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Houston and Zimmermanns' "Sources of the Christian self: A cultural history of Christian identity" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Houston, J.M., & Zimmermann, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Sources of the Christian self: A cultural history of Christian identity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 694 pp. \$55.00. ISBN 9780802876270

In *Sources of the Christian Self: A Cultural History of Christian Identity* many different contributors seek to answer the question, “What does it mean to be a Christian today?” This book is a collection of essays, edited by James M. Houston of Regent College in Vancouver and Jens Zimmermann from Trinity Western University. There are 42 different contributors; many are from the broader evangelical tradition. There is a nice mix, among the contributors, of institutional affiliation, denominational and ecclesiastical tradition, gender, age, and nationality. This diversity allows many different voices to come through as one spends time with this valuable book.

Using important people from the Old Testament to the twentieth century each chapter seeks to draw insight from each individual that the twenty-first century Christian believer can apply to his or her own life. Each chapter takes the time to examine the life and important moments in each person’s life, look at what they thought about identity and the self, and seeks to apply that insight to people living today. This looks different depending on whether the person is an Old Testament figure, a disciple of Jesus, a medieval saint, a Reformer, or a twentieth century philosopher. Most of the individuals written about are well known; however, there are a few enlightening essays on lesser known individuals that contribute to the helpfulness of this collection.

While the premise of this book is based on some of the ideas found in Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* and grounded on his discussion of what makes a Christian self a background in philosophy or theology is not necessary to benefit from the essays in this book. Even those essays that deal with philosophers whose ideas are more complicated to make sense of on your own are well crafted and are easier to benefit from due to the guidance of the author.

This would be a helpful book to use a relevant chapter for a survey course, for a full course in Christian identity, or even as a kind of devotional reading for personal use. While this is an academic book, because of its focus on Christian identity and what it means to be a follower of Jesus it will benefit the careful reader spiritually as well.

Reviewer

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