Patrick Gilger, S.J., ed.

The Jesuit Post: #Faith #God #Frontiers #Culture #Mystery #Love. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014. Pp. xiv + 210. Pb, \$19.

There is a common expression often used by those who know many Jesuits: “If you’ve met one Jesuit, you’ve met one Jesuit.” Never was this turn of phrase more prominently on display than in *The Jesuit Post*. In January 2012, a number of young Jesuits (mostly men who had not yet been ordained to the priesthood, but were in either philosophy, regency, or theology studies) formed the core team for a blog that would attempt something new in the order. As James Martin puts it in his introduction to this volume, the blog would examine “the intersection of faith and culture, and [...] would be specifically designed to appeal to the young (i.e., *real* young people: in their teens, twenties, and thirties) who might be otherwise bored with organized religion, confused about faith, but still curious about God” (xi). The present volume masterfully lives up to the mission of the blog. But, why do we need a book at all?

I must admit, I pondered the above question as I began reading this collection of twenty-nine short essays. Why, in fact, would anyone pay to read in a book what they could view online for free? The question is partially answered by the fact that only eight of these essays had already appeared (in slightly different forms) on the website. The more substantial answer, though, is that while these Jesuits-in-formation see the blog as a very important part of their ministry, they are also cognizant of the fact that participating in the “New Evangelization” cannot be used as justification for turning our backs on a good, old-fashioned book that we can hold in our hands, smell, and turn the pages of in search of that life-affirming quote. The sentiment comes out in a helpful essay from Ryan Duns, wittily entitled “Dispatches from the Control-F Culture.” This essay toes the line between what these Jesuits are trying to do both on their blog and in this book. Duns concludes his piece by reminding us, “we do not need to be afraid of technology or cultivate Luddite dispositions, but we do need to look critically and realistically at how our devices influence us” (89). One of the strengths of this, as of most of the essays in this collection, is that the authors are constantly asking us to reflect on the greatest influences on our lives.

In line with reflecting on influences in our lives—particularly in American culture—I was especially affected by Jeffrey Johnson’s analysis of the use of violence in film, “A Baseball Bat to the Head: Quentin Tarantino and Divine Justice.” Johnson does well to introduce the topic of violence as it is presented in popular culture, and to force the reader to ask both what role it plays in her/his own life and how she/he can respond to the injustice rampant in the world. Vinny Marchionni asks a similar question in his comparative study of two cler-

ics in the works of Victor Hugo. The focal point of complacency in Marchionni's essay, though, is the complacency of the church. If Martin's introductory comments concerning the aims of these Jesuits are accurate, then Marchionni's essay will be particularly poignant for many readers. He makes a stunningly simple, yet profound, statement about ministry in the church: "If we who serve in the church are distant, prepackaged and complacent, then the people in (and not in) the pews will sense God as such. If we're generous, compassionate, and eager to know and serve them, then the people in (and not in) the pews will sense God as such" (149). That sentiment, I suspect, will ring true in the ears of anyone who has ever been to Mass.

But what about those who think that Jesuits (and other priests, religious, and seminarians) have a tendency to come across as holier-than-thou or as direct conduits to God? These essays are antidote to any concern along the lines of clericalism. I was moved in particular by four of the selections. The editor of the volume, Patrick Gilger, recounts his priestly ordination in "An Ontological Change," narrating his priesthood as one among many changes in his group of friends over the last decade. I, like many other readers, could also see how things have changed and yet remained the same in this powerful account. Likewise, in "A Dirty Little Secret," Joe Simmons writes movingly of learning how to pray while he was a novice, while Chris Schroeder informs the reader that there is such a thing as "A Jesuit Who Doubts." These essays will be especially refreshing for people who sometimes feel alienated from the church, under the mistaken assumption that only the "pros" know how to get close to God. Nothing in this book, though, will stun them into prayerful silence as much as Paul Lickteig's poem (and, full disclosure: I generally dislike poetry), "How Vocations Happen (It Could Happen to You)." In five pages, the reader is introduced to a soul constantly moving painstakingly closer and further and closer to God. Of vocation, Lickteig concludes, "It mercifully unfolds and meshes with the stories of countless others / somehow naming a mystery / we will come to believe" (108).

One of the downfalls of a book with so many contributors is that it is impossible to do justice to all of its subjects; though, suffice it to say, the breadth and depth of this book are unmatched. In which other single volume can one read about contemporary Chicano artist Fabian Debora, so-called nineteenth century "Lumberjack Sister" Amata Mackett, and seventeenth-century Jesuit polymath, Father Athanasius Kircher? I found these, along with many other of the essays, very interesting and worthy of even more study. I do also wonder whether this volume (and the blog) could be improved in two key areas. First, I believe that the contributions of more—ahem—"older" Jesuits on a more regular basis would be a welcome addition to this group of younger confreres:

the best essay in this volume was George Williams's "Ministry on Death Row." Likewise, in his essay James Martin draws on experience that perhaps no Jesuit scholastic (seminarian) with fewer years in the order could equal. Second, some of these already bright essays would shine even more prominently if they were complemented by contributions of lay people in (and even not in) the pews, who could respond with their own faith experiences. I think this could be especially fruitful if these laypeople included some of the Jesuits' countless collaborators at their schools or parishes. As it stands, however, this volume is a fresh and refreshing addition to the field of Jesuit studies. It will whet the spiritual appetites of readers at almost any level, and should be required reading for anyone discerning his or her vocation in life.

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