

of how innovation may occur; indeed, they seem concerned only with sharing what we have already created rather than in creating anew.

In the end, the takeaway from *CGC* is that likeminded Christians can disagree strongly about what Christian social thought means in the world today, and find that their disagreements stem more from their priors on the nature of social science than from their theological framework. *Caritas in Veritate* has much to offer us, but the authors in *CGC* draw the wrong conclusions.

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## A Vexing Gadfly: The Late Kierkegaard on Economic Matters

**Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez**

Cambridge, United Kingdom: James Clarke & Co., 2011 (214 pages)

With this work, Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez has occupied an empty nook in Kierkegaard studies. Though some larger volumes touch on what the penetrating Dane had to say about economic matters, this short study strikes the topic directly. The closest treatise I know to *A Vexing Gadfly* is Jørgen Bukdahl's *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*—an important and relevant study Pérez-Álvarez hardly notices.

Pérez-Álvarez's neglect of Bukdahl's study is more telling than one might expect. There is, for instance, this oddity in the work's scholarly veneer: one of the two places Pérez-Álvarez cites Bukdahl is at the end of a long quote from Walter Lowrie's popular translation of Kierkegaard's *Attack Upon Christendom*—basic source material, along with Kierkegaard's posthumously published journals and papers, for Pérez-Álvarez's study. Apparently Pérez-Álvarez lifted this quote directly from Bukdahl's study. Why he would not bother consulting and citing Lowrie's text directly is unclear, but secondhand citing occurs throughout the book.

Despite this, Pérez-Álvarez's generous though highly selective use of Kierkegaard quotes, frequently including the Danish text in the scholarly apparatus, is valuable. In places, the book nearly becomes a compendium of Kierkegaard's late, miscellaneous comments on economic matters.

In other places Pérez-Álvarez cites Bukdahl, but he dismisses Bukdahl's argument out of hand because Bukdahl fails to appreciate the “significant economic agenda” at the heart of Kierkegaard's “assault on Christendom” (157). Perhaps he does, but this is too easy. Whether Kierkegaard had an “economic agenda” is very much in question. The most Pérez-Álvarez demonstrates is that Kierkegaard had things to say about certain economic activities—mostly those that helped him expose the hypocrisy of Danish Christendom, but this does not amount to an economic agenda, much less a significant one.

Pérez-Álvarez's argument turns on drawing a strong contrast between Kierkegaard's “old-fashioned conservatism” in his earlier “antisocialist” writings and a “new radical

position” expressed in his final works, defined by his direct assault on Christendom (127). To support this claim he argues that in “the transitional years of 1846 to 1852, one can notice Kierkegaard’s shift from the conservative to the more critical social and political paradigm, motivated in part by the general political transformations” sweeping through Europe in 1848 and bringing lasting democratic reforms to Denmark (84). This transition appears in Kierkegaard’s writings by his dialectical correlation of wealth to poverty. The evidence of this is found in a comment taken from *Christian Discourses* where Kierkegaard speaks of wealth as if it were a zero-sum game: “what I have, another cannot have; the more I have, the less another has.” As Pérez-Álvarez tells it, this dialectical correlation of wealth to poverty sets the stage for Kierkegaard’s radicalized economic agenda against “the structures that produced economic inequality” (84). This “radicalization of his judgments on economics” is why “economic issues are of major significance throughout Kierkegaard’s final, prophetic years” (xxi, 84).

There is compelling evidence that Kierkegaard’s critique of Christendom was the natural culmination of his life’s work and not a late and radical departure from his earlier writings. No doubt 1848 was a pivotal year for Kierkegaard, as it was for most Danes. The legal prerogatives of the Danish monarchy gave way to liberal democracy, and this fundamentally altered the social context of Kierkegaard’s work. Nevertheless Bukdahl, among others, highlights strong lines of continuity in Kierkegaard’s thought before and after 1848, grounded in his constant concern for what it means to live in truth before God in the totality of life in mid-nineteenth century Copenhagen.

Although this totality includes economic matters, these matters are always treated by Kierkegaard as symptomatic of a deeper spiritual condition. This is borne out in many of the quotes Pérez-Álvarez musters. Part of what it means to be a disciple of Christ—a large and much-neglected part by elite society in Kierkegaard’s mind, as Pérez-Álvarez shows—was to assume responsibility for the plight of the poor. Truly doing so, and not just making a show of doing so, would invite scornful rejection by elite society and commoners alike—but that was a cross the true believer would faithfully bear.

In Pérez-Álvarez’s hands these exposés of spiritual hypocrisy, especially among the clergy, are transformed into a “significant economic agenda” grounded in a view of prosperity as always built on the backs of the poor (and therefore evil, 130) and economics as fundamental to the gospel (136). Although Pérez-Álvarez’s study is a useful corrective to the view of Kierkegaard as a completely self-absorbed and spoiled recluse, he leads readers down a rabbit hole by transforming the gadfly of Copenhagen society into a liberation theologian with an organized economic agenda.

Pérez-Álvarez’s handling of Kierkegaard turns out to be as abusive as the “one-dimensional” interpretations that “portrayed him as ... the father of existentialism” that he laments in the introduction (xvii). He reads Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* as a call for gadfly social activism (27) and then, picking up on Abraham Khan’s view of Kierkegaard as a Danish Gandhi or Gutiérrez, he argues that such activism against “the existing order” is the embodiment of “a prophetic type of Christianity” (34–38). He affirms Álvaro L. M. Valls’ “materialistic” wonderland interpretation of Kierkegaardian realism (29) and joins

Enrique Dussel in declaring Kierkegaard “the founder of the ‘prehistory of Latin American Philosophy and the immediate antecedent of our new Latin American thinking’” (30).

Kierkegaard, however, was no Gandhi. Raised in privilege, he spent his forty-two years mostly as an idle and rebellious student and then as an independently wealthy author. He squandered his substantial inheritance on renting luxury apartments, maintaining a large staff (to increase leisure time), supplying himself with fine cigars, and having his new books bound in leather. Educated among Copenhagen’s elite from childhood, he frequented the city’s salons and theaters and was an active, if vexing, participant in high society. He never, in any meaningful way, embraced poverty by any obvious concrete choices in his life and yet, we are told, Kierkegaard “powerfully ... chose solidarity with the economically most unfortunate” (40).

Kierkegaard did care about the plight of the poor, and there is no doubt he spoke against the establishment’s perverted structures of favoritism and partiality—especially those he believed undermined the integrity of the Christian ministry. As Pérez-Álvarez shows, he was unrelenting in exposing these sins even as he refused to romanticize poverty or advocate asceticism. But the suggestion that he was the father of liberation theology with an organized economic agenda, or “powerfully ... chose solidarity” with the impoverished, or was some kind of Danish Gandhi, is too much.

—Bruce P. Baugus

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## Thomas Erastus and the Palatinate: A Renaissance Physician in the Second Reformation

**Charles D. Gunnoe Jr.**

Leiden: Brill, 2011 (542 pages)

The dynamic struggles between church and state over the two millennia of Christian history are critically important to understanding the development of Western civilization, and the Reformation-era physician and political theorist Thomas Erastus has been associated with one of the defining features of these conflicts. *Erastianism* is a historical term often used imprecisely as a virtual synonym with Max Weber’s *caesaropapism*, that is, a more or less absolute dominance of the civil authority exercised over spiritual matters and ministry. In his recent book *Divine Transcendence and the Culture of Change* (Eerdmans, 2011), David H. Hopper describes theories of the relationship between church and state associated with thirteenth-century figures such as Marsilius of Padua, who predates the life of Thomas Erastus (1524–1583), as offering “a persuasive statement of the Erastian position” (174). Hunter Baker, in his book *The End of Secularism* (Crossway, 2009), describes a situation in which Christians “surrender the priorities of the church to state approval” in the following way: “That is Erastianism and that is a heresy” (140). Although generally eschewing the term itself, except in association with the thought of Thomas Hobbes (132), Brad S. Gregory argues that the modern separation of church and state amounts