

contestation which so often disfigures polemics. He demonstrated that it is entirely possible to unite a spirit of liberality to zealous ultramontane convictions. Although his 'high' papalism was enough to make any *papabile* candidate decline the office, Goyau's chronic dependence on papal authority might persuade the reader of Grondeux's account to think critically about the risk of placing undue weight on the glib maxim: '*Roma locuta est; causa finita est.*' He wrote in *Le Vatican* (1895): '*Une incarnation perpétuelle de l'absolutisme divin, voilà le seul remède pour que la société ne soit point à la fois la dupe et la victime de ces droits souverains auxquels prétendent les individus. La papauté dans l'histoire, fut cette incarnation...*' Such an authority, '*le vicariat de Dieu*' he continues, would be opposed to all abuse of power.

Not without justification did Yves Guyot call Goyau: '*Légat laïque du Pape de France*'. Insufficiently critical of papal authority Goyau may be, certainly in his public statements, nevertheless he was a voice for moderation in the French Church as disputatiously and reluctantly she came to terms with the legacy of the French Revolution. Goyau deserves to be remembered and Grondeux's account will ensure that the reputation of this zealous defender of the faith does not quietly repose in the national archives.

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KIERKEGAARD'S CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM by Stephen Backhouse, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp 272, £65.00 hbk*

What relevance can an academic book on Soren Kierkegaard's 19th-Century social theology have for the practical social issues of the 21st Century? The likely answer is: more than many of us may be prepared to accept.

Backhouse's thesis can be laid out briefly: Kierkegaard's ruthless critique of the Christian nationalism of 19th- Century Denmark is directed not merely at an extreme version of feeling for country but at the idea of Patriotism itself. Patriotism, the affinity among those who share a common culture and language, is, according to Kierkegaard, an impediment to the realization of true Christianity. Backhouse uses two of Kierkegaard's contemporaries to set the context for his supporting argument: H.L. Martensen (1808–1884), the head of the established Lutheran Church in Denmark, and N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) an evangelical pastor, writer and politician. Martensen was a cultural imperialist who believed European Christendom to be the apotheosis of civilisation and an increasingly close approximation to the Kingdom of God on earth. Grundtvig was both more radical and more specific in his cultural claims. For him it is the Danish culture which is demonstrably superior to all other European varieties, even those of other Scandinavian nations. In choosing these two protagonists, Backhouse has laid out the boundaries of the theological and political space which Kierkegaard chose to invade.

Kierkegaard's choice of intellectual weapons for penetrating this space includes both theological and philosophical concepts which permeate each other so that it is difficult to untangle his thinking from his believing. Kierkegaard's theological position is that it is not culture that produces either faith or a Christian society, but rather a continuously renewed decision to live with, for and as Christ that breaks through all cultural accidentals. Custom, convention, moral attitudes are for him things that hide Christ. Nationalism, or even the milder attitude of patriotic feeling, is unchristian principally because it restricts or distorts our judgments about who is our neighbour, who it is that we are to confront with our own submission in self-denying charity. Patriotic sentiment is therefore destructive of

not only Christian relationships but Christian revelation because it diminishes the radical social and ethical demand of Christ.

There can be little doubt that Kierkegaard lives up to Backhouse's thesis. To show that this great pessimist was marginally more pessimistic than was previously thought would be little achievement; but there is a hidden relevance. The parallels between mid-19th-Century Denmark and early 21st-Century world culture are remarkable. True, the field of discussion has shifted from national culture to economics; but economics has become the world culture, the culture of calculation, of the corporation, of competitive markets, and of personal success. This culture is as vulnerable to the Kierkegaardian polemic as were the established church of Denmark and the pretensions of Nordic cultural superiority.

Martensen's avatar today is constituted by the mainstream American (and latterly European) Christian denominations which have committed themselves to involvement in national politics. Since modern politics revolve around economics, the churches are ineluctably drawn into a position on economic theory, in all respects parallel to the nationalistic and imperialistic cultural theories prevalent in 19th- Century Europe. Grundtvig's equivalent in our society are the more or less independent, evangelical congregations (often as so called Mega or Media churches), mainly in North America but spreading in Europe, which proclaim the Prosperity Gospel. Preachers of prosperity argue that corporate ambition and greed are not only acceptable but an important part of Christian life. The interaction between this brand of evangelism and the establishment produces a spiritual situation that is analogous to what Kierkegaard confronted. Today's economic and social outsiders perceive themselves as tomorrow's establishment and promote the power of that establishment in anticipation of divine promotion. The fact that personal economic success has replaced personal nationalistic hubris does not alter the basic paradigm.

In a sense therefore, Backhouse's focus on nationalism is too narrow to do justice to either his own thought or that of Kierkegaard. Nationalism is but a manifestation of the larger Hegelian enemy that Kierkegaard wanted to destroy. That enemy is theologically justified corporatism, the philosophy that the group creates and has a superior claim on the individual. Hegel believed that the nation itself was a kind of corporation of corporations. Whether it is convention that makes the man (or woman) or his tribal connection, the essential Kierkegaardian evil is the presumption that 'belonging' is prior to 'being'. Not until the 20th Century did it become clear that the corporate is a very different category than the national. Today it is the corporate that threatens the existence of independent nation states as well as individuals. Our culture is one of pervasive corporate presence with the persistent threat of corporatism through the corruption of individuals as well as political processes. It is not just Patriotism that Kierkegaard condemns, it is all corporate Ambition. Few of us in our pursuit of corporate success may be prepared to appreciate just how relevant Kierkegaard remains.

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DEATH AND AFTERLIFE : A THEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION by Terence Nichols, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010, pp 220, \$22.99 pbk

This is a lucid and readable introduction to the problems of the 'afterlife', which is at its best when presenting the importance of philosophical ideas to a Christian perspective. On pages 73–5, for instance, there is a short section entitled 'Descartes and the modern period' which, for all its brevity, is an excellent summary of a shift in thinking associated with what Nichols calls 'modern science' but which is perhaps better seen as the 'Enlightenment science' that began to