

Reviews



INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK REVIEWS FOR “MARY, MOTHER OF GOD”

In this issue, fortuitously focused on Mary, Mother of God, we at *Word & World* are pleased to feature five book reviews that highlight women in Christianity. The *Word & World* Book Review editor, Dr. Kristofer Coffman, invited me to write a brief introduction to the reviews in this issue. Not only do these books focus on women, including their history, theology, ministries, and so much more; four of the five books are either written by or feature work by Luther Seminary faculty.

Amy Marga, professor of systematic theology, provides a much-needed exploration of the theology of motherhood in her book, *In the Image of Her*. Women have long been relegated to the sidelines of history and theology, but theological reflection on motherhood is even more lacking. Dr. Marga's important book works to change that gaping hole in the literature. Jenny Pietz, assistant professor of New Testament, has crafted a riveting book in which she compares the history of interpretation between Mary Magdalene and La Malinche in *Mary Magdalene, La Malinche, and the Ethics of Interpretation*. For two women hailing from vastly different times and contexts, the comparison is both fascinating and surprisingly similar. Kirsi Stjerna, a professor at one of our sister seminaries, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, has edited a wonderful resource on women during the Reformation, which includes chapters by more than thirty interdisciplinary scholars, including Luther Seminary professor emerita of church history Mary Jane Haemig. Finally, in my own book, *Women and the Christian Story*, which grew out of teaching the history of women in Christianity at Luther (where I serve as assistant professor of church history), I strive to provide readers with an overview of the field and to highlight women's stories and contributions to the Christian faith over the last two millennia.

Through these books, we at Luther are working to provide inclusive scholarship in the areas of Bible, history, and theology. We hope you enjoy reading more about these books in the following reviews.

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THE HABIT OF POETRY: THE LITERARY LIVES OF NUNS IN MID-CENTURY AMERICA, by Nick Ripatrazone, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023. 125 pages. \$28.99.

The Habit of Poetry by Nick Ripatrazone explores the lives of five nuns over the introduction and four chapters. Ripatrazone's goal was to highlight the literary contributions of nuns in mid-century America, a demographic often overlooked and misunderstood by both literary scholars and broader American society. The book straddles a line between serving as a work of mid-century religious and literary history and a biography of five individual sisters.

The overall structure of the book devotes the introduction to Sister Mary Madeleva Wolff, and one chapter each to Jessica Powers, Sister Mary Bernetta Quinn, Madeline DeFrees, and Sister Maura Eichner. Ripatrazone is careful to explore the personal history of each nun, as well as exploring their relationships with their faith, their religious living, and the literary world of the mid-century. While they did not cohesively or intentionally write together as a cohort, they were all contemporaries who corresponded and knew of each other's works and careers.

The book struggles to be cohesive. Attempting to allow each sister's work to stand on its own without relationship to the other sisters detracted from the author's efforts to highlight this as a "literary renaissance," as the dust jacket description promises. Regrettably, he also fails to engage with a systematic exploration of the world these sisters interacted with. He quotes a literary critic who was surprised at the size and accolades of the works coming out of private liberal arts women's schools run by nuns, and "in the spirit of charity" defends his remarks as "incredulity of scope rather than expectations of gender" (66), explaining that the reduced faculty, student populations, and fundings were seen as a limit while refusing to glance at why women's colleges would be underfunded or poorly staffed.