

## REVIEWS

**James M. Houston And Jens Zimmermann, Eds., *Sources Of The Christian Self: A Cultural History Of Christian Identity*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018. (Xxv + 694 pp.) ISBN 9780802876270**

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The co-editors of *Sources of the Christian Self*, James M. Houston and Jens Zimmermann, have teamed up to bring together a superb volume. Enlisting a team of interdisciplinary scholars with expertise in theology, biblical studies, philosophy, and the humanities this book presents 42 chapters where each pursue the theme of Christian identity and what it means to be “in Christ” through a study of a figure from biblical and Christian history. The aim of this book then is to explore a cultural history of what it means to identify oneself as a Christian as revealed in the individual lives and lived reality of Christian saints throughout history up to recent history. The structure of the book is laid out in basically chronological order thusly: “Part One: Identity in the Old Testament,” “Part Two: Identity in the New Testament,” “Part Three: Identity in the Early Church,” “Part Four: Identity in the Middle Ages,” “Part Five: Identity in the Age of Reform,” “Part Six: Christian Identity in the Emergence of the Modern World,” and “Part Seven: Christian Identity in the Upheavals of the Twentieth Century.”

Students of philosophy will recognize that the title plays off of the study of selfhood in Charles Taylor’s groundbreaking *Sources of the Self* (Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1989), which serves as the editor’s inspiration for bringing together their own study. However, as much as Taylor has a place as a springboard, the editors indicate their desire to go beyond Taylor’s more general treatment of identity and its importance for the shaping of contemporary horizons of meaning. This explains the choice to focus so strongly on the lives of individual Christians from history and the crucial link between their understanding of Christ’s identity (as Christos or the Messiah and Anointed One) and their own lifelong process of identification with him through discipleship. Thus, as a brief (and not exhaustive) sampling, each section of the book contains the following studies: Part One: Abraham and Moses; Part Two: Peter and Paul; Part Three: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine; Part Four: Anselm, Aquinas, and Julian of Norwich; Part Five: Luther, Calvin, and Teresa of Avila; Part Six: Anna Maria van Schurman, Charles Wesley, and Christina Rossetti; and Part Seven: Karl Barth, Flannery O’Connor, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

While the choice to mention certain chapters is somewhat subjective, there are a few of the 42 present (of which all cannot be mentioned in the space given) that are particularly worthy of mention as touching on intersection points in contemporary Christian existence and identity today. For example, Markus Bockmuehl’s chapter, “Simon Peter: The Transformation of the Apostle,” is illustrative of the importance of metanoia, or one’s change in understanding and identity centred around Christ, to the Christian life. This

is epitomized in Bockmuehl's description of Simon Peter as "the second-chance disciple." And the volume as a whole testifies to the importance of women in Christian history for understanding Christian identity. This is nowhere better seen than in Elizabeth's Ludlow's chapter, "Christina Rossetti: Identity in the Communion of Saints," which uncovers a nuanced description of Christian identity in terms of the martyr through an examination of Rossetti's poetry. As well, two chapters in particular come into contact with discussions of theosis, or participation in the triune divine life, in recent theological scholarship. To be sure, Hans Boersma's chapter, "Gregory of Nyssa: Becoming Human in the Face of God," does not treat theosis outright. Nevertheless, Boersma's discussion of the beatific vision in Gregory of Nyssa can be seen to brush up against it with his own discussion of a theology of participation that is at once careful and suggestive for theological anthropology. Sven Soderlund's chapter, "Paul: The Christian as an 'in-Christ' Person," devotes space to specific mention of theosis in connection with scholars such as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and Michael Gorman.

Finally, an important contribution of this volume is the hermeneutical thread that runs through it. From a broad perspective the book itself can be seen as an extended exercise in cultural hermeneutics as well as a chronological description of Christian relation and identity. This is seen superbly in the chapter by Craig Gay, "Jacques Ellul: Christian Identity in a Technological Society." Through a conversation with Ellul and others, Gay uncovers the tendency of the emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness within the technological society to not only thin out human identity in general but also to subvert Christian identity in particular. In addition, the influence of the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur is a most welcome feature. The editor's introduction itself contains a brief primer on Ricoeur's narrative philosophy and relational hermeneutics of the self. The importance of Ricoeur can be felt in Ryan Olson's chapter, "Gregory the Great: Conversionis Gratia – Ipse become Idem," in which Ricoeur's understanding of identity in terms of "sameness" (*idem*) and "selfhood" (*ipse*) becomes a lens to examine Gregory the Great's treatment of identity, relation, friendship, and character. Jens Zimmermann's chapter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Question of Christian Identity," is also similarly concerned with Ricoeur's development of *idem* and *ipse*, this time in relation to Bonhoeffer. However, Zimmermann's exposition also demonstrates the manner in which Bonhoeffer's distinctive theological treatment of ethical agency toward the other, Christian identity, and their connection, which rests ultimately in our union with God in Christ and not ourselves, illustrates but nevertheless extends beyond Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self.

*Sources of the Christian Self* is a rich and rewarding volume on Christian identity for scholar, professor, student, or motivated layperson. The structure and layout make it fit for both individual study and the classroom. An impressive piece of interdisciplinary scholarship, it has something of value for cultural historians, philosophers, biblical scholars, and theologians alike.