
This book aims to analyze fasting in the New Testament in its historical, social, and cultural contexts. This involves examination of the matter of fasting in the cultural setting of the first-century Mediterranean world, which sets a background for the practice of fasting in the New Testament. S. H. Mathews, who teaches New Testament courses at Fruitland Baptist Bible College, describes the two general principles of religious fasting: fasting as nearly universal phenomenon and fasting as a means of identifying oneself with a larger community. He aims at interpreting the phenomenon of fasting in the Gospels and Acts by using the social-scientific critical method as a means of comparing it to the practice of fasting in evangelical Christianity today.

In chapter one, Mathews presents an anthropological approach to the New Testament, with the purpose of scrutinizing the biblical texts within their first-century Mediterranean sociocultural context using social-scientific criticism as a major tool. In favor of treating the biblical texts within their original cultural and social setting, Mathews argues, “Texts within their cultural environment are not viewed as one-dimensional; rather the social-scientific critic attempts to take into account the interplay of factors…which together comprise the text in its social, canonical, and theological context” (7). Thus he gives a brief analysis of the social institutions of the early Mediterranean world, including honor and shame, individualism and collectivism, kinship, and limited good. He then turns to a very short and comparative discussion of hermeneutical methodologies, namely, social-scientific criticism and historical criticism.

In chapter two, Mathews reviews fasting in the Old Testament literatures and the sociocultural life of the ancient Mediterranean world, which he considers a proper site to search for the theological, social, and cultural context if one is to understand fasting in the New Testament. Fasting had a significant place in the religious and communal identity of the people of the Old Testament and first-century Mediterranean world. In the Old Testament, fasting served as a “means of humbling the soul” (31) before God, both individually and corporately, for expressing “sorrow, repentance, and moral urgency” (47), rather than as an act of devotion intended for developing “personal moderation and self-control” (49).

Chapter three is the longest section of the book, in which Mathews examines fasting in the New Testament from a social-scientific perspective. He attempts to interpret instances of fasting in the Gospels and Acts in their theological, social, and cultural setting. Mathews emphasizes the importance of giving due consideration to the influence of the Jewish tradition (OT and extrabiblical Jewish tradition) in an interpretation of New Testament texts. Accordingly, fasting can be interpreted as a deep response to a personal or national suffering expressed in dishonoring oneself with the purpose of putting moral obligation on the observers and attaining honor through exhibiting higher devotion to God and one’s nation.
Although Jesus’s “forty-day fast” (Matt 4:1–11) would place him into the lineage of the prophets of Israel, he fasted with an intention to remain loyal to God rather than to gain honor for himself, even when his status as Son of God was challenged. Unlike the practices of other Jewish sects (Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and Essenes), Jesus’s fasting and his instructions regarding fasting in the Gospels provided the apostles and his followers with an alternative to Judaism. Thus the church appeared “as the alternative community within Judaism” (54–55). The Greek term nestia, which means “a fast” or “not eating,” indicates that the New Testament fasting is intentional and religious in essence, and a practice of humbling oneself for worship, service, and prayer. Mathews argues that prayer and fasting help the followers of Jesus to establish a holy lifestyle and spiritual authority. Yet, fasting cannot lead to righteousness or justification. Although fasting was practiced by the early church occasionally in the context of prayer, it is not normative, but can be practiced individually or corporately based on a felt need.

In chapter four, the author explores the practice of fasting in the context of contemporary evangelicalism, focusing on historical, theological, and spiritual perspectives. Unlike medieval Christianity, which emphasized mysticism and asceticism as the operative dynamics in medieval spirituality, evangelicalism belongs to the tradition of Reformation spirituality, which views grace and faith as central factors for salvation and sanctification. Evangelical spirituality promotes the teaching that a believer’s union with Christ can only be achieved by the work of the Holy Spirit based on faith rather than dependent on the believer’s worth. Thus, contemporary evangelicals encourage a wider practice of prayer, repentance, and fasting as a spiritual discipline that allows access to divine power, not as a state of grace.

Mathews brings evangelical and New Testament theology of fasting into dialogue in chapter five. To that end, he asks and responds to specific questions intended for comparing and contrasting the two fasting traditions. Fasting in the New Testament and in evangelical theology is a voluntary individual or community practice, rather than being mandatory for Christians. Fasting in the New Testament also has eschatological significance. He devotes more pages to the interpretation section, in which he discusses two anthropological dichotomies: the shame/guilt dichotomy and the ritual/ceremony dichotomy. Evangelicalism promotes the guilt-based perspective of fasting, which is private and spontaneous rather than ritualized. Mathews concludes that “evangelical Christians have liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with the use of good judgment, to interpret fasting in ways that make it meaningful for the culture in which they live” (146).

The significance of Mathews’s work is unquestionable. Besides the misuse of other spiritual gifts, the nature and practice of Christian fasting is the most misunderstood in some African church contexts. Although there are some inconsistencies on the text, Mathews has provided the church with a very important tool for addressing the challenges related to the practice of fasting. In short, the book is the outcome of a thorough analysis of a topic that seems neglected by evangelical Christians today. It is relevant and worth reading.

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Looking back at the history of Christianity in the twentieth century, the most important story of that century for Christians was the shift in their “center of gravity,” and the globalization of this religious community. In 1900, trans-Atlantic Christianity (Europe and North America) accounted for two-thirds of all Christians in the world, with almost half the world’s Christians in Europe. There was a long-standing (though stagnant) Christian monopoly in Latin America, and very small numbers of Christians in Africa and Asia. By the year 2000, this situation has been absolutely reversed, with two-thirds of all Christians living in the Global South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America). But these statistics alone are not the whole story; in Europe, Christian belief and practice are on a precipitous decline, while in North America they are stagnant at best. But Christianity is booming in the Global South, Latin American Christianity is thriving, and there are now 325 million Christians in Asia (China is a miracle of its own). The numbers of Christians in Africa have gone from 10 million in 1900 to 365 million by 2000, perhaps the largest growth of Christianity in a single continent in a single century in all of Christian history. This is not to say that things are uniformly well, but the vigor and the potential of Christianity, especially in the Global South, is remarkable.

This has meant, to say the least, a major transformation in Christianity, one that likely will continue well into the twenty-first century, and one with major implications for all Christians, and for our world in general. For Christians in North America these developments will define the future of our religious lives, and will be important to our own religious vitality if we pay heed to them. Good, bad, or otherwise we will have to look to the Christians of the Global South and learn from them anew about the Christianity that we, ourselves, had brought to them through the remarkable Christian missions of the past 200 years. The world has dramatically shifted, and we need to make sense of it.

One great place to start is this book. Douglas Jacobsen, who teaches at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, has written an extremely good and readable introduction to Christianity in its historical contexts and present global realities, one that can be of great help to its readers in understanding and digesting all these changes. This book is concise, incisive, and very well-organized, in a short narrative telling the history of Christianity and its present realities in each of the earth’s five continents. Jacobsen describes these events, taking each continent in turn as the focus for his narrative. Besides the very well-crafted text, the book contains useful images, graphs, and maps, along with a good bibliography at the end for further reading.

This is a compact introduction to the subject of global Christianity, but for a relatively modest book it still contains a trove of information, knowledge, and analysis that can be useful to many different levels of readers. Personally, I learned a great deal from the book, even though I have read in this area before, and I also appreciated the fine way in which he organized these materials. If you wanted one book to help you make sense of the whole of the Christian community in the twenty-first century, this would be the one to choose. It would be excellent for your own personal reading and reference. This is also the kind of work that might be useful in a congregation for book groups and study groups, and adult education—groups could work through one chapter at a time, or at their own pace. I will be using this book with my students at Luther Semi
nary, to make sure they have a sense of where Christianity is now, and where it may well be headed.

In sum, an excellent and supremely useful book—I highly recommend it.

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Readers of this journal may remember Kierkegaard for the Church, a collection of essays and sermons this scholarly pastor produced in 2013. Robert Perkins, the general editor of the twenty-six-volume International Kierkegaard Commentary, hailed that book as “a high-water mark in Kierkegaard research.” Marshall is well known in the Kierkegaard academic community for his many articles, and in November will deliver the prestigious Julia Watkin Memorial Lecture at St. Olaf College, mission central for Kierkegaard scholarship in the United States.

Marshall has announced his Watkin Lecture subtitle as “Luther’s Thought as the Matrix for Kierkegaard’s Writings.” That phrasing catches the tone of this new book as well. The heart of the book is a collection of twenty-seven sermons, actually preached at First Lutheran Church of West Seattle, where Marshall has served since 1979 and where Kierkegaard has been remembered every November since 1980. Martin Luther and Kierkegaard, “Luther’s best student or reader,” are constantly present in this new book’s pages, prodding the reader to hear the living word and act on it.

The sermons are bookended by essays well placed to introduce the aggressive sermons and to reflect on their reading or “hearing” as the author invites (393). In the Introduction we find ourselves facing what Kierkegaard called “the Bottleneck,” where “intensity” (the crucifixion, and the single individual) and “extensity” (Pentecost and the community) meet and oppose each other. Kierkegaard, facing a Danish state church, stressed the severity of intensity. Marshall surely does that as well but tells us that “in this book I want to show that it is possible to preach with intensity and extensity,” then adding, “in spite of the complacency of extensity.” There follows quite naturally a chapter “On Judging Others,” in which the author locates “a positive place for judging in Christian living.” But if we are to “judge rightly” (John 7:24), the biblical standards must apply to us as well and our judging must be “revisable,” “constructive,” and seek confirming “collaboration.” Thus Marshall equips the reader to evaluate the preaching he offers.

The six appendices critically engage other readers of Kierkegaard such as Kyle Roberts and Daphne Hampson. The first, “On Judaism,” may be of particular interest in this Luther year for its defense of the Reformer’s The Jews and Their Lies as evangelically motivated: “arguing against the religion of Judaism and not against the Jews in any anti-Semitic way” (301). He grants that “we may repudiate the harsh tactics Luther proposed” (310). There are also close studies of two biblical topics of great interest for Kierkegaard: Mary and Martha, and the Lilies and the Birds. The final pieces summarize the author’s “opposition to theological innovation” (380) and declare the author’s intention actually to live in The Hotel Kierkegaard (388–394). Finishing the book, one does not doubt that he does.

The beef of the book of course is in the sermons. Citing the Book of Concord, Marshall follows what he finds in Kierkegaard’s own sermons: “the Lutheran threefold format: condemning sin, proclaiming Christ, and leading
to good works” (23). As to the first, Marshall displays a rich contemporary tapestry of depravity and error, including the self-esteem movement and the defenders of doubt. In strongly employing the second use of the law he very much includes himself, and the first person plural prevails throughout the book. With regard to proclaiming Christ, the book’s preface, “Preaching the Atonement,” already sounds the predominant themes: the demands of the law, the requirement of punishment, and the Son, sent as substitute, paying the price his Father’s justice entails. Some variety is present in the details: “Jesus moves God to mercy” (92) and/or “stabilizes God’s love for us” (139). Thus the Christian, called to forgive others (part of that Lutheran third point), has the assurance that God is “already waiting in the wings with his absolution on the tip of his tongue” (84). Throughout there is a strong calling to repentance and faith, for while “only his [Christ’s] death makes salvation possible,” “what makes it actual…is our faith in it” (163). Yet, “[R]egardless if we believe in it [Christ’s sacrifice for us] or not, it still stands” (70).

There is a punctiliar quality to this first-order speech, featuring short particular passages in the Bible, Martin Luther, and Kierkegaard. Indeed Marshall agrees with the observation that “Kierkegaard well understood that like a Zen koan, the truth expressed in a line or three can glisten as a legitimate object of reflection and appropriation” (391). Perhaps a reviewer may be offtrack in assembling the particulars in some second-order structure of understanding. Yet one hungers for such a structure. Encouraging suggestions can be found: the affirmation of Augustine’s credo ut intelligam (199), the appropriation of Fear and Trembling’s criteria for distinguishing faith from fanaticism (363), Kierkegaard’s recognition of “a new how of the old what” of Christianity, and Marshall’s own six-point response to the identification of substitutionary atonement as “divine child abuse” (258). Pastor Marshall seems glad to “have assiduously avoided” making an effort “to bring Kierkegaard’s religious thought into dialogue with postmodern expressions of Christianity” (320–321). Does diluting accommodation threaten there? What if dialogue includes mutual critique? Kierkegaard’s massive production included works done with the left hand (the pseudonymous writings) and the right (the veronymous writings, emphasized here). Is there a sense that in that ambidexterity there was a dialogue under way between the Christian and other “stages on life’s way”? Could we hope for a third Kierkegaard book from Ronald F. Marshall?

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Cordell Strug has written an odd yet stimulating and charming book. The latter descriptor is one Strug himself frequently applies to his subject, the American philosopher and investigator of religious experience, William James. But Strug’s James is more than an affable interlocutor. A deliberately provocative, dubiously reliable guide to religious inquiry, he is no less illuminating and valuable for his flaws. Indeed, he is a worthy companion for Christian pilgrims whose commitment to godly living spurs a restless curiosity about God and life—and a formidable but charitable adversary for militants whose jealous regard for their faith precludes its rigorous examination.

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James’s value for religious life frankly recapitulates his own intellectual and spiritual journey. The book is organized in four disproportionate parts: (1) a brief introduction; (2) a lightly revised lecture delivered while Strug was a student at Luther Northwestern Theological (now Luther) Seminary in the mid 1970s; (3) the analytical and rhetorical meat of Strug’s doctoral dissertation for Purdue University’s department of philosophy in 1972; and (4) a brief conclusion, “Ave Atque Vale,” quoting Catullus to bid James and his spirit of fearless yet generous inquiry a sad, even sendemont farewell. The result both narrates and demonstrates Strug’s evolving view and use of James: first as potential herald of a modern, inclusive, socially responsible, anti-dogmatic theism; then as intellectually slippery, spiritually vapid supernaturalist; and finally as dearly missed and desperately needed rebuker of the American social conscience.

Though he demonstrates an impressive grasp of his subject’s diverse oeuvre, Strug’s focal text is James’s classic *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). As that title implies, the object of religious consciousness in James’s view—and thus the essential datum upon which any claim to a specifically religious truth must rest—is an immediate experience of the divine rather than a clear conception (much less a theology or creed) defining or explaining it. Such an experience cannot be reduced to psychology in the sense of a psychic need or drive, though the subconscious is its likely channel and perhaps marks the near side of its ultimate source. Individual religious experiences are too diverse (and frequently perverse) to be explained solely in terms of the evolved neurophysiology of the race, and their collective effects too characteristically disruptive and generative. As a class they represent the greatest known spur to what James called “the strenuous life”: a life devoted not to dominating, adapting to, or even surviving one’s given environment, but to challenging and expanding the boundaries of human moral potential.

Here it becomes clear—that God is essentially a warrant for, and ally in, our efforts to extend James’s pragmatist or “radical” empiricism beyond directly observable or socially transmitted experience to those mysterious forces knowable only through the behavior they appear to influence. Such forces do not determine that behavior; James was an implacable defender of free will. Rather, against what he called the “scientistic” view that reduces every meaningful human activity to an epiphenomenon of physical laws, James viewed the widespread human experience of communing with and channeling a supernatural good as evidence that we have a personal claim on reality; a reason, in other words, to believe we can make reality better (or worse) than we find it. Whether we do well or not by reality depends on our actions, which depend on our judgments, which depend on our ideals and inspirations as well as our careful reflection on their implications. Ultimately, James’s defense of religion is a defense of any experience that brings home the power, gravity, uncertainty, and inescapable responsibility of human choice.

Strug’s able explication of James’s religious investigations will interest *Word & World* readers and their congregations for several reasons. Among the most interesting to this reviewer, though unremarked by Strug himself, are some surprising parallels between James’s theism (such as it is) and Luther’s theology (such as this reviewer understands it).

Both thinkers, for instance, were constitutionally opposed to dogmatism. Certainly, both acknowledged sources of authority beyond the purely subjective—experience for James, Scripture for Luther. Still, both ap-
Reviews

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proached their respective texts not so much as sources of answers but inspirations to action: Ask, ye seekers, what each particular encounter with creation demands of you—and damn systematics! Consequently, both James and Luther encouraged their readers to live life dialectically, turning again and again to experience or Scripture to retest previously established conclusions and formulate new hypotheses to guide conduct. As a result, both thinkers typically conceived of virtue in social terms: James’s notorious “will to believe” did not imply solipsism any more than Luther’s “priesthood of all believers” meant “every man his own church.”

At certain points in his analysis Strug is skeptical of this last claim. More than once he accuses James of ignoring religion’s character (for most people) as a communal phenomenon, or at least as something mediated (and often generated) by social experience. The charge has merit, but more attention to James’s ethical writings would have revealed that James’s focus on rehabilitating the truth-value of the personal and mystical was a strategic gambit in his war against scientism.

One senses Strug would sympathize with such a reading, for his most recent thoughts linger on James’s empathy, tolerance, and epistemic humility—in short, his practice of what Strug considers genuine yet endangered virtues of Christian ethics. Strug is as scandalized by the moral absolutism of today’s evangelicals as James was by the intellectual absolutism of his own day’s materialists (and updated deists). Strug makes a persuasive and passionate case that although James did not believe in any God that most Christians would recognize, his respect for those who did should shame Christians who assert a monopoly on truth, virtue, or grace even while proclaiming the Good News of our deliverance from such fatal pretensions. James knew better than such self-styled true believers that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”—even if he conceived that glory in ideal rather than real terms. Appropriately, Strug leaves one with the impression that Luther’s injunction to “sin boldly,” while baffling to some, would strike James as a worthy motto indeed.

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At a time when many people are thinking about the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation it is instructive to read about that historical movement in England. Leslie Williams provides an insightful biography written for those interested in Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) and the English Reformation. It is a book, she says, for seminarians, priests, and lay students of English history and theology. It contributes a fresh insight into the development of the Anglican/Episcopal Church for the general reader, not for professional scholars in the field (1).

The book’s cover claims it is “A Short Life of Thomas Cranmer”; but in truth it is a profoundly compact and moving story of a person known perhaps only by those who may have seen a movie or a BBC production of this complex clergyman and his times. In politically treacherous waters, Cranmer served Christ, the Church, Henry VIII, and subsequent monarchs, a vitiating journey which required tremendous skill, adroit footwork, and a strong sense of commitment. By all accounts Cranmer often shifted with the wind; but he possessed a strong sense of survival. Knowing
how and when to compromise without forsaking basic principles made it possible for him to serve the unpredictable Henry for nearly twenty-five years.

As the narrative unfolds, one comes to realize that for the first 100 pages this book is really a dual biography. We learn that Cranmer was able to survive only because of his relationship with the protective, quixotic, and often cruel king Henry VIII. It does not stretch historical truth to say that the archbishop and the king had a symbiotic relationship. That is, neither could have achieved what he did without the presence and maneuvering of the other.

In early years Cranmer was an academic, a New Testament scholar at Cambridge. He had no ambition to be anywhere or do anything other than where he was. But almost by accident he casually posed a solution to Henry’s marital problem with Catherine of Aragon. Cranmer subsequently found himself favored by Henry; and eventually he was elevated to the position of archbishop of Canterbury.

But Cranmer always walked a tightrope in the nearly quarter century he served king, church, and country. In the political and religious hothouse of the time, Cranmer had many bitter, even lethal detractors, rivals, and enemies, many of whom were fellow clergymen—and they were ruthless. Yet the canny archbishop had a strong sense of survival; through luck and pluck he was able to stay just a little ahead of them because of Henry’s (often duplicitous) support.

Even though Williams regards this book as a short life of Thomas Cranmer, she packs a great deal of detail and depth as she unspools the narrative. We learn of Cranmer’s daily life and the tortuous routines of court life. We learn that Cranmer did not like Luther, though he took some theological cues from the continental Reformer, particularly with regard to...
justification and Eucharist. Moreover, on several occasions he tried to reach accord with the Germans, though things did not work out.

The archbishop was not always consistent and often had to compromise. For instance, he found himself in the unenviable position of personally opposing, yet having to endorse the infamous Six Articles of 1539. Among other things, these articles maintained the doctrine of transubstantiation, withheld the cup from the laity, and enforced clerical celibacy. This latter was especially nettlesome to Cranmer since he was secretly married.

The book is a sprightly and compelling drama for as long as the unpredictable king is alive to set the agenda. After Henry dies (in great pain), the book seems to lack a certain zip. Once Henry died, Cranmer allowed himself to grow a snowfall of a beard. Ever loyal, he supported the teenage King Edward. And he found time to revise what eventually became the Book of Common Prayer.

The rise of Queen Mary, however, was like a protracted kiss of death for Cranmer. The queen never forgave him his part in the divorce of her mother, Catherine of Aragon, from the headstrong Henry. In three heartbreaking chapters Williams details (almost day by day) the persecution, degradations, and fiery death of Archbishop Cranmer.

Williams’s writing has a tense “you are there” quality as she dramatically describes the moment when Cranmer held out his hand to be burned, for in writing that hand had often betrayed Cranmer’s inner convictions. These final chapters of the book are haunting. They might remind Lutheran readers that Luther might have stood in a similar pyre, except for luck and providence.

*Emblem of Faith Untouched* is a beautifully written book, rich in detail. In a book like this, however, the publishers ought to have allowed some illustrations to complement the text. A picture of Martyrs’ Monument in Oxford and of the fully bearded Cranmer would add visual value to the written word. Fortunately, one can search the web and see the difference in artists’ conceptions of Cranmer as he appears, beardless on the cover of the book, and later heavily bearded after Henry’s death.

One also wishes that among the vast cast of characters who appear in the book Williams might have referenced Robert Barnes, who played an important role in the doings of the day. It is satisfying to see that Williams notes Cranmer’s role in revisions of the prayer book: 1549 and 1552, the latter with the assistance of Martin Bucer. A more linear telling of that venture might have given added literary value to an otherwise rich narrative.

However, there are a number of compensating features near the end of the book. Williams has included a postscript and an excellent series of questions for thought and discussion on Key Issues in the Reformation: Polity, Practice, Worship, Doctrine (154, 155, 156). And she has included a pithy outline of Reformation Eucharist Theology (157), which can help clear up some of the knotty issues in the book.

One puts down this book having learned a great deal about Cranmer’s life and times. There is a touch of understandable hagiography in Williams’s final assessment of the courageous but fallible archbishop. But it is a moving testimony to someone who stood firm in the trials and flames when many others caved in. “This, then, was the end of the learned archbishop of Canterbury, whose stand at the end is more memorable because of the vacillations he made through his only-too-human weakness. The indelible image of his hand in the flames carried the Reformation through Mary’s bloody reign, and established Cranmer as one of the great heroes of the English faith” (151).

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Finally! A concise, contextual biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is now available in the English language for virtually every level of readership; in fact, for anyone interested in the life and thought of this Christian pastor, theologian, and martyr. Christiane Tietz, currently president of the German Section of the International Bonhoeffer Society and professor of systematic theology at the University of Zurich, has given the world (first in 2013 in German and now in 2016 in English) what has been lacking for over forty years. Bonhoeffer’s good friend and biographer, Eberhard Bethge, authored Costly Grace (Harpercollins) in 1980, which is now out of print, as a concise counterpart to his (Bethge’s) larger, definitive, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography (Fortress Press, 2000; revised edition). Further, Theologian of Resistance has the advantage of almost forty years of additional insights from volumes of more recently unearthed primary source material.

The completion of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke (1986–1999) and its translation, The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English (1996–2014) edition, has resulted in the publication of virtually all of the extant materials—primary and some secondary—of the Bonhoeffer legacy. Christiane Tietz has devoted her professional career to focusing on understanding and perpetuating the legacy of Bonhoeffer. Being chosen to lead the German Section of the International Bonhoeffer Society indicates the high esteem in which she is held among her colleagues. Tietz’s impeccable scholarship is evident in her careful selection of historical and theological material for this volume. David Gushee (Mercer University) captures the quality and appeal of Theologian of Resistance in his jacket endorsement: “this book should become the new standard concise biography of the towering German theologian of Christian discipleship and resistance.”

One could reasonably ask why this book about Dietrich Bonhoeffer is needed, given the plethora of books already available. Is this not simply “one more book”? In fact, Tietz’s concise volume is currently one of a kind and very timely. Since the appearance of Bethge’s Bonhoeffer biography in 1970, a number of historical novels have been written about Bonhoeffer: Theodore Gill’s Memo for a Movie: A Short Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Macmillan, 1971); Mary Glazener’s Cup of Wrath: A Novel Based on Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Resistance to Hitler (Smyth & Helwys, 1993); Denise Giardina’s Saints and Villains: A Novel (W. W. Norton, 2010). Many books have focused on specific aspects of his legacy (e.g., ministry, ethics, theology, resistance) and several biographies have been published: Charles Marsh’s Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Ferdinand Schlingensiepen’s Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945 (T. T. Clark, 2010); Eric Metaxas’s Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Spy (Thomas Nelson, 2011).

While every attempt to tell Bonhoeffer’s story—or unfold his contributions—aims at objectivity and authenticity, some succeed more than others. Don’t we all have our agendas and biases? Whereas Mark Nation, Anthony Siegrist, and Daniel Umbel (Bonhoeffer the Assassin?: Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peace, Baker, 2013) see—and sincerely write about—Bonhoeffer through their lenses of Mennonite pacifism, and Andrew Root (Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker, Baker, 2013) authentically reads—and then writes about—Bonhoeffer through his lens of youth and family ministry, the conservative/
evangelical theology of Georg Huntemann (The Other Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Re-assessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Baker, 1993) and Eric Metaxas (Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Spy, Thomas Nelson, 2011) clearly colors their interpretation. Christiane Tietz describes today—as objectively and authentically as anyone has—the real Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And, she has done this in one hundred forty-one pages! Tietz has carefully selected the biographical, historical, and theological detail necessary to tell Bonhoeffer’s story, concisely and contextually. So, yes, this volume has a very important place among today’s plethora of books about Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

It is in her epilogue in Theologian of Resistance that Tietz speaks about Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ongoing influence. While contextualizing “The Reception of Bonhoeffer after 1945,” Tietz displays her understanding of more recent Bonhoeffer scholarship, and states where she believes his legacy is focused today. Asking why Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s name and life continues to attract people’s attention, often people of quite divergent religious persuasions, she discusses how Bonhoeffer’s legacy has been useful in places as different as the former German Democratic Republic, South Africa, and South Korea. In stating how “Almost all his (Bonhoeffer’s) contemporaries and the first generation of Bonhoeffer scholars are gone, and the second generation has now retired” (117), she points to a time now when scholarship is more “critical” and “shaped by the moral and social positions of today” (117). The author rightly points out that Bonhoeffer’s influence and importance today should find expression less with people asking “What would Bonhoeffer do?” and rather in seeing his authentic life and particular responsible actions as inspiration for the way we authenti-
cally and responsibly engage our particular social and religious challenges (i.e., less hero worship and more shared responsibility).

Although I routinely assign my own book on Dietrich Bonhoeffer for the undergraduate students and parishioners I teach, I am very tempted henceforth to use Christiane Tietz’s new volume, because it is as readable as it is objective and authentic. I believe her book will be of significant value to persons new to Bonhoeffer’s legacy as well as seasoned scholars. I highly recommend *Theologian of Resistance*.

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