

Above all, these essays are unified by the quality, professionalism, and ambition of their scholarship, and that seems the best tribute to Donald Mathews and his influence.

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***Emptiness: Feeling Christian in America.* By John Corrigan.**

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. x + 225 pp. \$35.00 cloth.

Emptiness is likely not high on most people's list of familiar emotions, but in this evocative study, John Corrigan manages to foreground an emptiness that lends depth and complexity, if not quite coherence, to the fractious history of American Christianity. His book consists of an introductory synopsis of the relevant history, followed by five chapters of thematic elaboration: "Feeling," "Body," "Space," "Time," and "Believers." The synoptic history, ranging from Puritans and colonial Catholics to twenty-first century American Christians, still searching for something essential, comes at a blistering pace. For readers less versed in the history of American religion, the good news is that the thematic chapters review and elaborate aspects of what has already been synopsized. In that regard, the book's introduction—"Emptiness and American Christianities"—functions more like an overture to an opera than a blueprint to a building, and returning to it once the themes have played discloses an artistry that is hard to appreciate fully on a first hearing.

In the "Feeling" chapter, Corrigan rehearses the Janus-faced logic of emotional emptiness. American Christians of strikingly different temperaments, times, and cultural locations have, on his account of them, commonly sought cathartic liberation from the pseudo-satisfactions of a profane life. Here self-emptying proves to be inseparable from redeemed desire and the prospect of divinely infused fulfillment. But it is also true for these same Christians that pseudo-satisfactions—all the subtle and not-so-subtle exultations of ego—are, in their very presentation of fullness, empty. So how is it possible to lay claim to a fulfilling emptiness, a godly feeling, and not be simultaneously cast into the shadow of satisfactions whose falsity continues to remain hidden?

In the chapters "Body," "Time," and "Space," Corrigan introduces us to some of the ways that American Christians have tried to relieve the material world—the manifest world of separated bodies, situated in time and space—of its stubbornly profane determinacy. But as the transformative power of agency here has to be fully divine and not merely human, and so infinitely

generative in its offering, there is no human appropriation of emptiness that is not essentially indeterminate. In the last thematic chapter, “Believers,” belief for Corrigan’s Christians has mostly become what William James would have called overbelief: belief not as a representation, however imperfect, of something determinately true, but as a symbol of an inescapably empty feeling, squatting Janus-faced between God and void.

It is in the “Believers” chapter that Corrigan brings home his principal thesis about emptiness and solidarity in the American religious context: “A group that cultivates personal emptiness, that promotes a systematic denial of self, always runs the risk of creating a social environment that constructs a ‘frail sense of identity.’ In so doing, it not only can foment responses to perceived opponents and conspiracies that will serve the purpose of reinforcing group solidarity; it also raises the likelihood of demonizing those opponents” (176). Janus-faced emptiness is no wilting flower; it is part of a violent history. Look to Corrigan to remind Americans of the depredations, often religiously sanctioned, that come of confusing catharsis with scapegoating. (See especially the sections on The Empty Colored Body, Social Space, and Racial Time.)

The first time I read through *Emptiness*, I left feeling unsure of the book’s governing ambition. Is Corrigan aiming to use emptiness—a culturally mediated but still abstractable affect—to explicate the inner life of disestablished Christianity, or is he using the social history of the American scene to sound out the depths of a richly complex religious emotion? In other words, is emptiness the star of the show, or is it the understudy for American Christianity? I have come to think that there is no need to resolve the issue, that in this case we are faced with a virtuous ambiguity. But as I tend to keep an eye out for the philosophical offerings of history, I especially appreciate the window that Corrigan has opened on the inner life of emptiness itself.

As one of the epigraphs to his introductory chapter, Corrigan invokes a shrewd bit of wisdom from fellow historian, Teofilo Ruiz, who, like Corrigan, is attuned to the dynamism of social consciousness. Ruiz speculates that the Greeks were the first humans to stare unflinchingly into the void and that they formulated the Delphic maxims—Know thyself; Nothing in excess—to stave off the dominion of the irrational. “As worthy as these maxims are,” Ruiz concludes (quoted on p. 1), “they only reveal their opposites: that human life is often about excesses, and that very seldom do we know ourselves.” I am reminded here of the Socrates who greets us near the beginning of Plato’s *Phaedo*. He is rubbing his leg in pleasant relief, having just been released from prison shackles; he takes the occasion to remind his students of the peculiar conjunction of pain and pleasure—a two-headed monster—in the appetitive quest for satisfaction. If I am looking in my life simply to fill a void, whether God-shaped or less grandiose, I am bound to discover that filling this void is as much the negation of my desire

as its satisfaction. I will soon find myself wanting to void my satisfaction—if only to recover my desire. Likely there is a self-knowledge that has gone missing here.

Corrigan has brilliantly associated the fractious spirituality of American Christianity with emptiness. I read such emptiness to be the affective form of a religion of appetite, where desire remains shackled to lack. There is depth and complexity to this religion, to be sure, but no resolution—or none, at least, beyond the self-consumption that gives the lie to satisfaction.

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***Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms.*** Edited by **Kathleen T. Talvacchia, Michael F. Pettinger, and Mark Larrimore.** New York: New York University Press, 2015. vii + 215 pp. \$89.00 cloth; \$26.00 paperback.

*Queer Christianities* is a transdisciplinary collection of essays that transcends the bounds of academic publishing and whose contributors inhabit professional positions in and outside of academia. In this way, *Queer Christianities* is itself a *queer* thing to behold. And because of this, it is all the more powerful, more meaningful, and richer than other works similar to it. The editors of this collection have sought to demonstrate how “Queer folk have found Christian traditions not only hospitable to queer lives but in deep ways congruent with them” (1). And they have accomplished this task with this collection of lucid, interesting, engaging, and often times, poignant, essays. The book is separated into four distinct and still imbricated sections: “Celibacies,” “Matrimonies,” “Promiscuities,” and “Forward!” The editors detail their own struggles with naming these sections. Their candid description of these tensions—and others—in the processes of editing and publishing this work, bespeaks the importance and on-going contestations related to *Queer Christianities*’ subject matter. Even the term “queer” is itself a difficult term to pin-down with a definition, as Larrimore suggests in his introduction (3). The sections, however, help to give some structure to the entire volume by naming some common threads that tie the essays in each corresponding section together, with the final section naming the implications of this study and possibilities for further work by scholars and theologians. And it is of course, the pluralization of each of the three leading section headings (like that of “Christianities” in the book’s title) that begins