

McDonald does address are adequately handled and will find several supporters, particularly among moderate evangelicals. But the benefits of the book may not outweigh its shortcomings, especially in comparison with the many other introductory books to the historical Jesus available today.

Todd Brewer
Durham University



Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint, Sallie McFague, Fortress Press, 2013 (ISBN 978-0-8006-9960-4), 225 pp., pb \$24

Personal, spiritual narrative is the tool which Sallie McFague uses to present to the reader her plea for a dramatic shift in our approach to climate change and financial greed. She begins with her own narrative through which an early proposal for a text, written but not sent, to a publisher over forty years ago has developed into a series of lectures exploring the spiritual narratives of a number of 'saints'. Thus out of a continuing life-long theological reflection this interesting and often challenging book emerges.

McFague argues that for change in attitude toward climate change and financial greed to take place religious people and especially Christians should adopt four important stances namely: 'that the definition radical religious/Christian be the new norm rather than its usual lukewarm/liberal character; that there is a refocusing of religious/Christian concern from the personal to personal/public; the redirection of the goal of human life from self fulfillment to self emptying and the re-interpretation of the ethical instruction from the essay to the life story as change will come more easily through power of lived experience than through logical argument' (p. 5). The text then explores how these points can be incorporated into religious/Christian life through living a kenotic existence enabling us to 'live well on planet earth in 21st century' (p. 35).

As McFague begins her exploration through a critique of a 'spirituality of right living' not for ourselves but for the planet as a whole, she presents us with a range of statistics related to global warming, our consumerism and our individualism before challenging us to a new and alternative model of restraint which requires 'a disorientation, a disruption, a shock that jolts one awake from one's slumber induced by the comforts of conventional consumer culture to consider

a different way of being' (p. 34). This she suggests can be achieved through self emptying which will lead to personal fulfillment and public restraint. Such a right belief, however, may not always lead to right action, McFague argues, and so she offers the reader an opportunity to reflect on the lives of three saints as possible role models for change. The spiritual narratives that McFague chooses may at first sight seem unusual. Her three saints live in different times and come from different social and spiritual backgrounds; none have been canonized. Their actions, however, offer perfect examples for McFague's proposals of self-emptying which she argues is the ethic of our time especially in relation to climate change and financial chaos (p. 6).

The narrative of the lived actions of John Woolman, Simone Weil and Dorothy Day is what appeals to McFague as examples of kenosis from which we can all learn. Whether it is in the form of an economics based on universal love (Woolman), a philosophy paying attention to the Other (Weil) or a practitioner of public personalism (Day), the radical way in which each of these saints lives out their life should challenge us out of our complacency toward change. Their lives, characterized by their acceptance of poverty as a means of opening up new ways of paying attention to the lives of others, demonstrate what radical living out of the Gospel message can entail. But what should this mean for most of us? McFague suggests the 'wild space' of voluntary poverty which '. . . for folks like myself . . . will cause us to use all our considerable assets, at personal, professional and public levels, to seriously reduce energy use and bring about a new way of being in the world, a way which moves away from the narrow, individualistic understanding of the self to a wide-open, inclusive view of who we are, a view that has no limits' (p. 77).

McFague continues to help the reader explore the possibilities for such change through chapters on kenosis as a way to live and kenotic theology. While citing examples of the effects of climate change, McFague returns time and time again to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Whether as the classic example of someone whose kenotic practice presents a challenging example of self (p. 86) or as an opportunity to explain 'moral paralysis' (p. 162), she explores the dynamic of the parable as lived out by her chosen saints.

As always McFague presents her reader with a carefully thought through, theologically challenging text which should resonate with all of us. She concludes with an exhortation to the 'well-off people of the middle class', among whom she counts herself, to use a 'kenotic model of reciprocity of paying attention to the other . . . to live well on planet earth for all its inhabitants' (p. 214). But the book need not only address the well off, or the middles classes. The examples that McFague offers can provide the opportunity for change and restraint for everyone. The

book is accessible to all and is a timely reminder that we are all responsible for the planet on which we live.

Paddy Daniel
Canterbury Christ Church University



The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism: 1350–1550, Bernard McGinn, Crossroad, 2012 (ISBN 978-0-8245-9901-0), xiv + 721 pp., hb \$70

Bernard McGinn's monumental series on the history of Western Christian mysticism continues, here reaching its fifth highly impressive volume. The book's rich analysis of a variety of late medieval Dutch, Italian, and English 'vernacular mysticisms' extends the scope of McGinn's previous volume on late medieval German mysticism. It also sets the stage for McGinn's envisaged sixth volume on mysticism in the aftermath of the Reformation, which will include consideration of the sixteenth-century Spanish vernacular mystical literature not considered here.

The book is structured in a pattern which will be familiar by now to readers of McGinn's previous volumes. McGinn studies one individual at a time, beginning with a biography of the figure and, where appropriate, an account of the textual history of the relevant works. At times these figures are already-acknowledged members of the mystical 'canon'; at other times, McGinn expands the canon, by either highlighting the thought of a little-known figure or delineating what he perceives to be the neglected mystical element in a well-known writer. Thereafter, McGinn summarizes what he understands to be the key features of that person's mysticism. Such analysis is written in the mood of historical reconstruction, with McGinn foregrounding each author's own terminology rather than visibly imposing an exterior framework on his or her thought. Brief contrasts with other figures highlight the distinctive elements of each writer. As in the previous volumes, the analysis is always lucid and extensive; a testament to McGinn's encyclopedic understanding of the writers located in the mystical tradition. Extensive notes (167 pages in this volume) and a large bibliography guide the reader to recent secondary literature. Finally, thorough indexes of scriptural references, names, and subjects offer an invaluable apparatus for those who seek to use the volume as a handy reference tool for particular topics.

A brief summary of the contents of the volume will give some idea of its scope. Part I focuses on Dutch mysticism. McGinn begins with