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Book Review: Scripture In The Thought Of Soren Kierkegaard

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much to recommend it; if there is no first state of the universe, then it is far from clear that it is correct to say that it began, even if it is also temporally finite. However, I also see no good reason to think that everything which comes to be has a cause of its coming to be.

3. Smith outlines a probabilistic account of causation at pp.180-181; but it is subject to counter-example by well-known cases of pre-emption (Menzies) and double prevention (Hall).

4. The annotations to essay I—pp.67-76—update the 1979 text. I suspect that Craig's discussion of the post-1979 literature exhibits certain kinds of biases; e.g. I find it tempting to think that Craig's keenness to have the density parameter turn out to be less than one leads him to ignore the reasons which many cosmologists have for thinking that the density parameter must be almost exactly one. More generally, I think that he lays too much stress on current failures to detect postulated particles and structures: dark matter, monopoles, superstrings, etc.; it is, after all, *deficiencies* in the standard models which lead most cosmologists and particle physicists to be interested in the search for such things. On the other hand, there is clearly good reason to be cautious about these kinds of speculations.

5. At least if neutrinos *do* have zero rest mass; this question has been controversial of late.

6. See, e.g., Rindler, W. (1969) *Essential Relativity* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhardt Company, Chapter 5, esp. p.116: "A single photon certainly does *not* [have a CM frame]".

7. *The Large-Scale Structure Of Space-Time* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973

8. On the other hand, Craig himself is involved in a similar confusion when he claims that a condition of "infinite density" is precisely equivalent to "nothing" (43).

9. I have made this kind of criticism of Craig elsewhere; see my "Reply To Professor Craig", *Sophia*, forthcoming.

10. Smith makes a good case for the view that Craig is thus misled. Also, *inter alia*, he strongly suggests that my own claims about how to re-interpret Hawking's model—in "Professor William Craig's Criticisms Of Critiques Of *Kalam* Cosmological Arguments By Paul Davies, Stephen Hawking And Adolf Grunbaum", forthcoming in *Faith And Philosophy*—are similarly confused: if "superspace" is a configuration space, then it is simply wrong to identify it with a physical space.

Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard, by **L. Joseph Rosas, III**. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. Pp. 219.

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I welcome the opportunity to review *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* for *Faith and Philosophy*, for there is no better journal in which to call attention to the need to pursue this neglected aspect of Kierkegaard studies. Although the book is seriously flawed, it does deal with an issue that is very important, and Dr. Rosas makes several contributions that will be helpful to future scholarship.

Interpretations of the so-called "father of existentialism" have too often been limited to one of four trajectories: many have examined some of

Kierkegaard's ideas in depth while carefully skirting those issues—such as the relation between his ideas and the Bible—that might embroil them directly in normative theological matters; others have treated Kierkegaard as the intellectual savior of modern Christianity, a thinker who was not afraid to offer a radical critique of those aspects of modern thought that are inimical to faith, even though they too have generally said little about his relation to the Bible and traditional Christian doctrines. There have also been negative versions of both positions: Christians who have rejected Kierkegaard on the assumption that his thinking has strayed too far from biblical orthodoxy; and non-orthodox philosophers who impatiently dismiss him as little more than an irrational pietist with a talent for existentialist rhetoric.

The question of Kierkegaard's relation to the entire fabric of Christian thought will no doubt provide grist for scholarly mills for many generations to come. But the question of his relation to the Bible is one crucial aspect of that enquiry that could be managed by a small cadre of committed scholars. Moreover, it is almost virgin territory. Due perhaps to the various divisions described above, the Bible question is one that has been ignored in the majority of interpretations of Kierkegaard.

This situation has not appreciably changed since Minear and Morimoto complained about it over forty years ago.¹ At that time T. H. Croxall's *Kierkegaard Studies: With Special Reference to (a) The Bible (b) Our Own Age*² had been in print for five years, but Croxall's special references are primarily citations in footnotes of biblical passages that he deems relevant to a passage in Kierkegaard. What Minear and Morimoto called for was much more extensive. Noting that the key to Kierkegaard's hermeneutic is subjective appropriation by the reader of the truth expressed in the text, they identified two tasks: first, identification of "the pervasive influences of the Bible on his mind and heart,"³ and second, examination of the many ways in which Kierkegaard was "a peculiarly gifted interpreter of the Bible."⁴

Minear and Morimoto also observe that Kierkegaard "is rarely mentioned in histories of nineteenth century Biblical criticism," for his contemporaries did not view him an outstanding interpreter of the Bible.⁵ Given the fact that it is hard to imagine how one could practice the historical-critical method that dominated nineteenth century biblical criticism and simultaneously engage in subjective appropriation of the meaning of the text, that is not surprising. Kierkegaard was a critic of modern criticism, more because of its foreshortened perspective than its rigorous methods. He did not wish to make a contribution to biblical criticism as such. But he did state a position on what it means to read the Bible as sacred scripture, so his omission from discussions of nineteenth century biblical hermeneutics is more difficult to understand.⁶

There are, then, three tasks for scholars who would try to clarify the complex relation between Kierkegaard and the Bible. No doubt the first is by far the most challenging: are Kierkegaard's ideas genuinely biblical? This question is doubly complicated, for it requires establishing both what we mean by the biblical message and what Kierkegaard understood it to be. Is it possible to show that his existentialist manifestoes conform to the New Testament understanding of human existence? Is his appropriation of the

Gospel really a faithful appropriation of the full Gospel? It is no longer acceptable to answer in the affirmative on the basis of mere assumption and assertion. Kierkegaard must be critically read through a rigorously biblical lens.

The second task is a bit more accessible: is Kierkegaard really a gifted exegete of the Bible? Are his readings of passages from Genesis to Revelation defensible and insightful? Is *Fear and Trembling*, his famous meditation on Abraham's binding of Isaac, utterly wrong-headed as an example of biblical interpretation? Are his references to the Bible in *Either/Or*, which often appear ironic or even gratuitous, in fact profound and illuminating?⁸ Here *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* makes a substantial contribution, for it lists allusions to and quotations from the Bible in an appendix. Whereas Minear and Morimoto also provide an index to biblical references, they list the entries according to their location in the Bible, whereas Rosas reorganizes them according to where they appear in the Kierkegaardian corpus. He has also added quite a number, and distinguished among four types of reference (remote allusions, allusions, references, and quotations). Both indices are useful, all the more so now that they can be used in conjunction with each other.

But Rosas' major effort is devoted to the third task, a study of Kierkegaard's hermeneutical principles, as reflected both in his statements about biblical interpretation and in his actual use of biblical references. The first third of the book is devoted to background material: chapter one surveys four crises in Kierkegaard's personal life (his bizarre relationship with his father, the broken engagement to Regina, the infamous Corsair Affair, and the late articles attacking Christendom), while chapter two examines Kierkegaard's responses to several major philosophers (Kant, Lessing, Hegel) and theological movements of the time (orthodoxy, rationalism, the influence of Hegel, and higher criticism). These are followed by two much longer chapters that discuss the function of scripture in, respectively, "selected philosophical" (i.e., pseudonymous) works and other "selected" (i.e., non-pseudonymous) works. The book closes with a brief final chapter evaluating Kierkegaard's use of scripture, followed by the index mentioned above (a full forty pages), notes, and bibliography.

Rosas' strongest argument is that there are three different hermeneutics that correspond to Kierkegaard's theory of (three) stages in life (99-100). In *Either/Or I* he finds "an attitude of indifference to the Scripture" (145). The aesthete's allusions to the Bible are merely literary devices that do not take the meaning of the Bible seriously. Judge William, the pseudonymous author of *Either/Or II*, is an ethical thinker who appeals to Scripture for support for universal laws. In the literature on the religious stage a hermeneutic of paradox emerges, both in the conception of the incarnation and in "Kierkegaard's polemical approach to Christendom" (146). The ethical and religious discourses develop this further in a "hermeneutic of exhortation" (147).

Along the way, Rosas offers some valuable insights into Kierkegaard's hermeneutics, particularly the dialectic of appropriation in the hermeneutic of paradox. Thus he comments that "Kierkegaard's concern was not that one should exegete Scripture in a certain way, rather that Scripture should be

allowed to exegete life" (46). Such a concern was very likely the fruit of Kierkegaard's own hermeneutical experience, although the principle was available to him in the writings of Hamann and other so-called "pietists." On the question of modern skepticism, Rosas comments that Kierkegaard is less interested in defending the historical veracity of the claims of the gospel than in arguing that it is "a 'blasphemy' to avoid the offense of the paradox by making the gospel palatable" (129).

In addition to these comments on Kierkegaard's hermeneutical observations, Rosas provides summaries of eleven texts in which he includes examples of allusions to scripture that appear in that text. Although these seem to be chosen more because they demonstrate "the insightfulness of S. K.'s biblical exposition" (107) than for the light they shed on his hermeneutical theory, Rosas does frequently point out implicit paradoxes and remind the reader of the centrality of appropriation.

When Rosas turns to the task of criticizing Kierkegaard's approach to the Bible (151-152), he doubts that it will help us cope with the pluralistic situation we face today; he questions the individualism of Kierkegaard's Christian ethic; he disputes the concept of contemporaneity on the grounds that it denies centuries of tradition; and he laments the lack of a strong focus upon redemption through the cross. All of these questions are themselves very complex, and need much more discussion than the paragraph or two he gives to each. In particular, the complaint about Kierkegaard's individualism betrays a lack of familiarity with the major development in Kierkegaard interpretation in the last decade or so, and the rejection of contemporaneity ignores the close connection of that concept with Kierkegaard's notion of paradox,⁹ which is central to Rosas' hermeneutical reading. On the positive side of the ledger, Rosas lists (153-155) Kierkegaard's affirmation of the centrality of the Bible, his plea for the priority of subjective faith over apologetic proofs, his belief that Scripture can be read in many ways, and the possibility that he offers a viable alternative to the overwrought debate between fundamentalism and modernism.

Rosas' method of text analysis can be illustrated by his discussion of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. After two introductory paragraphs, he points out that *Postscript* contains "four major treatments of the 'how' of biblical interpretation" (92), and provides their page numbers in a note. The first of these is the famous critique of efforts to support Christianity by appeals to any allegedly objective authority—the Bible, the Church, or the historical tradition. This is treated thoroughly and well. Discussions of assorted biblical allusions and the concept of becoming a subjective thinker follow. Consequently the focus shifts from the function of scripture to the truth of subjectivity, and this carries through the very brief discussions of the second and third "major treatments," which are not even identified as such (96-97). Then come brief descriptions of Religion A, Religion B, and "childish Christianity." The analysis closes with a longer discussion of the use of the story of the rich young ruler in Mt. 19: 16-22 to rebuke the childish Christianity of contemporary clergy (98-99). This happens to be the fourth "major treatment," but no mention is made of that fact. Indeed, the entire discussion of subjectivity is never explicitly related to the hermeneutical questions of the book. The alert reader will see that the truth of subjectivity

provides the foundation for the attack on objectivity as well as for the hermeneutic of appropriation, but Rosas does not develop these connections. As a result the reader could get the misleading impression that the point of the book—the function of scripture in Kierkegaard—has been eclipsed by conceptual analyses and discussions of assorted biblical references. If Rosas wants his readers to appreciate the connections among the various points he makes, he needs to make them himself, and to develop their nature and implications clearly.

One very specific way in which Rosas demonstrates his failure to keep the reader informed about what he is doing is right at the start of the book. There is no Introduction whatsoever. But for the title, the reader would not suspect that the book is about the role of scripture in Kierkegaard's thought until the start of chapter three on page 58. As it happens, the conclusion to chapter five could contribute to a wonderful introduction to the book, for there Rosas makes a strong plea for "a new appreciation [of Kierkegaard] among evangelicals." He continues with this testimony:

This writer has found a new depth of faith, a more profound appreciation of the Bible, a new fear and trembling at the demands of the Gospel, and a desire for consistent commitment to the demands of discipleship at the feet of Kierkegaard. (155)

What better way to establish the importance of a study of the function of scripture in Kierkegaard's thought than with such a moving statement?

A related confusion that I experienced while reading *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* involves the question of audience: it is quite unclear for whom Rosas is writing. The issue of Kierkegaard's relation to the Bible is of potential interest to both Kierkegaard scholars and to Bible-reading Christians. (My enthusiastic response to the project is based upon the hope that there are enough people who are both of the above to turn a minor area of Kierkegaard scholarship into a major one.) But Rosas seems to be writing for lay readers one moment and scholars the next. In the first two chapters he details biographical episodes and general intellectual background in a manner helpful to novices but superfluous to scholars in the field.¹⁰ Yet he also uses Kierkegaardian terms such as inwardness, subjectivity, and even paradox without explaining them adequately for lay readers.

These various flaws are all the more puzzling when we realize that *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* appears to match perfectly the abstract of Rosas' PhD dissertation, "The Function of Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard," which was accepted in 1988 by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Normally a published dissertation betrays its origin by virtue of its tedious review of scholarship and plodding development of argument. The opposite is the case here. More attention to scholarship and development of argument are very much needed, and it is certainly surprising that they were not required by Rosas' dissertation director.

The same can also be said for matters that, although more procedural than substantial, are very important scholarly conventions. One involves documentation. In many sections of the book Rosas seems to draw heavily upon the work of another scholar: Stendahl, Gill, Thulstrup, and so on. This

entails two difficulties. First, the reader of Rosas' book has no way of knowing why those authorities reach the conclusions they do, since Rosas provides only their conclusions. Thus the extent to which major claims are grounded in solid interpretations of Kierkegaard's texts is left unclear. Second, it is sometimes difficult to know whether the ideas presented are Rosas' own or those of the authority cited for that section. He never dissembles about the fact that he has used another scholar's work, but he does occasionally lapse into a mix of words, phrases and ideas that are clearly borrowed without proper acknowledgement.¹¹

Another issue of scholarly procedure arises with respect to Rosas' use of primary sources. Unaccountably, he does not include *Repetition* or *The Sickness unto Death* in either his analysis or his index of references, despite their importance for Rosas' argument and the suggestive discussion of references to *Job* in *Repetition* by Minear and Morimoto. Seven other books are also omitted.¹² No one would expect that Rosas include every work by Kierkegaard in his study, but nowhere does he explain his reasons for excluding titles that are so germane to his project.

A third problem relates to the use of translations. It is not unusual to have excellent interpretations of Kierkegaard produced by scholars who do not have access to the Danish texts. But then the choice of translations becomes all the more crucial. When introducing his reorganized and expanded index to biblical references in Kierkegaard's works, Rosas explains that his page numbers for those works will differ from those in Minear and Mimoto because he has used "more recent translations . . . in most cases" (157). "Most cases" turns out to be precisely three titles¹³ out of the eleven indexed and analyzed by Rosas.¹⁴ Perhaps the most glaring example of failing to utilize the Hong's *Kierkegaard's Writings* is *The Corsair Affair* (1982), which could have helped Rosas make his own account (13-18) of that complex sequence of events much less confusing.

Finally, *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* also needs careful editing and endnote verification. It is not necessary to list the many errors both in the body of the book and in the endnotes. The publisher, Broadman & Holman of Nashville, is listed in *Books in Print* as a Division of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. If they intend to enter the academic book market, they will need to engage an editor with the expertise to rectify such problems.

Unfortunately, the very important project attempted in *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* is flawed by these weaknesses. Rosas has tackled what may be the most significant task facing Christian Kierkegaard scholars today. It is also one of the most difficult. Certainly immediate and total success should not be expected of anyone. Moreover, he has made several contributions that will help future efforts: an index that is organized according to Kierkegaard's works to supplement that of Minear and Morimoto; a suggestive interpretation of Kierkegaard's different uses of the Bible in terms of the theory of stages; and some insightful readings selected non-pseudonymous works in relation to the hermeneutic of appropriation. We can only hope that others will now take up the task, and that not many years will pass before it

will be possible to determine how “biblical” Kierkegaard’s thought really is, and whether or not he deserves to be called a “gifted interpreter of the Bible.”

NOTES

1. Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto, *Kierkegaard and the Bible: An Index*, Princeton Pamphlets No. 9 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953), pp. 6-7.

2. London: Lutterworth Press, 1948.

3. Minear and Morimoto, p. 6.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

6. For example, Kierkegaard is not even mentioned by Richard E. Palmer in *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), although Palmer dedicates his book to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who treats Kierkegaard as an important figure in the development of the hermeneutics of appropriation (see *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall [New York: Crossroad, 1990]).

7. Edmund Perry, “Was Kierkegaard a Biblical Existentialist? *Journal of Religion* XXXVI:1 (January, 1956), 17-23. For a contrary view see Janet Forsythe Fishburn, “Søren Kierkegaard, Exegete,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, XXXIX:3 (July, 1985), 229-245.

8. J. Leslie Dunstan, “The Bible in Either/Or,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, VI:3 (July, 1952), 310-320.

9. It is also integral to the hermeneutic of appropriation (or application), as Hans-Georg Gadamer observes in *Truth and Method*, pp. 127-128, 572-573.

10. The sections on Higher Criticism and the “The Kierkegaardian Alternative” (41-46) are not at all superfluous, since they relate directly to the task of the book.

11. Compare, for example, p. 63 on “intrinsic implications” with Dunstan, p. 314; or p. 71 on the different interpretations of *Fear and Trembling*” with Fishburn, p. 238. (Rosas’ odd phrase, “‘guided’ communication, is very likely a misreading of Fishburn’s “‘guarded communication,” since no such phrase appears in the location cited by Rosas [in Lowrie’s *Short Life of Kierkegaard*].)

12. Several of these omissions may be due to the fact that they had not been included in the index by Minear and Morimoto: *The Concept of Irony, For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself, Johannes Climacus, On Authority and Revelation* (which is discussed but not indexed) and *Two Ages* (*The Present Age* is in the earlier index, but not the complete 1978 edition by Hong and Hong). In addition, *The Gospel of Suffering, The Present Age, and Purity of Heart* are missing, despite their inclusion by Minear and Morimoto.

13. *The Concept of Anxiety, Fear and Trembling, and Works of Love*.

14. Of the other eight, two (*Philosophical Fragments* [1985] and *Either/Or* [1987] were available in “recent translations” by Hong & Hong before Rosas submitted his dissertation in 1988; and four others were published in time to update the 1994 book: *Stages on Life’s Way* (1988), *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (1990), *Practice in Christianity* (1991), and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1992).