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Theology Compromised: Schleiermacher, Troeltsch, and the Possibility of a Sociological Theology



MATTHEW RYAN ROBINSON and EVAN F. KUEHN

“How relevant is sociology for a theological understanding of church and doctrine? This provocative little book offers a new perspective on Schleiermacher and Troeltsch by connecting their contributions to contemporary social theory.”

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“At least since the 1990s, theologians have been suspicious of sociology and social theory. Yet in this short and striking book, Matthew Ryan Robinson and Evan F. Kuehn revive what they view as the sociological heartbeat of all theology, presenting Ernst Troeltsch as the pacemaker who has kept it going from the past to the present. Required reading for anyone interested in theological methodology.”

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Theological work, whatever else it may be, is always a reflection on social transformations. Not only pastors but also theologians work with the sources of the Christian traditions in one hand and a newspaper in the other. But how are we to understand the relationship between social transformations and the continuously “compromised” development of Christian ideals, as these are measured by doctrinal formulations? And how might a more deeply sociological perspective on this relationship inform theological work? Matthew Ryan Robinson and Evan F. Kuehn approach this question, not by reconstructing a history of ideas, but rather by telling a story about the development of churches and theological institutions. They take the turbulent and dynamic ecclesiological situation of nineteenth-century Germany as a representative case, focusing on the sociological methodological orientation of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Ernst Troeltsch in the context of the rise of theological liberalism, the history of religions, and the German churches’ confrontation with social and political challenges. Robinson and Kuehn then connect this orientation with the sociology of religion of Hans Joas and Niklas Luhmann, arguing for a functional focus in theological research on what doctrines do rather than what the reality behind or in any particular doctrine is.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Ryan Robinson is a research associate in the Protestant Theological Faculty of Friedrich Wilhelm University of Bonn.

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