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Blackhouse's "Kierkegaard: A single life" (Book Review)

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I was not sure at the start if I would be able to comprehend this book and I did not agree with all of its premises. However, the two authors provided a look at Job that was both scholarly and understandable and that made me want to study the book of Job anew.

Reviewer

Deborah R. Hunt, Lancaster Bible College

Backhouse, S. (2016). *Kierkegaard: A single life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 304 pp. \$24.99. ISBN 9780310520887

Stephen Backhouse is the Lecturer in Social and Political Theology at St. Mellitus College, London. His other works include *Compact Guide to Christian History* and *Kierkegaard's Critique of Christian Nationalism*.

Who does Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Hannah Arendt, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Franklin Roosevelt, and Hideaki Anno all have in common? They all were one of many influenced by “the Great Dane,” Søren Kierkegaard, according to Stephen Backhouse in this biography targeted to a non-academic, mainstream audience.

Backhouse introduces his book with a quote, the famous first line in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, which gives a good sense of the novelistic quality to this work of nonfiction. If Darcy and Jane ended up star-crossed because Darcy believed he couldn’t answer God’s call to reform Christianity and be married as well, then you would have the story of Søren and Regine.

Backhouse does an excellent job of explaining just why the social world of 19th century Denmark was so prejudiced against the seriously misunderstood Søren Kierkegaard (pronounced Kier-ka-gore), and why he is so important today. A man who believed that being a part of the crowd was living a lie, and gave voice to the single individual before God, the author reveals why Kierkegaard is one of the most enigmatic figures of intellectual history.

Like other serious Kierkegaardian scholars, Backhouse is compelled to explain why those who come into contact with the contentious Dane’s prolific body of work tend to misunderstand and mischaracterize his various points of view and respond negatively.

This is unfortunate, the author points out, because Kierkegaard stylistically would write under a plethora of different pseudonyms and personas to tease out specific viewpoints for the reader to contemplate. One almost has to read all his points-of-view before one can get a sense of what the real man behind the multitude of characters actually believed.

In the timeline provided in the last portion of the book, one can see how, although maligned, mocked and vilified in his lifetime, Kierkegaard's work spread across Europe and into the United States to make an impact in not only academic life, but the spiritual lives of many readers of various and diverse backgrounds.

This book provides a good introduction to Kierkegaard as well as a section in the back with an overview of everything produced by Kierkegaard. Overall, Backhouse successfully brings to his readers an approachable, easy to read biography on one of the greatest Christian intellectuals in history.

Reviewer

Kristin A. Vargas, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Gushee, D. P., & Stassen, G. H. (2016). *Kingdom ethics: Following Jesus in contemporary context* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 550 pp. \$40.00. ISBN 9780802874214

Gushee and Stassen's first edition of *Kingdom Ethics* was written for an American audience. It gained some popularity, was used as a textbook, and was translated into at least seven languages. With this wider audience and the passage of over ten years, Gushee and Stassen decided to write an updated edition to supply current and more global examples to provide contextuality of living out Christian ethics as shown by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (p. xi). They created substantial plans for the updated edition but Stassen died of cancer in April 2014 before the writing commenced. Gushee used the plan, and the help of a team of ten of their previous students, to finish the revision. While there are more authorial voices, it still blends well, and their use of the first person "we" for the authors allows the group to sound much as the first edition, and not like an edited work.