

consequences" (48). One striking example comes from Germany in the year 1704. Agnes Catherina Schickin, a thirty-year-old servant, deliberately killed a seven-year-old boy. She confessed to the deed even before anyone was aware that the child was missing, arguing that the "innocent" boy is surely in heaven. She expressed hope that her execution, which was to follow, would be after she had an "opportunity to confess and be absolved, sparing herself eternal damnation" (47).

Ultimately, Lee is critical of any ethical or pastoral approach that ignores God's deep compassion toward human frailty (15). Those who struggle with suicidal thoughts remain "God's beloved," bearing "a searingly acute form of the pain of inhabiting a creation that groans while awaiting its full liberation from the power of death" (70). The Christian community must always witness to the power of the resurrection and to the communion of saints, to which all Christians, not excluding those who have died by suicide, belong.

In conclusion, while Lee's significant contribution to this often-neglected topic would have benefited from a more sustained engagement with Scripture and church history, her effort to reach a broad audience is arguably better served by the brevity of her theological discourse and scriptural exegesis. Particularly compelling is her vulnerability as a "survivor of parental suicide" (65). The book's final paragraph, at once personal and prophetic, could only have been written by one who continues to trust in God's love and the power of the resurrection after losing both parents to suicide: "I can't guarantee that no one I love, or you love, will ever again die by suicide. But I can do what I can to witness to God's love and to the reality that this love connects us all. And I can encourage my fellow Christians to do the same" (97).

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Conflict and Catholic Social Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Approach.
By Taylor J. Ott. Routledge, 2025. 212 pages. \$170 hardcover.

Modern Catholic social teaching (CST) has addressed several conflicts over the decades: workers' rights, the nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and struggles for independence in the Global South, among others. Nevertheless, as Taylor J. Ott argues in *Conflict and Catholic Social Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, CST, and Catholic social ethics more broadly, has treated conflict as an aberration and social harmony as the default state of society. Instead, Ott proposes that conflict—which ranges from disagreement to social protest to armed

conflict—is a pervasive part of social life that exists along a spectrum of severity and which can be just or unjust. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Ott suggests that the fields of theology, conflict theory, and intersectional feminist thought can all inform the Catholic understanding of conflict.

Building on the earlier work of Charles Curran, in the first chapter, Ott traces how the themes of conflict and social harmony are treated in the official documents of CST. Although these documents regularly discuss conflicts over important social issues, beginning with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, they have typically treated conflict as a social evil that can be avoided through building mutual understanding. Indeed, CST itself is often presented as a means of establishing social harmony and avoiding conflict. Ott helpfully updates this history by including the social teaching of Pope Francis, who demonstrated a more complex attitude toward conflict. For example, in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) he acknowledges that conflict is inevitable and can spur positive social transformation, and in *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) he teaches that sometimes conflict can be part of the path toward authentic reconciliation. Even so, in *Laudato Si'* (2015), with its focus on ecological harmony, conflict is treated as a rupture from an original state of unity.

In the second chapter, Ott proposes that the field of conflict theory, and particularly the work of scholars Randall Collins and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, offer a more nuanced view of conflict. Conflict is a pervasive aspect of social life spanning from the interpersonal level to the global. It is multifaceted, takes diverse forms, and cannot be treated as a univocal problem; rather, concrete ethical analysis is needed to assess whether a particular conflict is healthy or unjust. Conflict is also often linked to social stratification and differences in power, and it can be latent rather than manifest. Then in the third chapter, Ott explores how intersectional feminism can add to this understanding of conflict. Drawing particularly on the work and life experiences of Pauli Murray and Audre Lorde, Ott shows how a premature insistence on unity can be false and ultimately unjust; there is room for healthy conflict and disagreement among those working toward liberation, but if conflict becomes too great, it can lead to a rupture in relationships.

Ott's more constructive arguments are presented in chapters 4 and 5. In the former, Ott engages social ethicists David Hollenbach, Bryan Massingale, Kristin Heyer, and Michael Jaycox, who have argued in favor of "conflictual solidarity," recognizing that conflict is not necessarily evil, but may in fact be necessary to bring about justice for the marginalized. Recognizing this as a positive development, Ott nevertheless argues this does not go far enough, since it assumes conflicts are "occasional and discrete events, rather than [a] pervasive

social reality” (112). Ott instead appeals to the work of Protestant theologians Ellen Ott Marshall and John Paul Lederach, who have developed theological accounts of conflict as a pervasive reality. Lederach, in particular, argues that conflict is rooted in creation, through human diversity and free will, and not in sin, even if, in our postlapsarian world, conflict is marked by sin. In the fifth chapter, Ott develops a “conflict hermeneutic,” a set of questions for analyzing conflict which can be incorporated into theological social ethics. In the final two chapters, Ott applies this conflict hermeneutic to two different case studies: that over the unionization of adjunct instructors at Catholic universities, and the dispute over the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. Both case studies illustrate the nuance of the model of conflict developed in prior chapters.

There are areas where the volume could have been further developed. For one, it could have acknowledged the contribution of Latin American liberation theologians in developing a theological account of conflict, particularly in their analysis of how conflict is inherent to the global economic system. Second, and more importantly, the constructive theological arguments in chapters 4 and 5 could be further developed, providing a more ample theological anthropology.

That being said, Ott’s work should now be a touch point for all Christian social ethicists addressing social conflict. It ably challenges faulty assumptions about conflict and broadens our horizons of understanding. The book will be of value to scholars and students of Christian social ethics, but also peace studies, conflict studies, and religious social movements.

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Reproductive Justice and the Catholic Church: Advancing Pragmatic Solidarity with Pregnant Women. By Emily Reimer-Barry. Sheed and Ward, 2024. ix + 287. \$29.95 paperback.

In *Reproductive Justice and the Catholic Church*, Emily Reimer-Barry pursues a vital yet thankless task: carefully assessing, in deeply theological terms, the costs associated with polarized thinking about abortion in the United States. Refusing to be pigeonholed into “the pro-life/pro-choice binary” (29), the project militates against the tendency to interpret abortion through preconceived partisan priorities. Those willing to engage the book on its own terms will be richly rewarded with a text that is meticulously researched and faithful to both “the complexity and ambiguity of human reproduction” (7) and the subtleties of Catholic moral thinking.