

creational, perhaps even ontological, warrant provided for that silence in vv. 13–15. Readers would have benefited from Works' perspective on these difficult verses.

Notable contributions are found in chapter 4, 'The Galatian Heirs', and chapter 5, 'The Church as the Least of These?' In the former, Works expands the concept of 'the least of these' beyond poverty, slavery and gender to include those subjugated by Rome's power. With a focus on Galatians, Works contends that to Galatian readers whose land had been taken by Roman occupation Paul's evocation of God's promises to Abraham is linked with the hope of new life in the Spirit, inheritance of God's kingdom and the arrival of new creation. Thus, 'the Galatians are indeed heirs and children of the promise, and what they are inheriting is life – the kind of abundant life that rectifies and reclaims human and nonhuman creation alike' (p. 106). In chapter 5, Works advances a fresh and compelling claim that Paul's metaphor of the Corinthians as 'infants' (1 Cor 3:1) stresses not only the Corinthians' immaturity but also their vulnerability, that is, their status as the 'least of these'.

The penultimate chapter, 'Paul as the Least of These?', aptly illustrates the vulnerability and humility of the 'least' of the apostles, who was willing to become 'least' in service of God's calling. The book concludes with a thoughtful chapter, 'Good News for the Least of These', that expounds the cosmic nature of Paul's 'gospel' and the gospel's ability to obliterate 'any distinctions used in our culture to foster hierarchy, privilege, and power' (p. 172). Works has written an excellent book that will be useful in many teaching settings, especially seminary or advanced undergraduate courses on Paul's letters.

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Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*

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In this book, Jennifer Herdt, Professor of Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School, sets as her task to retrieve 'the German *Bildung* tradition' and make it acceptable to Christian thought and moral reasoning, albeit in manner that allows for the participation of non-Christians as well (p. 245). In this effort, she is assisted by Karl Barth, who functions in the book like a wise, chatty Vergil, appearing episodically to help the author take stock theologically of her Dantesque journey through the past. Herdt calls these appearances 'listening sessions' (p. 243) with Barth.

Herdt's achieves her purpose, but it is a Pyrrhic victory. On the one hand, she admirably trudges over immense ground in German intellectual history and literature, from medieval mystics such as Meister Eckhart; to early-modern Pietist thinkers such as Johann Arndt and Jakob Boehme; to canonical thinkers of the German Enlightenment and Romantic period, such as Goethe, Kant, Humboldt, Schilling, Herder, and Hegel, with excursions along the way to ponder the 'ethical formation

and the invention of the religion of art' (the title of the book's fourth chapter) and the rise of the modern novel qua *Bildungsroman*.

On the other hand, the payoff for Christian ethics seems remarkably meagre. In the conclusion, where Herdt draws lessons from her inquiry, she offers up anodyne liberal exhortations: we are listen to those on the margins, encounter all others 'dialogically', rue bad things like 'police brutality' and racism – and, in general, do our part to help form a 'harmoniously diverse humanity' (p. 251).

These are of course fine and worthy goals, but if it came down to a choice between, say, Hegel's turgid prose and the Sermon on the Mount as a means toward these ends, I imagine that I would not be alone in wanting to shelve Hegel and opt for the latter. But my misgivings about the book do not end here. These might be organised under two terms: 'will-o'-the-wisp' and 'fixer-upper'.

First, in English folklore, a will-o'-the-wisp is a mysterious light that does not actually exist but misleads travellers because it appears like a lamp and, metaphorically, it is a hope or a goal that is impossible to reach and finally confounds. Something similar could be said for 'the *Bildung* tradition' (my emphasis). Herdt confesses early on in the book that the phrase is her construction, but she equally insists that its deployment offers analytic clarity about large tracts of German intellectual history and its abiding relevance. But does it?

As is often pointed out, *Bildung* is a notoriously difficult word to translate. Often it is used as a cognate for 'education', but possible alternative renderings would include formation, shaping, making, determining, creating, fashioning, moulding, and more. Herdt herself recognises that 'Bildung was not just an aesthetic, spiritual, and ethical ideal, but also a political ideal' (p. 2). In short, the word might be so nebulous and capacious that it in fact resists the analytic purposes which the author wants it to serve.

Second, Herdt realises that 'the tradition', if we grant the term, has problems and needs correction; in a word, it's a 'fixer-upper'. In particular, she notes that *Bildung* has often referred to a highly individualistic and aesthetic sense of self-formation; she by contrast wants to deploy it communally and even in a cosmopolitan manner. She also recognises that *Bildung*, like much else in German history, is tainted by the country's own imperial-colonialist past and its descent into racist nationalism in the twentieth century. These are important things to identify and seek to correct, to say the least. My sense though is that readers of Herdt's tome will not be given to championing colonialism, empire, or racism.

A more delicate topic than would have been for the author to define more clearly the roles of the *state* and the *church* in the process of education (*Bildung*). Curiously, neither word appears in the index, although surely they should be central to an inquiry of this sort? Barth himself after all emphatically entitled his work *Church Dogmatics* and, with others, worried not just about German racism in the 1930s but about the 'statification' (*Verstaatlichung*) of the church – the encroachment of Caesar into the realm of the things that should not be his.

To put the question bluntly to Professor Herdt: what role ought the state play in *Bildung* and what role the church? Historically and in the present, these remain the two major institutions that have wielded the most authority and influence in the realm of *Bildung*, often coming into conflict with one another in the process. Why then is a candid discussion of them largely elided in this book that otherwise covers so much ground?