

religious secular identities the Serbian Orthodox clergy and laymen reformulated the notion of Serbiandom and nation by exactly deploying modern concepts of their secular interlocutors. Hence, religiosity and secularism are not necessarily antagonistic even when the competing narratives point in this direction. They constantly inform each other in a dynamic relationship where both actors mutually shape their respective visions.

In one of his famous books, Bruno Latour claimed that we, the allegedly modern people have never been modern. Reading Falina's book the reader can go the other way and understand that even those who have claimed to be the most anti-modern are instead very modern and have participated in building modernity regardless of their original intentions. In the four chapters and the epilogue of the book, the author analyses the metamorphosis of how from supporters of the Yugoslav idea, the Serbian Orthodox Church gradually shifted its position and turned its back to Yugoslavism. Rather than putting the blame on one of the historical actors, Falina brings to the reader the world seen from the eyes of the Orthodox clergy and state actors. In her analysis that is very close to Geertz's "thick description," she argues how the promoters of integral Yugoslavism and the leading personalities of the Orthodox Church were caught in different symbolic webs that incapacitated them from building a meaningful dialogue, thus undermining the Yugoslav project. The position of the Yugoslav secularizers and modernizers is typical of the political elites of the twentieth-century Balkans, who consciously considered their countries as *tabula rasa* and conceptualized top-down social engineering under the banner of de-Ottomanization. This hostility toward the past, which became especially sharp in borderlands between different religions and empires, as was the case with Yugoslavia, and for that matter Albania too, triggered significant counter-reactions. Falina's book explains how in the end, the nationalism promoted by the Orthodox Church gradually became fervently anti-Yugoslav and qualitatively different from that of the nineteenth century, including its conservative and anti-Western orientation. Notwithstanding the communist interregnum, the ideological sources of the interwar era survived and re-emerged in the 1980s, when the Yugoslav state started cracking under the pressure of the competing nationalisms that eroded the whole architecture of power and the supranational identities that it promoted. *Religion and Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia: Serbian Nationalism and East Orthodox Christianity* sets an example of a solid academic work that overcomes partisanship while preserving the necessary empathy for its subjects.

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***Strength for the Fight: The Life and Faith of Jackie Robinson.* By Gary Scott Smith. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022. xiv + 298 pp. \$24.99 cloth.**

In *Strength for the Fight*, Gary Scott Smith delivers a unique and comprehensive spiritual autobiography of the baseball pioneer Jackie Robinson. The book builds upon a

theme in the existing literature that stresses the ways in which Christian faith sustained Robinson as an athlete and activist. But Smith adds depth and texture to this storyline by situating Robinson's life and faith within the broader happenings of American society. To achieve this, Smith skillfully integrates a wealth of primary sources, thoughtfully connecting them with relevant and up-to-date scholarly work. Notably, he provides an extensive bibliographic essay summarizing the source material documented in over 50 pages of endnotes.

The book is structured chronologically, beginning with Robinson's birth in 1919 and concluding with his passing in 1972. Early chapters trace Robinson's primary religious influences, starting with his mother, Mallie, who instilled in him the belief that God created all people as equals, while also encouraged prayer, a strong work ethic, and the value of a good education. This message was further reinforced when Robinson's family relocated from Georgia to California and began attending Scott Methodist Church in Pasadena, where a young Jackie Robinson met Rev. Karl Downs. According to Smith, Downs played a significant role in emphasizing to Robinson the importance of faith in God and self as a foundation for pursuing justice in society. The pastor also convinced Robinson that sports could be an effective means for overcoming racism.

These Christian voices guided Robinson's path through high school, college, and a period in the United States Army, during which he faced several frustrating encounters with racial discrimination. After his discharge, Robinson quickly excelled in baseball's Negro leagues as a member of the Kansas City Monarchs. Simultaneously, Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, was looking for someone to break Major League Baseball's color line. As he settled on Robinson to advance this end, Rickey would also become a notable religious influence on the baseball player. Both shared a common language in Methodism, forming the basis for their shared commitment to Christian nonviolence, inspired by Rickey's reading of Giovanni Papini's *Life of Christ*. Rickey believed that the integration of baseball demanded an individual with the strength and vision to refrain from responding to violence with further violence, instead relying on the righteousness of their cause. Robinson accepted this challenge and signed a contract with the Dodgers on October 23, 1945. Smith shows that this was a pivotal moment in civil rights history, occurring only two years after military desegregation, a decade before the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and nineteen years before the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

As Robinson played his minor and major league ball in Montreal and Brooklyn, respectively, Smith explains how both places were relatively hospitable locations for the baseball player. The diverse and mostly socially progressive audiences in these cities effectively wanted the integration of baseball and agreed that Robinson was the right person for the moment. But the larger baseball world did not always share these values, especially during Robinson's first year in the major leagues. "Throughout the 1947 season," Smith explains, "Robinson dealt with numerous death threats and the constant danger of flashing spikes and beanballs by playing with ferocity and running the bases with great skill" (93).

Insults and indignities continued to follow Robinson throughout his exemplary career, testing his powers of perseverance at every turn. But Robinson's success and character went a long way toward changing attitudes both on and off the field. As Smith states, "Across the country, as people discussed Robinson and the Dodgers, they were forced to confront their own bigotry and the nation's institutional racism.

That realization was arguably as important as *Brown* in advancing equality for African Americans” (131).

After his baseball career, Robinson continued his civil rights activism, advocating for antidiscrimination legislation and fighting racial discrimination in business and sports. Smith acknowledges that Robinson’s political stance was not easy to categorize. Robinson read in Scripture an emphasis on personal responsibility, leading to a distrust of welfare programs and a preference for Republican politics. Smith additionally demonstrates that Robinson’s endorsement of Richard Nixon made him somewhat of a pariah among younger civil rights activists. Nonetheless, Robinson’s contributions to sports and society remain invaluable. “We have a long way to go to eliminate discrimination,” Smith avers, “but inspired by his Christian faith, Jackie Robinson moved our society forward, and his life continues to inspire progress toward racial equity” (218–219).

This book is an essential resource for historians and scholars interested in the intersection of religion and sports in the United States. The extensive documentation alone makes it an exceptional book, but at its core, Smith’s examination of the various facets of Robinson’s private and public faith life opens into a compelling history of American sports, politics, and religion in the mid-twentieth century.

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***City of Dignity: Christianity, Liberalism, and the Making of Global Los Angeles.* By Sean T. Dempsey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023. 224 pp. \$45.00 cloth.**

*City of Dignity* offers a textured history of liberal Christianity in Los Angeles. The book makes its aim and arguments clear: mainline Protestants, Catholics, and progressive Black congregations banded together under a shared “vision of social justice rooted in the defense of human dignity and a preferential option for the poor and marginalized, the sick and the refugee, the hungry, and the homeless, as well as a global perspective that frequently framed local issues in terms of a global human rights agenda” (2). Dempsey persuasively demonstrates that Christian leaders (mostly clergy) from the 1940s to the 1990s mediated between the city’s most disenfranchised and its political and economic powerhouses. Dempsey carefully threads the needle in suggesting that his book is not a complete counternarrative to the host of systemic injustices that have plagued the city, but the main players in his book offered a different, dignified way forward. Stories of their successes and limitations in the arenas of civil rights, human dignity, and labor animate this book. Dempsey’s book is sweeping, covering many progressive religious organizations and movements.

The book begins with Jesuit priest George Dunne, after his return from years of missionary work in China. Dunne spearheaded and lead efforts in the 1940s to end segregation and uplift the dignity of labor. Chapter 2 demonstrates Dempsey’s strengths in urban history and religious currents of the 1960s, as the chapter weaves together a