

Review of DeJonge, Michael P. *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 281 pp.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer cites and refers to no one more than Luther, yet Bonhoeffer's own relationship to the Lutheran tradition remains a relative lacuna in Bonhoeffer studies. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to fill the void, and Michael DeJonge's new monograph is a significant contribution to this arena. In fact, DeJonge's book is a *tour de force* in Bonhoeffer scholarship, showing how Lutheran theological frameworks permeate Bonhoeffer's thought. Picking up where his previous monograph left off—*Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (OUP, 2012)—DeJonge argues that “Bonhoeffer's thinking was Lutheran and should be interpreted as such” (6). The point is not that Bonhoeffer was a “slavish” adherent of Lutheranism who tried to simply repeat what Luther or the tradition said. Instead, DeJonge's contention is that Bonhoeffer self-consciously understood himself and developed his thought in relationship to Luther and in contrast to other confessional traditions (7). DeJonge seeks to show that a Lutheran theological framework is hermeneutically fruitful for reading Bonhoeffer. What makes DeJonge's book so impressive is that he addresses the most challenging aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology for his thesis, those insights that most Bonhoeffer scholars have found to be *least* Lutheran, such as Bonhoeffer's criticisms of the *genus majesticum* and two-sphere thinking, his statements on peace, and his resistance to governmental authority. Through close readings of primary texts and in conversation with key Bonhoeffer scholars, DeJonge demonstrates that even Bonhoeffer's criticisms of the Lutheran tradition are from within. In other words, Bonhoeffer addresses what he considers to be problematic formulations in the Lutheran tradition to drive Lutheran theology to correspond more closely with Luther's own central insights.

The first two chapters on Christology highlight the center of Bonhoeffer's theology, and show its fundamental Lutheran character. The most exciting research is in the rest of the book where DeJonge takes on Bonhoeffer's understanding of the two kingdoms, his pacifism, and his resistance to governmental authority. In all three of these areas, DeJonge runs against the grain of Bonhoeffer scholarship. Whereas Bonhoeffer is usually portrayed as rejecting two kingdoms and pulling from other traditions for his peace ethic and for resisting authority, DeJonge shows that Bonhoeffer remained a deeply Lutheran thinker in all of these areas, even though he also challenged the tradition. The chapters on resistance are particularly interesting in this regard. Following Reinhold Niebuhr's reading of Luther and the Lutheran tradition, most normally understand Bonhoeffer to reject Lutheran quietism because it “lacks resources for resistance” (186). DeJonge, however, shows that Bonhoeffer's theology of resistance used resources that arise from the Lutheran Confessions themselves. DeJonge's point is not to defend the Lutheran tradition, but he does show that Lutheranism is more complex than mere obedience to authority. Bonhoeffer not only recognized this complexity, but he also deployed important elements of the logic in his own arguments (189–90). For example, Bonhoeffer made use of the logic developed in Article X of the Formula of Concord during the 1930s. For Bonhoeffer, Germany was *in status confessionis*¹ where the church and the gospel were at stake (205). For this reason, Bonhoeffer primarily answers the situation in Germany not with good ethics or right action but with confession. “And given the nature of the threats against the gospel, the confessing in

¹ DeJonge rightly notes that this is not the Formula's technical language, but it is the language Bonhoeffer uses (205).

question would need to clarify the nature of the gospel against false teaching while reasserting the roles and modes of governing proper to the state and the church according to two kingdoms thinking” (210). Even when Bonhoeffer’s thought moves from a focus on the church’s confession to the responsible action of individuals in 1939, Bonhoeffer’s “thinking about active resistance to political power finds some precedence in Luther himself” (259). DeJonge consistently shows Bonhoeffer to be a Lutheran thinker, who struggled with confessing the truth and proclaiming God’s law and God’s gospel in a Lutheran key.

DeJonge’s entire book is filled with key insights into reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer and understanding the central thrusts of his argumentation. As a Lutheran dogmatic theologian myself, I found DeJonge’s ability to formulate accurate Lutheran theology surprising and impressive. In my reading of secondary literature in Bonhoeffer studies, many scholars do not understand how to think like a Lutheran, mistakenly attributing Lutheran thinking to Bonhoeffer’s genius or simply not understanding his argument. DeJonge, however, has learned to think from within the Lutheran tradition himself. In fact, in one moment in particular, DeJonge shows himself to be a creative participant in Lutheran systematic theology. Discussing Bonhoeffer’s criticism of the *genus majesticum*—which Bonhoeffer says gives into Reformed thinking that focuses on the natures more than the person by trying to answer the question of *how* Christ can be present as both God and man (72–74)—DeJonge notes that the *genus majesticum* can be read differently from this sort of “how” thinking. DeJonge suggests, “There is also a way of reading the majestic genus not as a reversion to illegitimate ‘how’ thinking but as a form of legitimate ‘how’ thinking within ‘who’ thinking. Such ‘how’ thinking could perhaps be characterized as a descriptive ontology of the present person of Christ, precisely what Bonhoeffer names as the task of christology” (74). Although these types of statements are fairly rare since DeJonge’s point is to understand Bonhoeffer and show Bonhoeffer’s creative engagement within the Lutheran tradition, DeJonge is no mere repeater of Bonhoeffer himself. He is engaging within the Lutheran tradition creatively with and against Bonhoeffer, and his insights are worth considering.

All in all, any aspiring Bonhoeffer scholar *must* read this book. DeJonge’s study is one of those rare birds that opens up possibilities and avenues for further thought and research. In each chapter, I found myself reconsidering aspects of Bonhoeffer’s thought in light of DeJonge’s insights. Even if one has been long convinced of Bonhoeffer’s fundamental Lutheranism, DeJonge’s hermeneutical framework will open doors to understanding and reading Bonhoeffer anew. For anyone interested in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology, I cannot recommend this book enough!

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