

Petráček's book spins an engaging narrative. At times I found myself reading a novel that I could not put down, even though I was already well informed of the basic story. Petráček does not write as a dispassionate neutral observer, but as a Czech and a Catholic with a horse in this race. Far from detracting from his work, this insider perspective adds a depth of understanding that would be difficult for someone standing at a further distance to obtain.

As the title suggests, this work focuses on “the crisis of modernism” and the “twentieth century.” To be more precise, its arc runs from *Providentissimus Deus* in 1893 to *Dei verbum* in 1965, with special emphasis on the early decades of the twentieth century. It does an exemplary job of illuminating these very formative years in the development of Catholic biblical criticism. While later developments are briefly noted in the last chapter and a half, my only complaint (which is not a criticism) is that I want to read the next volume in the series. There is much that could be said, for example, about the reception of *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) and a certain neo-integralist backlash against progressive Catholic exegesis in more recent years. In his final reflections, Petráček writes: “Though the Catholic Church has finally succeeded . . . in objectively and impartially evaluating modern biblical scholarship and integrating it in a positive manner—the struggle is not definitively over” (301). I could not agree more.

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### ***An Odd Cross to Bear: A Biography of Ruth Bell Graham.* By Anne Blue Wills. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2022.**

Ruth Bell, the child of missionaries and an aspiring missionary herself, accepted Billy Graham's proposal of marriage in June of 1941. Her commitment to the burgeoning evangelist was unwavering, yet she knew the marriage meant a new direction for her life, one where she understood she would “slip into the background . . . be a lost life. Lost in Bill's” (70). Seven decades later, a wry epitaph on her grave testified to her humble spirit and grounding wit. It read: “End of Construction—Thank you for your patience” (228). Anne Blue Wills presents these two episodes deftly—among many others—to represent Ruth Bell Graham's sense of personal sacrifice in service to a larger evangelical project and her strength of character and agency within that same evangelical world. In other words, Ruth's “slip into the background” stands for Wills as a critical foreground for understanding mid-century evangelical marriage and motherhood while also gaining appreciation for a formidable person who occupied a rarefied cultural position as the wife Billy Graham.

Before she met Graham, Ruth was born and lived the majority of her life in China. Wills captures these formative years in detail, demonstrating how the experience engrained an obedience to what Ruth understood to be God's calling for service as a missionary. The call to service remained, but her field of service shifted to hearth and husband. That makes for a challenging biographical subject. She insisted on

privacy, raised five children, often alone during Billy's weeks-long campaigns, and prioritized prayer, poetry, and the small community of Montreat, North Carolina. It is no wonder Wills labored ten years to creatively render a life of a woman who lived the most private of public lives.

Wills utilizes the notion of the "two-person" career to frame the story of Ruth. Clergy wives, in Wills's apt phrase, have "unofficial official" (6) duties essential to the work of their husbands. She notes how "women married to such men made critical (that is nonoptional) contributions to their husbands' success" (5). As the son of a pastor, I know my mother's character, clothing, child-rearing, and cookies mattered to my father's congregations. These issues and others were magnified for Ruth across a national and global church. No pressure.

In Wills's account, this is feminine leadership and influence outside the bounds of feminism. For Ruth, this meant she exercised agency and independence while respecting "traditional" gender-family norms. And she felt no less liberated, making that known in her public criticism of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s. Her contrasting vision of liberation, one emulated by millions of women then and now, deepens our history of religion and gender. Wills tells it in the spirit of fellow historian Marie Griffith, who writes "surely there is adequate space within a feminist agenda for careful, empathetic reconsideration of what might actually be at stake for those women who, for religious reasons and perhaps other reasons, as well, persistently repudiate what they take to be established feminism" (7).

These themes coalesce in Wills's unique chapter on Ruth's literal homemaking during the design and construction of Little Piney Cove in Montreat, North Carolina. Ruth, not Billy, purchased the property, envisioned an atypical log cabin home constructed from salvaged materials she procured, and operated as a near-foreman on the building site. Wills places this story in the context of the suburban and conformist surge of 1950s America where Ruth's choices were decidedly non-conformist. The project, writes Wills, "ensured her privacy, expressed her individuality, and allowed for her domestic focus" (110).

Ruth's poetry blended these same considerations. From her childhood to her first published volume of poetry in 1977, Ruth regularly composed verse on faith, family, hardship, and public life. Will's careful readings of these works—especially in chapters "Poems and Prodigals" and "Poetry and Politics"—provide access to an observing and reflective personality who eschewed attention. Wills relies heavily on the poetry because two thousand pages of material are unavailable to researchers. Without access to those two thousand pages, Wills's biography is understandably less "complete" than it might be. When and if those papers are released, Wills's study will be an essential guide to study them. That said, future researchers will correct Wills on one key fact: Billy Graham's appearance in Madison Square Garden was in 1957 during his breakout New York City campaign, not in 1955 as the book reports (102).

But this biography was never about Billy. Wills presents Ruth on her own terms: a woman who led an extraordinary ordinary life. Ruth departed from convention while standing squarely within it. She oversaw construction of a nineteenth-century style house in an era of suburbanization. She was married to the most famous Baptist in the world and yet remained a Presbyterian throughout her life. She sacrificed her missionary dreams for her husband's evangelism. She stayed at home, raised the children, and took care of the practical details of family life. And whatever she said or did could become national, even international news. Few have lived a life

quite like that. Many have lived lives like some of it. Wills provides careful, insightful analysis of all of it.

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***In the Shadow of Ebenezer: A Black Catholic Parish in the Age of Civil Rights and Vatican II.* By Leah Mickens. New York: New York University Press, 2022. 205 pp. \$89.00 cloth, \$30.00 paper.**

*In the Shadow of Ebenezer: A Black Catholic Parish in the Age of Civil Rights and Vatican II* by Leah Mickens is a significant contribution to the fields of African American religious studies and to U.S. Catholic studies. Here Mickens documents, contextualizes, and interprets the interplay of faith, worship, and work for social justice in the lives of Black Catholics at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in the Atlanta Auburn Avenue neighborhood from its founding in 1912 through today. Using a mix of historical and sociological tools, Mickens brings to life the parishioners; the students who attended its parochial school; the priests, originally Society of African Mission priests and later diocesan and other religious order priests who ministered there; the religious sisters who taught at the school, first the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and later the Immaculate Heart Sisters; the Protestant family members, friends, and neighbors of Our Lady of Lourdes parishioners; and whites who gave financial support to the parish.

Central to Mickens's thesis is that among the things that made Our Lady of Lourdes such a distinctive community of black Catholics is the place where they lived out their faith—Atlanta and Auburn Avenue. When the parish was established, Atlanta had a quite small Catholic population that made black Catholic Atlantans a minority within a minority. Atlanta Catholics faced a certain degree of anti-Catholicism and exclusion. For most white Catholics, who desired to be accepted by their fellow white Atlantans, making their black coreligionists at home in the church was not a priority, and engaging in Jim Crow practices in Catholic spaces was a moral and social compromise they made. Therefore, white and black Catholics up through the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s essentially lived in their own Catholic worlds in Atlanta. While not all black Catholic Atlantans lived in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood, those that did attended Our Lady of Lourdes, which shared the neighborhood with a host of other houses of faith, several of which had cultural and political heft, such as Ebenezer Baptist Church, Wheat Street Baptist Church, and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Mickens explains that the power of that place gave black Catholics at Our Lady of Lourdes access to social, political, cultural, and spiritual gifts that they made the most of in the pre-Vatican II period. In the post-Vatican II period, these gifts helped them to survive an almost thirty-year decline in active membership and to harness the power of liturgical inculturation to create a black and Catholic worshipping community in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood that began to reattract blacks to the parish, as well as people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, to make it the vital Catholic parish it is today in the Archdiocese of Atlanta.