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REVIEW OF
TODD SPEIDELL, GREG MARCAR, AND ANDREW TORRANCE, EDS.,
SØREN KIERKEGAARD: THEOLOGIAN OF THE GOSPEL

(Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 243 pp.

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Karl Barth famously spoke of there being three kinds of people: those who never went to school with Kierkegaard, those who went to school with Kierkegaard (and never left it), and those who went to school with Kierkegaard, profited from him, and went on. (*Fragments Grave and Gay*, pp. 102-3). Barth obviously saw himself in the latter category. He criticized his first start in dogmatics as being too "existentialist" and perhaps still saw too much influence of the great Dane in his burgeoning dogmatics work. So many still see Kierkegaard as primarily the father of existentialist philosophy and only perhaps devotionally a Christian. The editors and contributors of this fine volume make it clear that Kierkegaard was clearly an incarnational Christian theologian first of all, with a continuing relevance for contemporary theology.

Readers of this journal will find much that is similar in Supplemental Volume 5 (2019) of *Participatio*, yet some essays have been revised or changed in title.

In the introduction the editors clearly see a commonality between Kierkegaard and Luther, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and also extending to T. F. Torrance.

"Truth is subjectivity" is not just individuality but Truth as active Subject. This is certainly persuasive when one considers the bulk of SK's work as being, as is popular to say today, theology *coram deo*, before God, not from a detached neutrality. It is from this perspective that God in Christ demands radical discipleship.

The chapters, involving eleven contributors, are divided into two parts: Part I: "Incarnational Theology and Ethics: and Part II: "Faith, Sin, and Offense." These are two worthy categories it seems, but the editors separate the first part, on ethics, from the second, which is on "what it is to be and live as a human self ... " This seems to be an arbitrary separation – both categories would seem to deal with ethics. In fact, some essays in Part I do not seem to deal with ethics *per se* ("Kierkegaard and the Trinitarian Grammar of Theology"), whereas Part II includes essays that seem to be better suited for the first on "Incarnational Theology" ("Kierkegaard: Father of Existentialism or Critic of Existentialism?"). Regardless, all of the essays maintain the steady thesis of the volume: Kierkegaard should be seen primarily as a theologian of the incarnation, not as an existentialist philosopher.

Murray Rae's essay "Kierkegaard and the Trinitarian Grammar of Theology" seeks to explore the trinitarian ground of SK's theology, despite what seems to be the scarcity of mention of the Trinity in the Dane's work. Instead of being an individualist, Kierkegaard sees the Christian center in communion with God through Christ (much like T. F. Torrance), but not based on any capacity in ourselves. Kierkegaard's aversion to doctrinal formulation is related to his opposition to Hegelian speculation, Rae argues. But SK does work with an Anselmian "faith seeks understanding" in the context of human existence. (One could almost hope for a study of Kierkegaard on theological existence in relation to a theology of ministry as *praxis* in T. F. Torrance's student, Ray S. Anderson!) The incarnation drives SK to deal with actual existence, as seen in the famous parable of the king who becomes like the maiden from *Philosophical Fragments*. Rae's emphasis on communion with God in SK is quite telling when one considers how often SK is discounted in contemporary thought as an "existentialist," allegedly for *lacking* communion! (An example is in the otherwise classic work of John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, pp. 103-4.)

The essay by David J. Gouwens, "Kierkegaard's Incarnational Realism: The Grammar of Christian Knowledge" more extensively compares Kierkegaard with T. F. Torrance when it comes to the issue of whether or not SK was a realist in epistemology, as Torrance claims. Gouwens exhaustively reviews the debate and concludes he was, even with saying "truth is subjectivity." The passion behind this does not deny that it is through faith that one knows the objectivity of God: "inwardness is shown to be objectivity" (*Journals and Papers*). Gouwens points out a fascinating parallel between SK and the fathers Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria in this regard. So Torrance also, many do not see, has a place for "inwardness," if you will, in his three tiers of knowledge of God, beginning with "the evangelical and doxological level" (*The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, p. 156.)

This is not to deny, Gouwens stresses, the differences between Torrance and Kierkegaard on realism. Torrance's concern for "scientific realism" is beyond the concerns of SK's "unscientific" reflections. His understanding of "grammar" is much more widespread than Kierkegaard. This is not to say, however, that they are in conflict.

"Paradox" and "the infinite qualitative difference" between God and humanity are often seen to be examples in Kierkegaard of logical separations and the separation of God from humanity. Andrew Torrance, however, claims in his essay, in Kierkegaard, they are expressions of the nearness of God. In fact, among the church fathers, one can find a profound emphasis on paradox in Cyril of Alexandria's Christology. Later, Andrew Torrance points out, we can find this in the Christology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The point is that Kierkegaard is against any theology that is a "puzzle-solving exercise." Rather SK expresses what T. F. Torrance calls the "explosive force" of God becoming human, something we cannot fit neatly in logical categories.

In like manner, Leo C. Barrett's essay, "Kierkegaard and the Beauty of the Cross" counters the popular view of Kierkegaard as the "theologian of gloom" because he sees the cross as a center of joy in his work. Sounding very Lutheran at this point, SK builds up the importance of the crucifixion as the source of the forgiveness of sins, a source for great joy. The *kenosis* doctrine of Philippians 2 is

very much in mind here, where exaltation does not exist without prior humiliation, but they are not necessarily always sequential in the Christian's life.

G. P. Marcar, in "Busyness, Worry, and the Prototypical Love of Christ" answers the typical criticism of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* that it ignores present social and economic conditions. Rather, the emphasis is that it sees everything in the priority of love of God. But this is not to neglect the love of neighbor. This can be seen also in the wider soteriological context of SK's writings: the importance of the incarnation, Christ becoming "humanity's redeemer" as the priority over everything else, and therefore Christ become "the Prototype" of love for humanity.

In "Kierkegaard: Father of Existentialism or Critic of Existentialism?" C. Stephen Evans presents a masterful criticism of the view that Kierkegaard is the direct source for the existentialist view of "radical choice" such as represented by Jean Paul Sartre. No, SK believes in the human creature as a being before God (*coram deo*), so his view of "truth is subjectivity" is quite different, with all the hopes, desires, and anxieties of human beings. Also, he does not share the foundationalism of Descartes, the Enlightenment, or Hegel's "System." In the end, contra Sartre, the self cannot invent the self, but stands before God. This self before God (*coram deo*) is found by Philip G. Ziegler as a remarkable correlation to Lutheran theology in his essay, "The Theological Self in Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*."

How one remains *coram deo* is explored by Joshua Cockayne in "Communion and the Remission of Sin: A Kierkegaardian Account." What is the relation between forgiveness of sin and remission of sins in Kierkegaard? Is there a place for the Eucharist here in SK's theology despite his rare mentions of the sacrament?

To be *coram deo* for Kierkegaard most famously, perhaps, is to be a "radical disciple," best exemplified in his later writings such as the *Attack Upon Christendom*. George Pattison, however, believes this was a degeneration from his earlier Christian theology. In "Kierkegaard on Sin, Ambiguity, and Gospel Radicality: Towards a Response to George Pattison," Aaron P. Edwards answers Pattison that SK did not forsake his Christian position but was in continuity with it. In fact, he was in continuity with the critical stand of Luther and the Reformation as well as his

earlier writings on being confronted by the living Christ. The earlier writings have a dramatic difference between them because of the different pseudonyms they are written under (Johannes Climacus, Anti-Climacus, etc.). This is a point also made by Stephen Backhouse's essay, "The Difference the Incarnation Makes: The Changing Nature of Faith and Offence in the Pseudonyms of Søren Kierkegaard."

Finally, Sylvia Walsh's remarkable essay, "The Inverse of Jest and Earnestness in Kierkegaard's Theology," sees Kierkegaard not as a theologian of gloom but of jest. SK sees the jest in the religious person's religious claims. But he also sees true jest in God's "gracious jest" when God acts and allows us to participate in his actions.

This is a fine collection that deserves a wide reading by both scholars and those beginning to journey through reading Kierkegaard.