

sociological entity” (198). Readers will judge that for themselves, though I find substantial evidence of the book’s theological character.

Intercommunal Ecclesiology is a clear and stimulating work of integrative constructive theology that engages multiple fields within and outside of theology, making it of interest to various schools of thought, such as liberation theology. The volume makes its own important contribution of a soteriologically inflected ecclesiology and to the pressing challenge of navigating difference and boundaries without claiming superiority or “othering” persons or groups. The text would also contribute to the foundations of an ethic that is authentically Christian without being sectarian or triumphalist. It is suitable for library and graduate classroom use.

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Humility: The Secret History of a Lost Virtue. By Christopher M. Bellitto. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023. x + 165 pages. \$24.95. doi:10.1017/hor.2024.55

Humility is a brisk, erudite, and highly readable history of this virtue. The book follows a chronological arc: the first sentence is “Socrates was a humble man,” and the final sentence is “humility’s time has come again.” In between are chapters about texts and thinkers in the ancient world, the Bible, the medieval era, and the Enlightenment and its aftermath.

Christopher Bellitto, a professor of history at Kean University, makes an argument with a historical prong and a normative prong. The historical prong is to trace the rise, fall, and nascent recovery of humility. The ancient world did not have much use for this virtue. While historians, philosophers, and myths, such as those of Narcissus and of Icarus, challenged “the excessive, blinding, egocentric, and overblown sense of self that the Greeks called hubris” (13), neither the Greeks nor the Romans developed “a corresponding positive picture of humility” (19). For example, an inscription to the athlete and statesman Polemaios “extols his good deeds and achievements without a hint of modesty” (19). After quoting the inscription, Bellitto concludes, “In the Greco-Roman world, if you did it, it ain’t braggin’” (20).

Incidentally, this sentence is just one of Bellitto’s many droll, contemporary turns of phrase. Such expressions do not make the book less scholarly. Rather, along with a smattering of references to popular culture (such as the movie

Jurassic Park) and contemporary literature (such as Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste*), Bellitto's writing enhances the reader's sense of humility's pertinence.

Socrates and Aristotle were ancient thinkers who tempered the dominant cultural view by seeing humility as a starting point for learning and self-improvement (20). Influenced by this alternative strand of thought and by biblical accounts, such as the Beatitudes (chapter 2), the medieval era saw the flowering of a robust vision of humility in monastic theology and practice (chapter 3) and in the thought of such theologians as Bernard of Clairvaux, Jean Gerson, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicholas of Cusa (chapter 4). Women theologians, such as Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena, and Islamic thinkers also helped shape this golden age of humility. An important legacy of the medieval era is the practice of learned ignorance, which begins with the awareness that "there is always something more to learn—a belief which should make the most advanced and accomplished expert humble" (93).

The normative prong of Bellitto's argument can be summarized, quoting from the book jacket, as a proposal to "recover and reclaim this lost virtue by developing a new perspective on humility as an alternative to the diseases of hubris, arrogance, and narcissism in society." A reclamation is needed because modern thinkers—typified by Enlightenment philosopher David Hume—downplayed and even scoffed at humility (chapter 5). Yet there were countercurrents in philosophy (Immanuel Kant), history (Edward Gibbon), politics (Benjamin Franklin), literature (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*), and theology (C. S. Lewis). Bellitto concludes chapter 5 with Pope Benedict XVI's decision to retire, "a shocking exercise in humility" from a person "who realized . . . that the office of the papacy is bigger than the person who holds it" (130–31).

The historical and normative arguments take the reader through 133 lively pages. There are terrific nuggets of insight to be gained at every step, even for readers well versed in virtue ethics. Thus, both scholars and graduate students will appreciate this book. In the final eleven pages, Bellitto presents six considerations for the contemporary recovery of this virtue. The lynchpin is that humility can be learned. The benefits of learning greater humility are the moderating, gratitude-promoting, and community-building habits that this virtue promotes. Because of such lessons and the book's approachable style, undergraduate students will also appreciate the book. One additional feature worth mentioning is the book's visual appeal: its size, the thickness of its paper, the quality of its typeface, and its jacket artwork by Thomas Cole ("The Course of Empire: Desolation") add to the pleasure of reading *Humility*.

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