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Review of Paternity as Function: Structuring the Religious Experience by Vassilis Saroglou. Translated from the French by Sarah Allen

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Even more significant are the comparisons that B. and W. make between the authoritarianism of the Shi'i tradition, especially in contemporary Iran, and the centralizing papalism of the Roman Catholic tradition. Significantly, however, the authors admit that facile comparisons between Pope John Paul II and the late Ayatollah Khomeini fall short: "Centralized papal control cannot begin to match the power of the Shi'i *faqih*" (137).

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A POETICS OF JESUS: THE SEARCH FOR CHRIST THROUGH WRITING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. By Jeffrey F. Keuss. Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Theology and Biblical Studies. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002. Pp. viii+ 217. \$69.95.

This study situates George Eliot's early novels within the 19th-century debates on the historicity of the Gospels and the significance of systematic theology. Keuss argues that Eliot dismissed both the attenuated version of Christ in Higher Criticism (Bauer, Strauss, Renan) and the systematic Christology of philosophical theologians (Kant, Hegel). Seeking instead a way to retrieve the emotional and imaginative impact of "the beautiful story" of the Gospels, she created, through the "true fiction" of her novels, scenes, characters, and symbols analogous to the person of Christ and his ethical message. Her purpose was not to affirm a theological interpretation of Jesus Christ but to engage the reader through the imagination to search for ultimate meanings and to lead an ethical life of love. K. calls this novelistic purpose a "poetics" of Jesus, who is "the ultimate nexus of subject and sacred in place and temporality" (197).

In each of Eliot's first three novels, *Scenes from a Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, and *The Mill on the Floss*, K. finds a progressive attempt to "figure" or embody Jesus in the female main characters. As K. sums up his thesis: "I argue that Eliot as an 'unhappy lover' of the theology of her time . . . still found a compelling drive to re-tell through her

poetics something more akin to Gospel as showing forth Jesus and telling this simple story in both content and form of her fiction" (201).

As a sequel to the five biographies of Eliot since 1990, this critical study both intrigues and baffles the literary critic. Unlike Hodgson's *The Theology of George Eliot* (2000), which argues for a sort of pantheistic theology in Eliot, K.'s work both agrees with her biographers that Eliot lost all belief in doctrinal Christianity on the intellectual level, but dissents from other critics by claiming she retained a "poetics" that retrieved Christ as both an ethical ideal and a divine/human being on the imaginative level. Unfortunately, K. tries to include theological history and post-structuralist literary theory of "writing" that overbalances the much too brief analysis of the three novels. The study would have benefited by beginning with the chapter on "Victorian Poetics and (Re) Writing Jesus," in which novels by Froude, Pater, and Ward are examined as failures to provide what Eliot created—a modern novelistic embodiment of characters analogous to Christ.

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PATERNITY AS FUNCTION: STRUCTURING THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. By Vassilis Saroglou. Translated from the French by Sarah Allen. Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001. Pp. 203. \$32.

In this intricately woven text, Saroglou, professor of psychology of religion at the Catholic University of Louvain, offers an integrative approach toward understanding the structure of several psychological dynamics involved in spiritual relationships. In developing a clinical anthropology of monastic spiritual mentorship, he examines the function and structure of the relationship between the monk and his spiritual father and highlights its paternity. As a principal pathway into the analysis, he relies on the wisdom of John Climacus, who composed the earliest texts on the subject: *Letter to the Shepherd* and *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. S. supplies his text with ample psychoanalytic perspec-

tives, among them Lacan's theory of pater-
 nity. Using such perspectives, he argues that, while the monastic community and the Church as a body serve a maternal structuring function for the individual monk, his spiritual mentor serves a paternal function.

Without slighting Freud's psychogenetic approach to the role of father, S. finds greater value in Lacan's three logical orders of father: the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. Through such a schemata, S. explores the psychodynamics within the monk as well as the paternity function and structure provided by the spiritual father for the monk. He goes on to weave into his text the categories offered by other European writers such as Patrice De Neuter, Jean Gagnepain, Daniele Hervieu-Leger and Antoine Vergote, placing special emphasis on the latter's understanding of the orality of mystical desire. Finally, he examines the significance of the symbolic law of filiation within the context of a monk's spiritual development.

In his intertwining of seemingly disparate concepts, S.'s style becomes at times esoteric, and the back-and-forth movement between psychoanalytical theory and spirituality taxes one's attention. Nevertheless, the careful reader may find that S., by employing psychoanalytical theory to interpret Climacus's ancient insights into monastic pater-
 nity, enhances our contemporary understanding of spiritual direction, monastic and otherwise.

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FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION: A WORLD WITH EVERYTHING OFF BALANCE. By George A. Kilcourse, Jr. New York: Paulist, 2001. Pp. viii + 328. \$24.95.

Even most basic bibliographical details concerning this volume reveal why this book is so at odds with much current scholarship on Flannery O'Connor. It is, after all, a book written by a Catholic priest and theologian at a Catholic university, and is published by a major Catholic press. Read alongside other significant works recently published on O'Connor's work that "ex-

plain" her Catholicism as something to be overcome, Kilcourse's book is swimming determinedly upstream.

K. interestingly attempts to locate O'Connor in the "modern Catholic contemplative" tradition of Thomas Merton (6). He promises "new readings of familiar stories," and frequently delivers, but because his range ambitiously covers all of O'Connor's published stories and novels, his treatments are often too scant and unbalanced. On the other hand, this book attempts something novel, in that it situates O'Connor's artistic imagination in a specifically Catholic theological context.

This latter aim constitutes a real achievement of the book, insofar as K. gives us a much-needed and very helpful reading of some of O'Connor's direct theological influences, with close attention in chapter 3 to Romano Guardini and William F. Lynch, S.J. K. thus makes a strong claim for a deliberately theological reading of O'Connor's work, and the book's success lies in its ability to substantiate the claim that her imagination is determined by the peculiarity of her Middle Georgia Catholicism—although the accent here is much more on Catholicism than on Middle Georgia.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, K.'s study is not so much theological literary criticism as pastoral theology. The real interest of the book lies predominately in the homiletical and catechetical wisdom of O'Connor's fiction, a fact that, one suspects, will unfortunately give some O'Connor scholars an excuse not to read it. However, K.'s intended audience is not primarily academic. Thus he claims hopefully at the outset that the "genius of O'Connor's Catholic imagination awaits only the discovery by gifted pastoral ministers and theologians" (13). This volume is as good an introduction and aid to that end as one could hope.

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PANDEMONIUM TREMENDUM: CHAOS AND MYSTERY IN THE LIFE OF GOD. By James E. Huchingson. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001. Pp. x + 230. \$17.