



Volume 59 | Issue 2

Article 61

2016

Fox's "A way to God: Thomas Merton's creation spirituality" (Book Review)

Kathleen F. Kempa
Southeastern University

The Christian Librarian is the official publication of the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL). To learn more about ACL and its products and services please visit [//www.acl.org/](http://www.acl.org/)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kempa, Kathleen F. (2016) "Fox's "A way to God: Thomas Merton's creation spirituality" (Book Review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 59: Iss. 2, Article 61.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1146>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Christian Librarian by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Lagerspetz, O. (2015). *Trust, ethics, and human reason*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 158 pp. \$34.95. ISBN 9781441184870

Lagerspetz came into the philosophical discipline of trust near its origin in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and has spent more than twenty years researching and interacting with the philosophical meaning of trust. This scholarly book is a result of that work. Lagerspetz's writing does suppose a modicum of familiarity with philosophy, both terms and schools of thought, but it is not much beyond a collegiate level introduction to a philosophy class. If one has minimal familiarity with philosophy, this work should be an engaging and fruitful read. Lagerspetz's work provides value for many realms of thought and action, including management and leadership, economics, history, psychology, and every day interpersonal relationships.

Lagerspetz does well introducing the idea of trust, or a component of it, in the chapters. After defining the key terms and issues to be discussed, Lagerspetz shows both the broader historical philosophical thought on the issue and the discipline of trust's views as demonstrated in the current literature. Lagerspetz then synthesizes the ideas of each chapter while demonstrating the purpose of this work, which is that trust is a foundational part of human reason, not something derived from it. This work is recommended for upper level philosophy class, but applicable to a wide range of human endeavors and interactions.

Reviewer

Rory Patterson, Liberty University

Fox, M. (2016). *A way to God: Thomas Merton's creation spirituality*. Novato, CA: New World Library. 308 pp. \$18.95. ISBN 9781608684205

A Way to God is a book of spiritual theology. What makes it somewhat different from other theology books is that it does not deal so much with doctrinal pronouncements, as with the personal experience of God and ways to approach a relationship with God. It is not a devotional book, but a scholarly study. Matthew Fox writes in a conversational and understandable style. What results is a theology book that can readily be understood by non-theologians on a topic that is central to the heart of thoughtful religious people of all faiths.

Fox begins this book by explaining his relationship with Thomas Merton. About 18 months before Merton's death, young Fox wrote to Merton asking for guidance about a theology school where Fox could study spirituality. Merton responded with

an encouraging letter and many papers and studies which he, Merton, had written but not published. Merton ended his letter to Fox by encouraging him to pursue his studies because Merton strongly felt that “what people want of us, after all is the way to God” (p. 17).

Next, Fox introduces the thought and writings of Meister Eckhart, a theologian from the 14th century, whose writings were rejected by Inquisition-led church authorities. Eckhart’s contribution to spiritual theology was to introduce the idea of four different pathways to communion with God, which Fox calls “the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality—the Via Positiva, Via Negativa, Via Creativa, and Via Transformativa” (p. 32). Fox points out that these paths to God are quite different from the traditionally taught ascetic Fall/Redemption path to God, in that they are very “beautiful and pleasant and joyful and familiar” (p. 32).

In chapters four through seven, Fox describes each of the paths using quotations from Eckhart and Merton, as well as other contemporary and historic writers. Fox makes reference to Buddhist and Muslim writings which show similar experiences of communion with God from non-Christian traditions. Fox describes the Via Positiva as a way to God through an appreciation of creation. The Via Negativa is a practice of quiet, and silent contemplation as a way to God. The Via Creativa is a way of experiencing God by being fruitful: making and experiencing art, poetry, music. And the Via Transformativa is a way to God through the prophetic work of striving for justice and caring for the earth; where love and compassion are the motivators.

Possibly because of his personal struggles with the Catholic Church, Fox presents several chapters dedicated to his so-called “heresies” and points to those of Merton’s writings which show that Merton supported similar positions. Fox points out the very strong historical and current bias of the Catholic Church against women. Fox defends his preference for what he calls “Original Blessing” in God’s creation of humankind over the concept of “Original Sin”. Fox was denounced for teaching the four paths to God, which he cites as being derived from the Old Testament biblical language rather than the traditional ascetic purgation path which espouses the dualistic anti-body/pro-spirit thinking, which originated in the sixth century.

Fox shares his and Merton’s concept of the importance of recognizing, in everyone, the Cosmic Christ. “We are other Christs...In us, the image of God, which is complete and entire in each individual soul, is also, in all of us ‘the image of God’” (p. 229). He quotes Paul: “I live...now not I but Christ lives in me” (p. 230). Fox sees this awareness as leading us to experiencing God and recognizing our responsibility toward each other.

Fox is a strong advocate in favor of creation spirituality because he sees it as an uplifting and positive way to develop a relationship with God. *A Way to God* is not a passive discourse on the pros and cons of different theological concepts. It is a passionate presentation, offering readers the freedom to experience ways to relate to God and each other beyond those ways traditionally provided within institutional religion. Fox does not repudiate traditional church teaching, he attempts to expand it to include options not usually presented.

A Way to God is strongly recommended for personal reading for Christians wanting to enrich their spiritual lives, schools with theological studies, historical insights on some Christian/Catholic teachings, or directed readings on some of Merton's insights.

Reviewer

Kathleen F. Kempa, Southeastern University

Story, L., & Schuchmann, J. (2015). *When God doesn't fix it: Lessons you never wanted to learn, truths you can't live without*. Nashville, TN: Nelson. 280 pp. \$16.99. ISBN 9780718036973

When God doesn't fix it is a deeply profound work on the topic of dealing with the most perplexing issues in our lives. Laura Story is anything but shallow and simplistic in her approach. The depth of the principles she shares stem from the broken journey she and her husband Martin have and are still walking through. Much of the book is autobiographical regarding the call to serve as the worship leader at Perimeter Church (Atlanta, GA), her husband Martin's brain tumor and the resulting challenges in the area of marriage and parenting. Many other stories from others are included too. An abundance of Scripture is used throughout as well.

Some of the invaluable truths are: the need to untangle our expectations of God versus His promises, consider replacing our endless why with how questions enabling us to move forward in the growth process, realizing the benefit of being transparent and share with others in the midst of our brokenness rather than fearing what others think thus postponing blessing others and glorifying God as being the hero. Laura Story is truly an example in this regard. The songs God has given her reflect her journey and many of the lyrics are sprinkled throughout the pages of this treasure.

I cannot recommend this book of time endured wisdom highly enough. My introduction was through participating in an online Bible study. A study guide and