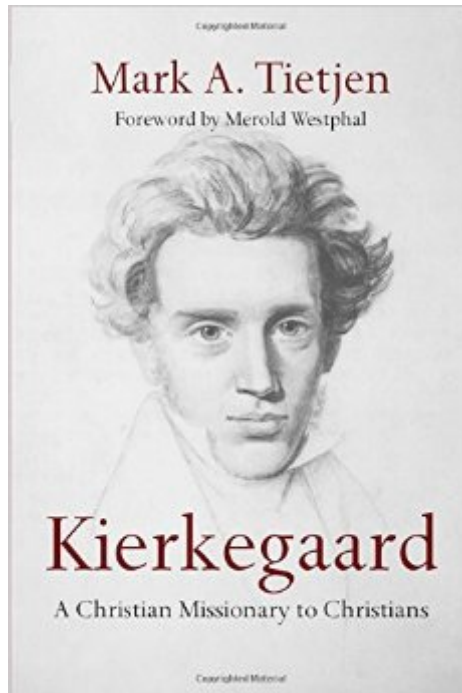


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Kierkegaard: A Christian Missionary To Christians



Synopsis

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) had a mission. The church had become weak, flabby and inconsequential. Being a Christian was more a cultural heritage than a spiritual reality. His missionâreintroduce the Christian faith to Christians. How could he break through to people who were members of the church and thought they were Christians already? Like an Old Testament prophet, Kierkegaard used a variety of pointed and dramatic ways to shake people from their slumber. He incisively diagnosed the spiritual ailments of his age and offered a fresh take on classic Christian teaching. Mark Tietjen thinks that Kierkegaard's critique of his contemporaries strikes close to home today. We also need to listen to one of the most insightful yet complex Christian thinkers of any era. Through an examination of core Christian doctrinesâthe person of Jesus Christ, human nature, Christian witness and loveâTietjen helps us hear Kierkegaard's missionary message to a church that often fails to follow Christ with purity of heart.

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Customer Reviews

Søren Kierkegaard was a nineteenth century Danish Christian philosopher. Kierkegaard had problems with the Christendom of his day, for he thought that it was nominal and cultural rather than vibrant and spiritually authentic. According to Mark A. Tietjen, Kierkegaard was a Christian missionary to Christians, and Kierkegaard had insights that can challenge, instruct, and edify Christians today. A number of the insights that Tietjen presents can be encountered in other Christian writings and sermons, as important as these insights may be: one should be a doer of

God's word and not just a hearer; one should set one's sights above momentary and temporary pleasure but also moralistic legalism. In addition, while Tietjen discusses how Kierkegaard diagnosed a number of spiritual and psychological maladies that people have, there was not much in Tietjen's book about possible solutions to these maladies, other than turning to Jesus. How that would help was not sufficiently explained. (A refreshing exception is Tietjen's chapter on Christian love.) The tension between relying on God's grace and rigorously doing good works also appears unresolved in Tietjen's book. On the one hand, Kierkegaard was critical of how the Lutheran emphasis on God's grace bred spiritual apathy, passivity, laziness, and complacency. Kierkegaard advocated obedience and self-denial in the Christian life. Yet, in a beautiful passage, Kierkegaard encouraged people with a variety of problems (i.e., loneliness, being forgotten, being suicidal, etc.) to rest in Christ's love, for Christ's burden is light. Are Christians supposed to strive for perfection or rest in God's grace? What is the proper mixture of these two approaches, or the correct relationship between them?

The only exposure I had with Søren Kierkegaard was in some passing references in theological and philosophical works. So I was hesitantly interested in picking up the recently published "Kierkegaard: A Christian Missionary to Christians" by Mark A. Tietjen, chaplain and Grace Palmer Johnston Chair of Bible at The Stony Brook School in Stony Brook, New York, former professor of philosophy at the University of West Georgia, past secretary-treasurer of the Søren Kierkegaard Society, and author. This 173 page paperback ended up being a pleasant read by an author who was knowledgeable and delighted with his subject. After a short foreword by Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard: A Christian Missionary to Christians" cruises through five easy chapters. The first brings the reader up to speed on the life of Søren Kierkegaard, his loves, academic background, and format of writing. The author coaches us on how to pronounce his subject's name properly, and addresses some of the bad press Kierkegaard has received from modern writers like Francis Schaeffer, Dave Breese, and Walter Kaufmann. In the end it is obvious that Tietjen sees that "there is no reason to think [Kierkegaard's] personal Christian beliefs were outside the parameters of classic Reformed, Lutheran orthodoxy" (36). The subsequent chapters address four themes the author perceives as central to Kierkegaard's program: Jesus Christ (theology), the human self (psychology), Christian witness (communicating Christian truth to the world) and the life of Christian love (ethics). Throughout each chapter Tietjen makes clear that Kierkegaard was pushing for a genuine Christianity, one that included body, soul, mind, life and love.

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