

# Bookshelf

## **Women and Redemption: A Theological History**

*Rosemary Radford Ruether (Fortress Press, 2012, 328 pp)*

The book helps unearth the lives of historical women and men and their many paths towards redemption. This is a much-needed affirmation of a tradition many Catholics sense lies just out of reach within the more frequently told stories about Catholicism. St. Thomas Aquinas, whose many contributions have been discussed in other publications, is revealed to have been a key architect in the imposition of systems that impose an inferior status on women in the church, which continues to stymie reform-minded Catholics today.

The second edition of this work builds upon the first version, published in 1998. The additions to the original material include: timelines for each chapter, suggestions for further reading and research, as well as a focus on what the author calls the “Fourth World.” This Fourth World is a postcolonial view that encompasses stateless peoples, indigenous groups and marginalized social and sexual minorities. The author examines the feminist critique developed by each of the four “worlds,” in which “redemption” is often understood to include critiques of existing structures related to race, class and colonialism. The book focuses on the 2000 years of the Christian tradition and a broad selection of its many antecedents and offshoots. Jewish, African, Protestant and Catholic views are incorporated into this work.

The section on 12<sup>th</sup>-century mystic Hildegard of Bingen depicts the tension between this prophetic woman and her self-image as a “poor little female figure.” She broke new ground for women in her day, but she didn’t see her role as transforming social norms. Instead, the outspoken visionary saw existing male and female social roles as supporting the rightful domination of men over women. Hildegard believed the worldly differences between men and women were not without remedy, but she saw social classes as being much more rigid: only noblewomen were allowed to join her monastery.

As the book moves through time it reveals a tradition of female spiritual seekers that was never truly obscured by the many voices that had a better platform within established religion. Solid scholarship and the true historian’s gift at getting inside long-vanished heads make *Women and Redemption* a worthy read.

## **Church Militant:**

### **Bishop Kung and Catholic Resistance in Communist Shanghai**

*Paul P. Mariani, SJ (Harvard University Press, 2011, 282 pp)*

Like history itself, this book can be read on a number of levels. As a Jesuit writing about a nation whose Catholicism has been heavily influenced by that order, it’s understandable that the author is telling the story from a step or two closer than one would expect from a history book. The result is anything but dry: rather, it is a well-researched and well-told narrative that has the tone of a book about war. It has all the tragedies, tactical maneuvers and heroism one would expect about a conflict between two great enemies, one of them with a clear moral ascendancy, with the part of heroes played by Catholic clergy and laypeople resisting government repression.

That Chinese communism was a political regime with an expressed enmity for religion, especially Catholicism, and that many faithful people paid a high price in that system, is clear from the author’s painstaking research. Even those readers who are less likely to take sides with the way the Catholic church has interacted with secular powers in the last century will find *Bishop Kung* a compelling read. The battles Chinese Catholics were forced to fight against the government also drew in Catholic missionaries and the secular and religious powers from their home countries, meaning this segment of history was not two sides, good versus evil, but the complex interactions between a variety of secular and religious entities. This book illuminates a new section of the sprawling and complex tapestry woven by Catholics as they engage with the world—as missionaries, faith communities and sometimes as dissidents.

1998 the drug Preven became the first FDA-approved EC product.

Subsequently, a different EC product, Plan B, became the center of a political firestorm during the George W. Bush presidency. The makers of Plan B asked that the FDA approve “over the counter” (OTC) status for the drug, arguing that ample scientific evidence demonstrated the safety of such a move. This application was subject to numerous delays and, predictably, the vociferous opposition of antiabortion forces, but finally was approved by the joint advisory committee of the FDA in 2003. Nevertheless, in an unprecedented action, Steve Galson, the acting head of the FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, rejected the recommendation of the advisory committee. He argued that Barr Laboratory, the makers of Plan B, had not shown that “young adolescent women” could safely use the drug “without the supervision of a practitioner.” As Prescott points out, this was the first time that the FDA had ruled that a drug be assigned a prescription status based on age. Barr Laboratory resubmitted its application, including data that demonstrated the drug could be safely used by adolescents, but the FDA repeatedly postponed its decision over the next two years. This postponement, widely believed to be driven by the Bush administration’s desire to please its social conservative base, led to the well-publicized resignation of Dr. Susan Wood, head of the FDA’s Office of Women’s Health. Not until Senators Patty Murray and Hillary Clinton made good on their threat to hold up the confirmation of a new head of the FDA did the agency finally release its decision in 2006: approval for over-the-counter status was granted, but only for women 18 and older. Later a judge ruled that this order had to also encompass women who were 17. Advocates again pushed to extend this ruling to those under 17, leading to the Obama administration’s overturning of the 2011 FDA decision mentioned above.

Most readers of this book will probably already be aware of the two main opponents in the enduring conflict over