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Review of "Art and Religion in Eighteenth Century Europe" by Nigel Aston

Ulrich Lehner

Marquette University, ulrich.lehner@marquette.edu

R. J. Berry on the reception of Darwin's theory by both biologists and theologians, and another by Amy Laura Hall on Charles Kingsley's response—are exceptions to the strongly theological flavor evident in topics such as intelligent design, ecology, providence, the Fall and sin, ethics, evil, and the status of natural theology. The tone varies from chapter to chapter. Denis Alexander mixes philosophy, court cases, and recent theology to deal with intelligent design. Neil Messer speculates about how to face the fact of natural evil. David Grumett compares ways of doing natural theology after Darwin. Michael Northcott wants to extend theological evidence beyond concern for the human. John Bimson treats the Fall and sin from a decidedly biblical perspective. Along the way contributors touch briefly but competently on other specific topics such as miracles, social Darwinism, and some implications of sociobiology.

The variety of topics and approaches makes this book an effective and clear illustration of the current status of the many debates about the theological implications of Darwinism, as well as a good primer for further analysis. Clearly good for testing the waters, the book needs to be followed by a work offering more consistent overall analysis.

MICHAEL H. BARNES
University of Dayton, Ohio

ART AND RELIGION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE. By Nigel Aston. Chicago: Reaktion *via* University of Chicago, 2009. Pp. 344. \$45; \$29.95.

Aston shows where modern historiography went wrong, namely, in its naive presumption that religious art as well as religion in general declined in the 18th century. Quite the contrary, it flourished but underwent a substantial transformation. Catholic art, for example, increasingly absorbed the values of the Catholic Enlightenment and distanced itself from Tridentinism. Art became a tool for presenting core doctrines in the light of intelligibility and morality, freed from miraculous depictions or Baroque ornaments. This, how-

ever, made Catholic religious art also less "dangerous" to Protestant buyers who often came into contact with Catholic art during their grand European tours as young adults. The resulting exchange of art between Protestant and Catholic areas contributed to the softening of confessional polemics, an exchange and a softening that has been—thus far—widely neglected by church historians. Also worth further exploration is the fact that "Art was . . . an opportunity for restating Christian truths in a manner that competed with the irreligious and skeptical currents of the century and preserved the ordinary mass of believers from lapsing" (120).

This remarkable book masterfully combines history of art and religious history and is a must read for everyone interested in early modern Christianity, since it successfully challenges established interpretations of religion and provides a magisterial overview of the contexts in which religious art during the 18th century was produced and received.

ULRICH L. LEHNER
Marquette University, Milwaukee

IMPOSSIBLE LOVES. By Don Cupitt. Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 2007. Pp. xi + 104. \$18.

Don Cupitt is a thoroughly engaging, witty, and erudite writer in the philosophy of religion. His attempt to rethink his way from religions that are dogmatic, authoritarian, and fundamentalist to a religion that is worldly, life-affirming, democratic, and undogmatic is attractive for many. Yet his approach to his sources frequently falls into a fundamentalist trap of a different kind, thereby weakening his own argument.

Drawing on the contemporary shift from commitments to organized religion to forms of "new spirituality," C. has developed a schema of an intramundane, secular religion "*after* God . . . [but] haunted by the ghost of God" (29), rooted in the pursuit of non-existent "impossible loves." Though he has long since moved beyond any realist understanding of God, C. acknowledges nonetheless that he is "stuck in an