

**Jon Stewart (ed.)**

*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources. Vol. 10: Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology. Tome I: German Protestant Theology.*

Aldershot: Ashgate 2012.

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*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources. Vol. 10: Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology. Tome III: Catholic and Jewish Theology.*

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These collections of essays are recent additions to the monumental series *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, which is a project of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Copenhagen. As their titles indicate, the three tomes of Volume 10 focus on Kierkegaard's influence on subsequent theology, including German Protestant theology (Tome I), Catholic and Jewish theology (Tome III), and Anglophone and Scandinavian theology (Tome II—not reviewed here).

Not surprisingly, the tome on German Protestant theology is the heftiest of the three. Kierkegaard influenced most of the major German Protestant theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so there is a lot of material to consider. This is especially true of Karl Barth, whose appropriation of Kierkegaard is arguably the most famous. Barth's *Romans* commentary is full of such Kierkegaardian themes as the 'infinite qualitative distinction between time and Eternity', paradox, the moment, divine incognito, the single one, and the emphasis on the wholly otherness of God (8-9). Yet as Lee Barrett shows, Barth was less of a Kierkegaardian than people often assume. First of all, Barth's appropriation of Kierkegaard in *Romans* is not uncritical. As Barrett notes, 'Barth intimated that Kierkegaard may have been guilty of a subtle type of self-justification, a self-justification by acts of negation', and that Kierkegaardian faith may be 'just another vain form of human spirituality' (14). Second, Barth did not have a sustained engagement with Kierkegaard's texts in the years that followed *Romans*. Barth's otherwise thorough *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* does not even include a chapter on Kierkegaard—an omission that is both strange and significant (12). Third, Barth's works rarely engage with specific Kierkegaardian texts in any detail. While his earlier work indicates a familiarity with Kierkegaard's journals and several of his books, Barth's references to Kierkegaard are rarely rooted in textual specifics. One notable exception is *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, where Barth criticizes *Works of Love* for its opposition of *eros* and *agape*. In general, though, Kierkegaard's appearances in the voluminous *Church Dogmatics* are usually little more than allusions (12-13). When Barth later summarized his view of Kierkegaard, he wrote: 'I consider him to be a teacher whose school every theologian must enter

once. Woe to him who misses it—provided only he does not remain in or return to it’ (18). For Barth, Kierkegaard was a highly instructive interlocutor and critic, but his orientation toward human subjectivity proves a decisive flaw that limits him as a theological resource.

Was Barth correct in this judgment? After a helpful overview of the scholarly debate, Barrett shows that Barth did not have an accurate overview of Kierkegaard’s thought, and that Barth often fails to do justice to what Kierkegaard’s texts say about such themes as subjectivity, revelation, and love. That aside, the two thinkers do ultimately differ in their emphasis, with Kierkegaard stressing the soteriological drama of the individual being opened—through great resistance and offense—to God and the neighbor, and Barth stressing the grand triumph of divine grace and the joy of divine love (33-34).

Barrett also contributes a chapter on Paul Tillich, who seems to reflect a strongly Kierkegaardian influence with his existentially-oriented theology, which employs such Kierkegaardian themes as anxiety, concern for the self, individual responsibility, paradox, the moment, and faith as a passion (361-67). If we look at Kierkegaard and Tillich through the lens of existentialism, there might seem to be continuity between the thinkers. But here the category of ‘existentialism’ is misleading; Tillich disavows the term in favor of his own brand of *essentialism*, drawing much more deeply from Schelling’s philosophy of divine immanence, in which finite and infinite are reconciled. In Tillich’s view, Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity was his decisive shortcoming (360, 368-70).

One finds a stronger Kierkegaardian influence on another great ‘existentialist’ theologian, Rudolf Bultmann. Heiko Schulz offers a thorough study of Bultmann’s relation to Kierkegaard, and even offers a chart documenting all sixty-two of Bultmann’s explicit references to Kierkegaard. Sixty-two is not an especially impressive number given the size of Bultmann’s corpus, but Schulz shows that Kierkegaard’s influence on Bultmann is even more significant at an implicit level. Granted, there are clearly vital differences between the two thinkers; it’s difficult to imagine Kierkegaard enthused about Bultmann’s programme of demythologization, for instance. Schulz also admits that Bultmann’s Kierkegaard has a strongly Heideggerian inflection (134). Nevertheless, Bultmann explicitly draws key insights from Kierkegaard in Christology, eschatology, and ethics, and these insights become part of Bultmann’s guiding convictions: ‘namely, that the existential relevance, truth, and authority of the Christian gospel can and will never be done away with, thanks to the inexhaustible potential for providing for its recipient a new, both eschatologically and ethically decisive model of self-understanding’ (136).

Curtis L. Thompson offers a very helpful study of Kierkegaard’s importance in shaping Emil Brunner’s major ideas: relationality, divine commandment and contradiction, the point of contact (contra Barth) between divine revelation and human being, truth as encounter, and divine self-communication. There are problems with Brunner’s reading of Kierkegaard, such as his neglect of the differences between the pseudonyms, such that every text is directly attributed to ‘Kierkegaard’, and his neglect of most of Kierkegaard’s signed works, such as the upbuilding discourses and *Works of Love* (96-97). Nevertheless, Brunner’s debt to Kierkegaard is clear.

One cannot say the same of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg—two theologians Thompson discusses in other chapters. For Moltmann, Kierkegaard is an influence in the topic of temporality, insofar as Moltmann draws insight from Kierkegaard’s category of the *moment* in developing his eschatology (214-17). For Pannenberg, Kierkegaard’s anthropology is the main interest, with a particular focus on the themes of anxiety and sin. The crucial difference between the thinkers concerns ‘the extent to which reason can capture reality’: while Kierkegaard insists on the impossibility of explaining sin, Pannenberg ‘holds out’ for just such an explanation (270). Thompson’s chapters on Moltmann and Pannenberg are very thorough—perhaps *too* thorough, given the relatively minor importance of Kierkegaard for their theology. Readers interested in Kierkegaard’s influence on these theologians will, however, find all the detail they need.

The volume includes shorter studies of Kierkegaard’s influence on Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Christiane Tietz), Gerhard Ebeling (Derek R. Nelson), Franz Overbeck (David R. Law), Ernst Troeltsch (Mark Chapman), and Helmut Thielicke (Kyle A. Roberts). Tietz’s article on Bonhoeffer sums up all of his references to Kierkegaard, and also includes a helpful list of which of his writings he knew. Tietz notes Bonhoeffer’s verdict, in *Sanctorum Communio*, that despite Kierkegaard’s critique of idealist subjectivity, he fails to recognize that the I only comes into being in relation to others, thereby remaining ‘bound to the idealist position’ and laying the basis for ‘an extreme sort of individualism’ (48, 50-51). Bonhoeffer overlooks the ways in which the Kierkegaardian self is not an a-social, self-positing being, as is evident in *The Sickness Unto Death*. Tietz could have offered some critical evaluation of Bonhoeffer’s objection on this point, but she is correct to note the difference between the two thinkers (60), insofar as Bonhoeffer’s account of sociality and ecclesiology is indeed more robust than Kierkegaard’s.

Gerhard Schreiber contributes a chapter on Christoph Schrempf, who rendered some of the first German translations of Kierkegaard’s texts, and whose edition of the Collected Works was instrumental in disseminating Kierkegaard to literary, philosophical, and theological readers early in the twentieth century (293). Unfortunately Schrempf’s translations are highly idiosyncratic, as he presumptively sought to render Kierkegaard as he would have written were he a native German speaker. This resulted in many glosses, deleted passages, attributions, and paraphrases that gave an inaccurate and sometimes very misleading versions of Kierkegaard’s works (298). Schreiber’s problematic translation of works like *The Sickness Unto Death* were the sources through which Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Tillich, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Adorno came to know Kierkegaard (294-95), which raises a major question for research. In Schreiber’s words: ‘To what degree was it Kierkegaard whom these thinkers so productively received, and to what degree was it merely Schrempf’s Kierkegaard?’ (308). To what degree, then, must we reconsider what these thinkers wrote about Kierkegaard?

Another controversial yet pivotal figure in the German reception of Kierkegaard is Emanuel Hirsch, whom Matthias Wilke discusses in his chapter. In addition to translating a new edition of Kierkegaard’s *Samlede Værker*, which replaced the questionable scholarship of Schrempf’s editions, Hirsch also published a multivolume *Kierkegaard-Studien*, both of which aided in making Kierkegaard available to German readers. Hirsch was, however, controversial for supporting the

German Christian movement, which embraced Nazism as a political corollary of the Christian faith (156). Hirsch cited Kierkegaard to support his politics, appealing to Kierkegaard's critique of leveling as a reason to oppose the parliamentarianism of the Weimar Republic, and to Kierkegaard's category of the moment in support of political decisionism (160, 170). Hirsch goes so far as to depict Kierkegaard as an 'intellectual Viking prepared to attack every foreign shore on which other thinkers had built house and home' (160). At the time this reading of Kierkegaard was controversial among German and Scandinavian scholars alike, and it remains a vexing feature of a scholar who still demands attention in Kierkegaard studies (173-75).

As mentioned, the third tome of this Volume focuses on Kierkegaard's influence on seven Catholic theologians and three Jewish theologians, resulting in a considerably slimmer tome than the one on German Protestant theology. It is understandable that Protestant theologians would find Kierkegaard more amenable to their work, but Tome III does show the genuine interest and challenge that leading Catholic theologians have found in Kierkegaard. As Peter Šajda notes (citing Heiko Schulz), 'Catholic reactions to Kierkegaard appeared in the public discourse in Germany as early as 1856'—just a year after his death (48). Moreover, during the 1920s and 30s there was considerable interest in Kierkegaard among Catholic theologians, just as there was among Protestant theologians during this time (48-51).

In his essay on Romano Guardini, Šajda shows that Guardini was ahead of his peers in his engagement with Kierkegaard, possessing an extensive and detailed understanding of Kierkegaard's works even in the early period of Kierkegaard's German reception (53). This engagement continued throughout Guardini's authorship, since he saw Kierkegaard as an ally in advancing a deeply personalistic theology. Guardini's main criticism is that Kierkegaard founds personhood in decision, which accounts for the dynamism of personhood but not the ontic stability. Thus on Guardini's reading of *The Sickness Unto Death*, if someone fails to make the right decision morally and/or religiously, they fail to become a person (58, 60). It would be helpful to have some critical discussion of this and other points in Guardini's reading of Kierkegaard, but Šajda's study—illuminating as it is—maintains a descriptive rather than critical approach throughout. What Guardini seems to miss is how that text presents the self as given, as a task to be taken up in faith; not to do so is to be a self in despair—something Guardini himself points out (68). In terms of personhood, despair means one is not the person one is meant to become, but this does not mean there is simply a void or no personhood there at all. This is, after all, why the pseudonym Anti-Climacus describes despair as the inability to be rid of oneself.

There are also chapters on Eugen Biser (Ulli Roth), Friedrich von Hügel (David R. Law), and Thomas Merton (Erik M. Hanson), and many readers will be interested to learn more about Kierkegaard's influence on such luminaries as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, and Erich Przywara. Joseph Ballan examines Balthasar's theological aesthetics, which is the context for his critique of Kierkegaard. As Ballan notes, for Balthasar 'Kierkegaard' often functions more as a symbol for certain themes and emphases, such as interiority, contradiction, discontinuity, radical interruption, paradox, hiddenness, and suffering. Balthasar maintains that Kierkegaard cannot reconcile Christianity with aesthetics, because he does not conceive of beauty as 'harmony,

integration, measure, and proportion’—features that are vital to theological aesthetics, and likewise Christianity—the ‘aesthetic religion *par excellence*’ (19-20).

The question of aesthetics also arises in Christopher B. Barnett’s chapter on de Lubac, who presents Kierkegaard as a foil to the atheistic humanism of Nietzsche (98). On de Lubac’s account, Nietzsche situates aesthetics and the principle of tragedy at ‘the very center of the universe’, embracing myth in such a way that ‘ultimately terminates in nihilism’ (104-05). But de Lubac highlights an important difference between myth and mystery: myth merges ‘the human being in the life of the cosmos—or in that of a society itself wholly of this earth—while [mystery] exalts the most personal element in each individual in order to create a fellowship among all men’ (105). In contrast to Nietzsche, Kierkegaard is a thinker who can help ‘rekindle in ourselves the sense of mystery’, which is vital to our recognition of the worth of human beings and the life of the spirit (105-06).

Barnett also contributes a chapter on Kierkegaard’s significance for Przywara, whose study *The Mystery of Kierkegaard* presents the great Dane as a thinker pointing toward Catholicism, and even embodying a certain ‘anonymous Catholicism’ (132). Kierkegaard recognized the limits of much Protestant thought on the relation between creaturely being and divine grace, and even utilized something like the *analogia entis*, which Przywara helped to reinvigorate for Catholic thought (144). Here it’s worth noting that what Przywara viewed favorably in Kierkegaard were some of the same features that Barth viewed with suspicion.

The essays on Jewish theology are few in number. There are other Jewish thinkers who bear Kierkegaard’s influence, such as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, but they are discussed in the volumes on Existentialism and Francophone philosophy (respectively). Jack Mulder Jr. contributes a chapter on Abraham Joshua Heschel, for whom Kierkegaard is engaged in a profound project of ‘depth theology’—i.e. the ‘pretheological’ questions and concerns that are ‘the *antecedents of religious commitment*’ (163). Tamar Aylat-Yaguri contributes a chapter on Abraham Isaac Kook, one of the most important rabbis of the twentieth century (171). This study is a bit anomalous insofar as it does not trace Kook’s *reception* of Kierkegaard; there is actually no direct evidence of his having read or being influenced by Kierkegaard. Kook was, however, conversant in philosophy, so he may have been acquainted with Kierkegaard, and Aylat-Yaguri takes it as significant that Kook scholars often compare him with Kierkegaard (173-74). Her contribution follows a similar path, staging comparisons between the two thinkers on the theme of faith as well as the *akedah*. The *akedah* also appears in David D. Possen’s essay on J.B. Soloveitchik, who was a highly influential leader of Modern Orthodox Judaism in North America. Soloveitchik was also a serious reader of Kierkegaard, advocating a synthesis of neo-Kantianism and a Kierkegaardian existentialism that made available, and perhaps even ‘domesticated’ Kierkegaard for Modern Orthodox Judaism (189-90).

In sum, both of these volumes are important entries in the *Kierkegaard Research* series. As always, one might question certain editorial decisions: the chapters on Moltmann and Pannenberg are unnecessarily long, whereas the chapter on Bonhoeffer could go into greater detail. And if

Moltmann made the cut, maybe Eberhard Jüngel should have as well. But these quibbles aside, these volumes are a rich resource. Most of these articles will serve well as a first stop for anyone investigating Kierkegaard's influence on a given thinker.

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