

Book Reviews

Understanding Friendship: On the Moral, Political, and Spiritual Meaning of Love. By Gary Chartier. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2022. xii + 246 pages. \$39.00.

“There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship,” as Thomas Aquinas wrote, and it seems likely that Gary Chartier would agree. Drawing on a range of disciplines from philosophy and theology to economics and political theory, Chartier explores in scholarly depth the nature of friendship and its implications for both the flourishing individual life and the common good.

The book comprises six chapters with an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 sketches a broad picture of friendship and its characteristics. Chapter 2 offers a theological approach to friendship, addressing the implications of interactions for friendship as well as the relational nature of the self and its impact on friendship, and finally friendship as a gift from God. Chapter 3 concerns the moral obligations we have to our friends, obligations which are constitutive to friendship, not primarily a hamper on personal autonomy.

Christian love and its relationship to friendship form the heart of Chapter 4, particularly an examination of the claim that we should reject as friends those who do not possess the right moral virtues—friends of virtue, in the Aristotelian sense. Friendship and its traditional emphasis as the ground of the body politic encounters modern liberalism in Chapter 5. Chartier maintains that friendship could potentially enhance political action, not limit it. Chapter 6 advances a spirituality of friendship, maintaining that religious disagreements are not a necessary hindrance to friendship: “Understanding and accepting the perspectives of loved ones who disagree with us and the reasons and motivations that lie behind those perspectives while learning to love them despite disagreement can be spiritually liberating and transformative” (213).

Chartier’s book is an original and erudite engagement with this most important question to a flourishing moral life. While he has clearly read widely in the literature on friendship, he is making original contributions to the genre for other scholars. He provides a careful analysis of the relationship between Christian love and friendship, maintaining that friendship is one form of Christian love

among many, and not the paradigmatic one. Christians ought to love others, and the shape of love is analyzed with care (129–133), but that does not suggest that everyone will be friends. Like Aristotle, Chartier sees that the commitment required for close friends means that their number is necessarily limited.

Chapter 6, the strongest chapter, features beautiful reflections on friendship and its relationship to moral and spiritual growth. Reflecting on the moments of vulnerability and dependence that friendship inevitably entails, Chartier observes: “But accepting gifts is part of what it means to be a friend. To let a friend know that she has something valuable to give by accepting her gift is a gift in its own right. And when we grant the reality of our dependence by accepting our friends’ gifts, we affirm again our status as God’s creatures” (206).

Chartier’s reading on the subject is so broad and his footnotes so numerous that I was slightly surprised not to find a reference to Thomas Aquinas. Chartier maintains that loving our friends is a way of loving God, but Thomas goes further: charity itself is friendship with God. This is not a detraction from such a wide-ranging survey of friendship. When we find friendship, “We gain access to one of God’s simple gifts, a gift we may hope to cherish in the course of an everlasting future” (237).

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A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence: Key Thinkers, Activists, and Movements for the Gospel of Peace. By David C. Cramer and Myles Wertz. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2022. xiii + 178 pages. \$21.99.

David C. Cramer and Myles Wertz identify eight broad streams of Christian nonviolence in their book *A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence*, which unveils the rich diversity of pacifism and theological scholarship on nonviolence in the Christian tradition.

The book stems from two primary inspirations. First, Christian nonviolence has more to offer than the work of John Howard Yoder, a leading voice for nonviolence later revealed as a sexual abuser (viii–ix). Second, Christian nonviolence is a broad movement, not exclusive to the historic peace churches of Yoder and other pacifists (26). The most painstaking, yet rewarding, chapter is the first, where the authors brilliantly move the Christian nonviolence discourse beyond the shadow of Yoder’s legacy. Likewise, the remaining streams help readers gain a deeper understanding of violence and how it affects societies: “Nonviolence of Christian Virtue,” “Nonviolence of Christian Mysticism,” “Apocalyptic Nonviolence,” “Realist Nonviolence,” “Nonviolence as Political Practice,” “Liberationist