Egyptian hospital, and Jason Josephson describes the transformation of Japanese Buddhist healing prayer rituals from being therapeutic technologies to a social “disease” infecting the body politic. And the book’s final two chapters each deal with issues of digital media at the margins of Euro-American hegemony: Maria José de Abreu describes a multimedia campus in São Paulo that Catholic charismatics share with a group of mystical Franciscan monastics, while Alexandra Boutros presents online communities of Haitian Vodou practitioners and Vodou’s unexpected presence in William Gibson’s cyberpunk fiction.

In addition to its varied content, this volume is also commendably diverse in terms of methodology and style. Richly-detailed ethnographies, far-reaching histories, and deep-diving cultural studies are cheek by jowl. Such juxtapositions are embodied in the first two body chapters, both about the logistical technologies of timekeeping. John Durham Peters’ expressive “Calendar, Clock, Tower,” with its almost stream-of-consciousness aphorisms [e.g., “[Clocks] are compasses whose needle points to the now rather than to the north” (32)] is followed by Wolfgang Ernst’s hyper-analytical “Ticking Clock, Vibrating String” [e.g., “What alphabetic writing accomplished for the phonetic stream of speech, the wheeled clock achieved for time: a radical individuation, a core of occidental combinatory rationality” (60)]. The intersections of issues of religion and technology in literature are also dealt with in a widely variegated fashion, with Peter Pels engaging the evolution of sacralized technologies in science fiction and John Lardas Modern dealing with the aesthetic and religious uses of Melville, particularly Moby Dick.

While this interdisciplinary, heteroglossic approach opens the conversation to diverse voices, it also opens it up to inconsistencies in theoretical frameworks. For example, in his chapter on the detachment of the oscillating clock from its religious origins in medieval European monasteries, Ernst writes that his “media-archaeological method . . . is intended to keep [religion and technology] apart and distinct” (45). Like a few of the other authors in this volume (from both within and without the discipline of religious studies), Ernst here seems to accept “religion” as an unproblematic universal category rather than to recognize it as a peculiarly post-Reformation European invention, as Stolow does so expertly in the introduction (18).

Such qualms aside, this book is clear, challenging, and—so rare in academic writing as a whole, but especially in the genre of the edited volume—a delightful read. Its introduction would work well in either a graduate or advanced undergraduate seminar on religion and material culture, and a number of the chapters would fit in a variety of other pedagogical contexts.

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Belief in the Trinity is perhaps the foundational expression of Christian faith. Throughout history, and in the world today, millions have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet what is at stake in a triune conception of God remains nebulous to many people. Common appropriations of the Trinity are often analogical—focusing on comprehension of a
“three-in-one” metaphor and hesitating to make claims about God’s being itself. Such caution in approaching the doctrine of the Trinity begs the question, why should Nicene faith be considered normative?

In this masterful work, Khaled Anatolios urges the faithful to examine the content and context of the fourth-century trinitarian debates. Expostulated in the introduction, Anatolios’s position is that “the historical development of trinitarian doctrine took place through a syntax that enfolded the entirety of Christian existence” (8-9). This holistic approach to the topic is balanced by numerous exhortations to engage with the major thinkers of this period on their own terms. Any information gleaned will be magnified by grasping, through familiarity, the integral system within which the theologian works. Anatolios manages to walk the thin line between theological abstraction and cultural reductionism by laying his hermeneutic on the table—his goal is to systematically assess and interpret the aspects of Christian faith and life involved in the establishment of Nicene orthodoxy (11-12).

The very substratum of Anatolios’s text works to support this interpretive project. Chapter 1 is the site of the methodological key for the entire effort. Here Anatolios overviews the variety of contemporary theological approaches to the fourth-century conflicts, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. The main difficulty in categorizing the key players in the ancient debates is that each party “shunned any self-naming other than reasserting their own claim to represent the apostolic and orthodox faith of the Catholic Church” (28). After neatly illustrating some of the inconsistencies in an ouisia vs. hypostasis model, Anatolios introduces his own framework. He draw a distinction between positions upholding a unity of being in the Trinity and those upholding a unity of will—favoring the former in accordance with his already-established hermeneutic.

The validity of this hermeneutic can only be tested by delving directly into the debate, a task Anatolios tackles vigorously in chapter 2. He chooses to bring the reader toward a holistic understanding of the Nicene legacy by first treating its discontents. For example, an empathetic portrait of Arius goes a long way toward removing contemporary biases against the heresiarch. What Anatolios accomplishes early in the book is to “locate Arius properly within the common flow of Christian experience,” and thus to demonstrate his “obvious and explicit efforts to give a substantial account of the unique primacy of Christ” (48). In a manner that is both erudite and charitable, Anatolios reveals the key question and starting point for all parties involved in the formulation of trinitarian logic: what has the saving work of Christ to do with the relationship between God and the world?

Such an exposition paves the way for the intricate discussion of chapters 3-5, which forms the apotheosis of this work. A close examination of the relationship between Christ and the Trinity guides Anatolios’s trajectory through the voluminous works of Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine. The solution each thinker proposes is unique: Athanasius focuses on divine kenosis and the need for Christ to save humanity from nonexistence (120, 149); Gregory on finding a way to speak about God and Christ through semiotics (197); Augustine on the proper function of an analogical turn in trinitarian discourse (248-49). Anatolios classifies each figure in terms of historical context, doctrinal content, and soteriological import. The final, normative step seals the hermeneutical circle in order to reunite the content of fourth-century debates with the expression of God’s trinitarian existence today.

Throughout the book, Anatolios interacts constructively with critical scholarship from the likes of Behr, Ayres, and many others—making this project an essential read for those
interested in historical theology. *Retrieving Nicaea* is a meticulously organized *tour de force*, the scope of which presents a veritable challenge for the intellect to absorb. From a student’s perspective, Anatolios’s treatment of the seminal issues of fourth-century trinitarian theology is both expansive and inspirational. I would recommend this study to anyone seeking a greater understanding of how the Christian doctrine of God developed in accordance with the Scriptures, through tradition, and in response to the universal experience of the faithful.

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