

Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, *The Architectonics of Hope: Violence, Apocalyptic, and the Transformation of Political Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2017. Pp. 234. Softcover, \$22.40.

Published as the 21st volume in Cascade's Theopolitical Visions series, Kyle Gingerich Hiebert's new book is a bold contribution to the conversation on political theology from a distinctly Mennonite, yet distinctly ecumenical voice. The author is currently the director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre at the Toronto School of Theology – a centre founded by A. James Reimer, the foremost Canadian Mennonite political theologian. In addition to the critical and constructive work he pursues in *The Architectonics of Hope*, Gingerich Hiebert's work has also appeared in journals such as *Telos*, *Political Theology*, and *New Blackfriars*, and he recently co-authored a book with Brian Haymes called *God After Christendom?* also published by Cascade.

In his appreciative preface to the book, Cyril O'Regan affirms that central to *The Architectonics of Hope* is “an original genealogical thesis” – and this thesis is that the Nazi jurist-philosopher Carl Schmitt established the terms upon which the discourse of political theology would proceed, and furthermore that this influence is still very present in the theological works of Johann Baptist Metz, John Milbank, and David Bentley Hart, each in different and interesting ways. Although these and other thinkers within political theology may mention Schmitt and reject him quickly, or not even mention him at all, *The Architectonics of Hope* contends that we ignore Schmitt at our own peril. I notice that even at the most recent meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Boston (November 2017), each panelist in the Political Theology forum was sure to mention Schmitt's name, as if to clear

the air or exorcise a spirit, before moving on to other (albeit very worthy) topics. *The Architectonics of Hope* however, insists that we cannot pass Schmitt by with only mention, but instead shows us a way to understand the subtle and negative influences of his thought, not least of which is the apocalyptic authorization of violence via a reading of the apostle Paul. “Schmittian aporetics” is the name given to the contradictions of these hidden influences, and one such *aporia* is the fact that Schmitt supposedly stood against violence while reinscribing violence in another key. Throughout the book the ontology and epistemology of violence remain a central concern, but more central than ontology and epistemology is the *aesthetics* of violence – an aesthetics that is mobilized in much the same violent way as apocalyptic.

The first chapter sets the stage by way of Hegel, and asks the reader to consider that theology might be a kind of seeing, a vision or paradigm. The second chapter then puts the genealogical lens to work by tracing hitherto unseen lines of influence from Schmitt into the work of Johann Baptist Metz, marking the book’s first major contribution. After showing us that even Metz’s *new* political theology cannot take us beyond Schmitt’s contradictions, the third chapter deals directly with the aesthetics of violence and the rhetorical and persuasive power of the appeal to beauty. Challenging the ontology of peace advanced so persuasively by John Milbank, the book provides another substantial contribution to the Mennonite critique of Milbank’s ontology of peace, rivalling in subtlety and rigor the work of other Mennonite theologians who have thus far engaged with the ontology of peace advanced by the Radical Orthodoxy school. The argument of the third chapter, in part, is that both Milbank and Hart use appeals to beauty and apocalyptic to justify the coercive use of violence, both rhetorically and politically. Rather than remain beholden to Schmitt’s violent notion of decision, in which the sovereign decides the state of the exception by choosing when the rule applies and when it does not, *The Architectonics of Hope* provides a new vision that tries to see beyond the identification of the other as an enemy, and beyond the identification of reason and beauty with transcendence. For Milbank, peace and truth are one with reason, and this is inseparable from his aesthetic vision. But *The Architectonics of Hope* critiques this use of beauty in service of rhetorical persuasion and epistemic power.

Showing his peace church convictions, Kyle Gingerich Hiebert opposes the educative and coercive use of violence by suggesting that Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder offers a way out of the Schmittian aporetics of violent coercion and its abuse of power.

In making this claim, Kyle Gingerich Hiebert finds himself in a new discursive environment which must struggle with the rhetorical, epistemic, and sexual violence of Yoder himself. In this area the book misses an opportunity to move beyond Yoder because it makes positive use of his theology without taking into account the now substantial body of work on the link between Yoder's sexual abuse of women and his theological position. Although adding an excursus on Bakhtin's dialogical hermeneutic, *The Architectonics of Hope* still sees Yoder as more of a solution than a problem for contemporary political theology, and it is the opinion of this reviewer that this is the book's weakness. The fifth and final chapter gives a retrospective and prospective look at the book's aims, in which the author notes with his signature subtlety that those he critiques are not simply beholden to Schmitt's problems, but also resist him in certain ways, and at certain times. This too can be said for *The Architectonics of Hope* on the Yoder issue, for it gives substantial resources for those interested in how violence is inscribed in not only corporeal ways, but in epistemic and ontological power relations as well.

Maxwell Kennel
McMaster University