genius of the Order of Preachers over the past eight hundred years: the intellectual zeal of Albert and Thomas, the spiritual ardor of Catherine of Siena, Meister Eckhart and Catherine de’ Ricci, the passion for God-in-the-neighbor disclosed in the lives of Bartholomé de Las Casas, Martin de Porres and Rose Lathrop, the commitment “to love the Truth as one loves a person” witnessed in the theologies of Congar, Schillebeeckx and Radcliffe, are only some of the Dominican lives reflected on in the book. Reading this text as a whole convinces one that the authors have captured something of the “cross-grain story” (Schillebeeckx’s description of the weave that holds the present in critical tension with the past) that is the Dominican tradition. From Dominic to Radcliffe, these selections evidence in their diversity the incarnational confidence that is the hallmark of the Dominican tradition. Whether it is Catherine de’ Ricci’s resolve, despite the suspicions of her own sisters, to bear in her body a mystical theology of the cross or Lacordaire’s drive, against tremendous odds, to re-found the Order in France, or Congar’s “rehabilitated” passion for the mystery of the Church expressed as the pilgrim people of God, the “golden thread” that unites these profoundly diverse human beings is an unwavering confidence in the fertile spiritual ground that is the intersection of faith and life. As Schillebeeckx rightly notes, there is a dynamism that orients true Dominican sensibilities toward “critical reflection on . . . the past religious tradition” while “tak[ing] up critically and positively the cross thread provided by whatever new religious possibilities for the future keep emerging among us.” This incarnational confidence “in the absolute priority of God’s grace in any human action” saturates the Dominican spiritual tradition.

I would only question the omission of Marie-Dominique Chenu from this collection. His influence on Congar and Schillebeeckx is widely recognized and yet curiously unacknowledged in their biographical sketches presented in the book. It seems a little incongruous that the one Dominican who contributed so profoundly to the unity of theology and history, faith and life would not be included in a series dedicated to “spirituality in history.”

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In this edited volume, Hoelzl and Ward bring together some carefully chosen passages commenting about the intersection of religion and politics from key primary texts of the Western tradition. In accomplishing this task, the book goes beyond the usual collected reader format and delivers a textbook with thorough yet concise introductions that help place primary texts in the context of their respective political, social and ecclesial controversies. The introductions are likely to be helpful to students who might be unfamiliar with these texts and their authors. Each introduction includes a brief outline of the basic arguments of the author along with a historical outline of
the controversies that give birth to these texts. The introductions serve to guide students through what often turns out to be uncharted philosophical and theoretical territory for undergraduates.

The book is chronologically organized and the primary authors are grouped under five broader categories, which, in turn, are given their own helpful historical introductions. The first, “The Division of Christ’s Political Body,” includes passages from Augustine, Aquinas, Dante and Luther. The second, “The Legitimation of Sovereign Power,” provides readings from Machiavelli, King James I of England, and Hobbes. The third, “Religion in Democratic Culture,” includes passages from Rousseau, Paine, de Tocqueville and de Maistre. The fourth category, “Politics After Religion,” includes readings from Marx, Schmitt, and Lenin. The final category, “The Contemporary Debates,” includes passages from John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, Charles Taylor, and Jürgen Manemann.

In addition to its many strengths, the book has an index of names and subjects that are very helpful for reference and research purposes. It also uses largely accessible translations of the primary texts, which is a welcome change of pace for those accustomed to sending students to internet websites for primary texts, where translations can be awkward, imprecise or downright inaccurate.

Although the volume is a strong collection overall, there are a few weaknesses which the potential reader should notice. First of all, the book is poorly titled; it is both inaccurate and misleading. A better title would be “Christianity and the Western Political Tradition,” since the readings are taken exclusively from these narrow perspectives. The current title undoubtedly disappoints many potential adopters. A second, less serious issue, has to do with the choice of texts and what I see as a few surprising omissions. Having been the editor of a book series, I understand the difficulties associated with acquiring permissions and staying within the publisher’s prescribed page limits. I also recognize the richness of this particular tradition and that second-guessing reviewers like myself will always find something wrong with the selection process. Nevertheless, I did expect to see readings from Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations, Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Reinhold Neibuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, The Nature and Destiny of Man, and John Courtney Murray, We Hold These Truths.

In any case, no single textbook should ever attempt to be all things to all instructors, since this is a formula destined to frustrate both publisher and editor while satisfying few potential adopters. Hoelzl and Ward do an admirable job of collecting, categorizing, translating, and introducing eighteen authors in the Western tradition that address the ways religion and politics interact. I could see this book being used in an honors class, or upper division major course where students are encouraged to read primary texts. I will likely adopt it the next time I teach my honors class examining the intersection of religion and politics.

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