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Review of The Surprise of Reconciliation in the Catholic Tradition

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***The Surprise of Reconciliation in the Catholic Tradition.* J.J. Carney and Laurie Johnston, eds. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2018. XXV + 330 pages. \$34.95 paperback/\$27.96 e-book. ISBN: 978-08091-5380-0.**

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The Surprise of Reconciliation in the Catholic Tradition is an aptly named volume. The contributors' ability to excavate enlightening aspects of social reconciliation from varied corners of theological tradition was indeed pleasantly surprising. Editors J.J. Carney and Laurie Johnston define the book's understanding of social reconciliation as "the journey to restore social peace and right relations in the context of sociopolitical violence and conflict" (xv). The chapters hone in on illustrative cases from throughout the history of Christian theology and praxis in order to highlight resources to cultivate the necessary elements for that journey, including forgiveness, truth-telling, violence prevention, memory healing, and justice (xvii). William J. O'Neill, SJ, in his chapter on mass incarceration, describes the need for a restorative "squint" that is needed to rectify the overly punitive American carceral system. To borrow that image, the book as a whole tries to apply a "squint" of reconciliation to Catholic Tradition. Catholic theological ethics are straining to surpass the entrenched dichotomy of nonviolence/just war, and that squint, or *ressourcement* of reconciliation, offers a possible avenue. The book situates reconciliation as an alternate paradigm for assessing and addressing violence and the use of force and effectively demonstrates how that paradigm develops from and is sustained by the tradition.

The book's chronological organization gives it a satisfying scope, and the individual chapters' very specific themes and figures allow them to develop substantive depth and nuance. Furthermore, the uniform chapter format is an effective tool to help keep the granular particulars attached to the overall project of the book. Each chapter has a concluding section on contemporary application and includes reflection questions that invite readers to contextualize the chapter in light of the book's *ressourcement*. A good example is Kristin Haas's chapter on fifteenth century Franciscan St. Bernardino of Siena. Siena and many other Italian cities in Bernardino's time were beset by factional violence over political power. Haas focuses on a record of Bernardino's preaching from a six-week period in 1427 when he was called to Siena to help promote peace. She highlights the way he takes several basic categories of theology—creation, sin, conversion, freedom—and gives them an inflection towards peace. For application, Haas notes how Bernardino shows how to connect social conflict to personal conversion in a way that can be a counterweight to overly technical modes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Furthermore, she gives a piece of useful advice for the church. She highlights how important good preaching can be for advancing the cause of peacebuilding, giving a reminder of how matters of social ethics, like reconciliation and peace, should be woven into the full fabric of Catholic life, including liturgy.

The book has three major chronological divisions: the New Testament and patristic era, medieval and early modern times, and contemporary cases which are all drawn from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The first is particularly strong. It encompasses foundational elements and episodes of Christianity: the theology of Paul (Thomas D. Stegman, SJ), the struggle with anti-

materialist sects of Christianity (John J. O’Keefe), the Donatist controversy (Scott D. Moringiello), and monasticism (Zachary B. Smith). Looking at these well-worn areas of tradition through the lens of social reconciliation was a genuinely refreshing way to see them. For instance, presenting Cyprian of Carthage during the Donatist controversy as having a central concern for fostering a social ethic of reconciliation proved a valuable way to go beyond the usual ecclesiological and sacramental register of that material. The medieval and early modern section is perhaps the most “surprising” in the way it lithely delves into much lesser-known sources: the Peace of God movement (Carney), Muslim-Christian relations (Johnston), St. Alphonsus Liguori’s legal analysis of restitution (Julia A. Fleming), and Haas’ chapter on St. Bernardino of Siena. Within a short amount of space, the authors succeed at making this unfamiliar content accessible and at situating it as both an extension of the principles of reconciliation laid out in the first section and an indicator for how they can continue to be applied in evolving social circumstances. The contemporary section reads quite differently than the first two. The earlier chapters all include a conclusion about modern day application, but these chapters are modern day application. They include the use of anointing of the sick during the Troubles in Northern Ireland (John Kiess), the witness of Catholic solidarity networks during the era of rampant political violence in Peru (Stephen M. Judd, MM), mass incarceration (William O’Neill, SJ), Catholic-Lutheran rapprochement (H. Ashley Hall), the case of Maison Shalom in Burundi (Emmanuel M. Katongole), and the practice of forgiveness in Uganda (Daniel Philpott). These chapters lend significant weight to the lessons of the preceding chapters. For example, Philpott’s discussion of the role of forgiveness in helping Ugandans overcome the social wounds of war make Fleming’s conclusions about the limits of restitution to restore social equilibrium much more vivid. And Katongole’s description of Maggie Barankitse and the way her work with Maison Shalom is driven by her understanding of the Christian vocation to love starkly illumines the Pauline lessons on reconciliation noted by Stegman. The conclusion written by Robert Schreiter, CPPS, masterfully draws more of these kinds of connections and cogently makes the final argument for reconciliation being a fundamental part of the church’s life and practice: “What is distinctive about the Christian view of reconciliation is that the different elements that make up reconciliation are brought together in a unified narrative that is also the basic story of Christianity itself” (317). His conclusion also very effectively merges the different tracks of reconciliation that run through the book; that is, the practical politics, the theological and ethical concepts, and the spirituality.

For all that there is to commend the book for, it would not likely hold much appeal to audiences beyond an undergraduate level. However, it does raise enough poignant questions and introduces enough challenging ideas and perspectives that it could be effective for some higher-level undergraduates or lower-level graduates. But this is more statement than criticism as the book seems clearly styled toward such an audience, and it accomplishes its goals effectively. The individual chapters maintain a common sensibility, and the book argues persuasively and illustratively that reconciliation is indeed an indispensable category for Christian theology and practice.