



# **I Was And I Am Dust: Penitente Practices as a Way of Knowing (Virgil Michel Series)**

*David M. Mellott*

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There are a variety of people, practices, and celebrations in the Catholic Church. At times some of these can be dismissed too easily as extreme, superstitious, or uninformed. Such is the case with the Penitentes of New Mexico. In *I Was and I Am Dust*, David M. Mellott shares his experiences of the Penitentes as an outsider. He explains their struggles with the institutional church, and some of the seemingly extreme rituals they facilitate during Holy Week. Through the voice of Larry Torres, one of the senior members of the Penitentes, Mellott poignantly provides readers with a more intimate picture of this community of practitioners.

Yet so much more than an analysis written by an outsider, this work attempts to understand the experience of those within a group whose practices are considered outside the mainstream. With Mellott and Torres, readers may be surprised to discover a depth of meaning in these practices and to realize the beauty of being dust.

*David M. Mellott is assistant professor of practical theology and director of ministerial formation at Lancaster Theological Seminary, where he teaches courses in philosophy, ethnography, and theology of ministry. He is committed to supporting and nurturing Christian communities that empower people to live more authentically as they seek to love God, neighbor, and self more deeply.*

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