



connect with a world of, e.g., unseen energy, past lives, and soul mates—which then shapes their this-world lives with other similar seekers. The weakness of Bender's investigation, though, is that she never explains what makes this motley collection of individuals—variously called spiritualists, mystics, practitioners, and the never-explained metaphysicals of the title—a coherent group or religious phenomenon. Moreover, her subjects reject the category she initially tried to put them in: “spiritual but not religious.” What really unites them is the search for direct religious experience, outside established religious traditions. Bender does not explain why they left traditional faiths to seek religious experience or why she studied the hundreds of Cambridge seekers who take this alternative path but not the tens of thousands in the same region seeking, and finding, just as much direct religious experience within established denominations. **Summing Up:** Optional. ★ Graduate students and faculty/researchers.—*B. Weston, Centre College*

48-2617 BX4700 2010-12302 CIP
Brophy, Don. **Catherine of Siena: a passionate life.** BlueBridge, 2010. 296p bibl index ISBN 1933346280, \$24.95; ISBN 9781933346281, \$24.95

Based on his family and personal ties to the Dominican Order, Brophy (retired editor, Paulist Press) was asked by BlueBridge Books to write this book about St. Catherine of Siena (1347-80). He provides a readable, devout panegyric of Catherine, a Dominican tertiary. The chief sources are from Raymond of Capua, her friend and confessor, and some 382 letters, translated and annotated by Suzanne Noffke. Brophy focuses on Catherine's “public” life, rather than her private, interior life. He is for the most part successful, but some problems arise from Catherine's reliance on scribes (since she was illiterate), and a few uses of “imagine” and “likely.” Furthermore, how does one verify visions and ecstasies? The turbulent times of Catherine included the pandemic of the bubonic plague, the Hundred Years War, the “Babylonian Captivity” of the Papacy, and continued warfare between the Italian city-states. Six popes during Catherine's brief life span added to her problems. Catherine, like St. Birgitta of Sweden, focuses on political advice rather than mystical theology. Like Margery Kempe, she was both passionate and forceful. Good bibliography and an interesting author's note. **Summing Up:** Recommended. ★★ Lower- and upper-level undergraduates; general readers.—*D. P. King, emeritus, Whitman College*

48-2618 BX1795 2009-52772 CIP
Bychkov, Oleg V. **Aesthetic revelation: reading ancient and medieval texts after Hans Urs von Balthasar.** Catholic University of America, 2010. 349p bibl index afp ISBN 9780813217314, \$79.95

Bychkov (St. Bonaventure Univ.) offers an original and important study of Hans Urs von Balthasar, one of the most prominent Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century, whose following among contemporary students continues to increase. Von Balthasar sought to counteract the aridity of the contemporary world, dominated by science, technology, and formal logic, by recovering a sense of the divine dimension of reality through a return to the emphasis on beauty so characteristic of ancient and medieval thought. Bychkov examines von Balthasar's treatment of classic texts drawn from Plato and the Platonists, the Stoics, Augustine, and the late medievals, particularly John Duns Scotus and Bonaventure. He generally approves von Balthasar's analysis, although he sometimes provides correction and amplification. Bychkov also supplies a methodological introduction to the study of traditional texts, thereby validating their use in contemporary discussion. Bychkov,

whose work has focused on late medieval thought and aesthetic theory, coedited and co-translated *Greek and Roman Aesthetics* (2010) and the first book of Duns Scotus's “Parisian Lectures.” **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. ★★★ Graduate students and above.—*P. L. Urban Jr., emeritus, Swarthmore College*

48-2619 BL65 2010-6509 CIP
Contemplative practices in action: spirituality, meditation, and health, ed. by Thomas G. Plante. Praeger, 2010. 261p bibl index afp ISBN 0313382565, \$44.95; ISBN 9780313382567, \$44.95

Clinical psychologist Plante and colleagues affiliated with the Spirituality and Health Institute, Santa Clara University, offer reports on contemplative practices as resources for healthful living. Although the essays focus primarily on Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), they also treat relatively familiar forms of spiritual practice from Asian traditions (mantra-repetition, yoga, and Zen sitting). Doug Oman deserves special mention for an integrative chapter and for assisting the editor in structuring the book into a meaningful whole that can serve as a tool kit for health care professionals and enable religious leaders to find positive points of contact in practices from some of the world's major traditions. Three chapters—one on the eight-point program of passage meditation derived from the work of Eknath Easwaran, a second on the Christian centering prayer associated with Father Thomas Keating, and a third on outcomes from a meditation program for Silicon Valley leaders—are among the best in the book. Plante earlier co-edited *Spirit, Science, and Health* (CH, Dec'07, 45-2070) and *Faith and Health* (CH, Apr'02, 39-4875). The current volume adds significantly to his body of work in a domain where psychology, religion, and serious challenges to the good life meet. **Summing Up:** Recommended. ★★ Lower-level undergraduates and above; general readers.—*G. R. Thursby, emeritus, University of Florida*

48-2620 BR848 2009-35845 CIP
Fassler, Margot E. **The Virgin of Chartres: making history through liturgy and the arts.** Yale, 2010. 612p bibl indexes afp ISBN 9780300110883, \$55.00

This vivid chronicle of the art, liturgy, and architecture of France's Chartres Cathedral from the 12th to 16th centuries chronicles the cathedral's construction amid political and historical changes, and then explores the cathedral's architecture, archives, liturgies, and music. Fassler (music history, Yale) reveals how Chartres “created history” to serve a variety of purposes. One example is the varying ways that Chartres' chroniclers changed the meaning, scope, and events around several major fires at the cathedral. Fassler's particular focus is how the cathedral's architecture, liturgy, and practices created and instilled a particular understanding of the Virgin Mary, Chartres' patron saint. Chartres' main relic was the Virgin's clothing. In her investigation, Fassler shows how institutions “create history” to sustain their own self-understanding. Dozens of clear photographs and colored plates of the cathedral's stained glass window make the author's arguments about the building easy to follow. The book's engaging style, integration of multiple disciplines (including musicology, theology, medieval studies, and liturgy), and meticulous archival work make it important reading for students and scholars of medieval studies, art history, liturgics, and theology. **Summing Up:** Recommended. ★★ Upper-division undergraduates through faculty/researchers.—*A. W. Klink, Duke University*

48-2621 BP189 2010-11130 CIP
Geoffroy, Éric. **Introduction to Sufism: the inner path of Islam,** tr.



by Roger Gaetani. World Wisdom, 2010. 219p bibl indexes afp ISBN 9781935493105 pbk, \$18.95

In this English translation of his book, Geoffroy (Marc Bloch-Strasbourg II Univ., France) offers yet another introduction to the complex phenomenon of Sufism across space and time. He demonstrates his command of the field through the wealth of materials provided and includes many quotations from and references to key Sufi texts and thinkers. However, the structure of the book, divided into five chapters with two sublevels in each chapter, is difficult to follow. In his first "Fundamentals" chapter alone, Geoffroy introduces categories, concepts, and terminology and links them to each other in a way that only an advanced student of Sufism can appreciate. Subsequent chapters are titled "Sufism and Islam," "Sufism in Islamic Culture," "Sufism as It Is Lived," and "Sufism and Interreligious Openness." The author attempts to include so much that no clear picture can emerge. The book follows a traditionalist approach to the study of Sufism. Its authoritative style belies the fact that the author is in continuous and critical conversation with the field of Sufism studies, responding to existing ideas and critiquing them. This book is suitable for advanced readers in the field. **Summing Up:** Optional. ★ Graduate students and above.—*J. Hammer, George Mason University*

48-2622 BR115 2010-8862 CIP
Guerra, Marc D. **Christians as political animals: taking the measure of modernity and modern democracy.** ISI Books, 2010. 216p index ISBN 9781933859927, \$26.95

Relying on a distinction between medieval and modern rationalism drawn from Leo Strauss and on judgments derived from two Catholic theologians, James V. Schall and Ernest L. Fortin, this book constructs an appeal for a Christian political thought reminiscent of that of 18th- and 19th-century European Catholicism. Guerra (Ave Maria Univ.) offers an analysis that presupposes his assumption that Christians "are distinguished by their belief in a transpolitical 'sound doctrine.'" He rejects modern rationalism, which he finds rooted in skepticism and which he charges has elevated natural rights above moral duties and unnecessarily subordinated or eliminated the role of revelation. He challenges the notion of religious toleration and denies that Christianity has any special affinity for modern democracy. He finds the roots of postmodern irrationalism in the weaknesses of Enlightenment rationalism. The author's approach to the relationship of reason and revelation falls clearly within the tradition of Thomas Aquinas, though many Thomists will find his conclusions problematic. In summary, this volume constitutes a conservative voice in an internal debate within the contemporary Roman Catholic Church. It will be useful primarily to those engaged in that debate or interested in better understanding it. **Summing Up:** Optional. ★ Graduate students and above; general readers.—*S. C. Pearson, emeritus, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville*

48-2623 BL50 209-46661 CIP
Panikkar, Raimon. **The rhythm of being: the Gifford lectures.** Orbis Books, 2010. 413p index ISBN 9781570758553, \$50.00

This redrafted version of the late Panikkar's 1989 Gifford Lectures is a provocative, seminal contribution to the discipline of interreligious dialogue. The author's depth of erudition, personal spiritual experience, and passionate concern for the future of humanity are clearly apparent throughout. Though intended for a popular audience, this book presumes facility with multiple languages and primary texts of most major religious and philosophical traditions. It sketches the outline of a new mythos the author sees beginning to emerge as traditional (e.g., the Abrahamic

religions) and contemporary (e.g., democracy, capitalism, science) narratives lose adherents. Like S. Mark Heim's *The Depth of the Riches* (2001), this volume uses a Christian Trinitarian structure, inclusively and nonideologically, to offer a compelling presentation of a worldview that affirms the possibility of communion among the divine, the human, and the cosmos without "... monistic identity and dualistic separation." Though beyond the grasp of all but advanced undergraduates, this is a necessary text for any collection in interreligious dialogue. **Summing Up:** Recommended. ★★ Advanced upper-level undergraduates through faculty/researchers.—*E. S. Steele, Saint Joseph's University*

48-2624 BX1406 2009-14176 CIP
Portmann, John. **Catholic culture in the USA: in and out of church.** Continuum International Publishers Group, 2010. 202p bibl index ISBN 9781441163592, \$110.00; ISBN 9781441188922 pbk, \$32.95

Portmann (Univ. of Virginia) here delves into the nebulous term "cultural Catholicism." His unpacking of this term is the most valuable part of the book. Working to explore cultural Catholicism's contemporary iterations and to account for some of its historical lineage, Portmann traces American reactions to the Vatican from the 19th-century Americanism controversy to the contemporary sexual abuse scandal. He explores American Catholic ritual life and beliefs by peering into the tension between frequent dissent from the Vatican and appreciation of baptism, weddings, and the Virgin Mary. His parsing of "cultural Catholicism" provides an interesting conversation starter about religious identity in the US. Portmann's efforts to understand the relationship between American culture and Catholic identity follow in the footsteps of Andrew Greeley and Jay Dolan. At times, his work seems to assume too much from too little. Rather than broad sociological studies of so-called "Catholics in the pews," he draws his examples from the likes of John Kerry and Sinéad O'Connor. This book does offer a useful glimpse into the knot of "cultural Catholicism," but must be used with other readings in the sociology of American Catholicism. **Summing Up:** Recommended. ★★ Lower- and upper-level undergraduates; general readers.—*K. A. Dugan, Northwestern University*

48-2625 BL2747 2010-15918 CIP
Religion and the new atheism: a critical appraisal, ed. by Amar-nath Amarasingam. (Studies in critical social sciences, v. 25) ISBN 9789004185579, \$141.00

Here is a welcome follow-up to the recent popular books that advocate atheism—critical essays from interdisciplinary perspectives, the first volume in Brill's "Studies in Critical Research on Religion." Contributors respond to best-selling atheist books by Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and others. To this reviewer's knowledge this scholarly collection is the first to tackle and criticize the arguments of these authors in a single volume. The essays cover topics ranging from sociology and ethics to Darwin, parenting, and Judaism. Rory Dickson's essay defending Islam is especially relevant and hard-hitting. Ryan Falcioni's, Jeff Nall's, and Stephen Bullivant's interesting contributions are also very provocative. Altogether the essays are clear and accessible to scholars. Nonbelievers are unlikely to be persuaded by these authors, who argue that atheists distort and oversimplify religion (especially Islam) and surveys on religious beliefs. Most of the "new atheist" books cover old ground, but with an aggressive, very critical, popular approach, never coy or restrained. Unfortunately, only libraries with generous budgets can afford this expensive book. It will be an important purchase for libraries that own one or more books