

Stiebert is particularly critical of those who argue that ancient Israel was matriarchal or egalitarian (see esp. Hildegunde Wöller's *Vom Vater verwundet: Töchter der Bibel* [Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1991]). She also warns against the assumption that literary depictions reflect actual practice. However, this position is risky. After all, metaphors can only work if they resonate with readers' experience, whether real or imagined. This fact is especially relevant for the so-called prophetic pornography (e.g., Ezekiel 16), which relies on recognizable imagery, regardless of its accuracy. Indeed, Stiebert herself cites the Bible's metaphorical use of daughter images in Lamentations, Ezekiel 16, and other prophets as demonstrating the vulnerability of women in ancient Israelite eyes.

This book is filled with interesting observations, often drawn from Stiebert's broad reading. For example, she provides numerous comparisons with ancient Rome rather than the ancient Near East as is typical in biblical studies and contrasts the pervasiveness of father-daughter incest in modern human culture with its reported absence in nature. By contrast, her references to biblical studies are sometimes puzzling, as when she draws linguistic data from Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs's *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901) and William L. Holladay's *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), rather than Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner's *Hebraisches und aramaisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) on which it is based, or David J. A. Clines's more recent *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011) and ignores Norman Gottwald's classic discussion of the *bêt 'āb* (*The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979]) in favor of Athalya Brenner's "Alternative Families: From the Hebrew Bible to Early Judaism" (paper presented at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Tartu, Estonia, July 2010; http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/a.brenner/bestanden/Brenner_Families.pdf).

Unfortunately, Stiebert's own views are sometimes obscured by awkward sentence structure and detailed descriptions of others' works. That is especially regrettable given her creative and insightful observations, such as her suggestion that Eve and Wisdom be seen as God's daughters, and her interest in finding a middle ground between the two extremes that this study attempts to avoid. Nonetheless, this topical survey of recent treatments of several passages relating to one aspect of an issue of contemporary concern is a stimulating study and valuable synopsis of a wide range of scholarly literature.

FREDERICK E. GREENSPAHN, *Florida Atlantic University*.

SZPIECH, RYAN. *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. 311 pp. \$59.95 (cloth).

Starting in the twelfth century, there is an efflorescence of Christian polemics that employ conversion narratives to attack rival faiths and affirm the truth of their own. Originating mainly in the western Mediterranean, especially Spain, a diverse group of texts such as Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogue against the Jews* (trans. Irvn Resnick [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006]), Alfonso of Valladolid and Abner of Burgos's *Teacher of Righteousness* (in *Mostrador de Justicia*, ed. Walter Mettmann, 2 vols. [Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1994–96]), and Alfonso Buenhombre and Alphonsus Bonihominis's *Epistle of Rabbi Samuel* (in *Die Epistel des Rabbi Samuel an Rabbi Isaak: Untersuchung und Edition*, ed. Monika Marsmann [Munich: Ludwig Maximilians-

The Journal of Religion

Universität, 1971]) incorporate the supposed author-convert's former religious persona, and frequently his conversion experience as well, into their polemical discourses in an evident attempt to give the arguments an aura of authenticity. If scholars have noticed this confluence of conversion-themed narratives, no one before Ryan Szpiech has endeavored to explore its significance or even to suggest that such narratives are a distinctive form within the genre of medieval religious polemics. We are especially fortunate that a scholar of Szpiech's linguistic talents has undertaken this task, for he is able not only to do a minute analysis of Christian texts written in multiple languages (Latin, Castilian, and Catalan) but also to compare the conversion paradigm found in these texts with Hebrew and Arabic polemical works that also employ conversion stories. The comparative perspective allows Szpiech to highlight the singularity of the Christian case. He suggests that conversionary narratives had been uniquely suited for the needs of Christian apologetics ever since Augustine linked the two by turning the story of his own conversion into a model of Christian salvation history, in which "the old self, like the Old Testament, is not rejected but superseded and incorporated into the new through a diachronic relation of potential and actualization" (56). Why, then, is it only in the late eleventh century that conversion accounts become prominent in Christian polemics? Szpiech finds the answer in the internal dynamics of the Christian theological discourse. He argues that the introduction of philosophical reason (*ratio*) into Christian apologetics destabilized the sources of authority (*auctoritas*) by which Christian truths had been substantiated since late antiquity, thus creating room for the use of personal testimony of converts alongside the traditional proofs—citations of biblical verses (*testimonia*; 62).

For analytical purposes, Szpiech organizes conversion stories according to their narrative paradigms rather than in chronological order. He then deconstructs each text in a dazzling display of erudition and masterful textual analysis that no review can adequately capture. Szpiech of course is not the first to point out the significance of the shift to extrabiblical argumentation in Christian apologetics. Anna Sapir Abulafia (*Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* [London: Routledge, 1995]) has studied the attempts to prove the truth of Christianity *sola ratione*, while Amos Funkenstein ("Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Late Middle Ages," *Viator* 2 [1971]: 373–82) and Jeremy Cohen (*The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982]) have explored how the growing awareness of Jewish postbiblical literature affected Christians' argumentation against the Jews. These previous attempts sought to link polemics to the state of Jewish-Christian relations and, more generally, to the changing status of religious minorities in medieval Europe. In Szpiech's interpretation, however, conversionary polemics are only tangentially connected to the interreligious conflict. He insists that they are first and foremost the product of the internal Christian exploration of the meaning of *auctoritas* through the writing of polemical texts.

This avowedly textual approach has its strengths and limitations. It allows Szpiech to sidestep some thorny issues that have baffled his predecessors. He critiques some scholars' attempts to access the spiritual core of the individual conversion experience through "the fog of the narrative," arguing that this approach imposes an arbitrary "hierarchy of significance" on a concept that has multiple unstable meanings (18). Szpiech's solution is to treat conversion as a constructed narrative within its specific ideological context; in fact, for him, "polemical conversion narrative literally *is* the convert" (23). The focus on the changing notion of *auctoritas* leads him to question whether the shift in Christian polemics in the thirteenth century was truly driven by the needs of the Dominican proselytizing efforts. In a similar vein, he puts to rest the common misconception that biblical *testimonia* is replaced by other

sources of authority, pointing out that it continues to share the stage with the newer methods of argumentation.

By approaching the much studied and debated texts from a new angle, Szpiech achieves a breakthrough, but by concentrating almost exclusively on the constructed narrative, “a thing made” (19), he has little to say about his texts’ subsequent reception. Despite his intention to examine the narratives as products of specific contexts, it is the context that is often missing from Szpiech’s study. Regardless of the texts’ original purpose, did they have an impact on real-life debates with non-Christians? The case in point is an anonymous treatise, not mentioned by Szpiech, written or copied before 1220 and published in 1953 by José Millás Vallicrosa (*Sefarad XIII*). It is clearly derivative of Petrus Alfonsi’s *Dialogue* and also written from a Jewish convert’s perspective. Decidedly less learned than Alfonsi’s work, the treatise’s two known manuscripts were included in collections of other works directed against non-Christians and intended for preachers’ use. Does this telling fact point to the possibility that the topos of a debating convert found some practical applications alongside the purely hermeneutic ones?

Szpiech’s unflinching focus on the internal needs of Christian apologetics seems at times overwrought. Given that many Jews and lay Christians were present at the Barcelona “Disputation” in 1263, it is difficult to accept his terse characterization of the event as merely a transposition of “internally directed Christian apologetics onto a public stage” (126). The need for a greater context is nowhere more apparent than in the central chapters of the book, where Szpiech turns to the narratives by Ramon Martí, Ramon Llull, and Alfonso of Valladolid, singling them out as the new direction in the Christian search for the authentic authorial voice. Szpiech considers them the culmination, but also the dead end of the genre, as they failed to make a sustained impact on subsequent polemics (143, 169). What Szpiech does not explain is why the more traditional *Epistle of Rabbi Samuel* (not technically a conversion story, which may explain why Szpiech mentions it only in passing) became a polemical best-seller in the fifteenth century: Columbus took it along on his voyage. Despite these unanswered questions, the study is sure to become an *auctoritas* on the conversion narratives Szpiech so lucidly and masterfully examines.
MAYA SOIFER IRISH, *Rice University*.

O’COLLINS, GERALD. *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xi+214 pp. \$45.00 (cloth).

This is a readable and highly informative survey of a wide range of material. After beginning with a brief overview of Christian, especially Catholic, perspectives toward other religions from the New Testament to the middle of the twentieth century, Gerald O’Collins rightly approaches his central topic by using all the documents of the Second Vatican Council that have relevance for relations with other religions.

One of the major current debates over the interpretation of the council concerns the degree of continuity and discontinuity between its pronouncements and the earlier Catholic tradition. O’Collins repeatedly and accurately points out the unprecedented teachings of the council on interreligious matters. He has little difficulty demonstrating that the council brought about a change, indeed a “reversal” (204), of Catholic teaching and practice regarding other religions, for example, in comparison with the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century.

Much of the most interesting commentary comes in the secondary but important goal of this book, that is, to comment on postconciliar debates, especially to defend