

Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter



A Publication of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library

St. Olaf College

Northfield, Minnesota

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Editor: Gordon Marino
Associate Editor: John D. Poling
Assistant Editor: Jamie Lorentzen
Assistant Editor: Cynthia Lund

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NEWS FROM THE HONG KIERKEGAARD LIBRARY

THE KIERKEGAARD LIBRARY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM, 1998

The Summer scholars Fellowship Program is underway for 1998 with 16 scholars expected to visit the Library between June 1 and November 15. Those participating this summer are: Tom Angier (Cambridge University); Dimitri Constant (Northwestern University); Elizabeth Duquette (New York University); Elizabeth Ewing (Stanford University); Hristo Karabadjakov (Sofia University, Bulgaria), Rafael Garcia Pavon (Instituto Tecnológico y Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Mexico City); Michael Lotti (University of Swansea, Wales); Darya Loungina (Moscow University); Jacob Olsen (Cambridge University); Philip Olson (Boston College); Cleide Rohden (UNISNOS in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil); Begonya Sàez Tajafuerce (Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen); Aaron Smith (SUNY-Stony Brook); Takaya Suto (Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo); Alvaro L.M. Valls (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil); William Vann (University of Minnesota). András Nagy (Budapest, Hungary) will be working in the Library as a Fulbright Scholar from September 15 - December 15.

If you are interested in applying for this program for 1999, please send a description of your research proposal, a vita, and two academic recommendations to Gordon Marino before March 1, 1999.

OTHER LIBRARY PROGRAMS

The Curator directed the following activities during the past semester sponsored by the Library: weekly Kierkegaard discussion group with St. Olaf students; advising creation and publication of student journal on existentialism; campus-wide discussion meetings at the time of the Iraqi crisis; summer book discussion group with high school students. Again this summer Thomas Pettersson from the University of Minnesota conducted Danish language sessions for summer scholars.

SPECIAL EVENTS

On March 17, 1998, Jens-Glebe Møller (Dean of the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen) delivered a public lecture on Habermas and religion. On March 18, 1998, Alastair McKinnon (McGill University) received an honorary doctoral degree from St. Olaf College. Louis Pojman (West Point), former editor of the Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter, pursued research in the Library during recent months.

NEW ACQUISITIONS

Gifts to the Library were received from Louis Pojman, Josiah Thompson, Jacques Message, Ettore Rocca, Giuseppe Mario Pizzuti, Javier Tiera Lafuente, Tatyana Schitzova, Rafael Larrañeta, András Nagy, Beyonya Sàez Tajafuerce, Alvaro Valls, Jacob Golomb, Jolita Admoneniene, Satoshi Nakazato, Julia Watkin, Masaya Honda, Arne Grøn, Jens Glebe-Møller, Darya Loungina, Kinya Masugata, Alessandro Cortese, Gordon Marino, and Howard Hong.

The Library's holdings of Kierkegaard's Writings is now complete except for the forthcoming index volume. This year Howard and Edna Hong published their translation of Kierkegaard's The Point of View: On My Work as an Author, The Point of View or My Work as an Author, Armed Neutrality. The publication of this, the 22nd volume of Kierkegaard's Writings, marked the completion of their translation project. In recognition of this remarkable accomplishment, the Danish ambassador hosted a luncheon for the Hong's and forty guests at the Danish Embassy in Washington, D.C. on 4 May 1998. The Hong's were also feted at Luther Seminary on 24 May.

Purchased acquisitions include volumes of the new Danish 4th edition produced by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre at the University of Copenhagen and titles from the personal library of H.P. Rohde.

The Hong Kierkegaard Library welcomes the donation of books on Kierkegaard and related thinkers to add to its collection and to share with other libraries and scholars.

CREATION OF ARCHIVES

A new part of the collection is being organized which will hold archival materials rather than printed materials. This will include papers of Howard and Edna Hong held by the Library; materials related to Kierkegaard activity on the St. Olaf campus over the years; historical materials and files related to the Library itself; copies of correspondence between Swenson and Lowrie and other Kierkegaard scholars; and other relevant documents. The Library would welcome the donation of personal papers and manuscripts of Kierkegaard scholars related to their work in Kierkegaard studies.

THE CATALOG

St. Olaf College changed its electronic catalog system to an Innovative Interfaces product this past fall. The new system called 'SAGE' has brought improved access to the Kierkegaard Library as well. SAGE is allowing us to add new categories of material into our catalog making it more accessible to scholars and available via the Internet to anyone looking at the catalogs of the St. Olaf College libraries. Sage is also giving us ways to make lists and subsets of the catalog which we were not able to create before. For example, we can now produce lists from the catalogs of titles we own which are also listed in the Rohde Auktionsprotokol, the list of Kierkegaard's books which were sold at auction after his death. Susanne Nevin has been instrumental in adapting the needs of the Kierkegaard Library to the new system.

Work has begun on adding our collection of periodical articles into the local catalog. St. Olaf student Kristin Partlo has taken an important role in this initiative. We are also completing listing of a large collection of newspaper articles, especially in Danish and English, which will be added over the next year using the same format. St. Olaf student Rachel Paarlberg has spent the past year working on this project. Finally, we are putting basic records of uncataloged materials into the database alerting scholars to additional holdings which are still in a backlog.

NEW INTERNATIONAL KIERKEGAARD BIBLIOGRAPHY PROJECT

The Hong Kierkegaard Library, together with the Søren Kierkegaard Bibliotek at the University of Copenhagen, is exploring the possible creation of a new Kierkegaard bibliography which would include primary and secondary materials related to the study of Kierkegaard published to date. Study is being done now regarding possible methodology for producing this bibliography over a period of ten years. Final form for such a bibliography is likely to be electronic database available on CD-Rom.

Memorial Fellowship Established

St. Olaf graduate Jonathan Stenseth lost his battle with leukemia on February 27, 1998. Jonathan was a student assistant in the Library for 3 years making many permanent contributions, including organization of our move from Holland Hall to the current location, book preservation, reorganization of the article collection, work with the summer scholars, and design of our bookplate.

Because of his personal interest in and concern for visiting scholars, the Library has designated one fellowship each summer to be awarded in Jonathan's name to a research fellow. Hristo Karabadjakov is recipient of the Jonathan Stenseth Memorial Fellowship for 1998.

Cynthia Wales Lund
Assistant Curator email:lundc@stolaf.edu
St. Olaf College telephone: 506-646-3846
1510 St. Olaf Avenue fax: 507-646-3858
Northfield, Minnesota 55057-1097 USA

From the Editor:

This spring our assistant editor Dee Bolton has retired from her position in the philosophy department at St. Olaf College. Sad for us to say, Ms. Bolton is also stepping down as assistant editor. Ms. Bolton has helped guide the Newsletter into press for a decade. So far as I am concerned, she is indispensable. But in her own humble way, Ms. Bolton assures me that this is not so and that the Newsletter will be able to go on in her absence. We will miss her dearly and wish her all the very best.

INTERNATIONAL KIERKEGAARD COMMENTARY

The Commentary on *Stages on Life's Way* is in process. People interested in contributing to this volume should send Professor Perkins a proposal. His address is as follows: Robert L. Perkins, Editor, International Kierkegaard Commentary, Stetson University, Philosophy Department, campus Box 8250, DeLand, FL 32720-3756; (FAX: 904 822-8825; e-mail: Perkins@suvax1.stetson.edu)

REVIEWS

Timothy Houston Polk, The Biblical Kierkegaard: Reading by the Rule of Faith (Macon, GA; Mercer University Press, 1997) xiii + 232 pages. Reviewed by Amy Laurel Hall

Loving by the Rule of Repentance: Timothy Polk's Biblical Kierkegaard

There is a misreading for every moment, for every stage along life's way; and the pattern--of misunderstanding, rediscovering our incapacity, being thrown back upon the love of God, renewing gratitude, and understanding anew that every good gift is from God--is a continuous process without systematic conclusion. It takes its shape from our imperfect lives, and only concludes when life does (147).

Timothy Polk's The Biblical Kierkegaard: Reading by the Rule of Faith attests to the blessings of teaching and writing within a liberal arts setting. Polk's facility with biblical hermeneutics and scholarship along with his knowledge of sociology and literary theory grant him a complex lens through which to view Kierkegaard's work. But perhaps the most salient feature of Polk's project is the other context out of which his work grows--the church. In this complicated text, Polk brings his academic tools to bear on the church's use and dismissal of its heritage and hope in scripture. Continuing the work of Bill Cahoy, David Gouwens and others, Polk seeks to elicit, clarify and commend Kierkegaard's unsettling advice to those of us who call ourselves disciples.

If we are to read scripture faithfully, Polk argues, we must, like Kierkegaard, be motivated by love. Polk views Kierkegaard's perspective on scripture as exemplifying something akin to a precritical Rule of Faith. Kierkegaard exhibits and attempts to instill, especially in his non-pseudonymous works, a love for the Bible that Polk characterizes as a willingness to approach the text with humble expectation rather than suspicion. Polk aligns Kierkegaard with those precritical readers who read scripture before textual dissection became the rule, interpreting Kierkegaard's hermeneutics as consonant with the efforts of Childs, Frei, Lindbeck, and Hauerwas postcritically to retrieve scripture as the text through which we know God and judge ourselves. Yet I will

suggest at the close of this review that these "Yale school" theologians, with their focus on ecclesiastical tradition over individual interpretation, may be read as a correction of, rather than as fully consonant with, Kierkegaard's use of scripture.

If scripture is for Kierkegaard the sole source of right vision, why did he not make more explicit his allegiance to that Reformation tenet? Polk explains in his first chapter, "A Kierkegaardian *Sola Scriptura*," that scripture had become so "ossified" as to leave the hearer unscathed. Only by reintroducing the reader indirectly to the Bible could Kierkegaard startle his slumbering neighbors. Polk contrasts the requisite investment to which Kierkegaard calls us to the determinately external perspective of critics like Frank Kermode who deem the Bible merely a classic. In a particularly apt section, Polk reads the Gospel of Mark against Kermode and as requiring precisely the loving stance Kierkegaard seeks to evoke. The insider/outsider distinction Kermode draws is muddled by the disciples themselves, who are privy to the "secret" way of faith and yet consistently miss it. Polk contends that Kierkegaard rightly calls for a radical receptivity enabled by "the self-scrutinizing practices known as confession and repentance." (35)

In an interesting and imaginative application of Kierkegaard's depiction of love as hiding sin, Polk argues that a faithful hermeneutic approaches the text as one

would a love letter, with an assumption of love on the part of the sender. Using Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," Polk explains in his third chapter, "Hermeneutic Scandal: Hiding Sin," that our reading of the bible often reveals more about our own vicious intent than about an inherent flaw in the canon. Polk respectfully submits to feminist exegetes that even a text as offensive as 1 Peter can be read through faith as testimony to God's radical love. Here emphasizing faith as the key to right reading, Polk interprets Kierkegaard's Words of Love as hinging on "the savior confessed in For Self Examination." (60) In order for one to approach the text without suspicion, she must confess Christ as the "love that hides the multiplicity of sins on a cosmic scale." Yet Polk's construal of faith itself relies so heavily on "the subjectivity of love" that he is led to claim that the scriptural texts "make their best sense as ethico-religious instruction." (70) Scripture, it seems, is authoritative primarily in that it effects our obedience. Given that Polk also holds to Kierkegaard's emphasis on sin, humility and confession, I would suggest that performative moral efficacy may be the wrong gauge to use.

In what is his best chapter, "'Heart Enough to be Confident': Doubt, Receptivity, and the Epistle of James," Polk seeks to describe the dispositional import of scripture using Kierkegaard's retrieval of James. In "making everything dependent on the heart," the book of James provides Kierkegaard with a clear textual "*paraenesis*" of faithful, moral exhortation. Rather than reading with "doubt, carelessness, sorrow, and defiance," one is to approach God's word expectantly and prepared to receive transforming grace. Hopeful receptivity is perhaps the most characteristic Christian disposition for Kierkegaard, as Polk depicts him here. This contrasts with the kind of suspicion that betrays one's "intent of defending oneself against God's word" (Kierkegaard, FSE). Inextricably linked with the individual's ability to love, and thus to read correctly, is the hopeful move toward repentance--hopeful because anticipatory of God's forgiveness. Polk thus begins to answer my prior query regarding the necessity of moral performance. For Kierkegaard, faithful reading requires a graced hope in God's love and in grace's power to enable our own. Polk deems this faith the "quiet heart of the whole corpus." (60)

If this process were in sync with the precarious ways of the world, the Christian would not need to put on the armor of resolute gratitude. But given that the faithful do indeed suffer, Kierkegaard calls forth Job as an exemplar of the Christian life. Against Peter Berger's sociological

typology of the text, Polk adduces Kierkegaard's reading of Job as praise that withstands even God's own tests (see Chapter 5, "The Praise of Job: Edifying Discourse Against Theodicy"). Without reference to the "activities of praise essential to that context," biblical criticism itself moves far afield from the most apt reading of scripture (155). Yet here I would distinguish between Polk's reading of Job and the use *Repetition's* young man makes of this righteous sufferer. The young poet's defense of himself as standing with "clean hands" in regard to the crisis suggests to this reader the need for repentance of sin rather than a doxological response to externally occasioned suffering. While the innocent sufferer and sinful perpetrator both must learn to praise God, we have a tendency to see ourselves exclusively as suffering when we are instead sinning. You and I are all too ready to see ourselves as Job rather than as Adam.

Given that, as Polk argues, "there is a misreading for every moment," Kierkegaard's focus on individual subjectivity is problematic. I would argue that because subjectivity itself is consistently recalcitrant even when faced with the word of God, the community of faith is necessary for right reading. Here we return to the applicability of Kierkegaard's hermeneutics for the contemporary Christian. While Kierkegaard recognizes clearly our proclivity to distort God's word for our own individual gain, his estimation of stale orthodoxy and the stultifying crowd leads him more often to stress God's work on the individual, as does Polk at times in this work. Yet Polk's retrieval of Kierkegaard corrects Kierkegaard himself, as Polk's appeal is "only plausible in the context of a community of mysteriously confident hearts." It is through our relation to the church that we are prodded to recognize the occasions of our misreading and called repeatedly to repentance and forgiveness. I would submit that those "postmodern" biblical theorists who currently underscore our need for the interpretive community have helped Polk reformulate Kierkegaard's call for individual conversion so that this book is indeed a work of love dedicated to his own community of transformative faith.

Paul Sponheim, Response to Arnold Come's Kierkegaard as Theologian (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) xx, 387 pp. (Søren Kierkegaard Group, New Orleans, Nov. 23, 1996)

I have been teaching at a theological seminary for more than 27 years and one of the more persistent stereotypes we struggle with is the tendency to juxtapose administrators and faculty--indeed to understand these categories as **opposing** realities. A convenient way of filling out the opposition is to identify the administration as theologically deficient--out-of-touch with, if not in fact a direct threat to, the noble work of theology.

Well, a person operating with that stereotype will have hard-going in coming upon the Kierkegaard study of Arnold Come. Here we have a Seminary president, a former one, at least, offering (in two volumes) nearly 1,000 pages of reflections which represent a close and faithful reading of the primary texts, a thoughtful locating of that material in our contemporary context, and a creative suggestion concerning how to advance the argument of the author by taking into account modest but significant criticism. In a rather Kierkegaardian way the abstraction of the stereotype is interrupted by the concreteness--one might well say the **weight**--of the accomplishment.

Arnold Come has been reading and contemplating Søren Kierkegaard for some 25 years he tells us, and teaching an annual Søren Kierkegaard seminar. Apparently he did not understand that someone concerned with the decidedly earthly realities of keeping an institution going would not be involved in the airy flights of theological speculation. It is as if he actually supposed that thought and life might have something to do with each other. I am grateful for such interruptions and glad to offer here some response to the second volume, Kierkegaard as Theologian.

Perhaps the most efficient way to introduce you to Kierkegaard as Theologian (Vol. II) is by relating it to Vol. I, Kierkegaard as Humanist. In Vol. I, Come considered only two of five topics concerning the self as drawn from Sickness Unto Death. So in Vol. II he takes up:

My Self: A Gift

My Self: A Failure, and

My Self: In Need of the Eternal

I have a question about the phrasing of the second and third of these, but I leave that for later. I note that in a

final chapter Come considers "The Christian Community in History," seeking to enrich the outline drawn from Sickness Unto Death with material from other works in Kierkegaard and, indeed, from beyond the bounds of the authorship. This second volume is further connected to the first by frequent references to the first, and by the question that Come finds haunting, namely: "if one grants much of the capacity of Christian loving to humanity in general, one has to wonder what is left that is essential and unique to a Christian view of self" (ix). He offers several explicit answers to this question. Thus he speaks of "subtle overlappings" (54), but also of how "in his depiction of universal human failure as ending in universal despair Kierkegaard as theologian comes to a **radical alteration** of the views of Kierkegaard as humanist" (203). The comprehensive sense may be that "everything that was said in Kierkegaard as Humanist about love of neighbor and about God as love now receives a transforming accentuation when seen and known in the 'pattern' or 'model' of Jesus as the Christ..." (369). I will comment in a moment about this haunting matter of the relationship.

A final word of comparison of the two volumes: The most striking characteristic of Vol. II is once again the careful reading of Kierkegaard's own texts, with significant attention to the Danish texts. In this volume there may be a little more interaction with the secondary literature--critique of Mark C. Taylor and Josiah Thompson, and conversation with Evans, Ferreira, Gouwens and others. There is considerable attention given to clarifying Kierkegaard's theological argument by setting it in the context of such figures as Tillich, Barth, Whitehead, Habermas, Freud and the like. These comparisons are usually such as to enhance Kierkegaard's standing, but Vol. II also is notable for the several critical questions Come puts to the Kierkegaardian formations.

After this cursory overview, I want to ask 2 questions: (1) In what "peculiar" sense (Come's adjective) is Kierkegaard seen here to be a theologian, and (2) what distinctive theological accents emerge in that angle of vision? Then I shall conclude with my comments on the matters earlier identified.

(1) Come contends that "Kierkegaard is primarily a theologian, who indeed is also a poet, but that his being a poet is precisely in the service of his being a theologian" (1, cf.40). But in what sense? Come wisely notes that "the central point of Kierkegaard's theological methodology is this: there is both an objective source and a subjective source of Christian theological formulation and neither one works without the other" (40). Come recognizes well that SK will not let the "what," the *fides quae creditur* of being Christian be collapsed in the "how," the *fides qua*. He notes that the objective pole is rooted in the historical reality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the eternal in time. It is precisely this that Magister Adler lacked (25). Yet Come's Kierkegaard is clear that correct concepts are not themselves the "object" of faith (29). After all, Christianity is not a doctrine, but an "existence-communication." And in this subjective dimension Kierkegaard's "peculiarity" comes into view. Here is Come's formulation: "No other Christian thinker has matched the depth and complexity of his analysis of how this 'subjectivity' comes into being and operates in the process of one's becoming a self and, especially in becoming a Christian self" (41). Come also finds in Kierkegaard a distinctive emphasis on the way in which the Christian's ethical life is transformed in the God-relationship (43). As I have said, I find Come's reading here very sound.

(2) So, what difference does this sense for the connectedness of the What and the How make in the content of theology? One might well begin by reminding oneself that Come's whole treatment of Kierkegaard as theologian is structured in the terms of "My Self": gift, failure, need for eternal. But within that whole, I will mention four theological themes of particular interest.

(A) Looking outside the self, Come stresses the full humanity of the Christ. In a page long footnote (397.52) Come defends his use of the phrase "God-human being" for *GudMenneske*:

"... Kierkegaard strongly rejects the notion of Jesus Christ as the unity of two generalized impersonal "natures." Rather, Jesus is a unique individual human being in and with whom the living God has come to dwell in a unique but not clearly definable unity."

He notes that Kierkegaard's nearly consistent usage of *Menneske* rather than *Mand* (used in many of Gruntvig's hymns) makes the point that "Jesus Christ was an

individual human-being like all the rest of us, males *and* females" and "preserves the distinction Greek makes between *anthropos* and *aner*."

(B) Come gives emphasis to the personal nature of Kierkegaard's God. *Christian Discourses* speaks of God as the "only one who knows himself, who in and for himself (*i og for sig selv*) knows what he himself is: that is God" (68). In noting Journal entry No. 2570's talk of God as "infinite subjectivity" Come remarks: ". . . this is a startling and unprecedented attribution to the nature of God, that is, to speak of God's 'subjectivity'; which is his definitive and most carefully worked-out anthropological concept" (69). Come then notes a later journal entry which makes the point that: "God relates objectively to [God's] own subjectivity"--that is, using the analogy to Socrates, "God acts ... out of passionate attention ... to what God *is*" (71). Come then develops the analogy of personhood, drawing Kierkegaard's God-talk into the person-to-person relationship in which indirect communication prevails (78). Here, then, the personhood of God is not a tidy proposition to be tucked away in some subordinate locus; it is the relationship to God in which I become transparent to myself and face the fact that I do not live as I ought (70). I can only add that Come acknowledges in a later note (476.104) that "one is tempted ... to push Kierkegaard to consider whether the God who so clearly finds it consistent with divine being to participate in and to relate with the temporal, finite, contingent process of human existence actually remains unchanged when all the infinitely diverse wonders of human individual creativity 'return ... in an inward direction back into' divine being." This, I think, is a temptation not to be resisted.

Time permits me merely to mention two other areas of particular interest: (C) Very briefly, I take note of the simultaneity of the *ordo salutis* being such that the "result of repentance/forgiveness is a new self" yielding a Christian way of life in the imitation of Christ (280, 297). Here Come criticizes the Hong translation of *etterfølgelse* as "imitation," since that term may suggest "a purely rote and external copying" (297).

(D) Come encourages the reader to recognize that Kierkegaard's grasp of Christian faith does bear on the "horizontal" relationships of life. He knows well that this will take some doing, and I will take a moment longer since here Come's constructive interest is explicitly active. Come stresses in his first chapter (p.36) that Kierkegaard "had a positive view of--even a devotion to--the Christian church as the carrier and proclaimer of the

Christian tradition." Of course Come acknowledges Kierkegaard's "strong aversion to and critique of sociality in general and of Christian congregation and church in particular" (p. 362), but he contends that these dimensions do not follow from Kierkegaard's "essential conceptuality." In that conceptuality Come, reaching back to the analysis in Vol. I of Sickness Unto Death, emphasizes that "the individual's finitude includes one's connectedness with family, society, state and universe, and that one's temporality includes one's own personal 'history' set in the context of world history" (362). So here Arnold Come would draw Kierkegaard toward a positive doctrine of church by developing the references in Works of Love to a "fellowship of the highest" and a "society of love" (360). And then Come would draw the reader of Kierkegaard beyond Kierkegaard by putting this question:

...if the 'fellowship of the highest' transforms the very being and functioning of the very human and mundane organization called 'church' and 'congregation', does not this Christian 'existence' also transform the life of the individual in every aspect and dimension of its dialectical unity of the finite and the infinite, of the temporal and the eternal, of the possible and the necessary? (372)

Thus is charted the way forward "for a positive reformulation not only of an authentically Christian congregation and church, but also of friendship, sexuality, marriage, childbearing, and family--all of which Kierkegaard came late in life to brand as perversions of authentic humanity and contradictions of Christian spirituality"(373).

I hope this cursory summary has at least suggested the richness and faithfulness of Arnold Come's work. While we do not quite have here Vol. I's sustained developing of a single integral conception, the somewhat more loosely knit garment covers well the angular frame of Kierkegaard's work as theologian. I find very attractive Come's suggestions for further development, particularly of the social and historical dimensions, including his call for dialogue with other religious traditions (214, 263). In closing I want to attach myself to Come's closing reference to what he terms "the nagging question of theodicy that Kierkegaard never adequately faced up to" (383). I have three questions.

(A) What difference would it make if one were to focus on the angle of vision a particular perspective gives on this matter? For lack of a better term I am thinking of

what one might call the "disciplinary" perspective. I am thinking of how Kierkegaard subtitles his works (such as Concept of Anxiety and Sickness Unto Death) and in particular of the intriguing distinctions to be found in Concept of Anxiety's introduction between what is termed psychology, aesthetics, metaphysics, the first and second ethics, and the like. Arnold Come certainly knows this material. Indeed, in making his major stress on individual responsibility and will, he draws on Concept of Anxiety's discussion of the "presentiments" involved in the state of *angst*. If at this point the matter is turned over to dogmatics, we might reasonably look to Part II of Sickness Unto Death for further insight. There Come's concern to emphasize personal responsibility in will in sin is recognized in the emphasis on defiance as over against Socratic ignorance. But then this is added:

...and then to fasten the end very firmly it [Christianity] adds the doctrine of hereditary sin" (SD93; cf. 95-6)

One is surely fastening the end here "by means of the paradox," as the text reads. Perhaps that is why Kierkegaard in this dogmatic section insists that "one has to learn what sin is by a revelation from God" (95). Somehow I miss in Arnold Come's work a gathered consideration of the difference this matter of perspective makes.

(B) On the other hand, there is a theme which Come picks up which may in a sense replace what I sense is missing, with respect to content. Here I remind you of the categorical structure employed in the two volumes. Two of the five categories are considered in Vol. I: self as a relation and self as a relation which relates to itself. Then in Vol. II, Kierkegaard the theologian is seen to turn to self as gift, self as failure, and self as in need of the eternal. These, clearly, are categories of a logically different order--the point I just made. But my concern now is the content.

As I think of these categories, the dogmatic loci of creation, fall and redemption come to mind. Passing over self as gift, I ask myself if it is adequate to speak of the second "moment" as failure. Arnold Come acknowledges that "Kierkegaard does not generally use the word failure" (145) for the process of becoming a sinner. But he contends that "'failure' is a more accurate term than 'sin' to indicate *how* all humans end up in the this [sic!] state of despair" (145). I wonder if this does justice to what we have just been considering, Sickness Unto Death's stress on defiance, or on what I would call "clear-eyed evil." Come seems to be drawn toward

failure language by the attention he gives to that curious passage in Sickness Unto Death (the end of Part I), where reference is made to an error in writing. The puzzling and problematic interjection Kierkegaard adds is this:

...perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production...(74)

We seem close here to a *Felix Culpa* formulation in which despair does indeed seem more a failure on the way to ultimate fulfillment than a "positive" and "knowing" act of defiance. But Come refuses to slide down that slippery slope. He writes:

Is, then, this universal human failure merely a learning episode that all individuals pass through on their [sic!] way to fulfillment, and therefore not be taken too seriously? Indeed not! (149)

Here Come is working with genuinely difficult strains which I suspect we would grant are not of his own making. The dialectic can be seen in a single sentence on p. 202 where God's creative work calls the self to become fully conscious, and Come adds:

...this condition exposes human beings to the **possibility** of failure in a context so unstable that failure is **unavoidable** and has to be dealt with as part of the maturing process.

We seem to be on the ground of Reinhold Niebuhr's formulation of sin as "inevitable but not necessary." Am I asking Arnold Come to resolve what Niebuhr would or could not? Am I asking him to remove the paradox from Kierkegaard? Perhaps I am, but I hope I am not. Perhaps my question is whether Come **locates** the paradox as between the second and third of the structuring categories of the self. It seems too little to speak of the human problem as failure but also too little to speak of God's response under the rubric of the self's need. Is too weak a self recognized in the first, as distinguished from a strong self in the second? That a strong self is recognized regarding the second is clear, and it is as if Come finds that to be the safeguard against a weak self's failure finding place in a blessed fall formulation. Immediately following Come's "Indeed not!" to the suggestion that failure is "merely a learning episode," he writes:

Even when the human individual is personally encountered by the God of love in person, the final and ultimate failure of taking offense remains a tragic

possibility. There is no guarantee that the mature child will understand and accept the Parent's loving help....(149)

Similarly, Come notes that one who is conscious of his/her despair is only "**dialectically** closer to being healed" than the one who is not thus conscious (150). And he notes as well Kierkegaard's insistence that despair is to be treated as the sickness, not as the cure (217). And against Karl Barth, among others, the medicine available is not irresistible (108, 130).

But is this "strength" adequately expressed in the language of failure? In his final paragraphs provided by the theodicy question, Come writes:

Kierkegaard's idea of the role of failure as 'an essential element in the whole production' of mature human selves may make sense in middle class suburbs of western society, but even for us who live there, the idea often grows hollow and meaningless, if not absurd....(385)

I am grateful for Arnold Come's honesty and I would want to read this closing candor back over the discussion of the self as failure. The complexity of the "cycle of the myths" Paul Ricoeur considered in The Symbolism of Evil requires fuller expression than the term failure provides. Perhaps Arnold Come himself tells us that, not only in closing this volume but in beginning the long section on the Self as Failure. There he begins his well-over 100 page treatment with his own poem and the first words of that poem are "**The mystery**" and toward the end he writes:

So the question: why I am a failure
I cannot brush aside as inconsequential (136)

(C) Finally, I return to the question of the relationship of the two volumes only to suggest that it may be helpful to consider that question in the slight light that may be thrown on the subject by recognizing disciplinary difference methodologically and the full range of a creation/fall/ redemption understanding with regard to content.

While I have stressed Kierkegaard's recognition of the gravity of the human condition of sin, I do realize that he would not have us deny that it is God who is still the creator. Thus Climacus, even in stressing the depth of the human problem, will still acknowledge "that there is more being in the non-being that precedes the second birth than in the non-being that precedes the first birth" (PF, 20). The creator's gifts are such that apart from

faith there is indeed much that the human person can achieve and understand. Arnold Come has a rich field to work in writing of Kierkegaard as humanist. So we are back to our original question: what, then, is "left over" for distinctively Christian treatment? The Christian can come to full consciousness that in the light of revelation despair is sin. But can we not make a second claim? Creation is not destroyed, but it is not completed either. And at that point, might it be too little to say of the third movement in content that the self is in **need** of the offense--as Arnold Come reminds us? But God's action is emphatic and calls for some stronger expression than that of the self's need. The humanist can write of "discovering" the self. But will not Christian faith speak of something more than **recovering** the self? What are we to make of this famous passage from Sickness Unto Death?

First of all, Christianity proceeds to establish sin so firmly as a position that the human understanding can never comprehend it; and then it is this same Christian teaching that again undertakes to eliminate this position in such a way that the human understanding can never comprehend it.

I do not want us to stop thinking about this. But I do take Kierkegaard's warning and reprimand seriously. He continues:

Speculation, which talks itself out of the paradoxes snips off a little bit from both sides and thereby gets along more easily--it does not make sin quite so positive--but nevertheless cannot get it through its head that sin is to be completely forgotten. But Christianity, which was the first to discover the paradoxes, is as paradoxical as possible; it seems to be working against itself by establishing sin so securely as a position that now it seems to be utterly impossible to eliminate it again--and then it is this very Christianity that by means of the Atonement wants to eliminate sin as completely as if it were drowned in the sea (100).

Arnold Come closes his book by addressing the ongoing community of Kierkegaard interpretation. I do not object to that, but rather to his book's beginning, where he speaks of now "turning to other projects" (xii). We need and want Come's voice in the community of readers and these 2 volumes enrich our reading of Kierkegaard. The world of theology cannot afford to be done with this Dane yet. Nor should/can Arnold Come.

George Pattison, *On Reading Kierkegaard Religiously: A Reply to Michael Strawser*

In the Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter (30) of November 1994, Michael Strawser gave an appreciative yet critical review of my book Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious¹ later developing further some of the comments made in the review in his own more recent book Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification.² In the spirit of amicable disagreement, I should like to reply in a critical but appreciative way, not in order to defend a wounded ego but to clarify the issue between us. I am emboldened to do this because the issue is one that, I believe, raises fundamental questions about the way in which Kierkegaard is read (and, more broadly, fundamental questions relating to the whole conception of critical interpretation). The issue, at its simplest, is this: how far are we justified in reading Kierkegaard as a religious author, or (to put it in other words), what does it mean to read Kierkegaard religiously?

This question has threaded its way through the history of Kierkegaard-reception from the earliest days. Already in his own lifetime there were those who understood him as being first and foremost a religious writer, whose devotional works spoke to troubled hearts,³ whilst others sought to enlist him in the cause of radical secularization.⁴ Since then the debate has taken a variety of forms in a variety of contexts. In the inter-war years in Europe, the neo-orthodox Kierkegaard confronted the Heideggerian Kierkegaard, whilst a generation later, in Paris, the discussion sessions of the 1964 UNESCO Kierkegaard conference were extensively preoccupied with the question as to whether atheistic existentialists and Marxists (in the persons of Jean-Paul Sartre and Lucien Goldmann respectively) could really read Kierkegaard without obscuring or ignoring the vital Christian element in his writing.⁵ More recently we have seen the "a-theological" interpretations of Mark C. Taylor and the anti-theological polemics of Roger Poole pitched against the kind of Christian, theological approach exemplified in, amongst others, Stephen Evans and David Gouwens. Is Kierkegaard a proto-deconstructionist or pre-postmodernist, or is he Christianity's most powerful voice against the destructive tendencies unleashed by Derrida and co.?

I think that Strawser and I probably agree that the question thus posed does not admit of a simple "yes" or "no" answer. I think that we would also agree that in

reading Kierkegaard or any author it is generally a good principle to base interpretation on as wide a range of texts as possible. In the case of Kierkegaard this is notoriously difficult, because the very diversity of the authorship means that different readers will be attracted to different parts of it. The student of modernist literature who feels at home in Either/Or, Repetition and Stages on Life's Way may be less interested in the philosophical and theological issues raised by the Climacian writing, whilst the philosopher who dips into the Postscript or The Concept of Anxiety for the sake of clarifying Kierkegaard's critique of idealism or concept of freedom may not immediately see much of interest in the various upbuilding or Christian discourses. Such compartmentalization could, of course, be raised to the status of a principle such that we end up treating each pseudonym as a self-contained author whose work has little or no relation to any larger conceptual or authorial "plan". If the difference between "religious" and "anti-religious" readers of Kierkegaard simply boils down to the fact that each side is reading different texts, then much of the argument evaporates into thin air. My view (and Strawser's too, I think) is that the question gets interesting in proportion to the range of Kierkegaard's writings under consideration. The argument is not about this text or that text but about the thrust of the authorship as a whole. This is why, for example, the readings of Heidegger and Sartre are particularly challenging to theological interpreters, because they do not hesitate to draw on Kierkegaard's religious and, indeed (in the case of Sartre), Christological writings. Simply to hold up the volumes of upbuilding and Christian discourses as a tangible demonstration of Kierkegaard's religious intentions will not do, for the question still remains as to how we, today, are to read them. Again, I think, Strawser and I are in agreement. Where then do we part company?

In Both/And Strawser sets the question up in terms of the categories of irony and edification. If we read Kierkegaard as a fundamentally ironical author, then the deep certainties that undergird a religious reading are radically destabilized, whereas an edifying reading means that irony is only a transient moment in the overall development of the authorship, a spot of regional unrest in the global providence of a religious life-view (even, perhaps, an apologetic tactic and therefore essentially fake). Strawser's own hypothesis is that irony and

edification provide two alternative lines of interpretation that run through every sentence Kierkegaard ever wrote. "How shall I choose to read Kierkegaard's writings? From irony to edification? From edification to irony? Or both, beginning from either end?" The "answer" he says, is left "in the lap of the reader."⁶

Strawser acknowledges an affinity between his work and my own, in that my account of things "explains how the relationship between direct and indirect communication is much more intimate than is usually perceived."⁷ He indulges in some sweeping polemics against those to whom he refers as "Kierkegaardologists" and, although I am allowed to count as a partial exception to their collective myopia, he concludes that "...Pattison does not go far enough...."⁸ My approach is, after all, too direct, too religious, too Christian.

In his review of Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious Strawser focuses his criticism on my concluding comments about the Friday Discourses. In a section entitled "A Real Presence?", I stated that, for Kierkegaard, the "...Communion is the preeminent sign of that relationship of forgiveness, blessing and indwelling in which God, in Christ, becomes an actual and creative presence in human life"⁹ I also argued that the materiality of this sign serves as a gesture by which Kierkegaard points beyond textuality and beyond aesthetics to what, for faith, is a real presence.

Noting that the question mark of the section's title disappears later on, Strawser points out that these signs are themselves "embedded in textuality, in the text of texts ..." ¹⁰ he goes on to say that the act of communion "as involving direct sense perception and a keen sense of imagination" can itself be seen as a kind of resurrection of the aesthetic in such a way "that the question of the real presence is left undecided[.]" (Ibid.)

I certainly agree that the presence spoken of and experienced by Kierkegaard in relation to the Friday Communion is not unproblematic or unambiguous. No more than the "moment" in which time and eternity touch can be made the object of an objective science or an institutionally guaranteed dogma, can the "presence" spoken of here be constituted as an item of public knowledge, and the rhetoric of secrecy is tellingly characteristic of Kierkegaard's Friday discourses. The question mark of the title of my concluding section may have disappeared, but it was not revoked, and the very brevity of my comments was intended as a clue that what I was saying was suggestive rather than dogmatic.

Moreover, the fact that the sign of this presence is Christological draws it into the realm of the sign of contradiction such that Christ cannot be said to be "in" the sign in any objective sense. To speak of the Communion as an experience of presence is necessarily to speak subjectively under the condition of objective uncertainty. Faithful reception of the sacrament is not an act of notional assent to a proposition: it is a gesture of affirmation that, in affirming presence negates the possibility of comprehending that presence. The material elements are placed before us as an eloquent refutation of the claims of the general and the universalizable. In being experienced sacramentally, however, the communion is experienced, firstly, as a gift, as grace bestowed on us from a dimension of "unincludable otherness" (Buber) and, secondly, as something intrinsically material and bodily. As a sign the sacrament is inescapably entangled in textuality, but, precisely in being believably appropriated as the singular sign it is, it constitutes a gesture towards the transcendence of textuality. Like Kierkegaard's auto-destructive novels--Bildungsromaner that annihilate themselves in the attempt to articulate a more-than-aesthetic content--the sacramental sign of contradiction works against itself in its own sign character.

In the nature of the case, I could circle around the verbal paradoxes involved *ad nauseam* and still fall short of the boundary that, perhaps, separates me from Strawser at this point. There is, however, one more, somewhat different point I should like to make in defending the project of reading Kierkegaard religiously that shows up the differences between Strawser's approach and my own more sharply.

Strawser suggests that we read Kierkegaard in the mode of "both/and", such that the balance between the ironic and the edifying is infinitely undecidable. What this proposal does not perhaps exclude but certainly does not emphasize is what (I would claim) is the seriousness that informs Kierkegaard's writings. Let me put my point like this. In facing the reader with the religious requirement, Kierkegaard does not invite us to consider a merely theoretical understanding of existence. He makes, and enables us to make (if we so choose) a venture of interpretation in which the stake is nothing other than our own identity as persons. The religious question is inseparable from the question as to "who I am". To address it I not only put myself in play, I put myself at risk. Unlike Pascal's wager, Kierkegaard's gamble does not offer a win-win formula. If the religious response turns out to be illusory I have wasted my life. Religion, in

this perspective, opens up the real possibility of a tragic understanding of life. As Unamuno, one of Kierkegaard's earliest interpreters recognized, religion is not the "answer" to tragedy, the happy ending that makes everything all right. On the contrary, it is religion that reveals the tragic, confronting me with the possibility that, however I choose, my life might be "for nothing". But that, as Iris Murdoch said, is perhaps the condition of any truly moral act. In the face of this possibility, however, irony must make way for commitment, although commitment will never of itself be able to stand as guarantor for certainty. The nurturing of commitment, self-commitment and commitment in love to others, is precisely what I take to be the task of edification. This task is "beyond" irony, not in the sense that it negates irony at an intellectual level, but because it requires an irony that is all-conquering in its own sphere of influence to serve ethical and religious commitments that operate on another plane. Irony is not done away with, because it remains an irreplaceable instrument for the testing of spirits, and every moral or religious assertion that strays outside its own territory is a legitimate prey for irony. The moment that the passion of faith congeals into dogmatic or institutional certainty, irony is free to have a go at it--although this does not mean that irony will in every case succeed in undermining its intended target: it may just be that from time to time it is irony that makes itself ridiculous. Deciding such things is not, of course, the matter of any exact science but of slow and careful reading that knows when and how to deploy both trust and suspicion. In the course of such reading, I suspect, irony itself may turn out not to be the most precise of terms with which to articulate the fundamental tendency of a non-theological reading and there may also turn out to be concepts (perhaps Kierkegaard's own favored concept of humor) that signal areas of significant overlap between irony and edification such that the either/or underpinning Strawser's both/and is itself called into question.

Of course I have to admit that there are theological readings that impose closure on the texts, subordinating their dynamic variety to a preconceived dogmatic plan. But I would also like to believe that such readings have no proprietary claim on the larger category of the "religious" (or even "the Christian", for that matter). When I speak of a "religious reading" I do so in the spirit of Bakhtin¹¹--not so much in terms of postulating certain theological "answers", but more of exploring the text's way of posing its guiding questions. The "religious" element in Kierkegaard, as I conceive it, is not primarily to do with dogmatic or theological content in any

conceptual sense, but with the way in which Kierkegaard deploys the paradoxical logic of the "sign of contradiction" as a means of interrogating the whole field of culture, science and society. The only "finality" allowable for Kierkegaard is eschatological, and neither his text nor its interpreter can deliver a final judgement on the outcome of this interrogation. This, however, does not absolve the reader from the responsibility of entering the strife of voices and, in full consciousness of the contestability of any single interpretation, arguing for that interpretation he finds the most humanly convincing and the best able to do the fullest justice to the widest range of texts.

NOTES

1. G. Pattison, Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992; pb. edition London: SCM, forthcoming).
2. M. Strawser, Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).
3. See, e.g., Frederikke Bremer, Liv i Norden (Copenhagen: Eibe, 1849), p. 37.
4. Most famously, of course, his nephew Henrik Lund. Lund fulminated against the Church's appropriation of his uncle's legacy in an emotional speech at Kierkegaard's graveside.
5. See Kierkegaard Vivant: Colloque organisé par l'UNESCO à Paris du 23 Avril 1964 (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
6. Ibid., p. 242.
7. Ibid., p. 180.
8. Ibid., p. 181.
9. The Aesthetic and the Religious, p. 187.
10. Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter, Number 30, November 1994, p. 22.
11. See my paper "If Kierkegaard is Right about Reading, Why Read Kierkegaard?" in N. J. Cappelørn and J. Stewart (eds.), Kierkegaard Revisited (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).

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