

Peter Frick. *Understanding Bonhoeffer*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017.

In *Understanding Bonhoeffer*, Peter Frick—theologian and New Testament scholar—offers a collection of broad-ranging essays on the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Frick begins with a brief introduction to his subject's life and thought, and divides the rest of the volume into three main sections. In the first of the two largest sections, titled "Backgrounding Bonhoeffer," the author explores Bonhoeffer's theological and philosophical influences, ranging from Thomas à Kempis to Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Gerhard Ebeling, and Friedrich Nietzsche. This section is followed by "Foregrounding Bonhoeffer," in which Frick engages Bonhoeffer's thought in the service of contemporary theological issues such as racism, economics, and politics.

Before Frick turns to the two sections on Bonhoeffer's influences and his contemporary theological significance, he offers two essays in a short section titled "Reading Bonhoeffer." Here he engages a central issue in contemporary Bonhoeffer interpretation: the limits of unrecognized perspective. Readers of secondary works on Bonhoeffer will quickly recognize the importance of this issue: the field is littered with partial readings where Bonhoeffer is leveraged in the service of irreconcilable political, social, and ecclesiastical projects, many of them revealing more about the author and interpreter than about Bonhoeffer. Hence Frick's interest in acknowledging his own perspective early on, and interrogating it; this both reveals his intellectual honesty and acts as an implied critique of those who fail to recognize their

own perspectives and put Bonhoeffer into political and theological camps in which he does not belong.

Perspective, however, need not be a bad thing. Specialized areas of knowledge can offer opportunities to expand the field in a direction faithful to Bonhoeffer's own patterns of life and thought. Frick was a member of the editorial board of the critical English editions of Bonhoeffer, a role he took up after discovering a multiplicity of errors in an early volume; in this case his background in New Testament scholarship added much needed perspective to the editorial board. This background makes Frick sensitive to particular strands of inquiry into Bonhoeffer: hermeneutics, exegesis, and the theological interpretation of Scripture in particular. This is seen in his brief theological and biographical sketch of his subject. It comes into even sharper focus in his thoughts on Bultmann (128-40) and Ebeling (152-55), and in an essay on Bonhoeffer, peace, and social responsibility (250-64). Rather than being a limiting factor, this expertise is a welcome aspect of Frick's work, bringing clarity to the way Bonhoeffer engaged with Scripture in his theology.

The Scriptural thread does not comprise the whole tapestry of this volume. Frick also shows great facility in philosophy, both ancient and contemporary; in fact, he begins to fill a number of gaps in our understanding of Bonhoeffer's philosophical influences. The volume also contains accounts of the early reception of some of Bonhoeffer's work. While the complete works have been available in German since the late 1990s, the critical English translation has only just been completed. Some of this work—particularly the volume comprising Bonhoeffer's writings, letters, and sermons from his time teaching at the Finkenwalde preachers seminary—is ripe for challenging or adding to conventional readings of, for example, *Life Together* and *Discipleship*. In engaging with this newly available material in English, Frick takes part in an important development in the ongoing reception of Bonhoeffer.

Many of these threads come together in Frick's penultimate, and for this reader the most important, piece in the collection, namely the essay on Bonhoeffer's preaching (265-82). The general thrust of the whole collection—Bonhoeffer's background in philosophy, his contemporary influences, his reading of Scripture, and his continuing significance for

theological reflection—comes together in an integrated whole in this essay, where Frick contends that Bonhoeffer's work as a theologian, philosopher, churchman, and interpreter of Scripture united to serve his ultimate vocation as a preacher.

The book is aimed at a scholarly reader and is intended for Bonhoeffer specialists. It fills a number of gaps in Bonhoeffer interpretation and as such it will be an important volume for specialists to consult. While some of the scholarly conventions—such as the occasional untranslated passage in German—may be off-putting to some readers, Bonhoeffer enthusiasts will be well served by reading this work by such a careful and self-aware interpreter.

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