

Reviews



CHRIST EXISTING AS COMMUNITY: BONHOEFFER'S ECCLESIOLOGY, by Michael Mawson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xii + 199, \$85.00 (hardcover).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's early work has been relatively neglected in comparison to his more well-known later writings. This is particularly true of his dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*. In *Christ Existing as Community*, Michael Mawson aims to recover this work that he deems foundational to understanding Bonhoeffer's theology. He also seeks to bring *Sanctorum Communio* into contemporary conversations about ecclesiology and the engagement of theology with the social sciences. He does so throughout the book by addressing two of the most common criticisms of *Sanctorum Communio*: 1) that, because Bonhoeffer starts with ecclesiology, and not a doctrine of God, the book does not place sufficient emphasis on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and 2) that the book relies on an outdated sociological model and is therefore inadequate for a dialogue between theology and the social sciences.

After a brief introduction, the book is divided into three sections. Part I, which includes only one chapter, locates Bonhoeffer in his intellectual context. At the time Bonhoeffer wrote *Sanctorum Communio*, many theologians who wished to

engage with social theory were dependent on the writings of Ernst Troeltsch, who believed Christianity to be a historical phenomenon and urged Christians to engage society in view of the church as a defined social structure. Mawson argues that while Bonhoeffer deeply appreciates Troeltsch's insistence upon the concreteness of the church, he also expresses concern that Troeltsch's work is not sufficiently theological. The other alternative of the time was Karl Barth, who insisted on a separation between God and the world and divine freedom for revelation on God's own terms. While Bonhoeffer affirms the need for freedom, he maintains that Barth does not pay sufficient attention to God's revelation *in the church*. Per Mawson, *Sanctorum Communio* is Bonhoeffer's attempt to provide a third ecclesiological alternative, one that is grounded in God's revelation by dealing with the reality of the church as a concrete, human community established by God.

In Section II, Mawson provides an overview of Bonhoeffer's engagement with social theory. Chapter 2 lays out sociologist Peter Berger's critique that Bonhoeffer's book is of little value for dialogue between theology and social science because he relies on the "formalistic school" of sociology rather than the historical sociological approach, which has endured more meaningfully in social-scientific circles. Mawson

describes the two schools in a way that is simple and approachable for the non-specialist. He concludes that Berger's criticism misses Bonhoeffer's aim in writing the book, which is not to open dialogue with the social sciences, but to discern how sociology and social theory might be of service to a theological study of the church.

Mawson goes on to demonstrate how Bonhoeffer employs social theory in his theological work. Chapter 3 illustrates how Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology draws on discussions about ethical relationships between people that were common among philosophers and social theorists, while simultaneously critiquing the underlying belief that reality is only true as it is perceived by individuals. For Bonhoeffer, this belief is the embodiment of sin. By contrast, the Christian person is aware that the chasm between the self and God, as well as between the self and others, is a manifestation of sin and seeks to heal the chasm by striving to see the other as an "I."

In chapter 4, Mawson describes this type of ethical relationship as the foundational way of being in the church. Because the community is composed of willing individuals, the more organically assembled "community-type" social formation (described by sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies) is not a structure that accurately encapsulates the church. Neither is the "society-type" formation (also Tönnies), which accounts for the willingness and shared purpose of individual Christians in the church, but not for the church as a community established by God. Bonhoeffer resolves that the church should be understood as a distinct sociological type.

Mawson concludes the section in chapter 5 with a detailed description of the fall, which Bonhoeffer understands

as a sinful collective person (Adam) who is overcome by the ethical collective person of Christ. Because Christ is embodied in the church, the church becomes the location in which the Christian dialectic of creation, sin, and reconciliation is realized.

Part III more explicitly lays out Bonhoeffer's contributions to the theological study of the church. In chapter 6 Mawson takes on the charge that Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology sidelines his Christology by arguing that, for Bonhoeffer, Christ both establishes and constitutes the church. Thus, Christ's work is not subordinate to the work of the church, but rather defines it; the church cannot exist apart from Christ. As such, in chapter 7 Mawson goes on to argue that Bonhoeffer stands in opposition to that current in theology that wishes to separate the concrete reality of the church from some sort of ideal form that the church might aspire to be, but will never realize in this age. In spite of human sin, the church was established by God and is the place where revelation happens. Thus, theologians must deal with the church as an empirical reality. Mawson concludes the book by suggesting some ways *Sanctorum Communio* might be useful for contemporary conversations about ecclesiology and the use of the social sciences in theological study.

Mawson competently achieves his goal of making *Sanctorum Communio* available for contemporary consideration. He is effective in addressing the book's critics and (not insignificantly) explains Bonhoeffer's contributions in a work that has a reputation for difficulty and complexity. As such, *Christ Existing as Community* functions as a valuable reader on Bonhoeffer's dissertation.

Of particular value for a contemporary audience is Mawson's emphasis on philosophical realism by means of

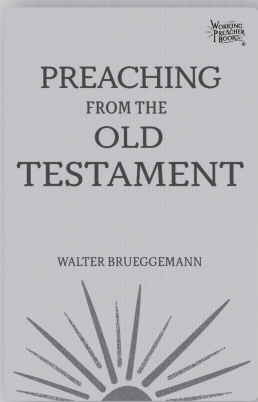
Bonhoeffer's insistence on the church as a concrete or empirical entity. While Mawson is careful to emphasize Bonhoeffer's reliance on the Lutheran notion that it is God who establishes the church and that people do not carry out the work of revelation on their own terms, he also ensures that theologians and practicing Christians engaging Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology will not be able to easily turn to an inaccessible time and place for holiness to be achieved. God's work happens in the concrete reality of the church here and now. This perspective is important for understanding much of Bonhoeffer's later work. It is also valuable for encouraging Christians to engage in the challenges of sin both within and beyond the church in this time.

Because of the importance of this work for contemporary ecclesiology and

ethics, Mawson's brief conclusion suggesting potential pathways for ongoing engagement with Bonhoeffer's book is also valuable. Considering that Mawson touches on four distinct areas of ecclesiological study in short order, and with only high-level explanation, the section may leave the reader a bit confused and desiring deeper engagement. While Mawson does not indicate directions for further study, one might hope that he or other theologians will take up the challenge that is suggested in the final pages of this book for contemporary ecclesiological study and its utilization of the social sciences.

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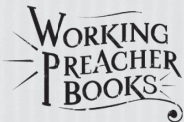
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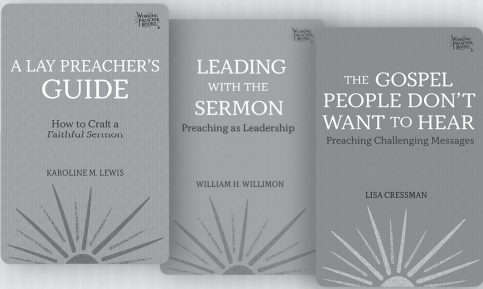
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KARL BARTH AND DIETRICH BONHOEFFER: THEOLOGIAN FOR A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD, by Wolf Krötke, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 272 pages, \$48.00 (hardcover).

As we know, every text has a context. And if a text is fortunate enough to include important and relevant material, such a text might even impact subsequent contexts. Wolf Krötke, emeritus professor of theology at Berlin's Humboldt University, was born in 1938 and educated in East Germany following the Second World War. He wrote these timely essays out of his context in both East and post-1989 Germany, employing the theological legacies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in their dynamic contexts. Translator John Burgess correctly describes Krötke's writings as "densely packed," and so allow me to begin this brief review by saying this book is heavy lifting. I recommend it for academics, well-read pastors, and informed laity. The first part includes essays about Karl Barth and, interestingly, resembles the writing style of Karl Barth: densely packed. The second part focuses on ideas of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and requires interest in engaging the prison writings of the mature Bonhoeffer. I would quickly add that the reward of such an investment will clearly and quickly outweigh the cost; only know, up front, that it will be a 258-page labor of dedication.

Before offering some detail about the essays themselves, two facts about the Barth-Bonhoeffer relationship seem relevant. First, Dietrich Bonhoeffer came to appreciate the insights of Karl Barth early in the former's theological career. He, at first, had only read some of Barth's works; after returning from the

United States in 1931, he met his theological mentor face-to-face. While Bonhoeffer valued the liberal discipline and confident openness of his teacher and neighbor in Berlin, Adolf von Harnack, it was Karl Barth who had the greatest theological impact on him. Second, Wolf Krötke's life and theology, while he lived in socialist East Germany between 1945 and 1989, was deeply shaped by the theological insights of both Barth and Bonhoeffer. It makes sense that he, the heir of both legacies, shares what he understands to be relevant from their texts and contexts. So, what themes does Wolf Krötke lift up from these, his mentors?

Without attempting to summarize Karl Barth's voluminous *Church Dogmatics*, Krötke lifts up some of the central ideas that he believes make Barth's theological legacy relevant in our "post-Christian world." Krötke's experience in parish ministry, as well as academia, has caused him to remain passionate about the importance of solid theology for the life of the church. He believes that Barth and Bonhoeffer have substantial things to offer "a world that has become . . . God-forgetful" (xi). No surprise to those acquainted with Barth's theology, "God's eternal election by grace is . . . the sum of the gospel" (72). Krötke devotes significant space describing, even redundantly reinforcing, this Barthian theme as it relates to pastoral care, political resistance, and Christian witness in the world. One essay, "Barth's Christology as Exemplary Exegesis," examines in great detail the importance of responsible interpretation so that authentic witness to the mystery of God's revelation takes place. "But because we can know Jesus Christ's self-manifestation only through the witness of Scripture, Christology has to be based on the interpretation of

Scripture” (60). Barth, like Bonhoeffer, affirmed the value of higher-critical tools when examining the Scriptures. However, both refused to offer obeisance to the frequent post-Enlightenment obsession with historical information as a necessary foundation for any scriptural witness to Jesus Christ. It is the Word—the living voice—of God, which is never dependent on knowing the historical exactitude of every word in the Bible, that addresses humanity about the saving Christ event. In his chapters on Karl Barth, Krötke does an excellent job of showing the evolution of political resistance in Barth’s thought. First, we are shown the period of 1933–35, when theology had the task (primarily through the work of the Confessing Church) “. . . of awakening and strengthening a capacity for resistance” (105). Second, in Chapter 7, he describes Barth’s evolution toward active, political resistance, the *ultima ratio*. Here, he shows that Barth, exiled in Switzerland, learned and appreciated how Bonhoeffer became involved in the military plot to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944.

In the chapters dedicated more specifically to Bonhoeffer (chapters 9–16), the author primarily uses material from the prison writings of 1943–44. While making periodic reference to Barth’s theology, greater attention is given to Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on “Sharing in God’s Suffering,” “God’s Hand and Guidance,” “Exegesis of the Psalms,” and “The Meaning of God’s Mystery.” The two places where Krötke’s essays on Barth and Bonhoeffer come closest together are when he addresses “Religionless Christianity” and “Resistance.” Bonhoeffer’s prison reflections on “religionlessness” and “non-religious

interpretation of Biblical concepts” (XX) have their origin in his reading of Karl Barth’s critique of religion. Thus, Krötke spells out how these two theologians agreed—and disagreed—on the topic of religion, and of the religions, and then offers further thoughts on religionlessness both in East Germany in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s and globally today.

One extremely relevant paragraph in chapter 7, “Theology and Resistance in Karl Barth’s Theology,” addresses the importance of “human resistance,” especially in the knowledge that no decision is perfect when dealing with human beings: “Even in obedience to God, every human act of resistance is relative. . . . Whatever resistance we are able to mount is tested by sin, hedged in by the limitations of our knowledge, and thoroughly marked by unsteadiness, . . . [but we must not] neglect to offer human resistance to whatever denies God’s grace to all sinful human beings and tramples underfoot the humanity that is God’s creation” (107). At this time in America (2020), one can hear hesitation among some who believe that resistance to the present administration is needed, yet who are cautious, given the “limitations of our knowledge.” While there is “information” a-plenty, uncertainty regarding “alternate facts” and “fake news” might occasion “neglect to offer human resistance.” Barth and Bonhoeffer’s thoughts—and actions—in this regard might prove extremely relevant. You decide!

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TRICK MIRROR: REFLECTIONS ON SELF-DELUSION, by Jia Tolentino. New York: Random House, 2019. 320 pages, \$18.00 (paperback).

At first glance, Jia Tolentino's *Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion* fits awkwardly into the *Word & World* ecosystem. Tolentino is a staff writer for *The New Yorker* and has held editorial posts at *Jezebel* and *The Hairpin*. Although significant publications in their own right, they are not what one typically finds in the church library or in the text of a Sunday sermon. Tolentino's only formal connection to American Protestantism is her Texas, megachurch upbringing, which she discusses throughout the book. It's also true that *Trick Mirror* is not explicitly a book about theology. But

it is a book about delusion, and humans' profound capacity to interpret themselves and their world in warped ways. Tolentino's stuck-in-the-mire approach to cultural critique offers one of the most penetrating analyses of the heavy, twenty-first-century chains we all wear.

The book begins with a theory of the internet: "The I in the Internet." This is an important starting place because, as Tolentino argues, the internet is "the central organ of contemporary life" (11). Whether a person is online or disconnected, the internet is shaping our world in profound and unseen ways. Tolentino goes on to argue that not only has the internet changed society but that it has also "rewired the brains of its users, returning us to a state of primitive hyperawareness and distraction while



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overloading us with much more sensory input than was ever thought possible in primitive times. It has already built an ecosystem that runs on exploiting attention and monetizing the self” (11). If twenty-first-century churches are to operate fruitfully in the current digital environment, they must come to terms with the fact that “the internet brings the ‘I’ into everything” (26). Here, Tolentino helps Christians ponder a matter too often neglected: how the internet fully exploits the bound human will.

Tolentino lays out five intersecting problems that the remaining eight essays address from varying perspectives: “first, how the internet is built to distend our sense of identity; second, how it encourages us to overvalue our opinions; third, how it maximizes our sense of opposition; fourth, how it cheapens our understanding of solidarity; and, finally how it destroys our sense of scale” (12). Although a terse set of theses, Tolentino manages to unpack how the internet—and social media in particular—is transforming human interaction on a basic level, simultaneously lowering the cost of solidarity and raising the prospect of cultural conflict. These changes will undoubtedly affect the church’s own patterns of faith and behavior, making it all the more important that Christians be aware of these dynamics. In my view, Tolentino’s lines are worthy of reflection—and perhaps even a sermon series or a class.

Part of what makes *Trick Mirror* so compelling is the way Tolentino strums her cultural critique to a decidedly confessional rhythm. This quality is apparent from the beginning: “I wrote this book because I am always confused, because I can never be sure of anything, and because I am drawn to any mechanism that directs me away from that

truth. Writing is either a way to shed my self-delusions or a way to develop them” (x). Similarly, in her comments on empathogenic drugs (e.g., MDMA), Tolentino reflects openly on how her inclinations toward chemically induced ecstatic experiences might be related somehow to her Houston, megachurch upbringing: “I can’t tell whether my inclination toward ecstasy is a sign that I still believe, after all of this, or if it is only because of that ecstatic tendency that I ever believed at all. . . . I don’t know if I’m after truth or hanging on to its dwindling half-life. I might only be hoping to remember that my ecstatic disposition is the source of the good in mind—spontaneity, devotion, sweetness—and the worst things, too: heedlessness, blankness, equivocation” (153). If only American public discourse were always this honest. Setting fantasies aside for the moment, these “confessions” are representative of Tolentino’s approach to writing: she serves up her critiques with one eye on society and one eye on the mirror.

But for the Christian, *Trick Mirror*’s most important contribution is pastoral—and concerns Tolentino’s ability to parse the human soul. With shattering and painful clarity, she shows that we live in an age of delusion, characterized by inescapable contradiction and despair. Our noblest efforts—at liberation, solidarity, and equality—always seem to land us back again in Egypt, in need of deliverance. Despite herculean efforts, we keep getting tricked. The same lesson might also apply to our Christian institutions. As mainline denominations gasp for cultural air, I am left wondering about the presence of denominational delusions, and whether our reactive quest for permanence might be the very thing keeping us in chains.

Chapter 3 (“Always Be Optimizing”) is just one poignant example. It is no accident that this chapter title is actually couched in the form of a command. While the call to “optimize” presents itself as a summons to individual freedom, it is in fact a call to bear an increasingly heavy yoke, as one learns “how to function more efficiently within an exhausting system” (77). Optimization offers a promised land but can never actually give it. It comes as no surprise, then, that such a system creates systemic despair: “It’s very easy, under conditions of artificial but continually escalating obligation, to find yourself organizing your life around practices you find ridiculous and possibly indefensible. Women have known this intimately for a long time” (68). The members of our communities know it too.

There are so many more chapters and topics to explore in this book, related to reality TV, millennial scams, rape and sexual violence, the “cult of the difficult woman,” and even the wedding industry. In each of them, Tolentino lays out her arguments with candor and wisdom. This volume deserves your attention.

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SECULOSITY: HOW CAREER, PARENTING, TECHNOLOGY, FOOD, POLITICS, AND ROMANCE BECAME OUR NEW RELIGION AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT,
by David Zahl. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019. 211 pages, \$26.99 (hardcover).

This is a rare book. It is not rare in the style of its presentation—breezy,

self-aware, literate in an always-on, East Coast, urbanite sort of way—nor unusual in the sources it cites or the subjects it addresses. Of-the-moment cultural criticism, pop psychology, and Christianity have all rubbed shoulders before. The book is rare because it speaks so perceptively to the state of the modern soul. Zahl approaches the varied battlegrounds of contemporary America through a single hermeneutical device, which he terms “seculosity.” The word, a portmanteau of *secular* and *religiosity*, denotes what happens when the ordinary (and, to a large extent, necessary) practices of secular life are imbued with devotional fervor. We don’t merely raise children, but engage in frenzied debates and defenses of particular child-rearing strategies. *Diet* no longer simply denotes what we happen to eat, or even our efforts to eat healthier, but a set of choices that speak to who we really are. Electronic devices intended as servants become the masters of our attention. And so on.

This devotional fervor has reached its destructive pitch precisely as (if not because) traditional religious adherence has waned. Zahl’s thesis is a startling inversion of the usual secularization line: “Again, our religious crisis today is not that religion is on the wane, but that we are more religious than ever, and about too many things. We are almost never *not* in church.” What Americans habitually seek in their careers, their parenting philosophies, their partners, the purity of their food, their politics, and—yes—even in their churches is not just hope or meaning, but what Zahl labels “enoughness,” a functional synonym for the more theologically freighted term *justification*. The book’s chapters trace the various locations in which the quest for enoughness has lodged itself. These are not exhaustive;

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Zahl himself suggests several forms of secularity that he might have gotten around to describing in a longer book. In an important sense, however, these are all alike. Every form of secularity is an attempt to do something to justify ourselves. Consequently, the concluding chapter, "What to 'Do' about It," can only point beyond itself to the Deliverer who interrupts all doing.

While a popular treatment by a non-academic, Zahl's approach, even so, bears comparison to James K. A. Smith's works (beginning with *Desiring the Kingdom*) on the theology of culture. Concerned that our desires are shaped by "cultural liturgies" beyond our understanding, Smith has proposed, in classically Augustinian fashion, practices that may serve to reorder our desire for God, the highest good. What, then, is the difference between Zahl's secularity and Smith's cultural liturgy? Very little, in the sense that these are in some sense parallel efforts to describe the same phenomena. Here we should grant that Zahl is a sharper observer of contemporary life, and so picks better illustrations: Smith's example of going to the shopping mall as a cultural liturgy is, well, kind of passé, and was already so in 2009. Zahl is also, however, a more sensitive witness to the movements of the human heart. The most compelling portions of the book identify things that are not on their face desirable, and follow through the counterintuitive ways they are drawn into our efforts at self-justification. Zahl's description of how leisure has been hijacked and compromised to serve a cult of productivity is bracing. At points such as these, the typical bounds of Augustinian discourse on desire have been breached.

That is to say, Zahl's contribution is distinctive because he follows Luther rather than Augustine, recognizing

that the central theological matter is not rightly formed love, but faith. The various secularities are merely places where faith has come to rest, as it must surely rest somewhere, when the true God is not manifest. Career, parenting, technology, food, politics, and romance have taken on cultic dimensions because they are the domains of gods in all but name. Luther's great explanation of the first commandment in *Luther's Large Catechism* could stand over the book as a theological summation: "A 'god' is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. . . . Anything on which your heart rests and depends, I say, that is really your god."¹⁸

Zahl's debt to Luther is explicit, if not explored in detail. At one point he cites thesis 26 of the *Heidelberg Disputation* ("The law says, 'do this', and it is never done. Grace says, 'believe in this' and everything is already done") (62), though an even more programmatic statement could be drawn from the explanation to thesis 22: desire cannot be cured by being satisfied, but must be extinguished. The extinction of desire and the end of futile striving are precisely the necessary consequences of that unlooked-for divine gift to which Zahl relentlessly points: "not the messiah we would elect but the one who elects *us*" (160).

Though he wears his theology lightly, Zahl's experience in pulpit and pastoral care (he is, among other designations, a licensed lay preacher in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia) shine through with regularity. His touch is gentle and full of good humor. *Secularity* is accessible enough to be used in congregations, but has particular value for preachers. It will help you understand your

¹⁸ Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert, 386.

neighbors—churched and otherwise—and, in all likelihood, yourself. More than that, it will remind you of the words to set them free.

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THE HOLY SPIRIT BEFORE CHRISTIANITY, by John R. Levison. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019. 272 pages, \$39.95 (hardcover).

For more than a decade, John R. Levison has been a leading voice in biblical studies on matters pertaining to spirit and spirits in the Old Testament and in Second Temple Judaism. *The Holy Spirit before Christianity* is sure to continue this trend. As might be inferred from its provocative title, with this book Levison seeks to pivot away from biblical scholars and toward a broader audience of theologians. He identifies the “origin of pneumatology” (p. 2, and frequently throughout) not in the early Jesus movement but in Israelite and early Jewish exodus traditions, especially those attested in Isaiah 63:7–14 and Haggai 2:4–5. This central claim, that pre-Christian, Jewish texts can be placed at the beginning of a theological trajectory that leads to the spirit theologies of the early Jesus movement, is both the greatest contribution and the greatest limitation of the project.

This short book (122 pages, with another 100 pages of endnotes and excurses) offers an extended interpretation of these two prophetic passages within their canonical context, as well as a reflection on their implications for Christian pneumatology. In chapter 1, Levison identifies Hans Leisegang as a

forerunner and conversation partner in tracing the history of the Holy Spirit to pre-Christian traditions (though Leisegang turned instead to Greco-Roman sources). In this, Levison follows a pattern established in his 2009 book, *Filled with the Spirit*, in which Hermann Gunkel served as a regular companion. This chapter also introduces the central argument of the project: Levison argues that Isaiah 63:7–14 and Haggai 2:4–5 constitute the “headwaters” (5) of pneumatological tradition since they are the earliest surviving texts that explicitly identify the divine presence that accompanied Israel in the wilderness as God’s “(holy) spirit”.

Chapter 2 analyzes the exodus and wilderness traditions of the Pentateuch, tracing variously how the pillar(s) of cloud and fire, God’s “presence-face,” the angel, and God’s glory are coordinated and at times loosely equated. Early in the chapter, Levison acknowledges the composite nature of these narratives but eschews any source- or redaction-critical analysis in favor of a final form-focused and largely literary approach. He concludes that, when brought together, these traditions present a poignant but ambiguous portrait of God’s presence with (and absence from) Israel in the wilderness, which invites further reflection from the post-exilic prophets.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Isaiah 63:7–14 and Haggai 2:4–5 respectively, as well as on related prophetic texts. Both chapters include surprisingly detailed text-critical discussions of the passages that are, unfortunately, clumsy to follow (since much of the necessary technical information is located in endnotes). For Levison, it is essential that these passages be situated against the backdrops of both the Babylonian exile and the Persian return, since these historical

experiences are what fuel the prophets' pneumatological creativity. For Isaiah, the context demands lament. The prophet, seeking God's presence in his own community, equates God's holy spirit with the angel that accompanied Israel in the wilderness. For Haggai, the return from exile provides the motif of the second exodus, which empowers his message of hope that the angel and pillar which *stood* (עמד) protectively for Israel at the sea (Exod 14:19) correspond to the spirit of God which *stands* for the Judean refugees now (Hag 2:5).

Chapter 5, the last and longest chapter, engages with the works of previous biblical scholars on these two texts, with special attention to how Isaiah 63:7–14 and Haggai 2:4–5 have fit into broader programs of biblical theology of God's spirit. His interlocutors range from Paul Volz to Jürgen Moltmann to N. T. Wright. Levison argues that his study mandates a reassessment of the idea that pneumatology is an exclusively "intra-trinitarian affair" (107).

Overall, Levison has crafted a biblical theology in the classic mold of the German scholars with whom he most conspicuously interacts. Such a format will likely endear *The Holy Spirit before Christianity* to some readers while alienating others. Thus, those seeking a historical-critical engagement with pre-Christian, Jewish spirit-related texts would be better served by consulting Levison's other works. In the end, *The Holy Spirit before Christianity* is less an effort to explore ancient Israelite or early Jewish notions of spirit(s) than it is a challenge to Christian theologians to acknowledge and account for the fact that Christian pneumatology is rooted, in large part, in early Jewish traditions.

In pursuit of this aim, Levison's work is a success, and his eloquent prose offers an inviting way into this topic for pastors and scholars alike.

With this said, one drawback remains: Levison's largely unexplained decision to label pre-Christian, Jewish literary traditions about God's spirit as "pneumatology" inevitably evokes an organizational framework that chafes against the disparate and decidedly non-systematic nature of these early Jewish spirit-related texts. Given the disproportionate importance of God's S/spirit in Christian tradition when compared to the concerns of early Judaism, such a category can only make sense within an intentionally Nicene-informed framework. Levison is, of course, well aware of this dissonance and evokes it intentionally in order to make his point. But it would have been helpful if *The Holy Spirit before Christianity* had included a methodological control on this label. For instance, if such a designation is left to stand, might it then be appropriate to label pre-Christian, Jewish messianic traditions as "Christology"? I expect that most scholars of early Judaism, including Levison, would find such a label to cause more problems than it solves. Likewise, maintaining the moniker "pneumatology" leaves the gate open to a well-trodden path that mischaracterizes the relationship that early Christianity has to early Judaism. Hopefully, Levison's more informed readers will know the risks of that path, but with the intended wider audience of this book, some may take that route happily, not realizing the implications of where they tread.

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