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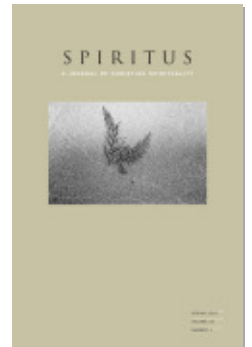
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Living Devotions: Reflections on Immigration, Identity, and Religious Imagination

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By contrast, White's perceptive portrayal of William James' vexed union of religion and psychology portrays a different effect of the embrace of the will (was there a Nietzschean effect in operation as well?), whereby James' commitment "to believe in free will" (48) in the face of scientific determinism became equivalent to religious conversion. In White's words: "Somehow [James] transformed his deep despair into a towering inner assurance, performing a remarkable inner change not unlike an evangelical conversion" (47). For James, then, assurance arose from an act of will/faith on the part of the individual, while Coe explicitly banished it as a goal for the Christian life. It is this doubleness—longing for spiritual assurance while also questioning its very possibility or relevance—that characterized the dilemma of White's unsettled religious liberals, living as they did (and others still do) in the midst of the petrifying "predictability" of scientific rationalism and the shocking "unpredictability" of spiritual effervescence.

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Living Devotions: Reflections on Immigration, Identity, and Religious Imagination. By Mary Clark Moschella. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 78. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2008. Pp. xiii + 229. \$26.00.

In his classic book, *The Uprooted*, Oscar Handlin remarked "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history." Mary Clark Moschella's book "Living Devotions" is an important contribution to America's ongoing connection to the immigrant story. It examines the particular experience of one group of emigrants from Italy to a small town in southern California. More than a social history of a people, it is a spiritual ethnography which mines some of the riches of one community's life and faith. Highlighting ritual practices that sustain immigrants as they break from their homeland, cross into a new land, and seek to weave their old world into the new, Moschella deals with "religious connections, ties, and binds, and how they are creatively negotiated when people immigrate" (1).

This book began as a dissertation in the Claremont School of Theology's Pastoral Care and Counseling Program, but it evolved into an extended research project that took almost eight years, producing an ethnographic narrative told in a pastoral, theological voice. As a work in contextual theology, it looks at, in Elaine Graham's words, the "critical phenomenology of Christian practice." Methodologically it "involves attentiveness, description, and reflection on religious and pastoral practices, in order to 'excavate' and critically examine the values and theologies implicit in them." The purpose is to "promote respectful encounter and theological exchange" (17). The author acknowledges that her own scholarly interests in the subject are rooted in the migration story of her ancestors, whose memory continues to influence her. Throughout the work she fuses together her personal and scholarly interests with her own journey of faith and the life of the people she studies. The author contends that religion and spirituality are interwoven into the overall fabric of life, and the book deals with how the economic, social, psychological, and cultural aspects of the immigrant's life constitute their spirituality.

Drawing from the stories of Italian and Sicilian Catholic immigrants to San Pedro, California, the author examines the piety and devotional practices of people at Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church, one of the largest Catholic communities in Los Angeles. “Intrigued by the complex interplay of history, nerves, and flesh” (5), she constructs a socio-historical, psychological, and theological work, which is generated from participant observation studies, archival research, and 31 in-depth interviews. These interviews help Moschella grasp the larger momentum and spirituality of the community (8) by generating what she calls a “snowball sample.” Her study is not limited to devout people but also those who, for various reasons, have left the Church. In many ways however the Church has not left them as many of the pastoral practices that have shaped their lives still remain very much a part of them.

After introducing the context, methodology, and the author’s personal motivations, the book has two main parts. The first looks at “Devotions, Immigration, and Identity in Context,” and the second examines, “Practice, Transformation, and Religious Imagination.” Moschella paints richly textured, “thick descriptions,” which offer insight into the life of a people and the spirituality that emerges from their experience of immigration and resettlement. A unique feature of the work is the website which accompanies the book. Photographs are available online which provide the additional element of visual depth to these descriptions (see: www.marymoschella.net/livingdevotions).

Moschella’s account and analysis of the evolution of the fishing industry in the area are particularly noteworthy because they fuse together the inner and outer geography of a people. This confluence is the place from which emerges the dangers and vulnerabilities the immigrants face, their gains and their losses, as well as the devotions and practices that sustain them in their times of celebration and their times of need and grief. These rituals, “complex interconnections linking sacred and mundane” (2), offer ways of fostering cultural memory, creating sacred spaces, and celebrating a collective story. Moschella sees “the large-scale rituals . . . as a performative, communal form of pastoral care, that lend a sense of spiritual value and coherence in the lives of the devout” (101).

In addition to discussing rituals within the official structures of the institutional Church, Moschella examines those that take shape around family tables and involve the rich sharing of food. These family meal traditions contain within them not only cultural value but theological and spiritual meaning. She illustrates how the shared practices around food are intertwined with tales of family, survival, ethnic identity, and Catholic faith. The customs of faith and food are the repositories of family memories and identity, those recollections that the second generation, who bear the brunt of immigrant hardships may wish to forget, but which the third generation, more firmly established in the new life and curious about family and cultural roots, wants to remember (2). Such ritual practices, whether centered within the Church, the family table, or both, help immigrants find connection and empowerment in their new setting. Moschella correctly notes that connection and empowerment are two central dimensions which foster healing among those who are uprooted.

Especially because the subject of immigration has received little attention in the field of spirituality, *Living Devotions* marks not only a valuable resource for the historical record but also an important contribution to an emerging body of

literature on the theological dimensions of immigrant communities. It points to an important need to do serious and critical studies of specific contexts which account for the spiritual, emotional, social, economic, and political life of a people. The contribution of this work is not just substantive content or constructive study of a people but also the methodology of how to do this kind of study. The development of such a methodology is a key step in advancing these studies beyond anecdotal interviews and case studies to accounts that manifest qualitative and ethnographic depth. Contributions of this kind will continue to enhance the field and clarify new avenues of theological and pastoral practice.

Given the accelerating pace of global migration, with twice as many people on the move today than 25 year ago, the study of this particular community touches themes that are certainly universal in scope. With more than 200 million people migrating around the world, or one out of every 35 people on the globe, the significance of this study cannot be underestimated. While it is not the intention of the author to make broad generalizations about immigrants, her work is certainly not diminished by noting some of these themes, at least in a provisional sort of way. This study contributes an important reflection on how pastoral practices and religious ideals play a vital role in healing and empowering immigrants. It would also be interesting to note how the group of immigrants about whom Moschella writes now interface with newly arrived immigrants from Latin America, whose story of separation, migration, and settlement would share much in common with those now established in this community. How they respond to or ignore these newcomers might say even more about their spirituality than how they respond to those within their own ranks.

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Lezlie S. Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy*. Leiden: Brill, 2008. Xvi + 228 pp. \$132.00.

Creating Clare of Assisi by Lezlie S. Knox is the fifth volume in Brill's series, *The Medieval Franciscans*, the mission of which is to publish annually interdisciplinary research on the Order of St. Francis. The inclusion of a monograph devoted to St. Clare and the uses to which her writings were put in the centuries following her death would no doubt have pleased Clare herself, as she never imagined herself as anything but a follower of St. Francis, even though one successive pope after another tried to hive off her Poor Sisters into a separate but unequal enclosed Order.

Creating Clare of Assisi attempts to contrast Clare's vision of her vocation, which privileged poverty above all else, to the subsequent convoluted history of the various religious groups, congregations and Orders that were directly and indirectly associated with her. That her sisters were variously called Poor Sisters, Poor Ladies, Religious Women, Sisters Minor, Minoresses, Poor Enclosed Nuns, Poor Recluses of the Order of St. Damian, Damianites, and Sisters of the Order of St. Clare exemplifies the complexity of the problem. There was nothing if not variety among the female followers of Francis and Clare, variety that drove a