

östsidan, dock under konstant, men ”diskret”, övervakning av den östtyska säkerhetstjänsten. Så småningom började han även hjälpa människor över gränsen. ”Mer än en gång fick jag packa in en förföljd medbroder i bakluckan på bilen och ta över honom”, berättar han (s. 170). Därmed ansågs han, av de östtyska myndigheterna, ha missbrukat sin diplomatiska immunitet och blev förklarad *persona non grata* i DDR.

Även om Heribert Jansson, föga förvånande, var en kontroversiell person, var han inte bara avhållen som vän och arbetskamrat utan tilldelades också flera utmärkelser av såväl tyska som svenska myndigheter, såsom regeringens medalj *Illis Quorum* och Konungens medalj i serafimerordens band.

I Santells bok ges en intressant, innehållsrik och initierad bild av ett viktigt stycke ”Svenska kyrkan i utlandet”-historia, något som författaren skrivit om tidigare. Jag rekommenderar boken för en intresserad, allmänbildad allmänhet, och på akademisk nivå även för studenter i Kyrkohistoria. Författaren anger delvis populärvetenskapliga ambitioner. Jag delar denna uppfattning men menar att läsningen ibland riskerar tyngas av en alltför omfattande detaljrikedom. Boken är dock, tack vare tydlig disposition och rubriksättning, korta kapitel och inte minst en sann berättarglädje, tämligen lättläst. Men kanske är den stora behållningen ändå att få ta del av och lära känna en personlighet som levtt ett innehållsrikt liv och samtidigt framstår som genomsympatisk.

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**Eric Metaxas. *Religionless Christianity – God’s Answer to Evil*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Faith, 2024. 140 pp.**

US-American theologian, author and radio host Eric Metaxas’ *Religionless Christianity – God’s Answer to Evil* deals with the age-old question of whether there is and should be a connection between religion and politics

and what that connection should look like. Utilizing 20th century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s thought, Metaxas calls for a Christian faith that is lived actively and openly rather than relegated to the private sphere. Metaxas’ previous bestselling biography of Bonhoeffer (*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, 2011) was celebrated in evangelical circles and received numerous awards. It was, however, also harshly criticized, most importantly for its oversimplification of complex political and theological questions as well as exaggerated and ideological formulations. Critically examining his latest book is thus essential if we hope to make sense of Metaxas as a theologian, but also of the way in which his theology relates to the current political situation in the US.

Metaxas’ argument departs from his criticism of the ‘Christless’ religion of the American church. This religion has drifted from its radicalness and turned into a secular faith which separates religious truth from the rest of reality, he claims. The primary reason for this development, as explicated in chapters 1–4, is the Protestant church’s preoccupation with emphasizing our being saved by faith instead of works. In Martin Luther’s theology, the idea of living out one’s faith was lost, Metaxas explains, and the church has grown increasingly complacent since. Here, Metaxas begins to draw parallels to the German church of the early 1930’s. The German church and Christians did not speak out against the national socialists, despite the threat that they posed to the church itself, and to the social and political order of early 20th century Europe. As Metaxas explains, they did not recognize their error before it was too late. An authoritarian state had formed which did not leave room for those with differing views. With its ‘cancel culture’ and attacks on free speech, the US-American state of 2024 resembles such authoritarianism, chapters 5–7 contend.

Returning to the utilization of Bonhoeffer’s story, chapters 8–14 again argue for the necessity of a faith that is both trusting

and engaged. Just as Bonhoeffer decided to become a double agent in the *Abwehr* (the German military-intelligence service during Hitler's regime) and to become involved in the assassination attempts on Hitler, Metaxas calls on his fellow Christians to be courageous and to grow political in their faith. Only in doing so can today's 'idea that biblical orthodoxy and theology are no longer considered sacred and immutable but are now changing to the satanic spirit of the age' (p. 99) be fought. The vilification of nationalism and the idea that science disproves or opposes biblical faith are only some of the results of this strenuous spirit of progressiveness. Others are efforts towards a one-world government and towards ecumenism. This, the, according to Metaxas, third and likely final existential crisis in the history of America (the first two consisting of the American revolution and the Civil War), is a battle between good and evil. Only reflection on and fighting for the principles and values on which the US were founded may save the American church and American people.

The book provides an apt description of Bonhoeffer's problematization of the modern worldliness of the church and therewith an opportunity for much needed theological reflection on ways in which to live the Christian faith more openly and responsibly. Nevertheless, for several reasons, the book's argument is incoherent and its message problematic. Firstly, Metaxas' description of the historical events of early 20th century Germany is rather simplistic. Perhaps because of this simplification, Metaxas uses Nazi Germany as a cautionary tale, nevertheless arguing for a Christian faith that speaks up for nationalism. One cannot but see the irony.

Secondly, due to Metaxas' engaging with Bonhoeffer's life and story more than his theology, large parts of the book utilize Bonhoeffer's thought in a way that one can hardly imagine was intended. For example, Metaxas vilifies secularism based on a seeming confusion of the concept with atheism. Secularism does not assume that there is no God, as

Metaxas claims (p. 116), but involves the idea that the state and church as institutions need to be separated. As most political theology after World War II, but more importantly Bonhoeffer himself contended, this separation is crucial for the Christian faith's ability to take a stance on political issues. Only if it stands outside the political arena is it able to scrutinize and criticize those who hold power in this world. Equally astonishing is Metaxas' criticism of ecumenism or a one-world religion, as he terms it, in the context of this book with its focus on Bonhoeffer. For ecumenism was one of the foremost goals of much of Bonhoeffer's work. This work and the connections and relationships he had built because of it were not least the reason for his attractiveness to the *Abwehr*.

Thirdly, the book leaves much to be desired from a scholarly point of view. Its tone veers into polemic rather than constructive critique. With its many rhetorical questions, dramatic language and charged formulations, it resembles a populist political commentary more than anything else. Most significantly, it seems as though Metaxas has abandoned the openness and adaptability that need to be the foundation of any theology. For as theologians we should be especially aware of the uncontrollability that characterizes our earthly existence and therewith of the fallibility of our knowledge. Theology needs to be eternally evolving, perpetually progressive. Bonhoeffer himself emphasized this time and time again, calling for a humble theology that is aware of creaturely errancy.

To sum up, the book's short chapters and sub-headings make the text easily read. Moreover, Metaxas' notable ability to make complex theological ideas comprehensible to laypeople in combination with his knowledgeability on Scripture, make the text approachable to a wide audience. Even though it sets out on the reasonable quest to establish a connection between politics and theology, however, the book makes of Bonhoeffer's theology something it is not. For the systematic and/or political theologian,

its content thus appears unproductive. And yet, in reconstructing Bonhoeffer's theology, Metaxas illustrates that any politically engaged theology risks being misunderstood or even misused if it does not make provisions against political ideology. At least for that, anyone working towards such a theology should be grateful.

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