

Book Reviews

Brad East, *Letters to a Future Saint: Foundations of Faith for the Spiritually Hungry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2024. ISBN 9780802883872, 220 pp., pbk. \$24.99; also eBook.

Brad East has penned a deeply attractive volume of mere Christian catechesis in digestible epistolary form, addressed in no uncertain terms to the reader as one called by God to live a holy life. East is a prolific online essayist and a thoughtful theologian. This volume marks his second book in the same year (after *The Church: A Guide to the People of God* in the Lexham Press Christian Essentials series); and his fourth overall, succeeding *The Doctrine of Scripture* (Cascade, 2021) and *The Church's Book* (Eerdmans, 2022). (East also edited a collection of Robert Jenson's essays on Scripture in 2019 with Oxford University Press, entitled *The Triune Story*).

East explains early on to his imagined correspondent that the idea for the collection came from his experience of writing personal letters to each of his godchildren and nephews for the days they were baptized: letters which they could read when they were a little older that explained something of what was happening to them in that rite. "Letters are more intimate, more conversational" than formal "religious books," East writes. "And it occurred to me: what if there were more letters, just like those, talking about this or that aspect of what it means to be a Christian today?" (Letter 3).

There are background influences and echoes in East's work that contribute to its particular character. The first two names he cites in the Acknowledgements of those "who handed on to me the faith I hope to hand on here" are C. S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer—both of whom were, of course, famous letter-writers (and Lewis also in a kind of "imagined" form as in reality). Both the intense seriousness of Bonhoefferian discipleship—East frames his book's account of Christian life between Polycarp at the beginning and the 21 Martyrs of Libya at the end—and the even-handed, winsome tone of Lewis can be observed throughout.

Bonhoeffer remarked in one of his prison letters that "One writes some things in a more uninhibited and lively way in a letter than in a book." East's collection retains that quality peculiar to the form, with its suggestive power and capacity for expressions both lyrical and pithy, pregnant with depths of

meaning the reader may ponder at length. And yet he has also succeeded in constructing something relatively comprehensive that manages to cover all the major aspects of Christian faith and life. And he does all of this in a manner which is quite naturally catholic. East's entire approach draws deeply on the broad river of Christian tradition and is full of (unforced) references to church fathers, medieval mystics, and catholic thinkers from across the globe. East's ecumenical approach aims to be "biblical, creedal, evangelical, and catholic all at once" (Notes and Resources). East wanted his book to present a Christianity which would be as recognizable to Julian of Norwich, Theodore Abū Qurrah, and Origen of Alexandria, as well as to "an ordinary Christian in modern-day Brazil, Nigeria, or Greece" (Notes and Resources). But as he freely admits ("I have neither succeeded nor attempted being all things to all people" [Notes and Resources]), it is the nature of a book such as this that it will not please everyone, especially those firmly entrenched in the corners of their traditions. East lists further catechetical resources, namely, Heidelberg, Luther (Small and Large), Philaret of Moscow (Shorter and Longer), the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the ACNA's *To Be a Christian* all receive commendation. The Westminster Confession and its associated Catechism are notable by their absence. For my part, however, I can only say that for an Anglican reader, East's book succeeds in being the sort of resource that could be very helpfully employed in a setting that seeks to present the Christian faith with clarity in a manner which is "grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures" (Canon A5 of the Church of England).

For this reader, one of the great merits of the book's presentation of the faith is that God is very much the primary agent. This is reflected in the twelve organizing headings for East's 93 letters, of which only two do not have God for the subject of the verb ("Five: Sin Corrupts the Life of Creation"; "Six: Death Opposes the Life of Creation"). The rest are wonderfully theocentric. "God Brings Life Through Death"; "God Becomes a Human Being"; "God Offers Himself for the World"; "God Pours Himself into His People," etc. For East, catechesis must root us in a much bigger story, and ultimately that story is the biggest story: God's. The route East takes to get there, however, is a particularly helpful one. After the introductory letters he begins not with Creation, but with the call of Abraham ("God Calls a Special People"). Thus is made vital the grounded, earthy particularity of the Christian faith, and East therefore presents a clear and helpful explanation of what it means that salvation is "of

the Jews.” This is not an introduction to Christianity which leaves one scrambling to find a way to explain ancient Israel later on down the line.

A word on the book design. It is simple, but the cover art plays delightfully with the image of a fountain pen, the traditional tool of the letter-writer: here, the slit and breather hole of the nib make a cross. Given that East frames his book with an invitation to martyrdom (and seems to have put the finishing touches to it on the Feast Day of Maximilian Kolbe!), this is entirely appropriate. Moreover, the image is tonally consistent with the winsome, personal manner in which East communicates the profoundest matters of faith throughout.

I have already given my copy away to someone in the bracket for whom East’s book is particularly aimed: an intellectually sharp young person in their twenties exploring the faith for the first time. Particularly in an age when many young people think deeply but might struggle (to put it bluntly) to find reading a book an attractive prospect, East has supplied the Church with something that may just help meet the need. Beautifully written and intellectually rich, *Letters to a Future Saint* is a book that expresses the story of Scripture and the ancient wisdom of the Church without losing the youthful energy and excitement that comes from being captured by the adventurous and costly goodness of the Christian way.

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Gerald R. McDermott, *Deep Anglicanism: A Brief Guide*, 2nd Edition. Nashotah, WI: Nashotah House Press, 2024. ISBN 979-8986920788, v+378 pp., pbk \$15.49.

As an Anglican priest and professor who has taught and written on Anglicanism, I eagerly read any new introduction to Anglicanism. We live in an age of acute identity crises, and Anglicans are often especially insecure in understanding who they are. While several introductions to Anglicanism have appeared in the last decade or so, each of these works is in various ways unsatisfactory, most commonly because they reflect too much of a contemporary view of Anglicanism or else lack depth. Gerald McDermott’s *Deep Anglicanism* fills an important niche in works on Anglicanism precisely because it meets the needs of the current day, which are especially the need for a broad yet deep introduction to Anglicanism as well as one that addresses the many questions that people commonly have about Anglicanism.