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### Soren Kierkegaard's Critique of Nineteenth Century Christendom

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SOREN KIERKEGAARD'S CRITIQUE OF  
NINETEENTH CENTURY CHRISTENDOM

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
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in partial fulfillment of the  
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Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The revival of interest in the life and works of Soren Kierkegaard since the turn of the century has been astounding. In spite of all this research, his name remains somewhat of an enigma to the church. Kierkegaard's penetrating critique of the established church of his day is still received with difficulty by contemporary churchmen. The purpose of this study is to examine Kierkegaard's critique of the church. An attempt is made to discover what it was in Kierkegaard's understanding of New Testament Christianity that brought him into conflict with the church. The church of today in turn must consider to what extent his critique and correctives are applicable to twentieth century Christendom.

There is no attempt here to give an exhaustive or detailed account of Kierkegaard's prophetic message. The study is limited in the first place to pointing out the weaknesses of the church as Kierkegaard saw them. In the second place, the study shows what correctives Kierkegaard employed to offset these weaknesses.

This study is also limited to what Kierkegaard himself thought of his age and Christianity. There is no attempt to determine how accurate his historical judgements

were or whether he actually interpreted his contemporaries correctly. The sources used are the writings of Kierkegaard, especially those following the 1848 Experience. All secondary sources are employed in an attempt to clarify Kierkegaard's position.

Every criticism and evaluation of Kierkegaard's message is made on his grounds and on the basis of his works. The basic criteria for criticism is the criteria Kierkegaard employed to judge his age; namely, Christianity of the New Testament. As he saw it, his task was to define what it means to be a Christian on the basis of the New Testament. The question is: to what extent does Kierkegaard in his attack actually base his criticism and corrective on the interpretation of Christianity in the New Testament? This question is posed with the recognition that Kierkegaard himself did not claim to give a total interpretation of the New Testament. Nevertheless, it can be shown that it was his approach to the New Testament that made the attack "one sided" in many respects.

After the first chapter, the first section of the following chapter deals with Kierkegaard's critique of the church. This is followed by a study of his corrective measures. Finally, there is an evaluation of his concept of New Testament Christianity.

## CHAPTER II

### CHRISTENDOM AND SOREN KIERKEGAARD

Kierkegaard's contemporaries considered his open attack on Christendom a betrayal of the faith. Except for a few trusted friends his only followers were the free thinkers and the anti-clerical element of the populace. It is understandable then why his message fell into obscurity soon after his death. One reason for this violent reaction was that very few people saw Kierkegaard's point of view over against the church.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to present the historical background from which the attack proceeded for the purpose of understanding Kierkegaard's own point of view. It is important to see the basic continuity in his works and the sense of prophetic mission he himself had.

Already in the Journals of 1835, Kierkegaard was struggling within himself to discover what his God given mission in life was.<sup>2</sup> With increasing maturity, the task became clearly a religious one. It is fully realized in the midst of the attack when he states, "My task is a Socratic task, to revise the definition of what it is to

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 467.

<sup>2</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, edited and translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 15.

be a Christian."<sup>3</sup> As he viewed the corruption of the Lutheran state church in Denmark, he concluded that Christianity of the New Testament did not exist.<sup>4</sup> His polemic was directed against det Bestaaende, the existing church. The object of his attack was not only the state church in Denmark, but the whole church at large.<sup>5</sup>

Kierkegaard viewed his prophetic task as a double edged sword. On the one hand, he attacked the church "from behind" with the purpose of calling it to repentance.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, he attempted to be a "corrective" influence that would rebuild the faith of the established order.<sup>7</sup> In both aspects of the task, it is evident that Kierkegaard always regarded himself as speaking within the church. While he admired the honesty of the free thinker, he was never inclined to champion any sectarian movement.<sup>8</sup> It is also evident that the self designated term "corrective" indicates his positive purpose in the

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<sup>3</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 238.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>5</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 427.

<sup>6</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Christian Discourses, translated by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 168.

<sup>7</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom" p. 90.

<sup>8</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 427.

attack. As violent and condemning as he was at times in the last stages of the attack, Kierkegaard's chief concern was to bring Christendom back to Christianity and not destroy the church. Finally, it must be understood that his task was basically an intellectual and a theological one. He considered himself a teacher of the faith to an age that lacked religious education.<sup>9</sup> He never attempted to set up an organization whereby his point of view could be propagated.

Throughout his lifetime, Kierkegaard describes himself as being "without authority." He never was ordained nor did he enter the parochial ministry, yet he spoke so resolutely against the church that he is compared with the prophet Jeremiah. While he claimed no delegated authority from God, Kierkegaard maintained that every individual must judge the situation for himself on the authority of the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> When Kierkegaard came forward as the prophetic voice of his age, he did so on the authority and basis of the New Testament.<sup>11</sup> His open attack on the church was preceded by months and years of exploring the

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<sup>9</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View, translated by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 74.

<sup>10</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 556.

<sup>11</sup>Edward D. Geismar, Søren Kierkegaard (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1929), p. 577.



New Testament conception of Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

The writings of Kierkegaard are a mixture of poetry, psychology, and theology. They give the reader an opportunity to understand the inner thoughts of the writer. At this point, I will trace the attack as it evolves in Kierkegaard's writings. In The Point of View, he states that from the very start he regarded himself to be a religious writer.<sup>13</sup> His earliest writings were designed indirectly to awaken his age to a religious consciousness. Either/Or was a protest against the deification of aesthetics and politics.<sup>14</sup> The Postscript was directed against the Hegelian system. The initial seed of the attack on the church appears in the Christian Discourses, written in 1847. This was still quite indirect in its criticism of the established church, but it marked the beginning of his open criticism. Here Kierkegaard states his original purpose of the critique:

Our aim is not in the least to condemn Christendom or any single individual in Christendom. . . . But it is indeed our aim to prompt the hearer to test his life, his Christianity, to be observant of where he is.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto, Kierkegaard and the Bible (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View, p. 59.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 22 f.

<sup>15</sup>Kierkegaard, Christian Discourses, p. 222.

With the conclusion of the Postscript in 1846, Kierkegaard felt his work as an author was complete. He had given a "hint" to his age and felt he had no further authority to speak. From 1846 to 1848 he produced very little. It was during Holy Week of the year 1848, however, that Kierkegaard had a religious experience that changed his course. Having become convinced of God's forgiveness, he laid aside his inhibitions to speak.<sup>16</sup> I include here several entries of the Journals that indicate the effect of this religious experience.

My whole nature is changed. My reserve and self resolution is broken. I must speak.<sup>17</sup>

From now on I shall have to take over clearly and directly everything which till now has been indirect, and come forward personally, definitely, and directly as one who wished to serve the cause of Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

The effect of the 1848 experience was decisive for Kierkegaard to the end of his life. From this time on he discarded the use of pseudonyms to disguise his identity. He also discarded to an extent the use of indirect communication.<sup>19</sup> However, his inner struggle to bring his criticism of the church in the open was not over at this time. It was not until 1850 that he published Training in Christianity, which was still a mild dose of criticism. Training

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<sup>16</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 277.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>19</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 406.

in Christianity served as a complement to the Fragments and the Postscript. It was more intense, direct and polemical in its definition of Christianity. The subtle humor of his earlier works is gone and his seriousness of purpose is evident.<sup>20</sup> This work and For Self Examination and Judge for Yourselves published shortly thereafter, are perhaps the best sources for a study of Kierkegaard's theology. They are open and pointed, but still retain a balance of thought which he loses in the later pamphlets. Kierkegaard did not regard these works as an attack on Christianity but rather as a defense of Christianity. The critique of the church would have ended at this point had the leaders of the church honestly conceded that Christendom was not living up to the ideal of the Christian faith.<sup>21</sup>

Before tracing the last stages of the critique, it is necessary to give some background on the individuals specifically involved. The first of these was Jacob Peter Mynster (1775-1854), Kierkegaard's pastor and the Bishop Primate of the Danish Church. Kierkegaard respected Mynster as a human ideal, but he criticized him for never taking a decisive stand for Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Mynster

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 430.

<sup>21</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," pp. 14 f.

<sup>22</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 261.

avoided the concept of Christian suffering. He excused the failure of his parishioners to live like Christians by taking refuge in the concept of faith as a "hidden inwardness."<sup>23</sup> Out of respect for the bishop, Kierkegaard restrained himself from making a more direct assault on the church until Mynster died in 1854.

The second personality that figures prominently in the attack is Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884). Kierkegaard had little respect for him. Martensen was a student of Hegel, and attempted to employ the Hegelian system in his systematics. Martensen was the "professor" at the University in Copenhagen whom Kierkegaard continually derides in his works. It was primarily against his mediating rational theology that Kierkegaard leveled his criticism. Lowrie's observation regarding Kierkegaard's relation to these two men in the attack is important:

. . . . But it is very clear that these two men were singled out, not for reasons of personal spite, but because in their different ways they were so eminently representative of the Establishment and represented it at its best. Martensen represented the dogmatic system, a thing for itself; and Mynster represented quietistic piety--as a thing for itself!<sup>24</sup>

A third individual whom Kierkegaard attacks verbally is Frederick Severin Grundtvig (1773-1872). He does not play the important role that Mynster and Martensen do.

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<sup>23</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 511.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 518.

Grundtvig is interesting, however, in that he also was making reforms within the church at this time. Kierkegaard would have no part of this movement. Grundtvig stressed the church organization, the sacraments, and adherence to the credal formulations of the church. It was Grundtvig's lack of concern for the individual and emphasis on the church as an organization that Kierkegaard attacked.<sup>25</sup>

In tracing the last stages of the attack, it is necessary to see its development from the 1848 experience. During those years following it, Kierkegaard devoted himself to the intellectual task of redefining Christianity. The peculiar emphases of the last stages begin to come to the fore. In the Journal of 1852, he states that he has added the idea of "imitation" to bring the critique in the sphere of existence.<sup>26</sup> In the following years there are several entries that indicate the ascetic life he was leading at this time. From this time on to the end there are numerous entries that show the influence of Schopenhauer in this respect. Kierkegaard states that he wished to add the ascetic element because Christianity is being identified with culture.<sup>27</sup>

It was not until 1854, however, that Kierkegaard

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<sup>25</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1941), p. 39.

<sup>26</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 462.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 486.

laid aside all subtlety and made his dialectical attack upon the clergy and the church. On January 30, 1854, Bishop Mynster died. In his funeral address Martensen eulogized the bishop and called him "a witness to the truth." It was this phrase particularly which infuriated Kierkegaard. He had used it to describe the true disciple in distinction to Mynster in his Training In Christianity. With Mynster's death, he no longer felt obliged to hold back his thoughts. After Martensen was installed as the new bishop primate, Kierkegaard published a pamphlet entitled Was Bishop Mynster a Witness to the Truth? This was published on December 15 and it marks the beginning of his pamphlet attack.

Kierkegaard continued the assault on Martensen and soon on the whole church through a series of pamphlets entitled The Fatherland. They were published from January to May of 1855. From May to October of the same year, a series of nine pamphlets entitled The Instant appeared. Kierkegaard was preparing the tenth issue when he became deathly ill and was taken to Frederiks Hospital in Copenhagen. He remained there until his death on November 11, 1855.

It is somewhat amazing that in view of the long prelude to these pamphlets they should have been so violently received. The pamphlets represent the shouts of a prophetic voice. They were deadly serious, and scornful of the failures of the clergy and the church. When the

battle subsided, it became evident that they were perhaps the least effective of his works. The clergy was embittered against all he had to say. The free thinkers used his material as arguments against the Christian faith. The authorities ignored him, and the people made him a hero instead of the martyr he expected to become.<sup>28</sup>

There are two things which distinguish Kierkegaard's earlier critique from the later ones. I have already mentioned the basic change in method of communication. The earlier writings were highly dialectical, designed to communicate indirectly and force the reader to make a personal application.<sup>29</sup> When the "hint" was not taken, he ventured to speak openly. In the pamphlets, however, there is a second change. Even as late as 1850 Kierkegaard was dialectical enough to see that there was two sides to every issue. He at least alluded to both up to that time. As he saw the clergy use "the other side" as an excuse for missing the point, he became less charitable to his opposition. In the end, Kierkegaard recognized that he would have to sacrifice himself and overstate his case. He hoped thereby to force a reaction on the part of his contemporaries and thus be a "corrective" for his age.<sup>30</sup> Thus Lowrie

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<sup>28</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 570.

<sup>29</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 321.

<sup>30</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 556.

says of Kierkegaard:

Perhaps at the end of his life and in the heat of battle he could not say as confidently as he did in 1849: "No one can justly accuse me of being too one-sided to see the opposite side for the opposite side has in me its greatest advocate."<sup>31</sup>

There can be no doubt that the reason for the attack was determined to a certain extent by Kierkegaard's own personality and the personalities that surrounded him. His strict religious upbringing endowed him with a serious nature. He laments the fact that he never tasted the freedom of childhood.<sup>32</sup> The inherited melancholy of his father haunted him throughout his life. It gave him an imminent sense of death. The image of Regina and their unfortunate engagement confirmed him as that "solitary" who ventured alone against his age.<sup>33</sup> The mind of Kierkegaard was influenced by the Socratic method, the Hegelian dialectic, and later the asceticism and pessimism of Schopenhauer. He was a highly imaginative and emotional man, and this is often indicated by the passionate assaults he makes in his later writings.

While it is important to take account of the psychological and biographical factors in interpreting Kierkegaard's attack, it is too simple to dismiss the whole affair on the grounds that he was a neurotic personality. In the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 493.

<sup>32</sup> Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 321.

<sup>33</sup> Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), pp. 221 f.



first place, this view fails to take into account the basic continuity in his work and the resoluteness with which he undertook his task. In the second place, this attitude fails to take into account Kierkegaard's attempt throughout his life to relate himself and his task to God. He personally recognized his own personality weaknesses, but it was the God-relationship that sustained him. The Journals and The Point of View indicate clearly this struggle within himself and how he finally resorted to find refuge in God.<sup>34</sup> Lowrie denies that there is cause to believe the open attack was a result of a mental disorder in Kierkegaard:

In the earlier Journals we have sometimes even reason to believe that S.K. was mentally ill when his will was unable to cope with the many possibilities his imagination suggested and the many reflections of his dialectical mind. Now we see (after 1848) only what most men are inclined to regard as an undebatable sign of mental soundness, namely, the clear perception of a task and the resolute will to perform it. It may be questioned which condition best exemplifies spiritual health. But at all events, those who suppose that his violent attack upon the church must be accounted for by some sort of mental derangement occasioned by feeble health, can find no support of this in the Journals.<sup>35</sup>

Edward Geismar can also be quoted in this connection:

We misunderstand this agitation if we believe that it is a sick man who wrote all these articles and pamphlets. These thoughts are not new to Kierkegaard. He had been with them for many years, as the entries of his diaries show.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View, pp. 64 f.

<sup>35</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 490.

<sup>36</sup>Edward D. Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Soren Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 84.

The question may be asked, How ought the church today view the message of Kierkegaard? It would seem that the answer lies in the earnestness of purpose with which the critique was written. Recognizing the partial imbalance in Kierkegaard's attack, the church must at least give ear to a sincere prophetic voice within its midst.

## CHAPTER III

### CHRISTENDOM AND THE WORLD

Perhaps Kierkegaard's underlying criticism of the church was the way in which it completely identified itself with the world. He attempted to correct this situation by pointing up the great chasm which separates Christianity and the world. An entry in the Journals serves as a suitable introduction to a study of this subject.

Imagine a fortress, absolutely impregnable, provisioned for eternity. There comes a new commandant. He conceives that it might be a good idea to build bridges over the moats--so as to be able to attack the besiegers. Charmant! He transforms the fortress into a country seat, and naturally the enemy takes it. So it is with Christianity. They changed the method and naturally the world conquered.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard saw that a basic change in approach toward the world marked the difference between 19<sup>th</sup> century Christendom and New Testament Christianity. Collins interprets his view as follows:

The basic change is that the established order undermines moral seriousness and the transcendence of Christianity, by secularizing the entire religious outlook of men. People came to see no difference between assuming the rights and privileges of temporal citizenship and being reborn in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, cited in Walter Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1942), p. 234.

<sup>2</sup>James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), p. 218.

Kierkegaard accused the established church of completely secularizing the Christian faith and life. The church did this in the first place by deifying itself. Kierkegaard maintained that if the individual attaches himself to anything except God for his ultimate good, that object is itself deified. When the masses attach themselves to the established order as their ultimate telos, the church is deified and everything is secularized. When the God relationship of the individual is made dependent on church membership, then God Himself is secularized.<sup>3</sup> The relation of the individual and the church will be viewed in detail in Chapter IV. At this point, it can be seen how this deification of the established order effected the attitude of Christendom toward the world. The following passage shows Kierkegaard's primary concern in this matter.

So it is always when the established order has come to the point of deifying itself; then in the end use and want become articles of faith, everything becomes about equally important, or custom, use, and want become the important things. The individual no longer feels and recognizes that he along with every individual has a God relationship which for him must possess absolute significance.<sup>4</sup>

In the second place, it was the church's attempt to live peaceably with the world that secularized Christendom.

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<sup>3</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

This policy of peaceful coexistence was fostered by the Hegelian spirit, which attempted to coalesce the human and the divine. It was Martensen who fostered a world view of this kind.

There must be a view of the world and life in which everything that has meaning in existence (Dasein) nature and spirit, nature and history, poetry and art and philosophy, harmoniously unite to form a temple of the spirit in which Christianity is the all governing and all explaining world view.<sup>5</sup>

It was against this both/and synthesis of Martensen's that Kierkegaard posited his either/or. In the early Journals he reacts against the humanism of Hegel.<sup>6</sup> He also condemns the pantheistic fusion of the finite and infinite by Schleiermacher.<sup>7</sup> "We have mixed the temporal and the eternal, highest and lowest so they coalesce."<sup>8</sup> It was the leaders of Christendom that were attempting to bridge the world and Christianity which resulted in loss of the vitality of primitive Christianity.

As a result of this complete amalgamation with the world, Christendom assumed that "we are all Christians"

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<sup>5</sup>H. I. Martensen, Af Mit Levnet, cited in Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, edited and translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 20.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>8</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourself, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 138.

in this world. This to Kierkegaard was the greatest heresy of his age. He concludes:

In case we really are all Christians, in case it is (Christianity) quite as it should be with Christendom, then the New Testament is eo ipso no longer a guide for us Christians.<sup>9</sup>

This thesis was so base to him because it created an illusion for the people whereby their hypocrisy was covered.

"There is nothing so objectional to God as hypocrisy."<sup>10</sup>

Kierkegaard saw greater virtue in the free thinker in that at least he was honest with himself.<sup>11</sup> He recognized that this "playing Christian" on the part of the established order had caused Christendom to deny the sine qua non of Christianity, the consciousness of sin.

Christendom has established a policy of "tolerance" toward the world which eventually degenerated into an indifference to the distinctive character of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> The following passage in the Journals indicates Kierkegaard's concern in this matter.

It is the tolerance of the orthodox which shows how completely Christianity is lost. Their solution is: if only we may keep our faith for ourselves, then the world can take care of itself. Merciful God, and that is supposed to be Christianity. That is the

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<sup>9</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 111.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>12</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 428.

power which once broke upon the world and through readiness to suffer forced Christianity on the world, compelled it more forcefully than any tyrant. The orthodox do not even suspect this, their tolerance is the effect of sheer worldliness, because they have not really understanding or courage for martyrdom, or a true belief in eternity, but really desire to have a good time in this world.<sup>13</sup>

Kierkegaard held the clergy responsible for this condition in Christendom. Mynster almost unwittingly confirmed the church in its hypocrisy. In distinction to Kierkegaard he refused to judge Christendom on the basis of its moral failures, but appealed to the concept of faith as a "hidden inwardness." This Kierkegaard deemed only an excuse and humbug.<sup>14</sup> To him Mynster represented the entire clergy soft pedaling Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Instead of confronting the people with the radical "either/or" of Christianity, the clergy preached ambiguously of "both/and" and "at the same time." With one eye on earthly fame and fortune, and the other eye on witnessing the truth, the clergy attempted to straddle two opposite forces.<sup>16</sup>

Kierkegaard carried his attack on the clergy to every possible sphere of their life. Their social respectability was basically inconsistent with Christianity.<sup>17</sup> They were

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 394.

<sup>15</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 17.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

men interested only in making a comfortable living.<sup>18</sup> They had no sense of sacrifice and suffering for the faith,<sup>19</sup> yet they made their living from the suffering of Christ and the apostles.<sup>20</sup> He finally concludes, "There is not one honest priest."<sup>21</sup>

With the possible exception of his later scorn for women, this attack on the clergy presents one of the biggest obstacles in a sympathetic appraisal of Kierkegaard. When one considers that Kierkegaard himself never attempted to meet the problem of his age on a parochial level, it might be asked if he was really in a position to make such an unyielding critique. His concept of sacrifice was related to the material level, yet he himself was never in want of the material. There is no New Testament foundation for denouncing every enterprise designed to earn a living as selfish. God does not ask, as Kierkegaard did, that the clergy should admit their weakness in earning a living from the Gospel instead of living in absolute poverty.<sup>22</sup> It is true that he begins the attack with the view of checking a mercenary and materialistic desire on the part of the clergy under state support. He objected to their

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>19</sup>Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourself, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>21</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", p. 227.

<sup>22</sup>Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourself, pp. 139 f.



pretence of sacrifice for the Gospel's sake.<sup>23</sup> It must also be said that in the heat of battle he lost his sense of charity in condemning everything and everyone.

The symbol of this secularized Christendom was the State Church of Denmark.

In a more relevant Kierkegaardian sense, "Christendom" signifies the unholy alliance concluded by Protestantism with the state, an alliance which spelled the end of the older nation between the Christian spirit and the powers of this world.<sup>24</sup>

When the state is the patron of Christianity, the divine becomes the human protege.<sup>25</sup> Thus the ruler of this world becomes the prerogative authority of God's kingdom. By putting its royal stamp on Christianity the people are led to the conclusion "we are all Christians."<sup>26</sup> State support of the clergy seduces young pastors into forgetting the seriousness of Christianity by giving them comfortable living.<sup>27</sup> Kierkegaard recognized the authority of the state, but criticized the church's relation to the state.<sup>28</sup>

In view of this situation in Christendom, Kierkegaard began his "corrective" by distinguishing by an infinite quality of difference all that is God's from all that is

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>24</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>25</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 102.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 83 f.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

man's. God is the "absolutely unknown", the wholly other. He cannot be known by man but only believed.<sup>29</sup> Man and the world are not only completely different from God but they stand by nature in direct opposition to Him.<sup>30</sup> Thus Kierkegaard establishes an absolute dualism between the finite and the infinite. 'This dualism was created by sin which sets the two at odds.'<sup>31</sup>

God is the absolute, and when he confronts man He places an absolute demand upon him.<sup>32</sup> There is no compromising with this absolute requirement. Kierkegaard demolishes any syncretistic attempts as were expressed in terms "both/and" and "to a certain degree". Either a man's life expresses the absolute by seeking the eternal, or his life expresses the relativity of this temporal order.<sup>33</sup> God demands complete obedience on the part of man and this obedience is never a matter of degree.<sup>34</sup> In view of this absolute demand of God, Kierkegaard maintained that every Christian first of all must sincerely ask the question whether he is a Christian at all. He endeavored to bring

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<sup>29</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup>Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourselves, p. 114.

<sup>31</sup>Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 238.

<sup>32</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 221.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>34</sup>Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourselves, p. 123.

Christendom to an understanding of the transcendence of Christianity. Christendom had first of all to become honest with itself. Thus Kierkegaard attacked "from behind" by bringing Christendom to a consciousness of sin, repentance and confession.<sup>35</sup> He portrayed the Christian faith in its ideal form and so forced a decision by his age either for or against God.<sup>36</sup>

Once Christendom had come to terms honestly with the transcendent God, its entire approach to the world would be reversed. The unconditional determinant of Christianity is that one must "die to the world." The goal of the Christian life is to become like God and be willing to sacrifice every earthly possession to that end.<sup>37</sup>

And this is Christianity piety: to renounce everything in order to serve God alone, to deny oneself everything in order to serve God alone.<sup>38</sup>

To be a Christian means to become completely heterogenous with the world, to renounce it and suffer because of this renunciation.<sup>39</sup>

It is this negative world view that led Kierkegaard to the radical asceticism of his later years. In an

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<sup>35</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", p. 97.

<sup>37</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, For Self Examination, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 98.

<sup>38</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 179.

<sup>39</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", p. 11.

attempt to separate Christianity and culture, he proposed a return to monasticism. He is critical of Luther and Protestantism for abandoning the abbeys.<sup>40</sup> During the years 1852-1853, Kierkegaard practiced a form of voluntary asceticism. During the last years of his life he was under the influence of Schopenhauer. Although their asceticism had different foundations, Kierkegaard's attitude toward women and his undue pessimism can be attributed somewhat to this association.<sup>41</sup> In the final stages of the attack, he rejects the idea of propagation and the marriage estate itself inasmuch as they too stood in the way of fulfilling the absolute demand of Christianity.<sup>42</sup> He viewed temporal existence as only an instant prior to eternity. Christianity concerns itself with the decision of eternity and sacrifices the present life to it.<sup>43</sup> His dark pessimism of the world was compensated with a strong eschatological view of life.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, Kierkegaard attempted to distinguish Christianity and the world by urging the separation of the church

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<sup>40</sup> Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourself, p. 179.

<sup>41</sup> Edward D. Geismar, Søren Kierkegaard (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1929), p. 586.

<sup>42</sup> Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," pp. 164 f.

<sup>43</sup> Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourself, p. 163.

<sup>44</sup> Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 189.

and the state. His dualism includes the concept of the two kingdoms.<sup>45</sup> The state belongs to the kingdom of this world and can never demand the allegiance of the members of God's kingdom.<sup>46</sup> He had no intention of abolishing the state or rebelling against it. He labored, as he said ". . . in the direction of getting the state to do away with it."<sup>47</sup>

Kierkegaard, by his radical interpretation of Christianity, attempted to let God be God. He attacked the demonic forces which created the illusion of the deification of man and the social order. Kierkegaard pointed Christendom to the judgement of God, the consciousness of sin. He brought the Johanne literature to bear on his age. "Love not the world neither the things that are in the world." This attempt at purification of the church, of showing the transcendence of God, and the absolute uncompromising character of the Christian ideal, was a valiant one on his part. This aspect of his prophetic message must at least be given a hearing by the church of every age.

At the same time, Kierkegaard is rightly criticized for being too "one sided" with respect to his dualism. Mackintosh maintains that he was not dialectical enough in his view of man and God. According to the New Testament,

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

man is indeed unlike God yet he was created in the image of God. While the image was broken in the Fall, man's nature was not made synonymous with sin.<sup>48</sup> Sin has created an abyss between God and man. However, Kierkegaard at times almost equates finitude with sin. He is therefore in danger of a Manichean view.<sup>49</sup> His view of the complete transcendence of God forced him to describe God in negative terms such as, "the absolutely Unknown", the "sheerly unqualified Being", the mere "limit". In doing this he comes close in terminology to the position of the pantheistic mystic.<sup>50</sup> The complete transcendence of God also raised the question of the place of the self revelation of God in the prophetic writings.

Haecker points out the same undialectical character of his view of the world. The complete negation of God's creation is not only unrealistic, but there is an inherent Gnostic danger in its pessimism. It appears as though the world were evil in itself and created by a demiurge.<sup>51</sup> During the last stages of the attack, he lost a sense of God's activity in creation.

With the passing years his view of the world became even gloomier and the expression of his mood was

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<sup>48</sup>Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>51</sup>Theodore Haecker, Soren Kierkegaard, translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 16.

tantamount to the belief that the world was a house of correction and nothing else; then it loses all the beauty of free creation and its beauty is but a snare and a temptation.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the influence of Schopenhauer and his conflict with the church, Mackintosh makes the following observation:

It had come for him to be an unpardonable sin in the church that it actually kept up some kind of contact with the world. For the world is there simply to be negated.<sup>53</sup>

In defense of Kierkegaard against this criticism, K. V. Martin maintains his view of the world was dialectical. The Christian dies to the world to be born anew in Christ. Through the eternal Christ we live in a world of eternity and righteousness.<sup>54</sup> In fairness to Kierkegaard, it must be said that he probably never lost sight of God in creation. The Journals provide an insight into Kierkegaard which shows more of the dialectic than some of his other writings. I quote from an entry dated in 1849.

Since God himself created and preserves this world one must be careful to guard against fanatical asceticism which without further ado hates and destroys it. No, from a Christian point of view, I should describe the relationship as possible this way. The world is like a game or a child's toy. The father may even find the toy beautiful and take a childish delight in it; but he nevertheless requires that the child should be gradually weaned from it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>53</sup>Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 253.

<sup>54</sup>H. V. Martin, The Wings of Faith (New York: Philosophical Library, c.1951), p. 122.

<sup>55</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 349.

In another entry he affirms the profound insight that the creation was completed in the incarnation.<sup>56</sup> Again he could say "melancholy is no closer to Christianity than light mindedness."<sup>57</sup> His basic monotheism and view of God in creation preserves him from the Manichean and Gnostic heresies. His appreciation for the personality of the individual prevents him from making any pantheistic union of man in God.

There is no doubt that in the last stages of the attack especially that his view of the world is one sided. It is so pessimistic that it fails to give God credit for creation. He undermines the necessary sphere of human operation when he disparages creation and time. As a creature the Christian is bound by a call of God to live and work in this world and consecrate all things to Him. Kierkegaard sets up a false antithesis in this respect. Receiving the call from God does not of itself mean the rejection of the call of family or vocation. The New Testament does not isolate the Christian from the world. It pictures him as the instrument of God through which creation is reconsecrated to God through the witness of His Son's redemptive action.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>57</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 154.



## CHAPTER IV

### CHRISTENDOM AND THE INDIVIDUAL

In the preceeding chapter, it was shown how Kierkegaard deemed the deification of the church as partly responsible for the secularization of Christendom. In this chapter, I shall take up in detail this critique of the idea of the "mass" which destroyed the personal character of faith. Over against this abstraction, Kierkegaard presents Christendom with "that individual I call my reader."

Kierkegaard viewed nineteenth century Christendom as the victim of an age which completely impersonalized the Christian faith. The huge system of Hegel and the national church spirit of Grundtvig laid complete stress on the social or numerical rather than the individual. Thus, Kierkegaard laments the condition of his age.

In the midst of all our exaltation over the achievements of the age and the nineteenth century there sounds a note of poorly conceived contempt for the individual man; in the midst of the self importance of the contemporary generation there is revealed a sense of despair over being human. Everything must attach itself to some movement: men are determined to lose themselves in the totality of things, in world history, fascinated and deceived by a magic witchery: no one wants to be an individual human being.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1941), p. 317.

It was the state church situation which helped promote this idea. Kierkegaard is bitter in his criticism of infant baptism and the rite of confirmation in this respect. The state church promoted a superficial membership to an organization everyone belonged to by virtue of state decree.<sup>2</sup> It was Grundtvig and his followers who encouraged this with their stress on the church. The confession of the creed and reception of the sacraments were the important signs of consecrated membership in the church. For Kierkegaard this kind of orthodoxy encouraged externalism and irresponsible church membership. The established church, so to speak, became the proprietor of Christianity to whom everyone must go in order to enter the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

Kierkegaard admits that there is a place for organization or the "crowd" in worldly matter, but not in the religious sphere.<sup>4</sup> The "crowd" is an abstraction. It is a static thing. The religious man on the other hand is always striving before God.<sup>5</sup> When the individual takes refuge in

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<sup>2</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 205.

<sup>3</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View, translated by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 135.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>5</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 89.

the "crowd" in face of personal responsibility, the "crowd" becomes a demonic instrument and untruth.<sup>6</sup> Thus the established order not only deprives the individual of his person, but it also offers him protection from a personal God relationship.

The established order demands a totality of being and will not recognize that individual in his personal conviction and relation with God.<sup>7</sup>

Kierkegaard set out to split the "mass" into individuals and then into individuals before God. With the category of the individual, he hoped to provoke the established church to reestablish Christianity in the New Testament sense.<sup>8</sup> He contended that to arrive at true Christianity you must begin with the individual and his relation to God. Martin clearly defines his position.

To be a Christian in the New Testament sense means that every individual as an individual shall relate himself personally to Christ in fear and trembling through the leap of passionate decision in the despair of his guilt before God.<sup>9</sup>

Everyman stands in equality before God and is loved by God.<sup>10</sup> God invites all men to Himself, but each man must

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<sup>6</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 92.

<sup>8</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup>H. V. Martin, The Wings of Faith (New York: Philosophical Library, c.1951), p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Two Discourses at Communion, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), preface.

accept the invitation by a solitary venture of faith.<sup>11</sup> To establish this "I" and "Thou" relation, the individual must isolate himself from everyone. "The very first condition for becoming a Christian is to be absolutely introverted. Being thus infinitely introverted, the introvert has nothing to do with anyone else."<sup>12</sup> The truly spiritual man must be able to endure isolation so that he is not dependent upon "the other."<sup>13</sup>

It is in this solitude that the individual is confronted by God. Confronted by the absolute demand of God, the individual, if serious becomes conscious of the reality of his sin. This is the conditio sine qua non of Christianity, and it is possible only for the individual as an individual.<sup>14</sup> In this condition, the individual must make the choice of faith and rely upon God's grace. Kierkegaard describes this action in "The Moral" of his first edition of Training in Christianity.

It is that everyone for himself in quiet inwardness before God, admits how he stands (in a relation of failing to reach the ideal) and accepts the grace God offers the imperfect. Then he shall go about his work asking God to

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<sup>11</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>13</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", pp. 162 f.

<sup>14</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, translated by Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954), p. 250.

help in all and humbling himself before God continually for failing to meet the requirement.<sup>15</sup>

In this venture of faith the individual breaks relations with all temporal and finite authority in order to endure the conflict with the powers of hell.<sup>16</sup> There is only one divine authority, Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup> Christ Himself, therefore, places the individual above the group.<sup>18</sup> Because the personal faith relation of the individual with God is pre-eminant, the established order becomes offended. The offense of Christianity is that God enters into a relation with the individual and that individual in turn owes all allegiance to God alone.<sup>19</sup> The individual who strives to be like God, totally subject to His will, stands in opposition to the establishment which would make a claim on his life.<sup>20</sup> Lowrie points out that Kierkegaard does not deny the divine authority of the church and ministry. He rebels only against such legal or constitutional authorities of the church which would infringe on the spiritual authority re-

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<sup>15</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 71.

<sup>16</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", p. 191.

<sup>17</sup>Kierkegaard, Two Discourses at Communion, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup>Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 216.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

siding in the individual.<sup>21</sup>

With the individual, Kierkegaard not only attempted to rescue Christianity from the established church, but also from the intellectualism of his age. He maintained that all truth must be appropriated by the individual in his life in terms of his God relation if it is to be truth for him. Kierkegaard refutes any attempt to bring the Christian life in a logical system by pointing to the concrete existence of the individual. The individual can never be comprehended in the logical abstraction of a system.<sup>22</sup> The individual also preserved Christianity from the pantheism of a Schleiermacher. When the individual maintains his identity there is no confusion between the vox populi and the vox Dei.<sup>23</sup> Although he stresses that the individual strives to be like God, there is always a return to the individual's own personality. The union of the individual with God proceeds through the personality and transforms the individual in the process.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the most gripping passages in Kierkegaard's works deal with his existential conception of man. The works vibrate with his passionate interest for "that individual I

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<sup>21</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 524.

<sup>22</sup>Edmund Clawney, "A Critical Estimate of Soren Kierkegaard," The Westminster Theological Journal, V (November, 1942), 29.

<sup>23</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View, p. 167.

<sup>24</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, edited and translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 63.

call my reader." It is difficult to overemphasize the important contribution he made in this area. His effort to stress the distinctive quality of each man as a person before God is essential to a true understanding of the concept of faith in the New Testament. He shed light for his contemporaries on the subjective apprehension of the Christian message. His effort to bring to bear the ethical consequences of a sincere personal faith can never be overlooked by the church.

Kierkegaard's isolation of the individual, however, raises an actual question. How is the individual related to the community of believers, the church? It is at this point where Kierkegaard appears most vulnerable. Martensen himself attacked him on the concept of the church. He admits the individual must be held up against Hegelian idealism and the personality of God and pantheism.<sup>25</sup> But he criticizes Kierkegaard for destroying the concept of the church in the process.<sup>26</sup> Martensen points out that personal existence can be developed only through a fellowship. The community depends on the individual, but the individual exists in and by the community.<sup>27</sup> The opposition of individualism and socialism is synthesized in the concept of the

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<sup>25</sup>H. L. Martensen, Christian Ethics, translated by C. Spence (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), pp. 221 f.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

church. The church is not a collection of individuals, but the body of Christ, an organic unity of members. Kierkegaard's concept of the kingdom of God lacked cosmic significance because he completely personalized "eternal blessedness."<sup>28</sup>

Martin and Lowrie both came to Kierkegaard's defense against Martensen's criticism. Lowrie maintains Martensen misinterpreted Kierkegaard's individual to mean individualistic. Kierkegaard was objecting only to the church as a society, which exists in abstracto prior, and apart from the individuals who make it up.<sup>29</sup> Martin's defense rests in the fact that Kierkegaard wanted to establish first of all responsible individuals before God. Only then would he consider their relation to the church.

It is only after the individual has acquired an ethical outlook, in the face of the whole world, that there can be any suggestion of really joining together.<sup>30</sup>

Kierkegaard probably never totally rejected the idea of the church. During his lifetime he attended church regularly, received the sacrament, and preached on occasion. He held the conviction that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church. His concept of the church is that it is

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>29</sup> Lowrie, op. cit., p. 525.

<sup>30</sup> Kierkegaard, The Present Age, cited in Martin op. cit., p. 127.



invisible and founded within the subjectivity of the individual.<sup>31</sup> He viewed the church as a body primarily in eschatological terms. Its real existence will be realized only in eternity. In time the church is always militant.<sup>32</sup> It exists as a parenthesis in Christ's life until his return.<sup>33</sup> For Kierkegaard the balance between religious isolation and the church will be realized in eternity.

"The congregation" therefore belongs properly to eternity; "the congregation" is at rest while "the individual" is at unrest. But this life is precisely the time of testing, the time of unrest--"the congregation" has its abiding place not in time but only in eternity, where it is the assembly at rest of all the individuals, who stood the test of combat and preparation.<sup>34</sup>

Even the most sympathetic reader of Kierkegaard will have to admit that he does not deal adequately with the relation of the individual to the church. In the first place, he never adequately distinguishes the concept of the church as it is developed in the New Testament over against the established order of his day.<sup>35</sup> Kierkegaard does not deal with the kingdom of God proclamation of Jesus in its universal scope. He does not come to terms with the petition "that they all may be one." The Pauline concept of the body

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<sup>31</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 197.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>35</sup>James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), p. 215.

of Christ is judiciously avoided. In view of this, the question could be asked if Kierkegaard was really in a position to judge the established church on New Testament grounds. Haecker points out this weakness which resulted from his undialectic approach to restore an ethical expression in Christendom.

This exclusive ethical passion finally led the great and experienced dialectician to misunderstand the dialectics of the church. It led him to ignore the fact that the church is like a net thrown into the sea, which catches all manner of fish, like a field sown with wheat which grows side by side with weeds, and that at the end of the world the angels will separate good from evil; that despite the rotten fish, despite weeds, the church is the holy net and the sowed field, but Kierkegaard wanted the separation in time.<sup>36</sup>

In the second place, it can be said that Kierkegaard's failure to relate the individual to the church cuts the individual off from the very means God employs to confront him. He isolates the individual so that technically at least, he is unable to hear the viva vox ecclesiae. Kierkegaard in his own lifetime was not consistent with this position. He did not live in abstracto but participated in the life of the church and the means of grace. His stress on the isolation of the individual threatens the very ethical response he desires. The individual becomes so preoccupied with his own condition that he fails to fulfill his responsibility to his brethren.

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<sup>36</sup>Theodore Haecker, Soren Kierkegaard, translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 43.

## CHAPTER V

### CHRISTENDOM AND THE PARADOX

It has been pointed out that Kierkegaard's critique was primarily intellectual and theological. It is understandable that he goes into length in the criticism of the message of the church itself. The next two chapters deal with Kierkegaard's appraisal of the Gospel in Christendom. The error of Christendom was not so much a matter of theological content as it was application of the Gospel. In this chapter, the rational objective form of the Gospel as it is communicated comes under criticism. Against this Kierkegaard set up the Paradox, the offense and the contemporaneous disciple.

The problem is summarized by Kierkegaard in the following passage.

It is an unpermissible and unlawful way people have become knowing about Christ, for the only permissible way is to be believing. People have mutually confirmed one another in the notion that by the aid of the upshot of Christ's life and the 1800 years (the consequences) they have become acquainted with the answer to the problem. By degrees, as this came to be accounted wisdom, all pith and vigor was distilled out of Christianity; the tension of the paradox was relaxed, one became a Christian without knowing it, and without in the least noticing the possibility of offense.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 38.

The preceding passage indicates Kierkegaard's critique of the intellectualism of his age. His generation thought of life in terms of understanding.<sup>2</sup> Danish orthodoxy under the influence of Hegel attempted to relate the Gospel in an objective rational form. This resulted in a strongly apologetic theology. Kierkegaard uses the "professor" as a symbol of this movement away from existence. He uses it as a characterization of Martensen who was professor of theology in Copenhagen. Kierkegaard labels any defender of Christianity on rational ground a Judas No. 2.<sup>3</sup> He criticizes the preaching of his day which "defends" and translates everything into "comprehending."<sup>4</sup> All apologetics are the device of Satan to undermine the authority of God.<sup>5</sup> He objected to the attempt at a "working", "positive" approach to Christianity that marked his age.<sup>6</sup>

This situation had its effect on the life of the church. It resulted in a divorce of life and thought. People became merely observers of the Christian system, and they failed

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<sup>2</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, edited and translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 218.

<sup>4</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 235.

<sup>5</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", p. 225.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Loewith, "On The Historical Understanding of Kierkegaard," The Review of Religion, VII (March, 1943), 234.

to enter the faith existentially.<sup>7</sup> Preachers made Christianity easy by rationally eliminating the offense of the New Testament message. Because the offense was eliminated, there was no real requirement for a personal commitment of faith. In short, the Gospel was never pointed in its radical form at the individual to force him to make a decision for or against it.<sup>8</sup>

Before describing Kierkegaard's correctives in this regard, it is necessary to understand a basic principle underlying this whole section. Kierkegaard maintained that truth is not a form of doctrine but a mode of existence.<sup>9</sup> A man possesses the truth as he lives in the truth.<sup>10</sup> Thus he posits the thesis "truth is subjectivity." When speaking of the Christian he does not deny objective truth or revelation. His point is "only truth that edifies is truth for me."<sup>11</sup> The subject does not receive the Christian truth from within himself but from the revelation of God in history.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup>Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, For Self Examination, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 60 f.

<sup>9</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Christian Discourses, translated by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 221.

<sup>10</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 228.

<sup>11</sup>Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 224.

<sup>12</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1941), p. 498.

truth for a Christian is revealed in Jesus Christ. He is the truth, and His life expresses the way to the truth.<sup>13</sup> To have the truth means to become a spiritual person in a covenant relation with God.<sup>14</sup> The important point is that truth must be approached subjectively; that is, it must be translated into the area of a person's existence.<sup>15</sup>

It is from this understanding of the apprehension of truth that Kierkegaard derives the principle of reduplication, which underlies the entire attack.<sup>16</sup> It is the principle that a man must be what he thinks and teaches.<sup>17</sup> When a man in truth relates himself to God this relationship is not only expressed in words but also by permitting God to transform his entire life.<sup>18</sup> To be a Christian means to reduplicate in one's existence the truth of Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup> This prin-

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<sup>13</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 202.

<sup>14</sup>Theodore Haecker, Soren Kierkegaard, translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 178.

<sup>16</sup>Edward D. Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Soren Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 49.

<sup>17</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View, translated by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 132.

<sup>18</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 352.

<sup>19</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 234.

ciple of reduplication is especially important in relation to his concept of the Pattern.

In an attempt to bring the Christian message into the sphere of the Christian life, Kierkegaard begins by pointing to the paradox of faith, Jesus Christ. Christ is the absolute Paradox, the eternal Word which entered the sphere of time. He is the individual man who is also God. This Paradox is not subject to speculation on the part of man.<sup>20</sup> The Paradox cannot be judged in a human fashion or be known through world history.<sup>21</sup> Christ was completely "incognito" to his contemporaries as He is today.<sup>22</sup> The Godman is qualitatively different from anything man can comprehend.

There is, therefore, only one relation a man can have toward the Paradox. It is the faith relation.<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard completely rejects human reason in connection with faith. Faith and reason are incommensurate. Therefore, it is impossible to "prove" the validity of Christianity.

The proofs which Scripture present for Christ's divinity--His miracles, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven--are therefore only for faith, that is, they are not "proofs," they have no intention that all this agrees perfectly with reason; on the contrary, they would prove that it conflicts with reason and therefore is the object of faith.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

Kierkegaard's concept of faith is a highly dialectical one. It stands in relation to the absurd, the Paradox. It is a venture of trust in God that enables the individual to leap over the uncertainty involved in holding to the Paradox, which is an offense to man.<sup>25</sup> Faith is man's highest passion which involves his total existence and by which he dies to himself and rises anew again in Christ.<sup>26</sup>

The offense of the Paradox is that Christ as a man claims to be God.<sup>27</sup> It is only by faith that a man overcomes this scandal to human understanding. At this point, however, the believer himself becomes an offense to the world and the object of scorn.<sup>28</sup> Faith involves the decision to follow the Paradox in suffering and humiliation before the world.<sup>29</sup> Faith is proportionate to the will to suffer for one's faith.<sup>30</sup> When this possibility of offense and suffering is removed, so is Christianity removed. Thus Kierkegaard by the offense of faith in the Paradox attempted to drive the individual to translate his theology into the area of existence.

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<sup>25</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 540.

<sup>26</sup>Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 224.

<sup>27</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 83.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>30</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 271.



Kierkegaard had much to say on how the Gospel was to be communicated in view of what has just been outlined. Since Jesus Christ is a sign of contradiction, this communication cannot be simply a matter of teaching doctrines.<sup>31</sup> The Christian message must be proclaimed in such a way that it presents faith with the choice to be or not to be offended.<sup>32</sup> An individual's faith is confronted only when the communicator completely negates himself and by reduplication points to the Paradox.<sup>33</sup> Thus he employs the term "indirect communication." When using this term after the 1846 Experience, he does not refer to the subtle indirect manner of his early work. He senses that this was simply a trick of the intellect, which from the Christian point of view was of no value. Communication of Christianity must ultimately end in bearing witness. Truth does not lie in the subject, but in God.<sup>34</sup> "Christianity alone is direct speech."<sup>35</sup> It is direct in that God directly confronts a man and forces him to make a decision. It is indirect inasmuch as it deals with the Paradox and can be received only by faith.

The question now arises, "How does God confront the individual and bring him to the point of faith?" Kierkegaard

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<sup>31</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, pp. 126 f.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>35</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 52.

himself recognizes how crucial the question is. "The difficulty of Christianity emerges whenever it is to be made present and actual; whenever it is uttered, as it is, and uttered now, at this instant, and to them precisely to them who are now living."<sup>36</sup> The individual to be a disciple must become contemporaneous with Christ. To be contemporaneous with Christ means to be transformed in His likeness, to bridge the infinite chasm separating God and man.<sup>37</sup> It is only in this "situation" that the individual receives the Gospel message.<sup>38</sup>

"This concept of "contemporaneity" is one of the most difficult to grasp in Kierkegaard. It is basic to his understanding of Christianity because it involves his whole concept of redemptive history. In view of the absolute there is only one tense, the present. Christ's life on earth was not simply an historical event, but an invasion of the eternal God into time once and for all.<sup>39</sup> Jesus Christ is the once and for all manifestation of eternity in time. Thus Kierkegaard concludes:

History you can read and hear about referring to the past. Here, if you like, you can form your judgements according to the upshot. But Christ's life on earth

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<sup>36</sup>Kierkegaard, Christian Discourses, p. 236.

<sup>37</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 67.

<sup>38</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", p. 24.

<sup>39</sup>H. V. Martin, The Wings of Faith (New York: Philosophical Library, c.1951), p. 56.

is not a past event; in its time 1800 years ago it did not wait, nor does it wait now, for any assistance from the upshot. An historical Christianity is galimatias and unchristian confusion; for what true Christians there are contemporary with Christ, having nothing to do with Christians of former generations, but everything to do with the contemporary Christ. His earthly life accompanies the race, and accompanies every generation in particular, as the eternal history. His earthly life possesses the eternal contemporaneousness.<sup>40</sup>

The present is the only tense that is real for the individual.<sup>41</sup> He must be related to God in the present and not by the past acts of his fathers. Christ, the eternal factor, transcends the bonds of time and confronts each individual in the "moment."<sup>42</sup> The individual is confronted by Christ decisively in the present "moment." He either chooses or rejects Christ in faith.<sup>43</sup>

There was for Kierkegaard no essential difference between the situation of the disciples of Jesus and nineteenth century Christians. Both became contemporaneous with Christ through a leap of faith that accepted the eternal Paradox.<sup>44</sup>

Each successive generation on the other hand, does not believe by means of the testimony of the preceding generation.<sup>45</sup> The witness of the present generation is an "occasion"

<sup>40</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>42</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, translated by David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1936), p. 48.

<sup>43</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 367.

<sup>44</sup>Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, pp. 82 f.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

by virtue of which God confronts the individual.<sup>46</sup> Soper summarizes his point of view in the following statement.

The Scriptures, the enduring church, are excellent witnesses, perhaps, where they have been existentially true to the standard, yet the individual becomes a Christian by direct confrontation with the paradox and by the inward personal leap of faith.<sup>47</sup>

Kierkegaard was attempting with this concept of "contemporaneity" to make the Gospel a reality for the present. He recognized that faith was not simply a matter of agreeing with certain historical facts. He goes so far in his argument to say, "We see at once that the historical in the more concrete sense is a matter of indifference." It is at this point that Kierkegaard encounters difficulty. The problem for Kierkegaard was this: while he denied that any historical event could form the basis of eternal happiness, he had to reckon with Christ as anhistorical person.<sup>48</sup> The term "eternal contemporaneousness" of Christ did not exclude the unique historical acts of Christ's suffering and death in time.<sup>49</sup> Thus in the Fragments he concedes that at least this must be accepted concerning the historical Christ:

If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: "We believe that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>47</sup>David Wesley Soper, "The Danish Jeremiah," Religion In Life XIII (Autumn, 1944), 534.

<sup>48</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 367.

<sup>49</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 181.

of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died," it would be more than enough.<sup>50</sup>

It is with regard to his whole analysis of time and history that Kierkegaard finds many critics. Because he failed to take more seriously the historical events of God in Christ, his concept of the person and work of Christ is not always clearly defined. Collins observes, "The incarnation does not become for Kierkegaard, as it did for Christianity the central reality in and for all things. . ."<sup>51</sup> Kierkegaard, however, does not fall into a position which denies the essentially historical redemptive facts. With his emphasis on Christ as the Pattern for this life, he is forced to consider in detail the historical account of Christ.

A more pertinent criticism of Kierkegaard's view of redemptive history is offered by Oscar Cullmann. He maintains that in Kierkegaard the importance of redemptive history ends with the death of Christ. He fails to take seriously the post Easter events and their significance in continuing the redemptive line. He does not take into account the resurrected Christ. As Lord of the Church, He reigns and appropriates the redemptive gifts through the Paraclete.<sup>52</sup> The

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<sup>50</sup>Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, p. 87.

<sup>51</sup>James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), p. 173.

<sup>52</sup>Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, translated by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d.), p. 147.

result is that Kierkegaard abstracts the present from the line of redemptive history.<sup>53</sup> He forces the individual to disregard his present situation and environment and leap 1800 years back to the Christ event.<sup>54</sup> Mackintosh makes the same criticism when he states that Kierkegaard failed to discover God's divine purpose and work in all generations.<sup>55</sup>

This criticism appears weighty in view of Kierkegaard's attack upon Christendom. He does admit the present generation by its witness provides an "occasion" for God to confront the individual. However, the reader must look long before he finds a witness that meets Kierkegaard's standards. In the final stages of the attack, he even criticizes the witness of the apostles as being too broad and watered down.<sup>56</sup> Lowrie points out that with this criticism of the apostles, Kierkegaard cut off the last link he may have had with the church catholic through the ages.<sup>57</sup> In effect, he does abstract the individual not only from the community of today, but from the church of the past. In view of this it is questionable whether Kierkegaard ever satisfactorily answered the question of how God confronts the individual today.

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>55</sup>Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>56</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 282.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

Mackintosh states the problem clearly when he writes:

Kierkegaard will not see the promised Kingdom of God looming through the past, beckoning to the future, finally triumphant over human failure. For him only two realities are luminously visible--the God-man and his soul.<sup>58</sup>

Finally it might be said that it is questionable whether his concept of the Paradox actually meets the need he intended. The Paradox concept is no less theoretical than the traditional Chalcedonian formula. In the last analysis, Kierkegaard makes of faith a blind assent to this incomprehensible formulation.<sup>59</sup> The result is that faith becomes a possibility only for the mature man. "Becoming a Christian belongs to a much later age."<sup>60</sup> Children do not possess either the understanding or the passion to confront the offense of the cross.<sup>61</sup> Only a man can will to make the leap of faith and give up all for Christ.<sup>62</sup> He denies infant baptism and even confirmation on the grounds that the child is unable to take on the demand of the Gospel. With his exclusive emphasis on faith as "trust" on the part of the individual, Kierkegaard obscures the basically theocentric character of faith.

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<sup>58</sup>Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>60</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 532.

<sup>61</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 212.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

In spite of these difficulties that arise in Kierkegaard's understanding of how a man becomes a Christian, his contribution in this area is great. The church must forever struggle with the problem of making the Gospel a living power in the hearts of men. Kierkegaard reminds the church that faith can never be simply an assent to historical facts. The Christian in his total being must become involved in the Gospel. The importance of the present time for the individual and the view of faith as essentially a total commitment to God are brought in focus in the message of Kierkegaard. He reminds Christendom that revelation and faith are correlative concepts; that faith is founded in revelation, and revelation is apprehended only by faith.



## CHAPTER VI

### CHRISTENDOM AND THE PATTERN

Kierkegaard not only criticized the form in which Christendom was communicating the Gospel, but the content and its application to life as well. In this chapter, his critique of the theological misemphases of the church will be investigated together with his own "corrective" theology.

Kierkegaard began his open attack against Martensen on the occasion of Bishop Mynster's funeral. He attacks the eulogy that Mynster was "a true witness to the truth" on the principle of reduplication. A genuine witness to the truth must emulate in his life the truth to which he gives witness. God expects that when Christianity is introduced to the world at least the one who introduces it must be a Christian.<sup>1</sup> The clergy, however, in their preaching lacked seriousness. Everyone knows the preacher is just the opposite in life from what he is proclaiming.<sup>2</sup> The eloquence of their sermons is made of none effect by their failure to produce an existential expression.<sup>3</sup> Their preaching is

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<sup>1</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 112.

<sup>2</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, For Self Examination, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, edited and translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 343.

also marked by generalizations of the concept of sin. It soft pedals Christianity.<sup>4</sup> It lacks the existential "I" and "thou" quality and encourages admiration of the Christ but no followers of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps even more detrimental than this failure to reduplicate was the complete distortion of the content of the Christian message that the clergy witnessed. In the first place, Kierkegaard is critical of the Lutheran emphasis on justification by "faith alone." In view of his insistence on the individual reduplicating his thought in existence he reckoned this doctrine "faith alone" was for his age tantamount to "faith without works."<sup>6</sup> Christendom had learned to make Christianity easy with this emphasis. The sense of the ethical requirement, of the rejection of the world inherent in Christianity was slighted by Sunday confession and absolution.<sup>7</sup>

This personal irresponsibility was fostered in the second place by a false antithesis Christendom had concocted regarding "works" and "grace". Christendom concluded, "If

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<sup>4</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1944), p. 228.

<sup>6</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 41.

<sup>7</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 375.

I do works, I deserve merit. If it is grace alone, I don't need to work."<sup>8</sup> Thus Christendom employed the concept "grace alone" as an excuse for the individual who was not striving after the likeness of God.

In the third place, Christendom's view of Christ and the Redeemer and exalted Lord of the world contributed to this lethargy. The exaltation of Christ led the individual to believe the parousia is already present in the world. The church was triumphant already over the powers of the world. The followers of Christ were partaking now in the spoils of His conquest. This encourages a flock of admirers in Christendom, but it was a snare to anyone who would follow Christ in His suffering.<sup>9</sup>

Kierkegaard begins his corrective in this connection by introducing the concept of Christ as Pattern.

No, the Pattern must be brought to the fore, for the sake at least of creating some respect for Christianity, to get it made a little evident what it is to be a Christian, to get Christianity transferred from learned discussion and doubt and twaddle (the objective) into the subjective sphere;. . .<sup>10</sup>

Kierkegaard viewed the redemptive work of Christ in terms of His entire life. The story of His passion and death underlies His entire life.<sup>11</sup> Christ is the way and

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<sup>8</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, pp. 204 f.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 216. *Judge For Yourself*

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

the truth. That is, an individual cannot be a Christian only by believing in Christ. He must follow Him as the way to eternal blessedness.<sup>12</sup> Christ revealed Himself in His humiliation, while on earth.<sup>13</sup> To be a Christian means to follow this Pattern He set on earth.

Kierkegaard here employs the principle of reduplication in terms of the imitation of Christ. The Pattern obliges each individual to strive after His likeness.<sup>14</sup> Since Christ was an offense to the world and suffered in humiliation, the individual must be willing to endure the same suffering.<sup>15</sup> Kierkegaard, therefore, considered martyrdom as the ultimate expression of following the Pattern. With this emphasis on the Pattern Kierkegaard attempted to overcome a superficial admiration of Christ and force Christendom to follow Him in life. He contrasts the two attitudes in the following passage.

A follower strives to be what he admires; an admirer holds himself personally aloof, consciously or unconsciously, he does not discern that the object of his admiration makes a claim on him to be the things he admires.<sup>16</sup>

With this emphasis of the Pattern, Kierkegaard does not overlook Christ the Redeemer. There are a number of passages

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>14</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," p. 243.

<sup>15</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

in which he deals directly with the atonement. He came more and more, however, to stating this concept in relation to Christ the Pattern:

. . . surely as Savior of the world our Lord Jesus Christ brought no doctrine in the world and never lectured, but as the "Pattern" he required imitation, casting out if possible, by His atonement all anxious dread from men's souls.<sup>17</sup>

Kierkegaard viewed the present life as a time when God examines a man to see if he is a Christian.<sup>18</sup> It is a time of suffering for the faith which is the test of Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Kierkegaard views the present life as a militant one as also the church is militant. All triumphant theology must give way to the "Gospel of suffering." When an individual enters into this testing period, he recognizes his own frailty and sin. It is Christ the Redeemer who sustains him in his suffering and despair of sin. Thus it would not be fair to say Kierkegaard omits the crucial aspect of Christ's person and work.

The emphasis on the Pattern also shapes Kierkegaard's concept of faith and grace. He admits with Luther that faith is an inward property and cannot be judged. It can, however be known in "works of love."<sup>20</sup> Good works are a

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 181 f.

<sup>19</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourself, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 209 f.

<sup>20</sup>Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 317.

necessary expression of faith. This is not to say they have inherent merit. They are like the gift of a child to his parents who gave it the power to buy the gift in the first place.<sup>21</sup> Kierkegaard's corrective is the attempt to interrelate the Lutheran conception of justifying faith as trust in Christ, and the best Catholic interpretation of the imitation of Christ as the Pattern.<sup>22</sup>

Kierkegaard uses the term "grace" in two senses in order to include what the concept Pattern implies. When he speaks of "grace in the first instance" he refers to the grace by which God empowers a Christian to work out his own salvation as he faces the future. "Grace in the second instance" is God's merciful act of forgiveness for our past failure and sin.<sup>23</sup> Christendom took refuge in the latter aspect of grace and refused to consider the grace that empowers a man to follow the Pattern. Kierkegaard was here concerned with a misuse of the term which resulted in a misapplication to life. Christendom thought of grace in terms of indulgence, and Kierkegaard in terms of imitation and sacrifice.<sup>24</sup>

No man, however, can become blessed except by grace. The Apostles also were accepted by grace. But there

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>22</sup>H. V. Martin, The Wings of Faith (New York: Philosophical Library, c.1951), p. 113.

<sup>23</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 576.

<sup>24</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom," pp. 286 f.

is one sin which makes grace impossible, that is, insincerity; and there is one thing which God must unconditionally require, that is, sincerity.<sup>25</sup>

It must be said that Kierkegaard's correctives, the Pattern, works of love, grace in the first instant, were in themselves valid New Testament insights. They are necessary aspects of theology if Christianity is to involve man's total being. The difficulty in Kierkegaard arises, however, especially in the last stages of the attack. As he becomes involved in his polemic against the church the dialectical character of his earlier theology disappears. This development toward a one sided interpretation is discernible in his works. In his early works, Kierkegaard has praise for Luther and his corrective faith alone. He objects only to the way in which his followers misused his insight.<sup>26</sup> In the last stages of the attack he is vehement in his denunciation of Luther and his accursed doctrine.<sup>27</sup>

The same loss of the dialectic is evidenced in the way the Pattern completely overshadows the Redeemer. From the start Kierkegaard tended to lean heavily on the Pattern. In the end the Gospel is almost reduced to a nova lex. His understanding of the Pattern itself is curtailed by the

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<sup>25</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Christian Discourses, translated by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 195.

<sup>26</sup>Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourselves, p. 202.

<sup>27</sup>Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", p. 41.

manner in which he sharply separates the states of humiliation and exaltation. Only the former has relevance for our present life.<sup>28</sup> This results in his very austere view of the present life. He does not seriously account for the significance of the resurrection and the Lordship of Christ in the new eon. While he began with a profound sense of God's love and His gifts of joy in peace, this is not evidenced in his later polemical writings.

The cause for this unbalance and one sidedness of Kierkegaard's theology is attributed directly to his approach to the New Testament. He approached the New Testament as existentially as he did everything else. As in the case of all truth, what is true in the Scriptures was true for him only when he embodied it in his life. As he confronted the problems in Christendom, he became engaged in an existential struggle that led him to take hold of the Biblical solution which was a solution for him.<sup>29</sup> Thus Kierkegaard's Biblical exegesis is inseparably bound with his sphere of existence and the situation of his age. It is because of this personal involvement in laying bare the New Testament that the reader is so deeply moved by his works. They are a very personal and vital expression of a man's faith.

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<sup>28</sup>Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 161.

<sup>29</sup>Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto, Kierkegaard and the Bible (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 8 f.



However, within the strength of his basic hermeneutical principle, there is the weakness that led to the one sidedness of his theology. Kierkegaard becomes eclectic in his appeal to New Testament writings. He himself admits that he makes no attempt to give a complete system and that he is selective in his New Testament emphasis.<sup>30</sup> Because of the situation in which he found himself, such passages that deal with the Christian life, divine justice, sin and judgement, the Sermon on the Mount, and Christ's humiliation are stressed. On the other hand, he almost overlooks the concept of the body of Christ, the resurrection, the atonement etc. Over against Luther, who stressed Paul, Kierkegaard leans heavily on James.

It is probably too much to expect anyone so totally involved in a situation as Kierkegaard was to give an "objective" portrayal of the theology of the New Testament. It does seem, however, that he could have preserved a better balance had he developed a broader hermenetical principle. In his subjective interpretation he does not take seriously the basic principle that "Scripture interpretes Scripture." Nor does he seriously ponder the witness of the church in response to revelation in the Scriptures through the ages. His existential approach in effect lays the

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<sup>30</sup>Theodore Haecker, Soren Kierkegaard, translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 42.

groundwork for the liberal exegetes of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Surely one cannot deny the importance of this principle of Kierkegaard. When taken by itself, however, the result is the highly selective and subjective mutilation of the New Testament.

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<sup>31</sup> Minear and Morimoto, op. cit., p. 11.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

It is quite obvious that Kierkegaard's prophetic mission cannot be judged on the basis of its success or failure in his own time or in the present time for that matter. His voice is as one crying in the wilderness calling Christendom to return to God. Whenever the church falls into the snares of indifference and formalism, his message will be a corrective. As long as the church is subject to human frailty, he cannot be ignored.

Any revival of Kierkegaard's thought must be made with an understanding of the situation out of which he speaks. This is not true when one refers to the great system builders, but Kierkegaard has no system. He is only a "corrective." He can be taken seriously only when the object of his correction is kept in mind. It is necessary also to have charity in one's heart in studying his work. It is easy for the reader to be bruised by his one sided sharpness as he tries to communicate his message.

In evaluating this attempt at correcting a situation of his time, one must pay Kierkegaard the tribute Haecker does.

Kierkegaard grew up in the third generation of Goethe and the second generation of Hegel, and came of age in an atmosphere laden to excess with their ideas. It was for him to fight, not in the widespread middle class, nor official class, but as genius versus genius:

which was almost necessary since every sphere requires its own savior, to defend the supernatural against the natural, the transcendence of God against the immanence of rational philosophers, the personal God against pantheism, to urge the absolute singleness of the God-man, the reality of sin and salvation, and the love of God as opposed to that which men call love, the holiness of God as against the impurity and sentiment of the beautiful soul of Rousseau. This part of his mission Kierkegaard fulfilled as a servant of God in the service of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard's greatest contribution lies in the major emphases of his message rather than the specific detail. He was a man who had deep sensitivity for the pathos of the human being as he is related to his God. As a theologian who attempts to put this into concrete terms, Kierkegaard offers nothing essentially new and is himself subject to correction. It is important, therefore, that the church give Kierkegaard the place he himself requested. It is not the place of the great system builders upon whom the following generations depend and follow. It is the place of a prophet whose message is vital in any situation within the church where it can act as a needed corrective.

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<sup>1</sup>Theodore Haecker, Soren Kierkegaard, translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 58.

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