

and the whims of political fashion. Sadly, we have lost in Nelson a unique and insightful guide to what will be a fascinating journey of economic change as the environmental and progressive agenda evolves.

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God, Hierarchy, and Power: Orthodox Theologies of Authority from Byzantium

Ashley M. Purpura

New York: Fordham University Press, 2018 (226 pages)

In *God, Hierarchy, and Power*, Ashley M. Purpura seeks to demonstrate how the Byzantine tradition of hierarchical theology situates all true power as derivative of God and that these “theological ideals of hierarchy and power . . . have great relevance for contemporary Orthodox Christian conversations engaging the exclusive, inclusive, and power-based challenges of hierarchy” (17). Largely a work of historical theology, Purpura’s book dedicates one chapter each to the life and work of four Byzantine theologians: (Pseudo-) Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Niketas Stethatos, and St. Nicolas Cabasilas. Her last chapter puts the common contours of the Byzantine thearchical conception of power and hierarchy in dialogue with modern theorists of power, namely Karl Marx, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. While the constructive content in her final chapter and conclusion is less careful than her historical work that precedes it, I recommend the book for its contribution to historical theology.

Purpura sums up the extent and limitations of power across her four historical sources as follows: “Each author limits the authority of the visible earthly hierarchy and its individual members when its participants are not believed to communicate divinity. Moreover, Dionysius, Maximus, Stethatos, and Cabasilas directly and indirectly identify power as residing in the relational activity of communicating divinity rather than inhering in a particular office or human person based on ecclesiastical position” (132). As already mentioned, all four authors stress the divine nature and origin of true power: “With the theological starting point that all power belongs to God and this power is manifest through condescension in order to elevate others, Dionysius, Maximus, Stethatos, and Cabasilas configure hierarchy as the divinely given and uniquely structured means of mediating and participating in divine power” (138). All of these authors were aware of shortcomings in their own contexts within the visible, institutional church hierarchy as well, tempering their otherwise idealistic conception: “Acknowledging the human participants within the hierarchy and the varying degrees of divinization among them, the ecclesiastical Body of Christ is both already divine and ever in a state of becoming divine” (142). The concretely imperfect hierarchy of the church in the process of “becoming divine” is reflective of the celestial hierarchy and meant to facilitate the divinizing ascent of those who liturgically participate in it, in whatever rank or office they may occupy.

Importantly, in each historical chapter Purpura helpfully explores how each of the authors' biographies shaped their conception of power and should shape our reading of their work. In particular, she notes how all of them adopted subversive roles to greater or lesser degree: accepting the common conjecture that Dionysius was a fifth-century monk, the author would have thus adopted a pseudonym of much higher hierarchical rank and authority than a mere monastic; Maximus took refuge in Rome after finding himself at odds with both ecclesiastical and imperial power in Constantinople during the Monothelite theological controversy; Stethatos carried on the legacy of St. Simeon the New Theologian, whose charismatic claims to authority challenged those hierarchically higher than he; and Cabasilas likely wrote his major works before his ordination, writing as a lay theologian for a broad audience. These biographical details complicate and challenge any strongly authoritarian readings of their understandings of hierarchy. Hierarchy is perfect and indubitable to the extent that it derives from God and is divine, but to the extent that individual human hierarchs fail to fulfill the divine purpose of their offices, they can be challenged, even if the efficacy of their liturgical function is ensured by divine activity regardless of their failings. Conversely, those who may not have held any formal hierarchical rank or authority may be recognized as such through the working of God through them, or at least those of a lower rank may be attributed a higher honorary status. In these ways, each theorist embraced significant realist qualifications to their hierarchical ideals.

Purpura puts this Byzantine construction of power in dialogue with the four modern theorists, but unfortunately more superficially and with less care than she gives to the historical lives and works of the Byzantine authors who receive the bulk of the book's attention. Economic dynamics of power are hardly mentioned, despite Marx being one of her main interlocutors. Purpura does acknowledge a certain resonance with Arendt's distinction between power and violence, while also carefully noting that the Byzantine vision of power remains distinct in its normative and mystical qualities. She pushes back against Foucault's claim that only "masked" power is "tolerable" (155). But then, again, one would expect some engagement with Butler on questions of gender dynamics, but no direct engagement can be found.

This last point is all the more puzzling since gender dynamics are one of Purpura's main research areas. Indeed, she mentions gender at least in passing in each of the historical chapters of the book, but only returns to it in her conclusion, and never dedicates more than a few paragraphs to it. A dedicated chapter section, at least, would have been welcome. This all may seem secondary to the book's goal, and indeed I think it is, but what is secondary is not therefore unimportant. Unfortunately, due to this neglect her passing comments on the topic seem speculative at best.

For example, Purpura claims,

If we read Dionysius as successfully enacting his hierarchic ideal by the practice of pseudonymic writing, then the degree to which Dionysius conceives of hierarchy as determined by divinizing activity challenges every other constructed boundary of hierarchy. Specifically, the arguably complete absence of women from the

Corpus Dionysiacum, and the emphasis on activity as constituting hierarchy as the divine image, suggests that gender is irrelevant to determining authentic hierarchic participation and rank. (53)

This goes too far, both historically and logically. Absence of evidence is not evidence of anything. That Dionysius was a Syrian monk is the common scholarly conjecture today, but imagine two other possibilities: Dionysius may have been a bishop, in which case the pseudonym, though still subversive to some degree, would not be subversive with regard to hierarchical rank. According to tradition, the historical Dionysius was bishop of Athens. On the other hand, what if Dionysius were not only a monastic, but a nun? The discovery that Dionysius was an ancient George Eliot would be directly and profoundly relevant to modern questions of gender dynamics. But at present, we simply do not know the author's true identity. And, to quote Wittgenstein, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

Nevertheless, one can—indeed *must*—say that *God, Hierarchy, and Power* is well worth reading for its contribution to a nuanced, Byzantine, historical theology of hierarchy and power. Once again, I recommend it.

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Interrupting Capitalism: Catholic Social Thought and the Economy

Matthew A. Shadle

New York: Oxford University Press, 2018 (392 pages)

Since the publication of *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, Christians in the West have wrestled with how Christianity navigates the issues and questions of their respective contemporary social locations and what that means for the future. In *Interrupting Capitalism*, Matthew A. Shadle introduces a bird's-eye view of Catholic Social Thought (CST) by highlighting the ways in which a communitarian perspective better deals with the issues facing the world than other ideological attempts of the past.

Shadle believes that the primary focus of CST ought to be singularly concerned with deconstructing capitalism. In the book, Shadle wants to "help Catholics reimagine what their tradition can contribute to the way we understand and inhabit the contemporary capitalist economy. Today, Catholic faith demands the interruption of capitalism" (3). The remaining chapters in the book survey the ways in which CST and its interpreters have succeeded or failed at being anticapitalist and pro-communitarian.

The book operates with three central theses described in chapter 2. First, a "theology of interruption" outlines the framework of the book. Borrowing from Lieven Boeve, Shadle argues that capitalism should not be assumed to be a "closed narrative" net social good and that it needs to be interrupted with new questions and deeper understandings. Second,