

4:1–11, where Paul attempts to dissuade the Galatians from taking on the practice of Jewish laws. He shows with precision the steps Paul takes to argue that being “under the law” is tantamount to being “under the *stoicheia*.” Not surprisingly, given that he is a student of Richard B. Hays, M. also frequently suggests how OT texts lie in the background of Paul’s exposition (e.g., Ps 89:32–33 and Job 2:4–6 behind 1 Cor. 4:18–21 and 5:5, respectively).

At times M. takes a contended exegetical position for which he does not fully argue, but this is easily forgiven. Too many dissertations are myopic in their focus on a single text. M.’s expansive coverage is a breath of fresh air. And his focus on practice for illuminating Paul’s understanding of spiritual powers is innovative and helpful. My main critique is that M. too narrowly concentrates on occasional or dramatic practices—like baptism or punishment. While he frequently mentions the formation of a Christian *habitus*, he does not cover the quotidian practices involved to cultivate it (e.g., prayer and teaching). Nevertheless, this volume is well worth reading.

Thomas D. Stegman, S.J.  
Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

*Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith.* By Merold Westphal. Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014. Pp. x + 284. \$35.

This volume provides an excellent tour of the main parts of the Kierkegaardian corpus concerned with faith. In it, Westphal lucidly guides readers through the ways three of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms approach the concept: Johannes de Silentio, Johannes Climacus, and Anti-Climacus. Dealing with Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms is often anything but straightforward (scholarly opinion varies widely over the sense in which Kierkegaard actually intended his writings to be read, pseudonymous or not), but W. takes him at his word: the pseudonyms form a coherent whole, whose common goal is to describe “what it means to become a Christian in Christendom” (7). Consequently, W.’s attention in this book never strays far from the topic stated in the title, and the result is a beautifully illuminating picture of faith through the eyes of these three pseudonyms, approachably presented and formidably supported.

One of the common threads that runs throughout most of the book is W.’s insistence that Kierkegaard is not an irrationalist. Against the backdrop of often-popular but ultimately inadequate characterizations of Kierkegaard as rejecting reason in favor of a kind of blind faith, W. argues convincingly that faith in Kierkegaard does not abolish reason, but relativizes it. The concept of reason itself is hardly consistent throughout philosophical reflection, and the plurality of ways of envisioning reason makes it “anything but self-evidently absolute” (225). This comes as a breath of fresh air for those who suspect (quite rightly, as W. shows) that there is far more to Kierkegaard on faith than simply saying no to Hegel. Reason is not abolished in Kierkegaard, but the

task of faith requires that reason be allowed to falter and even fail in the Christian's encounter with God.

In this way of explaining the interplay between faith and reason in Kierkegaard, W. might be misread as arguing that faith perfects or forms reason rather than contradicts it. Such a reading would, however, miss the point. W. argues that Kierkegaard is steadfastly Lutheran, rejecting the Thomistic synthesis that reason ideally serves faith. Faith remains a leap, unable to justify itself according to rules of rational understanding—though not necessarily without any justification at all. “Faith may indeed be a leap, but it is not a blind leap. It is an interpretation, a mode of understanding, and it has its own interior rationale. There is a ‘logic of insanity’” (260). W. takes great pains to elucidate the import of Kierkegaard's fundamental opposition, not between faith and reason, but between faith and offense. Reason itself is ideological, just as conceptions of faith can be. W. uses an example of children rebelling against some parental instruction to illuminate his point: “[The children] don't want evidence; they want their parents to loosen up” (160). Often the “choice” between faith and reason is simply a mask for the choice between faith and offense.

One area toward which W. gestures, whose development would have been helpful, is his treatment of faith and immediacy. While Kierkegaard may not have understood the term “immediacy” in the same way many late- or post-modern authors did, W. clearly shows that he is conversant with much of late- and post-modernity. To develop the contemporary repercussions for faith of Kierkegaard's rejection of immediacy in light of other authors (whom W. draws into the discussion when covering other issues) would have strengthened his explanation of the point. That said, W. clearly explains at least what Kierkegaard meant by resisting immediacy: dying to one's absolute commitment to finite ends.

Possibly the most poignant contribution of this book, besides presenting an unparalleled account of faith in Kierkegaard's thought, is W.'s explanation of why Kierkegaard is so interested in keeping Christian faith the province of the individual. In a theological and philosophical context where individualism has become a dirty word, and the communal dimensions of Christianity are often seen as prior and superior to Christian individuality, W. argues along with Kierkegaard that an overemphasis on social ontology or social conformism leads to dissolution of the Christian self. Kierkegaard's alternative, however, is not strict individualism. As W. points out, Kierkegaard “presents an essentially relational self” (245). The point is not to substitute social ontology for the essentially relational self. In so doing, the self would despair of becoming itself, and would deny any responsibility for the loss. The alternative task—of becoming a Christian, of leaping to faith—is, as W. states, the task of a lifetime. With that emphasis, this book delivers an invaluable depiction of what that task looks like for Kierkegaard, and what is at stake in recognizing it for what it is.

*Benjamin Durheim*  
*College of Saint Benedict, Saint Joseph, MN*