europe at large.

Since there is little published and accessible material in English on the subject, this work is a boon for those interested in the development of Reformed theology in France in the century after Calvin. The contributions cover the period of the accession of Henri of Navarre to the French

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