



chapter to each, and in each chapter the sequence is the same: from early (mid-1990s) to mature (mid-2010s), with a process of transition in between (mid-2000s). The process is granular but, for just that reason, demonstrates Senner's thesis. Aside from minor disagreements on the margins, I can't imagine many admirers of Webster's work finding much to dispute here.

The book lacks either a constructive or a critical component, however, and at times Senner is a bit too defensive on Webster's behalf, which results in occasional special pleading and question-begging. Senner therefore does not settle any questions for the future reception of Webster but rather sets the conditions for it. In doing so, his work raises two important questions.

First, *whither Barthian theology?* Senner rightly makes much of the shift from Barth to Aquinas in Webster's thought, a shift with wider resonance in the field over the last decade or two. Barthian scholasticism, like neo-Hegelian social trinitarianism, appears to be on the wane. Should readers of Webster follow this trend? If so, what to do with so much of Webster's early writing, saturated in Barth's ideas and language as it is? If *he* became dissatisfied with it, ought we be too?

Second, *whither Protestant theology?* It is true that, in addition to patristic and medieval theologians, the late Webster also turned to Lutheran scholastics and the Reformed orthodox. Nevertheless the sharp lines that mark Webster's earlier writing as decidedly *not* Roman or Eastern become undeniably blurry in his final publications. Colleagues like Bruce McCormack were not wrong to register anxiety at this point. Was Webster's theology moving toward a Catholic destination? For those who would learn from him, what would it mean to continue walking in the same direction?

The final impression of Senner's book is just how much Webster's thinking changed over the years. Given the confidence of Webster's rhetoric in all his writing, this may come to some as a shock. But Webster's evolution manifests a strength, not a weakness. His life, so 'God-intoxicated' (as Katherine Sonderegger has put it), was one long sustained act of faith seeking understanding. As he never failed to insist, such understanding is never complete in this life. The upshot, for such a profound and creative thinker, is ironic but fitting: an overarching movement from originality to *unoriginality*. Nor is such a remark an insult. In theology, as Webster well knew, there is no higher compliment.

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Brent Waters, *Common Callings and Ordinary Virtues: Christian Ethics for Everyday Life*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), pp. xv + 268. \$27.99

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'It is in the mundane, mind-numbing, boring, and tedious chores of taking care of ourselves and others that we catch glimpses of what God created us to be' (p. 11). From this

premise, Brent Waters' *Common Callings and Ordinary Virtues* departs. True to his subtitle, 'Christian Ethics for Everyday Life', Waters shifts our attention from the extraordinary contexts that so often draw ethicists' attention to the unexceptional routines that occupy most of our time. Although Waters worries that this focus may not make for particularly exciting reading, he finds in it a vista on the ordinary virtues that may yet dispose us to flourishing amid the malaise of late-modern society.

While each of the book's chapters might be read as a standalone reflection on one or another facet of daily life, they fit within the train of a larger argument. Waters' work begins in the doctrines of creation, incarnation and resurrection. In the doctrine of creation, Waters underscores human beings' existential debt to a gratuitous act of love. God creates for love and for no other reason, and this truth is reaffirmed in God's decisions to become human in the incarnation and to rehabilitate humankind in the resurrection. This doctrinal paradigm frames our common calling as human beings. We are called to order our lives according to that love which is our beginning and our end. As embodied, finite creatures, we pursue this calling over time and in particular places. Thus, most of the time, it is diffused into the diverse, unglamorous activities of daily life. Nevertheless, Waters avers, if we approach these tasks with an eye to the creation's eschatological trajectory, they become a school for the virtues. Chapters about various sorts of neighbours (friends, spouses, strangers) and various sorts of activities (housework, personal hygiene, eating), then, do not amount to so many digressions, but a thoughtful engagement with the times and places, peoples and relationships, that facilitate our growth in Christian character.

The challenge, as Waters sees it, is that inhabitants of late-modern culture find themselves awash in a world preoccupied with excitements and pleasure that promise the extraordinary but amount to little more than trivial diversions. It is remarkably difficult, at this stage in history, to appreciate 'the good of being boring' (p. 233). To overcome this challenge, Waters enlists the help of theologians and novelists to draw out the theological profundity and rich textures of everyday practices.

Though *Common Callings* is a work of theology, Waters' analysis is at its best when he allows the novelists to take centre stage and present everyday life in rich, narrative detail. In these cases, the novels do more than provide illustrations of theological or ethical points that might be attained by other means. Instead, they make the particularity and arbitrary contingencies of everyday life a vital setting for drawing theological insights that would be unavailable otherwise.

The book's penultimate chapter on eating may provide Waters' best and most consistent foray in this approach. Led by Iris Murdoch and Idwal Jones (and supplemented by Clement of Alexandria), Waters demonstrates how choosing recipes, fumbling with ingredients, sharing meals, savouring food and doing dishes all point to goods beyond eating. From the mis-example set by Charles Arroy in Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea*, Waters guides the reader to appreciate the fundamentally social nature of eating. Under the tutelage of Jones' Gallois, Waters draws out the interplay of memory and anticipation evoked by the fragrances and flavours of a meal. The combined effect is an account of eating that shows it to be an act of love shot through with eschatological longing; a compelling demonstration of Waters' central thesis.

Ironically, this very same descriptive acuity may be what leaves readers wanting more from the book. Waters' literary conversation partners hail from primarily Anglo-American and European contexts. The particularity of these authors may raise questions about the commonality of the vocations they describe. One might wonder whether a different experience of the everyday, say, one provided by Toni Morrison

or James Baldwin, would furnish a different theological vision. Moreover, the epistemic significance that Waters ascribes to the everyday gives such questions distinctive exigency.

All the same, this limitation should not discourage prospective readers. Waters does not pretend that his account is comprehensive. Therefore, the places where he falls silent might be read as invitations for others to speak. *Common Callings* is a valuable contribution for precisely this reason. Moral philosophers and theologians have seldom given such consistent attention to the miscellanea of everyday life. Thus, Waters' book provides a thought-provoking call to conversation. The familiar subject matter and accessible prose commend it not only to scholars but to graduate and undergraduate students alike. The book might be particularly at home in a course on pastoral ethics, but it might just as well provide the topic of conversation for a dinner party – its suitability for the latter may be its defining success.

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Angelo Di Berardino, *Ancient Christianity: The Development of its Institutions and Practices*

(New Haven, CT: ICCS Press, 2021), pp. xvi + 701. \$89.95

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Angelo Di Berardino is professor emeritus of the Augustinian Patristic Institute in Rome. He will be known to many readers of this review as the General Editor of the many editions in Italian and English of *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* and *The Historical Atlas of Ancient Christianity*. According to the foreword, 'This book is a summation of his lectures over the past thirty-five years ... You will hear the lecturer's voice on any number of occasions' (p. ix). Indeed, the give-and-take of a lecture hall permeates De Berardino's book, as the professor clarifies and expands on the subject matter in response to students' questions and concerns. In numerous places, the book exceeds dry academic rhetoric to offer what one may call 'pastoral wisdom'.

In his brief introduction, Di Berardino states that the goal of the book is 'to offer a panorama of their [Christian institutions and practices] birth and development in both their variety and complexity' (p. xvi). Notably, he rejects the tendency of some church historians to 'cite a few texts and generalize them, offering a homogeneous but false vision' of the churches' practices and institutions. Throughout its entire history, he states, Christianity has 'always been multi-faceted' (p. xii). In chapter 1, 'Problems, Methodology and Sources', he illustrates the difficulty of this approach, remarking: 'Because of the significant diversity in the first three centuries, many speak of "Christianities." But then we must ask: If only some people or groups have different opinions, is it really another Christianity? How great must the differences be to constitute another Christianity?' (p. 3). Over fourteen chapters that explore the development of various Christian institutions and practices from roughly the New Testament period