

Smith, James K. A. *The Nicene Option: An Incarnational Phenomenology*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2021. pp. xi, 241. \$39.99 (hardcover). ISBN 978-1-4813-1372-8

About fifty years ago, there was a great resurgence of Christian philosophy within the analytic tradition. Philosophical heavyweights such as Alvin Plantinga and Eleonore Stump brought previously-scoffed-at questions about God and faith back into mainstream academic discussions and paved the way for a robust generation of Christian philosophers after them. In *The Nicene Option: An Incarnational Phenomenology*, James K.A. Smith calls for a similar Christian renaissance within the continental tradition. Central to this renaissance, claims Smith, should be a celebration of our embodied limits in the face of a tradition that often derides finitude. Smith's work is both provocative and thoughtful. He offers bold critiques of continental philosophy's current state, while at the same time dispensing sage advice for Christians just entering the field. Despite containing many loose threads that leave the reader with more questions than answers, *The Nicene Option* is a must-read for any person interested in the future of Christian thought within the realm of continental philosophy.

The Nicene Option is divided into two major parts. In part one, Smith offers some overarching critiques of both the continental tradition and the philosophy of religion as a whole. The first two critiques that Smith levels revolve around the importance of liturgy. In chapter one, Smith argues that philosophy of religion is too wrapped up in a Cartesian rationalism that ignores embodied practices. Philosophers, Smith claims, need to both engage more with liturgy as a topic of reflection and have increased awareness of how their understanding and imagination are shaped by liturgy. In the second chapter, Smith takes his argument one step further by claiming that religion essentially is liturgy. In this way, Smith makes the daring claim that all people (including atheists) are essentially religious insofar as they have practices that form their deepest values and understanding of life. The nature of these first two arguments will be unsurprising to anyone familiar with Smith's previous work, but they are well argued and provide solid pushback against modern assumptions about the nature of religion.

In his third chapter, Smith shifts focus to offer some technical advice for people hoping to enter the field of religious continental philosophy. Broadly speaking, Smith encourages these philosophers to be less insular and to adopt more rigorous standards of critique. Although Smith's advice is only directly helpful to a very specific niche of people, the chapter does provide some inter-

esting insights into the state and everyday practice of academic philosophy that anyone could appreciate.

In the fourth and final chapter of section one, Smith contrasts two competing understandings of finitude within the continental tradition. The first is what Smith calls a “logic of determination” which sees our finite existence as fundamentally impure and violent (70). Rejecting this outlook, Smith calls philosophers to embrace what he calls a “logic of incarnation” that celebrates our finitude and embodied existence as fundamentally good (75). This chapter is clearly the linchpin of the book and provides clearest insight into Smith’s vision for the future of a continental philosophy of religion. Smith does a great job of making this chapter both accessible and academic. While the specific content of the chapter focuses around debates within continental philosophy, the overarching message is easily grasped and could be beneficially applied to many different fields of study.

The second part of *The Nicene Option* consists of essays that apply Smith’s embrace of finitude to specific issues within continental philosophy. Chapters five through ten all examine or critique specific details of Jacques Derrida’s philosophy. Smith expertly exposes the flaws and contradictions within Derrida’s thinking on topics such as messianic religion, reason, hope and epistemology. Smith takes a brief interlude to defend some of Derrida’s earlier works on the nature of Platonism, before using Augustine to critique Derrida’s theory of deconstruction.

In his last two chapters, Smith shifts from critiquing the ideas of Derrida to those of Jean-Luc Marion. In chapter eleven he provides a very thoughtful critique of Marion’s contrast between idols and icons that points the reader to a more incarnational view of iconography. In his final chapter, Smith builds on the possibilities within Marion’s thought for a more positive view of intersubjectivity in contrast with violent imagery found in the work of Levinas. The specificity of the arguments within the second part of the book will inevitably leave the reader more interested in some of the chapters than others. Beyond illustrating Smith’s pro-finitude theme there’s nothing that really connects the chapters together, which can leave the reader feeling lost as to what the overall point is. That said, people with an interest in the topics that Smith examines will certainly find the chapters worth reading for their own sake.

The Nicene Option is by no means an easy read. The use of technical language, especially in the second part of the book, would make it hard for someone unfamiliar with continental philosophy to work through. The disparate nature of the chapters also can make the reading tough, as most of the chap-

ters do not build off the previous ones. One wonders if the book would have been better marketed as a collection of essays rather than a cohesive work of its own, especially considering that almost all of the chapters come from earlier published works. Despite this, the insights that Smith provides in *The Nicene Option* make it well worth the work. His deep understanding of Christian orthodoxy and the continental tradition allow him to illuminate a path forward in philosophy that remains faithful to both. If Smith's work is any indication of things to come, then there is much to look forward to within continental philosophy's study of religion!

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Brock, Brian. *Disability: Living into the Diversity of Christ's Body*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2021. pp. xii, 180. \$21.99. ISBN 978-1-5409-6297-3

Disability is a difficult phenomenon to define. Most people, therefore, operate on a "know it when I see it" basis, but this is often a serious mistake. This modus operandi is not problematic only because many disabilities are not visible at all; it also causes us to begin our thinking of and interacting with disabled people with unchecked, harmful presumptions. The hurtful presuppositions people often carry about disability, in the Church and in secular life, are legion. Christians have their own problems in this regard; for instance, many persons with visible disabilities have uncomfortable stories about strangers praying over them, attempting a "drive-by" faith healing. Often, theology exacerbates problems like this rather than alleviate them. No one intends this; rather, it is a sin of omission and a failure to pay attention. Disabled theologians notice what others generally do not when those things elude received wisdom. They are, by their lives, uniquely primed to see them.

For those who have not been so primed, Brian Brock's *Disability: Living into the Diversity of Christ's Body* provides the next best thing. Strictly speaking, it is not a work of disability theology. But Brock is no stranger to that field: he has written numerous publications about how disability impacts Christian reflection on practical theology, biomedical ethics, and Scriptural interpretation. In this book, he brings together the whole breadth of his knowledge to address pastors in a less academic, more practical register. Brock is concerned with the misconceptions Christians hold about disability, particularly as they often ap-