Book Reviews

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John E. Phelan Jr., *Separated Siblings: An Evangelical Understanding of Jews and Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 360 pages, $25

Everything I knew about Judaism, for too many years, I learned from *Fiddler on the Roof* and Chaim Potok novels. This left me with a limited and inadequate view of Judaism. When I was a pastor at Simi Covenant Church in California, I became good friends with the director of a Jewish retreat center. We spent hours talking about our respective faiths. My friend taught me about his beliefs and practices, and the rituals of Judaism that sustained him. I also heard about the pain Jews suffer as a minority religion, including the injustice and horror Jews have suffered at the hands of Christians. Through dialogue, my understanding of Judaism deepened. Our faith differences did not distance us from each other, but rather gave us new insights into each other's religion and enriched our own faith journeys. I sensed that I was only scratching the surface of Jewish thinking, heritage, and history. Then came Jay Phelan's book!

For me, and for many evangelicals, Phelan reminds us that our understanding of Judaism ends around 70 AD with the destruction of the Second Temple and picks up again with the Holocaust (Shoah) and the establishment of the State of Israel in the mid-twentieth century. "Most of the history of the Jews … is unknown and unappreciated by most Christians. It is … difficult and daunting history. It is the story of a vulnerable people living at the sufferance of others under the constant threat of extinction. But it is also the story of a remarkable intellectual and spiritual flourishing under these most difficult circumstances" (p. xviii).

Emerging out of his deep friendship with a rabbi in Chicago, Phelan shares his appreciation for and deepening understanding of the richness and variety of Jews and Judaism. He gives his evangelical readers insights in ways that are both respectful of a people and their history, and help those outside of that faith to access this tradition.

In the first eight chapters, Phelan explores themes and persons found in what Christians call the Old Testament: Abraham and identity, Moses and revelation, commandments and law, prayer, righteousness, the Land. Then, in chapters nine and ten, he reminds us that Jesus and Paul were both Jews, liberating them from the evangelical tendency to make them like us. Though an outsider, Phelan respectfully examines these themes through a new lens—a Jewish lens—and he invites the reader to view these themes from a new vantage point as well.

Separated Siblings continues with an overview of the last two thousand years of Jewish history. We learn about the sacred texts of Judaism: Tanakh, Mishnah, and Talmud. Phelan goes into depth explaining key topics including Midrash, stories of rabbinic leaders, the painful centuries of persecution, and Jews living in diaspora. Phelan then offers a critical account of Judaism's most recent history: the Holocaust, Zionism, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the wide spectrum of modern-day Judaism. We find Judaism to be a living, dynamic religion; a vital, varied, community of faith and practice. Throughout his discussion, Phelan breaks through evangelical stereotypes and misinformation, helping the reader to gain a new perspective and understanding of Judaism.

In the final chapter, we are invited into something deeper. We are encouraged toward dialogue between Jews and evangelicals, to humbly learn from and listen to each other, to become friends. We recognize our differences, but we celebrate what we share in common. We cultivate deeper faith convictions while holding these convictions with a sense of grace, humility, and curiosity. As Swedish theologian Krister Stendhal

reminds us in his "Three Rules for Religious Understanding," we look to Jews and Judaism and find room for "holy envy," a window into the living faith of Judaism which can enrich our own Christian faith.

This book offers a model and a hope for Christian-Jewish reconciliation. We are separated siblings who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and seek to do his will. We stand together, bearing the image of God (pp. xviii, 304). Today, as anti-Semitism is increasingly raising its ugly head, this book calls us to remember and lament the horrors of the past. We must stand against hatred toward our "separated siblings." We are convicted by the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as he witnessed the hate-filled, murderous actions toward Jews in Nazi Germany: "Only those who cry [out] for the Jews may sing Gregorian chant."[1] We remember and pledge: Never forget, never again.

KURT N. FREDRICKSON

Matt Jenson, *Theology in the Democracy of the Dead: A Dialogue with the Living Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019), 352 pages, $27.99

Christian tradition is the lifeblood of the church, even though some parts of the church are more enthusiastic about tradition than others. Tradition ensures that our reading community is as large as it can be. If reading sacred Scripture is an act best done in community, then reading it with a community stretched across both geography and time gives the best kind of reading. Matt Jenson's *Theology in the Democracy of the Dead* helps readers do exactly this by introducing them to several key figures in the history of Christian thought. Each figure sought to know Christ, read Scripture, and articulate the truth of the Christian faith within their own historical and cultural contexts.

Jenson does an excellent job bringing figures such as St. Anselm of Canterbury and Martin Luther to life with biographical sketches located toward the beginning of each chapter. These sketches remind us that each of these theologians was first and foremost a person living in a specific time and location, and subject to all of the idiosyncrasies of life that every person experiences. Jenson does not shy away from various biographical

[1] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision. Man of Courage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 512.

details indicating that the theologians covered did not always work with the full support of those around them, or that they had moral failings of their own. He tells us the story of St. Thomas Aquinas's abduction at the hands of his brothers to prevent him from joining the Dominicans, as they believed joining the Benedictine order would better advance the family's status (p. 131). The reader also hears hints about the full role of Charlotte von Kirschbaum in Karl Barth's household (p. 278).

Each chapter provides the major themes of the theologian's work, working directly from primary texts and explaining the concepts in ways that will be clear to readers at a variety of levels. A bibliography at the end of the book offers a good set of primary and secondary resources on the various thinkers. The book would be enhanced by a list of primary texts for readers who have not previously read these authors. Someone new to St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, would likely benefit from suggestions on where to start in such a large body of writing.

There is much to be praised with this book. It will clearly be valuable both for the classroom and for Christian readers in a variety of vocations and situations. At the same time, there is one key omission—the presence of any women. Jenson acknowledges this as a potential problem. He comments, "The fact is, few women wrote formal theology at a high level before the last couple centuries" (p. 3). He raises this issue in the context of the larger question posed to him by a colleague: "Is this a democracy or a meritocracy? Do I really mean to extend theological suffrage 'to the people,' or only to the best and brightest? We might ask further whether this isn't an aristocracy, with only people of a certain status gaining the right to vote" (p. 3). Both concerns seem linked here.

There are women who wrote theology at a high level prior to the modern era. Jenson is right to note that there were not many of them, but it can also be pointed out that not many people at all were writing theology at a high level prior to that era. Theology was often written by those who had the education to read the tradition and write about it, which inevitably left many people out for much of Christian history. To write a theology text that excludes consideration of the women who were writing in the field seems problematic. Including Julian of Norwich, for instance, would have given readers a better sense of some of the diversity within the medieval tradition. For that matter, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, mentioned in the book, was a theologian in her own right who could have been given a longer treatment within the chapter on Barth.

Perhaps the most important issue still to be resolved (and somewhat

outside the scope of Jenson's book) is, who gets to write theology and who determines which voices are centered? If theology is to be a democracy, and if it is to matter for the people in the pew moving forward, it needs to include a diversity of voices—not only those speaking to the present situation, but also reading and responding to the tradition and determining how that tradition is understood in the context of new work. In our context today, it is crucial that we seek out the fullness of human experience and the theology that comes from that experience. It is only in doing that work that Christians will be equipped to address all that our present situation demands.

MARY VEENEMAN

K. James Stein, *From Head to Heart: A Compendium of the Theology of Philipp Jakob Spener* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2020), 348 pages, $15.99

It is my privilege to write this review of James Stein's *From Head to Heart: A Compendium of the Theology of Philip Jakob Spener*. The title deserves two comments. First, the use of the word compendium is most accurate. Stein has translated excerpts from Spener's writings (7,000 pages!) and arranged them in the form of a book on theology and ethics. Each of the appropriate loci is treated. This is Spener on Spener.

The second comment is related to the expression "from head to heart." A layperson had listened to Spener and asked, "How does one get this from the head to the heart?" The problem with this is that Pietism got associated with "heart religion" in the sense that it was often accused of interiorizing the faith and reducing it to feelings, thus allowing an individualism to dominate.

The importance of reading this book is to discover that Pietism via Spener did seek "heart" and "the other." It includes an exposition of the neighbor, neighbor love, and love of the enemy. This section needs to be read with the section that distinguishes legal obedience from evangelical obedience (comprising several points). For example, the former is an imposition from the outside and resented; the latter arises from within and from a new nature.

Stein includes an extensive excerpt regarding Spener's work regarding the poor. The concrete administrative procedures are included. Just how massive this is, is outstanding, and includes a reference to Francke's

work in Halle.

Spener is well-known for his emphasis on the new birth. By conviction, he held and preached the Lutheran doctrine of baptismal regeneration. But what about people who became dead in their sin and trespasses? The new birth was the fruit of genuine repentance and faith in Jesus Christ's forgiveness. Spener called people to repentance and new life.

He distinguished the new birth from renewal. Renewal required effort and did not happen all at once. Renewal involves a process of strengthening and a crucifixion of the desires of the flesh. Such persons see the daily need of God's grace.

If Spener were present to me, I would like to ask him why he was so sure humans lost the image of God in the Fall? James 3:9 seems to say otherwise. So does Genesis 9:6. In my work with abuse victims, one of the central points I tell them is that an abuser may pile up images of desecration after desecration, but one they cannot touch is the *imago Dei*. That is the person's pushback, and it cannot be taken.

Finally, among the churches with a heritage in Pietism, the Evangelical Covenant Church might have profitably learned something from Spener. In its desire for a "holy people" and for "truly regenerate communicants," it separated the "sheep from the goats." But Spener said that the holiness of the People of God was from the presence of Christ and the holy sacrament, and not the people. Maybe the early Mission Friends could have learned something from Spener who taught the new birth as passionately as they did but could release the church to the judicial and redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

In the meantime, Spener employed a metaphor regarding the Lord's Supper that, if explored in sermons and teaching, might have helped the Mission Friends think differently, or at least less militantly about having communion services for believers only. Spener also addressed this issue but recognized Jesus's words about awaiting the time of judgment, yet not ignoring flagrant sin. Spener spoke about the medicinal value of the Word and Sacrament. This sentence calls for personal and congregational reflection: "We do not always have enough nourishment from the Word of God but also require the more costly medicine that we receive in the Lord's Supper." Let it be said that therapeutic metaphors are no less concerned for truth than juridical metaphors. And such metaphors can apply to congregations as well as persons. But it requires some form of care which the conventicles provided, and by means of which individuals were equipped to care for others. Congregations could be renewed from

within by such renewal innovations as conventicles if they were put to responsible use.

PS: I completed my doctoral work under Dr. Stein, writing a dissertation on another Pietist, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1689–1752). Dr. Stein knew how to ask questions that kept a writer true to the topic. I recall that day early in my writing when he stopped me and asked me to reduce my thesis to one paragraph. It was a crucifixion! But it was the moment which freed me to write and later to work with students on their theses. Dr. Stein taught by teaching. My deepest gratitude.

JOHN WEBORG

Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2021), 256 pages, $19.99

When author and speaker Beth Moore announced via Twitter that she was formally severing her relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention due to its explicitly patriarchal theology, millions of American evangelicals responded with shock and confusion. Moore had long been a prominent figure in the denomination, but her recent support of female pastors and preachers made her the target of increasingly vicious attacks from clergy and laypeople alike. One person who was likely unsurprised by these events is scholar Beth Allison Barr, whose latest book delves into the complicated history of complementarianism. Having recently endured her own painful separation from a church community that does not affirm women in ministry, Barr weaves together personal anecdotes with the narratives of forgotten female leaders, revisionist histories that have intentionally dismissed the contributions of women, and the ulterior motives behind modern institutions and publications.

Barr notes that although women have found ways to challenge or transcend their subordinate role over the centuries, patriarchy has shapeshifted as cultures and ecclesiastical structures have changed, resulting in ongoing inequalities that have been baptized in the name of "biblical values." Despite the modern evangelical obsession with these so called "biblical values," Barr skillfully argues that complementarianism is not, in fact, a scriptural mandate nor a divinely ordained hierarchy, but rather a man-made creation built on ancient power dynamics and a decidedly un-Christlike lust for power and control.

While Barr is not a biblical scholar or a theologian, she is an excellent historian, and this slim volume is well researched and thoughtful as it navigates these controversial topics. Drawing from the expertise of countless talented scholars, most of whom are female, Barr's text is both compelling and relatable as she shares her academic conclusions and personal reflections with clarity and conviction. Readers will be entertained by Barr's exploration of a wide range of topics, which move chronologically from the biblical world to the present day and include a new perspective on Paul, the rise of the cult of domesticity during the Protestant Reformation, and a heresy that lurks behind the Southern Baptist Convention's modern understanding of subordination.

Although not explicitly named, Barr's main focus is on specifically Western history and predominantly white narratives, with little attention given to non-Western Christianity and non-white figures. Moreover, this text most directly addresses the culture of modern evangelicalism, largely ignoring the rich tradition of female voices in mainline and African American denominations. This white, evangelical audience is certainly one that will benefit from Barr's analysis, but the book may not be as engaging for Christians outside of this demographic. Perhaps the most important audience for Barr's text is the white male, evangelical pastor who will need to reckon with his own role in creating or supporting these damaging narratives, and to relinquish some of his authority in order to make room for gifted female colleagues and lay leaders.

Overall, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* is a necessary and timely addition to the current academic and religious dialogue surrounding gender roles, women in ministry, and the uncertain future of evangelicalism. Readers who seek to increase their understanding of patriarchy and its relationship to the church and vocational ministry should supplement Barr's book with such similar titles as Kristin Kobes Du Mez's *Jesus and John Wayne* (New York: Liveright, 2020), which helpfully names how whiteness intersects with toxic masculinity, and Aimee Byrd's *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), which continues Barr's prophetic challenge to congregations and denominations. In the end, Barr's book not only asks us to confront our patriarchal assumptions, but gives hope that by identifying them we have the power to correct those narratives and create an inclusive church that invites all to participate.

MEGHAN DOWLING