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## Soeren Aaby Kierkegaard

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**Soeren Aaby Kierkegaard**

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## I

Essays on Kierkegaard (just as such on many other great men) usually turn out to be no more than mere glimpses of the man and his work given by writers who are either for or against him, just as their studies have led them to see in him either a very great man or (to say the least) a very great enigma. It is therefore extremely difficult to arrive at an objective judgment of Kierkegaard by the study of biographies and historico-doctrinal monographs, no matter how many of them one may read. But to peruse his original writings is to the average student still less satisfactory, for unless he himself has patiently and laboriously plowed through his works, all of which have now appeared in English, he is hardly fair in judging Kierkegaard at all. Yet the average student of Kierkegaard has hardly the time, the ability, and the inclination to devote so much attention to so restricted a subject; all he can do is to read what scholars have written on him and to analyze in the light given him those works of Kierkegaard, either philosophical or theological, in which he is chiefly interested. The result is that he, too, will furnish a glimpse of Kierkegaard which may be of value to others inasmuch as it offers viewpoints and emphases that are all his own. This essay is no more than an attempt on the part of the writer to present to his readers impressions which he has gained from his study of what Kierkegaard himself has written and of what others have written about him.

Kierkegaard's influence on modern religious thought, as mediated especially through Barthian theologians, must certainly be recognized. He has been called by his admirers the "greatest Christian thinker of the nineteenth century," the "accusing angel



of contemporary religion,"<sup>1</sup> "le Pascal du Nord,"<sup>2</sup> "the greatest of all Christian psychologists,"<sup>3</sup> and so forth. On the other hand, as we have been told by a Kierkegaard *Kenner* of note, he has been known also as the "Schopenhauer of Denmark." Even Mackintosh admits that Kierkegaard "at last began to preach openly the negation of life" and "felt a growing sympathy with Schopenhauer."<sup>4</sup> Carl Meusel in his well-known *Kirchliches Handlexikon*, on the other hand, points out that his life and work were of great value to the Church of his day,<sup>5</sup> and in *Die Kirchliche Zeitschrift*<sup>6</sup> Prof. W. Rodemann devotes a lengthy and thorough article, "Kierkegaard's Einfluss auf die nordische Theologie und Kirche," to the far-reaching influence of Kierkegaard's work, in particular on Scandinavian religious thought and church life. It is true, for a long time Kierkegaard was almost entirely forgotten, but today he again is in the limelight, and the fact that all his works have now been translated into English proves how highly he is regarded by many in the English-speaking world. Our periodical will therefore do well to take notice of him.<sup>7</sup>

## II

Kierkegaard's life was lived in that calm and uneventful way which the retiring author, busy with the publication of his works, chose for himself because by such very simplicity and seclusion he could best serve the cause to which he had devoted himself. He was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 5, 1813, in a spacious, pretentious residence, which his retired, wealthy, but eccentric father had bought shortly before. It stood alongside the city hall, which faced a large square called the New Market. His father, a former manufacturer and merchant, was 57 years old at Soeren's birth and lived until his youngest son had become a man

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *American Lutheran*, Vol. XXII, No. 10, October, 1939, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses*; Strasbourg-Bureau de la Revue: 1. bis, Quai Saint-Thomas; Seizième Année — No. 1; p. 46; Janvier-Février, 1936.

<sup>3</sup> *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 218. H. R. Mackintosh; Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1939.

<sup>4</sup> *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> *Sub Kierkegaard*.

<sup>6</sup> 46. Jahrgang, Heft 1, Januar 1922. Wartburg Publishing House, Waverly, Iowa.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Lowrie in his excellent *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J., 1942, publishes the complete list of Kierkegaard's works which till 1942 had appeared in English. Since then the few remaining works not yet translated have also appeared in English.



of 25 years.<sup>8</sup> Of old Michael Pederson Kierkegaard's seven children but two survived him: Soeren Aaby, his last-born, and Peder Christian, his first-born, who later became a bishop in the Danish State Church and was throughout his life the very opposite and, in a way, also the opponent of his younger brother.

The student of Soeren Kierkegaard who wishes to understand his life and work must first learn to understand his ancestry and the strict, if not austere, training which he received in his early childhood. As a man he complained: "As a child I was strictly and most severely trained in the Christian religion. Humanly speaking, this bringing up was a species of madness, for my earliest childhood was made to groan under impressions too heavy even for the melancholy old man who laid them upon me."<sup>9</sup> Again: "I have never enjoyed the happiness of being a child."<sup>10</sup> This austerity of training largely had its source in the melancholy, hypochondriac attitude of his father, who, having once cursed God in the bitterness of his youthful experiences, imagined himself all his life to have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. Kierkegaard writes of this, no doubt, with a deep shudder: "How terrible about the man who once as a little boy, while herding the flocks on the heaths of Jutland, suffering greatly, in hunger and in want, stood upon a hill and cursed God—and the man was unable to forget it even when he was eighty-two years old."<sup>11</sup> Despite his father's harshness and moroseness Soeren was greatly attached to him and expressed his love toward him not merely by word but also by deed. Of him he writes gratefully: "I owe everything, from the beginning, to my father. When, melancholy as he was, he saw me melancholy, his prayer to me was: Be sure that you really love Jesus."<sup>12</sup> The father, who was stern and demanding, was also a brilliant thinker and, after his fashion, a devoted Christian, who never failed to attend church and hear friendly Bishop Mynster's impressive sermons. From active business the father retired at the age of 40, devoting himself to eager study and serious contemplation as also, in particular, to the training of his

<sup>8</sup> Cf. chaps. I and II of *Something About Kierkegaard*, by D. F. Swenson. Revised and enlarged edition, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1945; also *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*, by W. Lowrie. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J., 1942; above all, Lowrie's large biography of Kierkegaard. Oxford University Press, 1938.

<sup>9</sup> *The Point of View*, p. 76; quoted in *Something About Kierkegaard*, page 5.

<sup>10</sup> *The Journals of Kierkegaard*. Edited and translated by Alexander Dru. Oxford University Press, New York, 1938. P. 279, par. 860; quoted in *Something About Kierkegaard*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Dru: *Journals*, p. 150, par. 556.

<sup>12</sup> Dru: *Journals*, p. 246, par. 773.



youngest son, of whom he seems to have been quite proud. No wonder Soeren manifested his attachment by dedicating numerous works to his memory. Writes Professor Swenson: "It is moving to note the stereotyped regularity with which each succeeding volume of Kierkegaard's religious addresses was inscribed: 'To my deceased Father, Michael Pederson Kierkegaard, formerly a woollen merchant here in town.'" <sup>13</sup> The sad fellowship between father and son is well depicted in Kierkegaard's following description of it: "There once lived a father and a son. A son is a mirror in which the father sees himself reflected, and the father is also a mirror in which the son sees himself reflected as he will be in the future. But these two rarely contemplated one another thus, for their daily intercourse was through a gay and lively conversation. But it sometimes happened that the father stopped and faced his son with saddened visage, let his eye dwell upon him, and said to him, 'Poor boy, you are the victim of a silent despair!' Nothing more was ever said, either of what it meant or of how true it might be. The father thought that he was the cause of his son's melancholy, and the son thought that it was he who had caused his father so much grief—but never a word was exchanged between them on the subject." <sup>14</sup>

But it must not be thought that the large and well-furnished home of Michael Pederson Kierkegaard was a sort of melancholy madhouse, in which there was neither joy nor a healthy interest in life. There was, in fact, much love for study and culture and, if we may piece together Soeren's occasional remarks to this effect, a good deal of worldliness, too. In *Zwischen den Zeiten* <sup>15</sup> Hermann Diem admits that there is much in Kierkegaard that is "pathological" (psychoneurotic), but he warns the reader that one must not regard his psychology in any other way than normal, though perhaps mediocre. Mackintosh regards Kierkegaard's psychology as abnormal and calls attention to the fact that he has been called the man "of extraordinary intelligence with a sick imagination." <sup>16</sup> Douglas V. Steere, however, in *Christendom* <sup>17</sup> says, in a review of *Kierkegaard og Pengene*: "It [the book] shatters the legend and shows conclusively that Kierkegaard lived comfortably on a decent income derived from his father's property; that he did take interest on money; that he allowed himself certain little extravagances that garnished a life which during the

<sup>13</sup> *Something About Kierkegaard*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 192.

<sup>15</sup> "Methode der Kierkegaardforschung," Vol. 6, p. 162.

<sup>16</sup> *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 262.

<sup>17</sup> Vol. III, No. 1, p. 151. Winter, 1938.



years of his almost, unbelievable productivity was devoted to his writing from morning until into the night; that he and his estate derived more from the sale of books than has customarily been thought; that his gifts to the poor were substantial but not Franciscan in character; and finally that the customary account of his inheritance's being just used up at the time of his death is correct." The fact is, so far as one may judge from Kirkegaard's own writings, that he was a confirmed ascetic neither before nor after his father's death, but lived a comfortable life that was to his own liking, even though it was uneventful. W. Lowrie in his well-written *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* even has this detail: "During the month of November, 1847, he had *Gaensebraten* four times, larded lamb four times, salmon twice—not to speak of more ordinary viands. The inventory of his house reveals that when he died, there were thirty bottles of wine left."<sup>18</sup>

In his wealthy and cultured home young, brilliant Soeren, then, grew up, instructed by his father, instructing himself by much private reading, and attending such schools in Copenhagen as wealthy citizens would choose for their favorite sons.<sup>19</sup> In 1830 he matriculated at the University of Copenhagen and took up the study of theology, devoting also considerable time to philosophy and esthetics. He did not, however, complete his theological studies until after the death of his father, when, as a sort of tribute to him, he wrote the dissertation and passed the examination that entitled him to the ministry in the Danish State Church. Kierkegaard did not contemplate becoming a pastor, though later in his life, it seems, he planned to spend his last days in parish work, after having finished his self-chosen calling as writer of books which, in his estimation, the world so greatly needed. The opportunity, however, never came. Only twice did he leave his beloved Copenhagen to study in Berlin, the seat and source of the philosophy which had spread from Germany into Denmark and which he gradually learned to hate with a perfect hatred.

Sooner than he expected the busy pen fell from his limp hands. On October 2, 1855, he became unconscious as he was out taking a walk. It was found that his legs were paralyzed. He was taken to Frederik Hospital, where he expressed the thought that he had come here to die. Just before this mishap he had drawn the last funds left in the bank of his father's, originally not meager, inheritance. It sufficed to pay for his hospital expenses and for his funeral. In the hospital his life was sustained for forty days.

<sup>18</sup> P. 7; cf. also what W. Lowrie writes of his visits to King Christian VII, as also Kierkegaard's own remarks in his *Journals* on his association with Denmark's great men.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*, pp. 43 ff.



His sickness was attributed to a disease of the spine, but he himself declared his ailment to be psychic. Visitors friendly to him were admitted to see him, but not any ministers of the State Church, since by this time he had completely broken with the Danish State Church. A friend of his youth, however, Pastor Boesen, insisted on seeing him daily until near the end, when he was called away from town. Faithful as a pastor, he subjected Kierkegaard to frequent catechetical inquisitions. When thus he asked the patient whether he would receive Holy Communion, Kierkegaard replied that he would receive it from a layman, but not from a pastor. When he was reminded that this attitude certainly was not right, he replied categorically: "Then I die without it. I have made my choice." When he was asked whether he could pray to God in peace, he answered: "Yes, that I can." When Pastor Boesen said: "And this, then, is all because you believe and take refuge in God's grace in Christ?" he said: "Why, of course; what else?" The question of his burial was a rather delicate matter, since his last months had been spent in bitter attacks upon the Church. But finally it was decided to hold the funeral service in the Frue Kirke, the Bishop's cathedral, though the only ministers who officiated there were his brother, Peter Kierkegaard, and Dean Tryde. At the cemetery, however, Kierkegaard's nephew, Henrik Lund, contested the right of the Church to appropriate his uncle's body, and reading from John's letter to the Laodiceans, who were neither hot nor cold, he so vehemently held forth that the funeral gathering gradually dispersed and no church committal service was held. Kierkegaard was buried in the family lot, but the grave was not marked, and later on, when a marble slab was chosen to mark his burial place, it was made to lean against the pedestal of his father's monument. Thus father and son, who during their lives had been associated so long and intimately, were also united in death, Soeren's slab leaning against that of his father, just as the son had leaned upon his father while he was a child and a youth.<sup>20</sup>

To the reader it might appear as if we had crowded Kierkegaard's life and death too closely together. But Kierkegaard never lived to an old age; when he died, he was only a little more than forty-two years old. Within this short span of life, however, he had produced a vast number of books, all of which stood in close relation to the problems of his time, especially its religious and philosophical thought. In a well-written article, favorable to Kierkegaard, in the *Lutheran Church Review*, Prof. Adolf Hult

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. for further details Lowrie's readily accessible *A Shorter Life of Kierkegaard*, pp. 253 ff.



groups his career around four deeply felt experiences, or crises, that had an important bearing on his life and literary work.<sup>21</sup> The first was that of his "conversion," when on Sunday, April 22, 1838, he wrote in his diary: "If Christ shall enter in to dwell in me, it must come about according to the superscription above the Gospel of the day in the almanac: 'Christ enters in through closed doors.'" A few years before, Kierkegaard, being a university student and moving in circles which were downright worldly, if not profligate, had joined them in a life of sinful pleasure, though perhaps he had never become guilty of gross immorality. Of this perverse life he seriously repented as long as he lived, and from this deep and continuing repentance came the earnest desire to dedicate himself entirely to Christ in true fellowship, following Him in His footsteps of suffering. To this must be added the severe blow that struck him when on August 9, 1838, his aged father passed away, and that not until Soeren had discovered his soul-crushing secret, which had weighed and preyed on his mind for some threescore years and ten, his conviction that he had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost by cursing God in an hour of despair. Since then and until his death Kierkegaard devoted his life to make clear to his contemporaries what he thought it means to be a Christian.

The second experience crisis came soon afterwards, when on September 10, 1840, moved perhaps by the depressing loneliness which befell him because of his father's demise, he became engaged to Regina Olsen, a carefree, sunny, inexperienced young girl, who loved him with an honest and deep love and whom, again, he loved no less. Very soon, however, Kierkegaard realized that it would be sinful to join this innocent young girl to himself since he was so hopelessly melancholy and dedicated to an otherworldly cause. There is no reason to assume with Professor Brandes, a noted biographer of Kierkegaard, that physical causes impelled Kierkegaard to break off the engagement.<sup>22</sup> Hult no doubt is right in stating that he did it "out of love and pity for his beloved, fearing the tragical consequences of his deep melancholy, inherited from his father." So the engagement was broken off, and although Regina Olsen was afterwards happily, and very advantageously, married, Kierkegaard never quite overcame the agony of his broken engagement. Of her he speaks again and again in his *Journals*, where he says, for example: "When I left 'her,' I asked one thing of God—that I might succeed in writing and finishing *Either-Or* . . . and so to a country parsonage; for that, I thought,

<sup>21</sup> Vol. 25, No. 1, January, 1906, pp. 54 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Hult's article "Soeren Kierkegaard," *Lutheran Church Review*, page 67.



was the proper expression for giving up the world."<sup>23</sup> Despite his sorrow, however, Kierkegaard remained fairly busy. Eleven days before the engagement crisis, on September 29, 1841, he held his disputation for the philosophical doctor's degree, and ten days after the crisis he received his doctorate. On July 3, 1840, he had passed his theological examination.

Had no further crisis occurred in Kierkegaard's life, he now might have become ordained and finally settled down as a parish priest. But the moral dissolution in Europe since the July Revolution in 1830 had influenced also Denmark, where a frivolous, unprincipled spirit prevailed. The ungodly spirit of Copenhagen's worldly populace was reflected especially in *The Corsair* (*Korsären*), edited by a brilliant, but corrupt Jew, Meir Aaron Goldschmidt. *Korsären* had praised Kierkegaard's books and hailed him as Denmark's foremost writer, whereupon honest Kierkegaard begged the editor not to commend him since his flippant praise could be regarded by him in no other way than as a deliberate insult. This happened in 1845, when Kierkegaard was thirty-two years old. Goldschmidt replied to Kierkegaard by deriding and caricaturing him so grossly that he became the butt of ridicule in the whole town, and he no longer dared to show himself anywhere. But *Korsären* overdid its sordid work, and the result was that within half a year it had to go out of business. The returning boomerang struck the supercilious Goldschmidt and drove him out of town. Kierkegaard, however, was so greatly vexed by the experience that he turned all the more diligently to his self-chosen task of publishing religious books, by which he would call people to repentance.

The final experience or crisis came near Kierkegaard's end. In his religious writings Kierkegaard had emphasized a *personal* Christian faith and life over against the formalism of his age. The fault of this externalism, in his estimation, lay not so much with the people as with the clergy of the State Church, whose rationalistic and pantheistic (Hegelian) views made it impossible for them to be true Christians. Kierkegaard nevertheless attended church regularly. When, however, on January 30, 1854, Bishop Mynster died and Prof. H. L. Martensen took Mynster's place as Bishop of Zealand, and when, moreover, Martensen in an official eulogy praised his predecessor as an outstanding witness to the truth, Kierkegaard could no longer restrain himself, and he published one violent, invective article after another against the State Church and its clergy, first in the widely read paper *Fædrelandet* (*The Fatherland*) and after that in his own organ, *The Moment*, of

<sup>23</sup> Dru: *Journals*, p. 490, par. 1294.



which nine numbers were published, the last in September, 1855. But the exertion proved too much for his strength. Attacking others, he wore out himself. He died on November 11, 1855, 42 years and 6 months old.

In agreement with these four experiences, or crises, of Kierkegaard, Professor Hult divides his works into four classes, though usually they are classified merely as the *esthetic*, 1843—1846, and the *religious*, 1846—1855. Dr. Hult's grouping is as follows: (1) The *preparatory* writings, including a literary review of a writing by Hans Christian Andersen, the philosophical essay "On the Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates," his doctor's thesis, quite Hegelian in spirit and expression, but nevertheless prophetic of his later works, and a number of newspaper articles, some of which stirred up no little excitement, as, for example, his "Defense for the Emancipation of the Women," which was written when Kierkegaard was only 21 years old. In reality, however, it was no more than a piece of irony. (2) The *esthetic-philosophical* writings, with occasional psychologico-religious writings interspersed, as, for example, *Either-Or* (1843); *Fear and Trembling* (1843); *Repetition* (*Gjentagelse*), in the same year; *Philosophical Fragments* (1844); *The Concept of Anguish* (1844); *Stages on the Way of Life* (1845), and also minor writings, religious, humorous, and polemical. (3) The *religious and religious-philosophical* writings, to which belong *Edifying Addresses* (1847); *The Works of Love* (1847); *Christian Addresses* (1847); *The Sickness unto Death* (1849); *Exercise in Christianity* (1850); *Concerning My Activity as Author* (1851); *For Self-Trial* (1852); *Judge for Yourself* (posthumous, 1876), and many others. (4) The *ecclesiastical denunciatory* writings, in which Kierkegaard ruthlessly attacked the "official Christianity" of the State Church. Of these writings especially the condemnatory *This Must Be Said—Then Be It Said* (May, 1855), which was his ultimatum to the secure, impersonal Christianity of the "official Church" was widely read.<sup>24</sup>

### III

It goes beyond the scope of a brief essay to analyze Kierkegaard's various writings and, since this investigation concerns religion only, to discuss at length his basic philosophical premises. But a general characterization of his religious beliefs and aims as set forth in his various writings is indeed necessary, though not even this is a simple task and easy of execution.

<sup>24</sup> When Dr. Hult wrote his valuable article, very few of Kierkegaard's works had been translated into English; consequently he read them in the original and supplied the titles himself. In later translations the title wording is somewhat different, though not essentially so.



The following opinions may interest the reader as showing how extremely complex and difficult it is rightly to judge Kierkegaard. He himself put forth the claim that all his writings are fundamentally religious, serving an ultimate religious end. There is much truth in this affirmation, for, after all, the line of demarcation between philosophy and theology in Kierkegaard's writings is hard to trace. To him philosophy was religious in essence and religion philosophical. As a person reads his works, he gains the impression that to Kierkegaard his calling as a writer seemed to be a sort of atonement for the sins of his father, his own, and his contemporaries. Evidently he had the conviction that he was called by God to be a "voice in the wilderness." There was, no doubt, much compensation in this dedication, and from it he derived no little satisfaction.

W. S. Ferrie, in *The Evangelical Quarterly*,<sup>25</sup> in an article entitled "Kierkegaard: Hamlet or Jeremiah," closes his keen analysis of the man and his work with the words, which, we believe, are very fitting: "That experience [his personal tragedy throughout his life], which might have made him a Hamlet (with whom he has often been compared), did not in fact do so, but made him instead — if we must seek some comparison — a Jeremiah, a prophet for whom *via crucis* was *via lucis*." This agrees with the judgment of Eduard Platzhoff in the *Theologische Rundschau*,<sup>26</sup> in which he calls Kierkegaard "den Apostel des Ernstes und der Verinnerlichung" (S. 135) and says of him that he died as the "Wahrheitszeuge, der das Christsein wieder einmal schwer gemacht hat in einer Zeit, die es damit gar zu leicht nahm" (S. 226).

Hermann Diem, in *Zwischen den Zeiten*,<sup>27</sup> judges that it is very difficult to receive Kierkegaard among the theologians ("Kierkegaard unter die Theologen aufzunehmen"), and that because he does not present anywhere in his works a systematic (comprehensive) church doctrine. Then he goes on to say, pointing out the difference between Kierkegaard and Barth: "Karl Barth nimmt dagegen in seiner Dogmatik entschlossen den Standpunkt in der Kirche und bemueht sich um eine Kirchenlehre. Damit ist aber fuer ihn die Abgrenzung gegen Kierkegaard gegeben. Er braucht eine Lehre, auch wenn sie nur in der Form der Prolegomena moeglich ist. Zu einer solchen hat aber Kierkegaard direkt nichts zu sagen und Barth erwaeht ihn auch nur noch an zwei Stellen, ohne sich auf ihn fuer seine Arbeit zu be-

<sup>25</sup> James Clarke & Company, Ltd., London; Vol. VIII, 1936, p. 147.

<sup>26</sup> "Soeren Kierkegaard"; Vol. 4, Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tuebingen und Leipzig, 1901.

<sup>27</sup> "Methode der Kierkegaardforschung," Vol. 6, p. 170.



rufen (S. 72 und 404). Der Begriff des Paradoxen kommt ueberhaupt nicht mehr vor. Das dient wesentlich zur Klaerung der theologischen Lage. Wieweit Kierkegaard nach wie vor durch seine Problematik indirekt in der Barthschen Theologie wirkt, ist natuerlich eine andere Frage. Aber direkt kann sich Barth nicht mehr auf ihn berufen. Wenn das Unternehmen der Dogmatik wirklich gewagt wird, kann Kierkegaard nur noch als 'Korrektiv' dabei sein."

W. G. Moore, in *The Hibbert Journal*,<sup>28</sup> analyzes Kierkegaard's objective as a religious writer thus: "Living as a Christian, he is trying to deal with the philosophical explanation of the life of his own generation. In this process he meets of course, first and foremost, a system of thought which is in many ways the most imposing of modern times, the philosophy of Hegel. Not only is his whole work a commentary on that system, but he finds himself and becomes sure of his own real existence as a personality through an increasingly radical repudiation of Hegel. So that we could not unfairly say that where Hegel is right, Kierkegaard is wrong; where Kierkegaard is right, Hegel must be wrong" (p. 571 f.). He believes that Kierkegaard deserves a hearing today on various counts: "He recalls us to the mysteries of the personality, to the reality of God, to the truths which are to be known only by participation and decision" (p. 581).

Edmund P. Clowney, Jr., in the *Westminster Theological Journal*,<sup>29</sup> judging Kierkegaard purely from his philosophical works, views his whole metaphysical objective as a polemic against the essential principle of Hegelianism, namely, that "thought and being are one," and he says: "Against the speculative world-history system of Hegel, Kierkegaard would place as the canon of reality the existing Individual" (p. 36). Ultimately Dr. Clowney reaches this conclusion: "Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard stand on the same ground as over against Christianity. The ethical construction of Kierkegaard's Individual is vitiated by the relativism which the skeptic cannot escape. . . . The pathos of Kierkegaard's Individual may provide at least this service: it may call attention to the fact that there is a terror in the heart of a man who, ruling out God, attempts to be a god for himself. The force behind Soeren Kierkegaard's efforts is indeed despair: it is the despair of the autonomous Individual perishing in his own relativism. There is bitter irony in the fact that his dirge of pagan darkness

<sup>28</sup> "Kierkegaard and His Century"; October, 1937, to July, 1938, pp. 568 ff.

<sup>29</sup> "A Critical Estimate of Soeren Kierkegaard's Notion of the Individual," Vols. IV and V, November, 1941, to May, 1943, pp. 29 ff.



clothes itself in the language of Christian truth, which alone brings light" (p. 61).

Emanuel Hirsch, in *Zeitschrift fuer systematische Theologie*,<sup>30</sup> arrives at this conclusion concerning Kierkegaard: "Er hat die Menschen nicht mit dem Christlich-Religioesen gleich als mit einer toedlichen Forderung ueberfallen . . . er ist zu ihnen hingegangen und hat sie den Weg der Innerlichkeit zum Christentum zu fuehren gesucht. Er ist dem Humanen gegenueber nicht der Feind, sondern ein bei aller Strenge verstehender und liebender παιδαγωγός; εις Χριστόν" (p. 144).

E. Gomann, in the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*,<sup>31</sup> has this to say: "Kierkegaard accused Luther of having confused the spiritual with the secular *telos* when he taught that the faithful performance of daily duties were *Gottesdienst*. That was indeed a mistake on the part of the great thinker. For Luther was far from substituting work for worship. On the contrary, he intended to show that true worship is not confined to Sundays and festal days, nor is it left to the priests, but that it pervades everyday life and sanctifies the humblest occupation. But I wonder if, in this industrial age which idolizes labor, the higher aim of life is not pushed aside and the spiritual *telos*, if served at all, reduced to a 'Sunday business.' For without the belief in work righteousness there is so much 'activism,' or rather *Treiberei* in the Church of today that one would think Luther's *Gottesdienst* is 'workshop' rather than worship, an ordinary business rather than the contemplation and aspiration of the highest value—God and fellowship with Him through the atonement. On the other hand, seeing that the deeper meaning of justification by faith is largely lost to the twentieth-century man, and that for many grace has become a pillow of self-contentment, proud humility, and spiritual laziness, Kierkegaard's 'fear and trembling' can stir up our hearts to self-examination and reorientation and fill us with new zeal for the Kingdom of God. For the 'individual before God' cannot lie down in idleness on a 'confirmed faith.' He must love as well as believe and work." (P. 407 f.)

O. P. Kretzmann, in the *American Lutheran*,<sup>32</sup> closes his brief, but excellent estimate of Kierkegaard and his work thus: "It is true, of course, that Kierkegaard was not a Lutheran in the historic sense of the word. His doctrine of inspiration is liberal. He has only contempt for the Church. At times his statements, especially in the *Journals*, are not even Christian. He has no system of

<sup>30</sup> "Kierkegaards Erstlingsschrift," Vol. 8, pp. 90 ff.; Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, Goettingen, 1931.

<sup>31</sup> "Soeren Kierkegaard and His Message," Vol. XVI, 1943, pp. 393 ff.

<sup>32</sup> "Soeren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth," Vol. 22, No. 10, October, 1939, p. 8.



theology and no roots in confessional Lutheranism. After this has been said, however, the fact remains that in calling man back to the concepts of sin, repentance, and faith he performed a remarkable service to the Church of the twentieth century."

F.R. Hellegers, in *The Presbyterian*,<sup>33</sup> offers this appraisal of Kierkegaard: "We, too, suffer from a smug, complacent Christianity, one which has removed the offense by becoming secular: Christ has become one in whom all are expected to be pleased; we vainly imagine that it is easy to be like Him; we forget that the men of His own day were deeply offended by Him; we ignore the fact that the wisdom of God must appear to worldly men as foolishness; we think that we can understand Christianity merely by studying it rather than by living it; ours, too, is a generation of admirers rather than followers of the Christ; we, too, lay violent hands on sacred things and forget that God can be known only by men who know awe and wonder, reverence and humility. Should we take Soeren Kierkegaard as our guide in theological thinking today? It would be rather difficult to do so and also rather unwise. He himself had no such thought in mind; he was not interested in building up a great system which others should follow; he wrote for 'that single individual whom I with joy and gratitude call my reader.' His interest was not that of developing all the great beliefs of Christianity, but rather that of plumbing this and that depth. And there he has few rivals."

William T. Riviere, writing in *The Christian Century*,<sup>34</sup> says: "To Kierkegaard the world as we can see it and live in it is not an open door toward God but a closed door. The door can be opened only from the other side. The door opened and the Gospels record what happened. This revelation reached Kierkegaard through the Bible. He humbly trusted his life and his soul to God, as he understood God and God's will. Unaffected by the beginnings of literary and historical criticism of the Bible, he would probably have remained unaffected today. To him, truth was subjective, but not all subjectivity was truth. And since he disliked professors anyway, one fears that the dialectic of criticism — the historical Jesus, the apocalyptic Jesus, form criticism — would have caused him to remark that the very sayings outweigh the lucubrations of professors who dissect the words in which the sayings reach us. In his last violent polemic Kierkegaard charged that the visible church and its ministers are characterized by an absolute lack of Christianity: 'Christianity is not there!' . . .

<sup>33</sup> "Kierkegaard and the Church," Vol. CXII, No. 16, April 16, 1942, page 5.

<sup>34</sup> "Introducing Kierkegaard," Vol. LVI, No. 39, Sept. 27, 1939, p. 1164 f.



Kierkegaard was an extremist, of course. . . . A good deal of the vitriol which Kierkegaard poured on his contemporaries in his native land ought to burn some of us American pastors; it has put some blisters on me."

Very aptly, in the writer's estimation, M. Storck, Bethel bei Bielefeld, in *Der Geisteskampf der Gegenwart*<sup>35</sup> sums up Kierkegaard's central theme. He writes: "Kierkegaards Anklage ist die: Das Christentum des Neuen Testaments ist untergegangen in Menschlichkeit. 'Welchen Sinn hat es doch, dass alle diese Tausende und aber Tausende ohne weiteres sich *Christen* nennen? Diese vielen, vielen Menschen, von denen die weitaus ueberwiegende Mehrzahl, soweit man ueberhaupt urteilen kann, das Leben in ganz andern Kategorien fuehrt, wovon man sich durch die einfachste Beobachtung ueberzeugen kann. Menschen, die niemals in die Kirche gehen, die niemals an Gott denken, nie seinen Namen nennen, ausgenommen, wenn sie fluchen! Menschen, denen es nie klar geworden ist, dass ihr Leben irgendwie Gott gegenueber verpflichtet ist. Doch alle diese Menschen, selbst die, die behaupten, dass Gott nicht da sei, sie sind alle *Christen*, werden vom Staat als Christen anerkannt, werden von der Kirche als *Christen* begraben und als *Christen* in die Ewigkeit entlassen.' Das ist das Verbrechen, Christ zu sein, ohne Bekenner zu sein, ohne Nachfolger zu sein. Wie kommt es aber, dass die Lehre von der Gnade, wonach der Suender selig wird, heute so viele 'Christen' als Anhaenger hat? Die Propheten des Alten Bundes, die Apostel, die Christus selber in die Welt sandte, sind um ihrer Verkuendigung willen verfolgt und getoetet worden. Seit langem ist die Christenheit aber keine verfolgte Christenheit mehr. Das sollte uns zu denken geben. Es bleiben nur noch zwei Moeglichkeiten der Erklaerung bei einer solchen Sachlage. Das Wort Gottes, das zu uns spricht als zu den immer Widersprechenden, hat mit den Herzensmeinungen des natuerlichen Menschen einen innigen Herzensbund geschlossen — oder aber die Menschen haben die Feindschaft gegen Gottes Wort abgelegt. Da ist etwas nicht in Ordnung, sagt uns Kierkegaard, und weist uns mit grenzenloser Ruecksichtslosigkeit auf unsere Unwahrhaftigkeit, auf unser staendiges Besserwissenwollen, wo Gott immer recht hat und wir immer unrecht. Wo wir nicht bereit sind, aus der Reflexion und dem Sinnenbetrug eines ungelebten Lebens ein Leben der Wirklichkeit vor Gott zu leben, da verfallen wir in die furchtbarste aller Sunden, Gott zu vergewaltigen und ihn zum Narren zu machen. In dieser absolut verkannten Lage des Menschen vor Gott sieht Kierkegaard die Schuld unseres Lebens. 'Es waere das Traurigste, was gedacht

<sup>35</sup> "Soeren Kierkegaard und wir," Vol. 69, No. 9, 1933, p. 339.



werden kann, wenn ein Mensch durch das Leben hindurchginge, ohne zu entdecken, dass er Gottes bedarf.' Das hat uns Kierkegaard mit nicht misszuverstehender Deutlichkeit wieder vor Augen gestellt. Das ist sein Verdienst und seine Mission an unsere Zeit." (P. 342 f.)

The problem of Kierkegaard is stated more or less clearly in all of these quotations, which have been selected not at random, but very carefully and from all sorts of writers: Lutheran and Reformed, orthodox and liberal. Briefly stated, Kierkegaard's objective in all his writings, no matter whether philosophical or religious, was to expose to his contemporaries the offense of formalism, of lip service, of religious hypocrisy, and to lead men back to what he regarded as true Christianity.

#### IV

The complaint has been voiced that Kierkegaard's writings make such difficult reading that he will never be popular even in learned circles. That is true, and Kierkegaard himself wanted to have it that way. His appeal was never to the masses, but always to the individual. M. Storck, in his article "Soeren Kierkegaard und wir"<sup>36</sup> puts it plainly and correctly when he writes: "Die Frage nach der Gemeinde stellt Kierkegaard nicht. Jeder Mensch ist einsam, immer und ueberall, und deshalb auch in seiner Kampfstellung Gott gegenueber. Vielleicht liegt hier einer der wichtigsten Angriffspunkte, der gegen Kierkegaards Theologie im engeren und weiteren Sinn ernsthaft erhoben werden koennte." What adds to the difficulty of perusing and understanding Kierkegaard's works is not so much his speculative thought, which often is purposely couched in vague and mysterious expressions, as rather his peculiar "indirect impartation" by a Socratic pedagogy, his "double-reflectivity," as Adolf Hult so well calls it. But the study of Kierkegaard also has its compensations, and the patient reader is apt to find himself very much attracted by his complex, subtle dialectic and wit.<sup>37</sup>

It is remarkable, however, that Kierkegaard in his specifically religious works, in which, in a special way, he appeals to the reader's soul, such as *Fear and Trembling*; *Edifying Addresses*; *Christian Addresses*; *Training in Christianity*; *For Self-Examination*; *Judge for Yourself*; *The Sickness unto Death*, often speaks with a clarity and persuasiveness that makes these works the most desirable of all he has written, no matter whether the reader finds

<sup>36</sup> *Der Geisteskampf der Gegenwart*, Vol. 69, No. 9, p. 343.

<sup>37</sup> For sheer delight read Kierkegaard's *Kritik der Gegenwart*. Translated by Theodor Haecker. 2d edition, Brenner-Verlag, Innsbruck, 1922.



himself *en rapport* with the author or not. They also clarify Kierkegaard's peculiar religious problem.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the most climactic of Kierkegaard's writings are *The Sickness unto Death*; *Training in Christianity*; *For Self-Examination*; *This Must Be Said—Then Be It Said*. In these works he bitterly condemns the Christianity of his age and demands a Christianity which consists in absolute imitation of the confessing, suffering Christ. He exhorts those who call themselves Christians to concede that while indeed they name themselves after Christ, they do not live after Him, and that not any word or institution of the Church, but the *fear of God* decides whether one is a Christian or not. In the last-named tract, which appeared in May, 1855, he even demands that Christians who cherish their salvation should no longer attend church since by staying away from public service they at least do not commit the sin of treating God as a fool. In these appeals Kierkegaard reaches the utmost extreme of religious fanaticism: Christianity has been feminized, softened; and the cause of this perversion is woman, for which reason also marriage must be rejected as incompatible with true Christianity, which in reality is total world abnegation, extreme suffering (for Christ's sake), and martyrdom.

The chief problem, according to Kierkegaard, that faces every person is *how actually to become a true Christian*, not merely how to get acquainted with Christianity as a doctrine or institution. Man is a sinner, and as such he is corrupt and in opposition to God. How, then, can man be so changed that he finds himself in real agreement with God and, by God's strength, walks God's way and not his own? This total change takes place only through the "miracle of faith," that is, man's deliberate decision by which he enters into that relation with God which renders him absolutely obedient to Him.

For the ordinary Christian, who is not inclined to meditate on religious problems, the way of becoming a Christian (according to Kierkegaard) is one of simple, honest obedience and effort to realize in his life the Christianity of the New Testament, at the same time honestly admitting his insufficiency, but also believing that divine grace will avail for his deficiency and imperfection. For the more alert person, however, who faces his religious problems with intelligence and full awareness of their implications, the way is much more difficult; for he is inclined to explore other possibilities of life, without, however, finding satisfaction in fol-

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<sup>38</sup> Kierkegaard's *Journals* do not only make delightful reading, but also throw much valuable light on his inward problems, his deep-going religious experiences, and his frequently almost overwhelming soul struggles.



lowing his own way, while at the same time his "sickness unto death," or his "despair," his awful consciousness of his total separation from God, his inward anguish of sin, is constantly tormenting him. From this there is no other escape than by a bold faith leap into the confidence attitude to Christ by virtue of his personal decision.

There are thus three stages which a person may face: (1) The *esthetic existence*, the stage of enjoyment, be it ever so refined, the end of which is despair. (2) The *ethical existence*, in which one makes the universal norm of humanity, the norm of duty, the standard of his life. But again and again in this ethical existence man faces sin and, because of sin, guilt, and, because of guilt, condemnation. But the very question "Guilty or not guilty?" leads him to consider Christianity, which promises him salvation from the power of sin. (3) The *Christian, or faith, existence*, in which a person by virtue of his absolute dedication to Christ (and so to God) realizes in his life that Christianity of honest confession and of Christlike living which alone is Christianity. The problem for a person thus consists in gaining confidence in God despite his sin and guilt, and this is possible only through total consecration to Christ, or through faith in the absurd, namely, that Christ is God and man at the same time. Christ is the absolute Paradox, in whom reason absolutely must be offended. To become a Christian therefore means constantly to surrender one's rational thinking and to gain by faith a blessed life in communion with God.

Kierkegaard was well instructed by his father, and later at the university, in the doctrines of Lutheranism, and the fundamentals of his own religious system are built up upon basic teachings of Lutheranism. At the same time Kierkegaard's speculative religion is also a total departure from the Lutheran doctrine. In his religious works we find a morbid onesidedness, which is essentially foreign to Lutheranism. Lutheranism in its pure form indeed emphasizes the absolute holiness and righteousness of God, more even than did Kierkegaard. Likewise Lutheranism emphasizes the damnable of sin, and that likewise more than did Kierkegaard. Again, Lutheranism emphasizes the necessity of faith—the *sola fide*—by far more than did Kierkegaard, and for the genuine Lutheran the *fides qua creditur*, saving, justifying faith, is not man's own decision, not man's own venture leap into a right attitude toward Christ, but the gift of the Holy Spirit. Lutheranism, moreover, emphasizes holiness of life as a most necessary fruit of faith, but it does not say with Kierkegaard that Christianity is essentially world abnegation, suffering, martyrdom, but rather: Christianity as a new faith life *shows itself* in all these



things; in other words, these are the fruits of true faith. Judged according to the norm of Lutheranism, Kierkegaard was not merely an extremist, but a departer: he left the safe ground of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and lost himself in a religious philosophy which at last terminated in utter religious pessimism. The fact that Kierkegaard at last adjured the Christian people of Copenhagen not to attend church, that he refused to admit a representative pastor to his sickroom, that he declined Holy Communion administered to him by a pastor, that he did not wish the ministration of a minister at his burial—all this proves that a thorough break with the Church had occurred, and an absolute repudiation of organized Christianity. Kierkegaard, starting as a rationalizing philosopher, ended as a rationalizing religious fanatic. It has been said that Kierkegaard's Christianity was that of the Old Testament, not that of the New Testament; but this contrast is not justified. Kierkegaard's Christianity was of his own making, a Christianity of defeatism, an impossible Christianity just because it was a Christianity of pessimism. Certainly, the Christian following Christ and the Apostles is not "an isolated individual, alone with God, and in contact with the world only through suffering,"<sup>39</sup> but one of faith and fellowship with others,<sup>40</sup> one of deep and constant joyousness and kindness,<sup>41</sup> one of real appreciation of all gifts of God, temporal and spiritual,<sup>42</sup> in short, the very opposite of Kierkegaard's morbid, melancholy substitute for Christianity.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *The Concordia Cyclopedia*, sub Kierkegaard.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Acts 2:42-47.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Phil. 4:4 ff.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the very helpful article "Soeren Kierkegaard" by Dean Gross, in *Monatsschrift fuer Pastoraltheologie*, Vol. 9, pp. 24 ff., which is perhaps the finest introductory article to Kierkegaard which this writer has ever read. Dean Gross admits Kierkegaard's vanity and psychoneurotic tendency, his onesidedness and exaggeration, but also points out his deep seriousness in telling his contemporaries that a formal Christianity is no Christianity at all, for which reason he had a definite mission in his time and still has a mission today. To this we agree; but, with *The Presbyterian*, we must say that we cannot agree to receive Kierkegaard as a guide, for when he theologizes, he teaches commandments of men, not the Word of God. This does not mean that we recognize no value in his work; but it does mean that we do not value his work when it goes beyond Scripture and purposes to burden us with a Christianity that does not take cognizance of the principle of Christian liberty, which St. Paul so strenuously defends in his Epistle to the Galatians. It speaks well for Karl Barth that gradually he has moved away from Kierkegaard and is building up his *Dogmatik* along the lines of the traditional *Kirchenlehre*. We do not believe that Barth in his *Dogmatik* represents the orthodox Christian faith, but there certainly is between him and Kierkegaard a great gulf. Kierkegaard merely offers certain emphases, while Barth again endeavors to present a more or less complete system of doctrine.



## V

It is true, Kierkegaard was greatly offended at the paganism of his age and, we must add, at the worldliness that had entered into the Danish State Church, at the formality of religion, the lip service, the externalism both of the clergy and laymen of his day. He indeed had reason to raise his voice against the rationalism which from Germany had entered into the ecclesiastical circles of his country, against the sham and pretense prevalent about him. But it must not be forgotten that there were men in Denmark, too, who were leading back the masses to the fundamentals of Christianity, and that in a quiet, normal, Scriptural way.

There was, for example, Bishop Mynster, whom despite his criticism Kierkegaard personally esteemed and whose services he diligently attended as long as he lived. Bishop Mynster may not have been without fault. But Bishop Martensen was not wrong when in the eulogy of his predecessor he praised Mynster as a witness to the truth. He was that indeed. While crass rationalism generally prevailed in ecclesiastical circles, the pious common people held to their Bible and Catechism, their ancient sermon postils and books of devotions, and it was to this pious, simple Christian folk that Mynster, eloquent, impressive, and devout as he was, largely ministered. Meusel, in his *Kirchliches Handlexikon*,<sup>44</sup> says of him: "Sein Leben lang hat er wie eine feste Mauer gegen den Ansturm des Liberalismus dagestanden." Kierkegaard's *Journals* show that Bishop Mynster, though frequently tormented by Kierkegaard's visits, personally treated him with the greatest consideration. No doubt Bishop Martensen was right when he said of Mynster: "Er gehoert in unserm Vaterlande zu denen, die nicht vergessen werden koennen; denn er ist fuer viele das Beste gewesen, was ein Mensch fuer andere sein kann, naemlich der Weg zum Wege."<sup>45</sup>

Kierkegaard's final onslaught upon the Church, his ecclesiastical denunciatory period, as Dr. Hult calls it, began when Bishop Martensen, Mynster's successor, praised his predecessor as a witness to the truth. Kierkegaard had no liking for Bishop Martensen, and perhaps this personal dislike for the man had much to do with his violent attack upon him. But Dr. Hans Lassen Martensen had come a long way from Hegel and Schleiermacher, from Tauler and Jakob Boehme, until on February 3, 1884, he, on his deathbed, made this confession: "Nichts ist mir gewisser als der auferstandene, gen Himmel gefahrene Christus und sein himmlisches Reich." In Martensen's *Dogmatik* and *Ethik* Lutheranism does not

<sup>44</sup> Cf. sub Jakob Peter Mynster.

<sup>45</sup> Meusel, *Kirchliches Handlexikon*, sub Mynster.



appear in an unadulterated form. They show very much the influence of Hegelian pantheism and of mysticism. Nevertheless both Mynster and Martensen did far more for the Christianizing of the Danish people by their quiet, sane, Scriptural approach than Kierkegaard did by his use of philosophic speculation, ironic ridicule, and vehement fanaticism.

In his *Journals* Soeren Kierkegaard exhibits a cordial contempt for Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, Danish bishop, poet, and hymn writer. He writes of him, for example: "Grundtvig's preaching is nothing but a constantly reiterated wandering of the imagination, such that no legs can ever keep up with it; it is a weekly evacuation."<sup>46</sup> It must indeed be admitted that Grundtvig erred in many ways and on many points. He regarded, for example, the Apostles' Creed as coming directly from the very mouth of Christ and as being His *viva vox*, which deserves a place far above Scripture itself. His enthusiasm did not permit him to accept the historic Christian doctrine regarding the value and place of Scripture as an authority in doctrine and life. He also attacked the prevailing Church and its clergy; but despite all these faults Grundtvig's main attack was upon the prevalent rationalism of his day, and his witness for the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the vicarious atonement, and other fundamentals was quite definite. In the light in which he saw the truth, he labored diligently and faithfully to gather God's elect into Christ's fold and to establish them in the faith and secure them against the sham of rationalism and formalism. Meusel says of him, in his *Kirchliches Handlexikon*: "Grundtvig hat mit warmem Herzensglauben den in der Gemeinde lebendigen Herrn als ein treuer Zeuge bekannt und ist fuer Unzaehlige im Norden ein Fuehrer zu ihm geworden."<sup>47</sup> By the way, Bishop Peter Kierkegaard, the elder brother of Soeren Kierkegaard, was a follower of Grundtvig, who is known as the "Prophet of the North," and whose funeral in Copenhagen, in September, 1872, was among the most imposing ever accorded to a church leader.

Let no one, then, think that the Lutheran Church in Denmark was so entirely corrupted that there was absolutely no spiritual life in it and that there were no believing leaders to direct the searching people to Christ. There were God's "seven thousand" also in the State Church of Denmark, and there was sincere and pure Gospel preaching, and it is quite generally conceded that wherever the Word of God was proclaimed in its truth, the churches

<sup>46</sup> Dru: *Journals*, p. 80, par. 313; cf. also other expressions in the *Journals* none too favorable to Grundtvig.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Kirchliches Handlexikon*, sub. Grundtvig.



were filled. Kierkegaard therefore was wrong in seeing nothing but formalism and in not recognizing that while there is the broad way which attracts the majority, there is still the narrow way upon which walk the poor in spirit, the Lord's elect saints, whose profession of the faith is never a lip service. Kierkegaard never in his writings shows a clear understanding of the true evangelical faith; both in spirit and in doctrine he differs from Lutheran and traditional Christianity.

## VI

Kierkegaard, it seems, could never appreciate Luther and his evangelical viewpoint. He writes of the great Reformer: "Surely it was a misunderstanding on Luther's part when he thought that the devil was hard upon him. It seems to me that, on the contrary, Satan must have been well pleased with Luther for having produced a confusion which is not so easily put right, because it requires a noble and honest man, and honest, noble men are, as we all know, few and far between."<sup>48</sup> Again: "The closer I examine Luther, the more convinced do I become that he was muddle-headed. It is a comfortable kind of reforming which consists in throwing off burdens and making life easier—that is an easy way of getting one's friends to help. True reforming always means to make life more difficult, to lay on burdens; and the true reformer is therefore always put to death as though he were the enemy of mankind."<sup>49</sup> Or: "I often think, when I look at Luther, that there is one very doubtful thing about him: a reformer who wanted to cast off the yoke—is a very doubtful matter. . . . That is why Luther had such an easy fight. The difficulty lies precisely in suffering, because one must make things more difficult for others. When one fights to throw off burdens, one is of course understood by very many whose interest it is to throw off the burdens. And consequently the real Christian sign, double danger, is absent. In a sense Luther took the matter too lightly. He ought to have made it apparent that the freedom he was fighting for (and in that fight he was on the right side) led to making life, the spiritual life, infinitely more exhausting than it had been before. If he had kept strictly to that, then practically no one would have remained with him, and he would have reached the sphere of double danger; for no one follows one in order to have their lives made stricter."<sup>50</sup>

Why this criticism of Luther? Because Kierkegaard never came to a clear knowledge of the basic difference between Law

<sup>48</sup> Dru: *Journals*, p. 501, par. 1316.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298, par. 889.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284, par. 1079.



and Gospel, but consistently mingled Law and Gospel. Ultimately Kierkegaard's entire teaching was Law. Christianity to him was not essentially trust in Christ and the blessed rejoicing which flows from reliance on Christ, but asceticism, self-imposed suffering, work righteousness. Even Kierkegaard's best works are far removed from the spirit of the Gospel, the spirit of Christ, the spirit of spiritual joy which is the gift of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of true believers. Not all that Kierkegaard regarded as such was externalism: in his condemnation he made no distinction between true believers and nominal church members, and that because he never understood the joyousness of faith and the sweetness of Christian liberty which is in Christ Jesus. Kierkegaard certainly never understood 1 Cor. 3:21-23. So he is not a safe guide of the Christian Church of today. His theology is not rooted in Scripture and the Christian creeds, but in a new norm of Christianity which basically is rationalistic and therefore anti-Christian. He did not preach Law and Gospel, sin and grace, justification and sanctification, Christian good works and Christian liberty, as these are set forth in God's Word and the Lutheran Confession, but he taught a rationalistic enthusiasm which one-sidedly, and even wrongly so, emphasized sin without pointing out to his readers how they might become free from sin. He preached rightly neither the Law nor the Gospel, but pictured to his contemporaries a Christianity which is not that of the Gospels, or of free grace.

In concluding his polemic against the "heavenly prophets," Luther warns his readers against these false teachers for two reasons. Of the second he says: "The other [reason] is that these prophets avoid, flee, and are silent with regard to the chief part of the Christian doctrine; for they nowhere teach how we may become free from sin, obtain a good conscience, and secure a peaceful, happy heart in relation to God. This is the true sign that their [guiding] spirit is the devil, who indeed arouses, terrifies, and confuses the consciences with strange words, but does not lead them to quietness and peace. Nor can he do it, but he goes about and inculcates certain strange works with which they should exercise and torment themselves. But they do not know anything about how a good conscience is secured and constituted, for they have never felt nor known this." As one studies Kierkegaard's religious works, and even the best of them, these words of Luther seem to characterize his chief fault: not knowing the Gospel himself, he did not know the art of teaching how sinners "may become free from sin, obtain a good conscience, and secure a peaceful, happy heart in relation to God." Our slogan therefore dare not be: "Back to Kierkegaard!" But it must be: "Back to Scripture! Back to Christ!" And the Lutheran believer, who



goes back to Scripture, cannot do otherwise than go back to Luther, whose every theological thought was rooted in, and drawn from, Holy Scripture, in particular the Gospel of Christ. This explains his Christian joyousness and his triumphant assurance of salvation; and this too marks the great difference between Luther and Kierkegaard.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

### Some Remarks on the Question of the Salvation of the Heathen

"In order to save universal grace before the forum of the human understanding, some have thought that the Gentiles will be saved for Christ's sake, without faith in the Gospel, on account of their moral aspirations (thus, for example, Hofmann). Others have assumed that after this life an opportunity to hear the Gospel and to believe will be offered (Martensen, Kliefoth, etc.). But these are human speculations, without any basis in Scripture" (Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, II, p. 35). Millions of men have died who never in their life heard the Gospel of Christ, their Savior. Shall we say that they are eternally lost? What, then, becomes of the universality of God's grace? This forms, says the *Lange-Schaff Commentary*, "one of the most bewildering subjects in religion" (on 1 Pet. 3:19 f.). "Christians of all times have been concerned over the fate of those who in this life have never heard the name of Christ." Thus Dr. C. M. Jacobs in *The Faith of the Church*, p. 61. Is there no hope for them? Then what becomes of the universality of God's grace in Christ? "The universality of Christ," says Jacobs (p. 59), "has always been a hard fact for men to grasp and hold."

Is there no way to solve this difficulty, no way to harmonize the truth of universal grace with the fact that many die who never heard the Gospel of grace? Human reason suggests various ways. Some have set up the monstrous thesis that such men may be saved through their moral endeavors. It is not surprising that the theology of Rome operates with this thesis. The Christian, too, is saved through his good works, says Rome. It was, therefore, good Romish theology when Andradius, the defender of the Council of Trent, declared that it is not only Scripture but also man's natural knowledge of God which engenders saving faith, and when, before him, Erasmus, the defender of the Pope, declared that Cicero and other virtuous Gentiles "lead a quiet life above" (*Baier-Walther*, II, p. 10). Speaking for Rome, W. E. Orchard declares: "That the heathen can be saved, without ever having heard of Christ at all, is fortunately a doctrine tenaciously held by the