

and its anxieties—while creating readers to an informal and captivating history of the medical practices surrounding birth in America. Sloan shares his first bumbled attempts at delivering babies as an intern, which leads him into reflect on why doctors persist in having women lie down to give birth when standing or squatting are better physical postures for it. Sloan ranges surely and splendidly over epidurals, cesarean births, premature birth and neonatal nurseries, as well as the state of an infant's five senses at birth. For example, he points out that the fetus not only smells the foods its mother eats, it remembers them after birth and tends to like what it remembers. Sloan counsels that women cannot prepare for labor, because events change rapidly during the process. He advises women to surround themselves with the people they love: "unlike other labor pain relievers she may choose, their benefits will last the rest of her life." (Apr.)

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## Religion

### An American Gospel: On Family, History, and the Kingdom of God

Erik Reece. Riverhead, \$24.95 (272p) ISBN 978-1-59448-859-7

Sometimes religious inspiration can come from the most unlikely places. Reece, author of the award-winning *Lost Mountain*, is the son and grandson of Baptist preachers. His own religious worldview, however, comes not from traditional Protestant Christianity, but from American thinkers such as Walt Whitman, Thomas Jefferson, William James and the lesser-known scientist Lynn Margulis. The author intercalates his personal story, which is one of great tragedy, with those of these great historical figures. His goal is not quite clear from the outset, but that is the point. He is searching for a form of Christianity that he can live with, since he believes that the usual sources are unhelpfully dogmatic. The primary tension is a classic one: the struggle between the material and spiritual worlds. Reece is unconvinced by his stern grandfather's brand of Christianity, based more on the punitive teachings of Paul, he believes, than those of Jesus. The kingdom of God

can be found, at least partly, right now—no need to slog through life in order to celebrate one's reward in the hereafter. There are disjointed moments in the narrative, but the overall project is commendable. (Apr. 2)

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### Compass Points: Meeting God Every Day at Every Turn

Margaret Silf. Loyola, \$13.95 paper (160p) ISBN 978-0-8294-2810-0

A collection of short-form meditations, anecdotes and nuggets of insight gleaned from Silf's work, travels, family and spiritual life, this volume aims to highlight God's appearances in ordinary life. A British retreat director specializing in the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola, Silf (*Close to the Heart*) asserts, "God isn't as elusive as we think." Her meditations are sparked by events as diverse as travel through the American West, Wales and South Africa; pastry made by a old friend; or even an Internet story about a race for children with special needs. Wherever we journey, she says, we will discover that God awaits us "through every point of the compass." Some of the illustrations she uses are compelling. Some are, frankly, rather dull. This is not her richest or most reflective book. But Silf fans will find the writer they know and have come to depend on for grounded ideas on how to incarnate one's faith in daily life. (Apr. 1)

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### The Orthodox Heretic: And Other Impossible Tales

Peter Rollins. Paraclete, \$19.99 (164p) ISBN 978-1-55725-634-8

Don't be fooled by the slender spine of this unusual book. Rollins, the Irish philosopher/po-mo theologian who has previously published *How (Not) to Speak of God* and *The Fidelity of Betrayal*, upends some of Christians' most cherished platitudes about God in his newest outing. He cautions readers that the book is not to be read quickly, for acquiring information, but to be savored slowly for possible transformation. Mostly, the book lives up to this billing. Rollins recasts some of the most familiar parables of and stories about Jesus, sometimes subversively—as when he proposes a version of feeding the 5,000 that shows Jesus and his disciples pigging out on meager resources while the multitudes look on, starving. His

point? That Christians are the body of Christ, and when we oppress the poor and hoard scarce resources, we are saying that represents the kind of God we serve. Although not all of the parables work equally well—some could use further illumination—Rollins is a tremendously talented writer and thinker whose challenges to Christianity-as-usual should be well-received by the emergent church crowd, if not beyond. (Apr. 1)

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### Women of Opus Dei: In Their Own Words

Edited by M.T. Oates, Linda Ruf and Jenny Driver. Crossroad, \$24.95 paper (224p) ISBN 978-0-8245-2425-8

The Catholic group Opus Dei (Latin for "work of God") emerges in this compact collection of essays and interviews as an entity that gives its female members a deep sense of purpose amid ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. Whether they are stay-at-home mothers or professionals in academia and business, these women tell of lives changed by their faith and what they commonly refer to as "the Work." Opus Dei members, according to founder St. Josemaría Escrivá, aspire to be "contemplative souls in the midst of the world who try to convert their work into prayer." They do this through offering their work to Christ and following a spiritual regimen of daily prayer and regular theological development programs. Excerpts from Escrivá's writings and an explanation of the group's structure help fill out the selected narratives. Readers looking for the kind of intrigue found in *The Da Vinci Code's* treatment of this group won't find it here, but they will get an honest appraisal from women who know Opus Dei from the inside out. (Apr.)

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### What Southern Women Know About Faith: Kitchen Table Stories and Back Porch Comfort

Ronda Rich. Zondervan, \$19.99 (224p) ISBN 978-0-310-29179-4

Former journalist and NASCAR publicist Rich, a spirited speaker on the evangelical Christian circuit, has much to say on this subject. With stylish sass, Rich wants to convince her readers that Southern women of faith have a distinct edge over females living anywhere but those warmer climes. Rich shares comical asides