

(4). Chandler adds an insightful “Postlude” on “The Place of Bell.” He emphasizes that Bell, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, understood that “a church that lives only for itself will lose itself and be lost to others; a church that lives for the world will find itself—and be found” (183).

Chandler has sought to provide a scholarly yet accessible biography. He is aware that “one must also think of what the market will bear” (xi). It will be of special interest to Bonhoeffer scholars and devotees, since Bell was such a key figure in Bonhoeffer’s life and work. In addition, students and scholars of the rise of the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches will be eager to read it. As the subtitle suggests, it is also an excellent case study of a church leader wrestling with church and state issues in an age of dictatorship. It was impossible for any church or church leader to come through that period unscathed.

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Existing Before God: Soren Kierkegaard and the Human Venture. By Paul R. Sponheim. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017. xxxi + 167 pp.

Paul R. Sponheim, emeritus professor of systematic theology, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota—as he turns eighty-seven—has published his third book on Søren Kierkegaard, to go with *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence* (1968), and *Love’s Availing Power* (2011). His first book was about how Christ is the cohering center of his vast writings; and the second one on how the cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead (1886–1951) rounds out Kierkegaard’s views on Christian love. This third volume, on Kierkegaard’s *Sickness Unto Death* (1849), has both a one-of-a-kind commentary on it (3–74) and a history of its reception and an assessment of its legacy (77–145).

SUD is one of Kierkegaard’s most difficult books, being “an epitomization . . . of his view of human nature” (Hongs, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 2000). Its difficulty lies in its lines that could “easily” be turned into chapters (26). But in Sponheim’s hands, this “impenetrable dialectical labyrinth” (SUD, ed. Hongs, 77) takes on clarity without any dumbing down. He carefully follows the structure of the book, moving from the secular analysis of the self in Part I to

the sacred account in Part II. Throughout Sponheim works to show how Part II doesn't leave Part I behind—somewhat unexpectedly revealing a natural theology in this Christ saturated author.

Sponheim works to show how SUD is about “the restless heart [finding] peace, joy, and calling in the will and work of God known in a strange itinerant preacher named Jesus” (130). He employs “twists and turns” (143) in his analysis to show how our despair both impedes and aids in this venture—being both on the “wrong track [and] on the ‘proper’ wrong track” alternately (31). Along the way he shows striking parallels to Luther's writings (9, 35, 39, 44, 48, 53, 54, 61, 62, 64, 71, 92, 96, 97, 108, 111, 135, 136)—even once saying that Kierkegaard's sin/grace dialectic “reeks” with Luther's potent influence (60)!

Both parts of this book are full of demanding insights—like there being a defense for the Christian faith even though Kierkegaard thought such defenders were but versions of Judas (41–74), and the need for “a Christian dialogical openness to persons of other faiths” (140), when Kierkegaard thought Christ was the “only name in which there is blessedness” (*Christian Discourses*, ed. Hongs, 222–23).

If this book were longer (xxvii, 93, 137), I would have liked Sponheim's concern for the pastoral adaptation of Kierkegaard (79, 130–32) to have addressed the many attacks on faithless pastors in SUD (52, 57, 64, 78, 79, 91, 102–104, 112, 116, 117, 128, 129, 130). Also I would have liked him to link his concern for global warming (131, 144) to Kierkegaard's critique of the earthly (SUD 59–73). Finally I would have liked his celebration of honesty before God (144–45) to be more closely linked to a robust and “rapturous love” for God (SUD 103) as an ideal tugging our honesty onto greater heights. Sponheim rightly notes God's gracious acceptance of our honest shortcomings, but Kierkegaard also worried about self-deceit infecting such honesty (*For Self-Examination* ed. Hongs, 44), rendering it “garrulous” (CD, 168).

This work is part of the *Mapping the Tradition* series edited by Paul Rorem. Every reader of Kierkegaard who cares about what he says but also has had trouble understanding him, must read Sponheim's new, challenging study, because in this small (xiii) book is more than you will find in most books twice its size.

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