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THE CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALISM  
OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD AND ITS INFLUENCE  
UPON RUDOLF BULTMANN

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O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou didst not come to the world to be served, but also surely not to be admired or in that sense to be worshipped. Thou wast the way and the truth--and it was followers only Thou didst demand. Arouse us therefore if we have dozed away into this delusion, save us from the error of wishing to admire Thee instead of being willing to follow Thee and to resemble Thee.

Soren Kierkegaard

## INTRODUCTION

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem herein undertaken consists of an analysis of the Christian existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard with a view toward determining his influence upon Rudolf Bultmann. This will involve a survey of the theological beliefs of both men and a tracing of the direct influences as well as the points of difference. The comparisons and contrasts will center in those elements which have to do primarily with Christian existentialism.

The study will be largely theological and philosophical. However, the life of Kierkegaard is so intimately related to his theology that some biography is deemed necessary.

It is hoped that the study may be helpful in introducing, to the layman, something of the thought of these two men. Therefore, some definitions and certain historical data are to be included.

### JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

Both of these men are being constantly mentioned, referred to and written about. Many of the current theological books and journals contain helpful insights into the

thinking of each. This fact alone suggests the importance of each to the study of theology.

One of the questions being asked today by student and layman alike is--What is Christian existentialism? The Church of today indicates a deep interest in this problem. Any answer to this problem must involve the thought of Søren Kierkegaard who is the father of Christian existentialism.

During the second world war the "demythologizing" controversy arose in Germany. During this controversy Rudolf Bultmann came forward with what he considered to be a more satisfactory presentation of Christianity. Bultmann's thesis is that something must be done with what he calls the mythology of the New Testament. In the development of his thesis Bultmann indicates concepts which have a direct relationship to some of the Christian existential concepts of Kierkegaard. This fact justifies the exploration of the problem in order to determine the degree of influence.

A further justifying reason for the study is the belief that these men have a message for the Church of today. What is it that they were trying to do? An analysis of this question should provide the Christian with a deepened perspective and some helpful insights for the present-day ministry.

In summary, the justifying value of this study is to be found in these facts: (1) There is a current interest in the thinking of these men. (2) Christian existentialism is the focus of much attention and many are eager to learn more about it. (3) There is good evidence to believe that Bultmann was influenced by Kierkegaard. (4) These men have a contribution to make to our day.

#### A. Preview of the Method of Procedure

The first chapter will be a survey of the formative influences of Kierkegaard's life. This will have to be brief because it is not the main thrust of the study. Yet it is necessary to bring the study into proper focus. "In an exceptional degree this man's thought was shaped by his life."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, some insights into his life will introduce the reader to his personality. For Kierkegaard's reality was what he himself had passed through, and students who are working over his ideas find it necessary to start from his personality.<sup>2</sup>

These formative influences include the salient characteristics of the age in which Kierkegaard lived and biographical aspects, with four important events, highlighted.

. . . . .

1. H.R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, Scribner, New York, 1937, p. 220.

2. *Ibid.*



Chapter two will be a presentation of the existential thought of Kierkegaard as reflected in his works. The later works receive the major area of attention. The first section of this chapter is extra-Kierkegaardian and definitive. This is a setting forth of the characteristics of existential thinking. Then follows the basic concepts of Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion and the ethical principles of Christian living. The philosophy has to do with his presuppositions while the ethics has to do with the outworking of these in life.

Chapter three represents the final step in the study. The purpose here is to show the influence of Kierkegaard's thought upon Rudolf Bultmann. The chapter includes a biographical sketch of Bultmann, the basic elements of his theology and a tracing of the Kierkegaardian influences. The conclusion of this chapter includes a noting of the ideas wherein Bultmann does not follow the Christian existentialism of Kierkegaard.

#### B. The Sources

The primary area of interest in this thesis is with the actual thought of Kierkegaard and Bultmann respectively. Therefore, the main sources will be those of the writings of these men as listed in the bibliography. However, these men are not easily understood at all points. Much has been written which is valuable commentary material upon their thinking. Where these secondary sources have a contribution

to make they will be employed. Of particular value are the current theological journals which contain articles bearing upon the subject of study.

Some of these secondary sources have been helpful in calling to attention pertinent material in the primary sources and have been used in this respect.

A SURVEY OF THE FORMATIVE INFLUENCES  
OF SOREN KIERKEGAARD'S LIFE

CHAPTER I

A. Introduction

A popular concept abroad today is that a life is influenced in the formative years and then it is lived. But, if one is to take into account his ever-present social environment and analyzes his experiences in relation to that environment, it can be questioned whether the popular concept is sufficient. The environmental factors of religion, home, politics, and education have a continuous formative influence upon each person, so long as he lives. This is particularly true with respect to Kierkegaard. He was sensitive to the pulse-beat of his age, and yet he possessed resources which enabled him to live above his age and to speak to it. In an uncommon manner his environment and his experiences shaped his thinking. In this chapter the attempt is to present in brief manner these formative influences which were operating in Kierkegaard until his death in 1855.

B. The Age in Which He Lived

1. Political and Religious Climate

The first part of the nineteenth century was a dis-

tressing period for Denmark. In 1807 the British fleet bombarded Copenhagen and captured the Dano-Norwegian fleet. In 1813, the year of Kierkegaard's birth, the country went bankrupt, and in 1814 the union of Denmark and Norway was dissolved. But hand in hand with the period of dissolution was a period of rebirth. There was a revival of art and literature as well as religious life. One of the outstanding men in the religious revival was Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>1</sup>

Copenhagen was a city of two hundred thousand inhabitants, the capital of Denmark, the residence of an absolute monarch, and the cultural center of the land. Besides the King's palaces and parks it possessed the one university (at that time) in Denmark; Frue Kirke was the cathedral of the bishop primate of the Danish Lutheran Church and was already adorned with Thorwaldsen's celebrated statues of Christ and the Twelve Apostles. Copenhagen also had a Royal Opera house, the Royal Theater, and the Royal Library. The city was not an industrial center but a cultural community toward which the artistic and literary talent of Denmark flowed. Kierkegaard, one of the few great men born there, loved his home city.<sup>2</sup>

The Lutheran Church of Denmark was faced with many of the problems of any state church. The trouble was that

. . . . .

1. Reider Thomte: Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1948, p. 3.
2. Walter Lowrie; A Short Life of Kierkegaard, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1942, pp. 3-4.

everyone was a Christian so that very few were really Christian. Kierkegaard made his own analysis of the religious situation of his day.

The misfortune of Christianity is clearly that the dialectical factor has been taken from Luther's doctrine of faith so that it has become a hiding-place for sheer paganism and epicureanism; people forget entirely that Luther was urging the claims of faith against a fantastically exaggerated asceticism.<sup>1</sup>

Whether the Danish Lutheranism of the 1800's was any worse than other Protestant Centers is a most difficult question. Kierkegaard saw the Danish Lutheranism of his time betraying the true meaning of justification by faith in two ways: first, by trying to combine it with or even subordinate it to, a metaphysical interpretation; second, by counting the Church as having already reached a state of grace so that it need only quietly meditate on its good fortune instead of engaging strenuously, in fear and trembling, in the struggle to appropriate what "following Christ" really implies.<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard felt that the one disease of his age was a divorce between thinking and life.

And so there live perhaps a great multitude of men who labor off and on to obscure their ethical and religious understanding which would lead them out into decisions and consequences which the lower nature does not love,

. . . . .

1. S.A. Kierkegaard: The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, Edited and Translated by Alexander Dru, Glasgow, Oxford University Press, 1938, p. 300, #899.
2. David E. Roberts: Existentialism and Religious Belief, Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1957, pp. 130-131.

extending meanwhile their aesthetic and metaphysical understanding, which ethically is a distraction.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard made the further criticism that men had forgotten the significance of existing as human individuals. The age had forsaken the individual and taken refuge in the collective idea. Men had lost themselves in a speculative contemplation of world history. The attitude of the observer (a purely objective attitude) had replaced choice and decision in human striving.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Philosophical Climate

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the greatest contribution to Danish thinking came from Germany. There were other outside influences as well, yet Danish philosophy always maintained a certain independence in its leanings toward individualism. By philosophical individualism is meant that view of life which maintains that the individual is of supreme value. The decisive ideal for an individual is that which is subjectively true, the insights and convictions of the individual spirit. When confronted with actions which involve choices with reference to good and evil the personality receives its real significance.<sup>3</sup>

In the time of Kierkegaard, Hegelianism was the

. . . . .

1. S.A. Kierkegaard: *The Sickness Unto Death*, Translation with an Introduction by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1941, pp. 152-153.
2. Thomte: *op. cit.*, p. 14.
3. *Ibid.*: p. 4.

ruling philosophy in Germany as well as in Denmark. Hegel's Absolute is no static identity but a "dialectic process" or a "logical" progression which builds upon the contradictory relationships which are part of its nature.<sup>1</sup>

Hegel views nature as a system of stages of which one necessarily rises out of the other, but not in such a way that one stage is caused by the other. He regards it as a faulty conception of other philosophies to look upon evolution as a process brought about by external forces or circumstances. It is the self-activity of the immanent idea which is the foundation of nature. Hence metamorphosis can only happen to the idea itself. All development therefore is a change in thought.<sup>2</sup>

...the state is the expression of the progression of God in the world. Each state, each civilization with its particular arts, religions, and sciences, each government embodies a phase of the universal idea or world-spirit. Thus the history of the world becomes the actual realization of an infinite, eternal, and objective mind. The state is the full reality of the moral idea. Hegel maintains that since the state is the true spiritual totality, the individual derives his true value through participation in the life of the state. The individual finds himself and realizes himself through participation in the institutions of society.<sup>3</sup>

Hegel describes orthodox religion as a clinging to the literal expressions of dogmas, unaware of the fact that the age of "immediate" religion had yielded to an age of culture and reflection. Rationalism presented a concept of God which was empty and finite. The task of philosophy is to find a way out of this dilemma.

While religiously the eternal truth is conceived in the

. . . . .

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.: p. 5.

forms of imagination as historical events or in external pictorial forms, philosophy translates the content of religion into the form of thought. Thus the distinction between philosophy and religion is one of form only.<sup>1</sup>

Hegel's philosophy does not exclude a theistic position, but his monistic evolution leads to a pantheistic view of life. Thus, he leaves the door wide open for a monistic-pantheistic religion.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary with Hegel was the German theologian Schleiermacher who emphasized the element of feeling in religion. He and Hegel had this belief in common--that all the opposites of life could be brought into harmony and mediated in a higher unity.<sup>3</sup>

The offense of New Testament Christianity was thus greatly reduced by the prevailing philosophical climate. These were the philosophical trends of Kierkegaard's day, the philosophy he studied and attempted to embrace for a time, but which he was soon to reject due to a void regarding the meaning of life.

### C. Biographical Aspects

#### 1. Birth

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was born on May 5, 1813 in Copenhagen, Denmark. His father was a retired wool mer-

. . . . .

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.: cf. pp. 5-6.



chant, having retired with an ample fortune. Søren Kierkegaard was the youngest of seven children born to elderly parents. The father, Michael Pendersen Kierkegaard, was 56 and the mother, Anne Sørensdalter Lund, was a servant in the house when Michael's first wife died without children. Both parents were of peasant stock of the Jutland heath.<sup>1</sup>

He was born in the great house his father had recently bought alongside the City Hall, facing one of the greatest squares of the city, called the New Market. In Copenhagen his whole life was spent; there he died on November 11, 1855; and there he was buried (with a popular demonstration which almost degenerated into riot) in the family lot, where a marble slab bearing his name now leans against his father's monument, though owing to the crazy jealousy of his elder brother, Peter Kierkegaard, there is no sign to indicate where his body lies.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Home Life

Søren Kierkegaard's home did not offer many diversions, and as he almost never went out, he early became accustomed to occupy himself alone and with his own thoughts. When he occasionally asked permission to go out, his father

. . . . .

1. Walter Lowrie: Kierkegaard, London, Oxford University Press, 1938, p. 19.
2. Walter Lowrie: A Short Life of Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 3.

generally refused to give it, though once in a while he proposed that Kierkegaard should take his hand and walk back and forth in the room. During these occasions they would go on imaginative tours to the country or abroad. The descriptions were so real at times that after half an hour of such a walk with his father he was as much overwhelmed and fatigued as if he had been a whole day out of doors.<sup>1</sup>

As the youth grew older he was permitted to listen in upon his father's philosophical discussions. The older he grew the more the father engaged him in conversation and debate.

His life did not know the various transitions which commonly mark the different periods of growth. When Kierkegaard grew older he had no toys to lay aside, for he had learned to play with that which was to be the serious business of his life, and yet it lost thereby nothing of its allurements.<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard also inherited from his father a melancholy disposition which was to pervade his life. The father, during some hardships of his youthful days, had cursed God on one occasion. For this he could never forgive himself. Then five months after his second marriage the first child was born. As a result, his life was per-

. . . . .

1. Ibid.: pp. 45-46.  
2. Ibid.: p. 48.

vaded by a sense of guilt which was deeply rooted. This had its influence upon the family and especially upon Kierkegaard.

It is terrible when I think, even for a single moment, over the dark background which, from the very earliest time, was part of my life. The dread with which my father filled my soul, his own frightful melancholy, and all the things in this connection which I do not even note down. I felt a dread of Christianity and yet felt myself so strongly drawn towards it.<sup>1</sup>

The father was most intent upon instilling in his children, especially in his youngest son, the most decisive concepts of Christianity. One of the earliest concepts to be communicated was the crucifixion in all its severity. From this Kierkegaard grasped a concept of suffering which was to pervade his life and writings.

The Journal contains a further entry which shows the effect which religion had upon the youth.

The greatest danger for a child, where religion is concerned.

The greatest danger is not that his father or tutor should be a free-thinker, not even his being a hypocrite. No, the danger lies in his being a pious, God-fearing man, and in the child being convinced thereof, but that he should nevertheless notice that deep in his soul there lies hidden an unrest which, consequently, not even the fear of God and piety could calm. The danger is that the child in that situation is almost provoked to draw a conclusion about God, that God is not infinite love.<sup>2</sup>

As the study proceeds it will be shown how these various factors, the restricted yet unique home life, the

. . . . .

1. Journals: op. cit., p. 273, #841.
2. Op. Cit.: pp. 374-375, #1055.

inherited melancholy, and the severe approach to religious education, exerted an influence upon the life and thought of Kierkegaard.

One more element must be mentioned herein. Due to the financial circumstances of the family, Kierkegaard had the leisure to think and to write. Upon his father's death he inherited a substantial fortune which kept him generally free of the economic concerns of life. An entry in the Journals, during his later years, reveals Kierkegaard's own appraisal of the conditions of his productivity.

There is another danger which threatens far more completely to destroy my pleasure in writing. That is the condition of my finances, and the confused financial times in which we live, when one does not know which way to turn. My kind of work requires time and peace. The further I go the more passionate will be the opposition I meet from outside, I who have already got so far that I am in the power of the people. If on top of all that I am to have worries about my livelihood, then my work cannot continue. It has always been a sacrifice and is therefore looked upon as mad. But if my money comes to an end further work is obviously out of the question...<sup>1</sup>

There were anxious moments in his life when he feared the resources might not last. But it is interesting to note that, on October 2, 1855, he fell unconscious on the street while returning from the bank from which he had withdrawn what remained of his fortune. There was just enough left to care for the funeral expenses after his death on November 11.

. . . . .

1. Journals: op. cit., p. 269, #832.

### 3. Education

Kierkegaard began his formal learning by entering school at the age of five and he distinguished himself as an apt student. When he was something over seventeen years old, on October 30, 1830, Kierkegaard matriculated in the University of Copenhagen after passing his examinations cum laude. He chose the faculty of theology--doubtless in conformity with his father's wish, but presumably not unwilling at that moment. The minimum requirement of liberal study was disposed of when he passed the "Second Examination" on April 25, 1831. However, for the next seven years he studied but little theology, and a great deal of history, literature, and philosophy. After the Second Examination a student was completely free; he was under no compulsion to attend lectures, and he could postpone his examination until he was inclined to apply for it.<sup>1</sup>

During these years the father was much disappointed in Kierkegaard's ever widening interests and the general trend of his life. On September 1, 1837 there occurred his exclusion from the home, however his father paid the debts which his allowance would not cover.

These years, 1836-37, represent the enthronement of the aesthetical. This chosen path carried him far beyond the bounds his reflection had set for him and he finally

. . . . .

1. Lowrie: op. cit., cf. pp. 66-67.

slid into an abyss. This situation was the more tragic for him because, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, he had not renounced morality. This was the one absolute value that remained to him from the impressions of his childhood. Religion in general and Christianity in particular he regarded with critical aloofness. He had decided to leave the question of the truth of Christianity undecided for the moment. It is to be noted, however, that he never slumped into the position which treats religion as a "value"--thereby seeking to avoid any possible conflict between religion and philosophy. Christianity for Kierkegaard was either true or untrue, it was either the absolute truth it claimed to be, or it was not truth at all. Hence he regarded it as a competitor of philosophy, and at that moment it seemed to him an unequal competitor. However, he became less and less confident of discovering absolute truth through philosophy as he was dissatisfied with the Hegelian system, which was the philosophy then in vogue.<sup>1</sup>

After his conversion in 1838 he returned to the study of theology and passed his examination with honors in 1840.

a. The Hegelian Revolt

Since Hegelianism was the prevailing philosophy of Kierkegaard's time, it must be noted why he rejected this

. . . . .

1. Lowrie: op. cit., p. 121.

philosophy even while living on an aesthetical plane. Even though influenced by Hegel he was never a "servant" of Hegel.

One of the chief aspects of Hegel's philosophy was the theory of the higher unity into which contradictory positions could be mediated. By this process of mediation the real edge was removed from all contradictions. Therefore, the absolute contradictions between good and evil are removed. Kierkegaard's greatest ridicule is directed against this aspect of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

A further reason for rejecting Hegel was that he had no ethic. One of the great fallacies of Hegelianism, as Kierkegaard saw it, was the exaggerated emphasis upon philosophic contemplation of world-history. The ethical view which regards life as striving or endeavor was considered by Kierkegaard to be in mortal combat with the metaphysical view which contemplates the epochs of world-history. Kierkegaard felt that the thing that escaped Hegel was "what it means to live."<sup>2</sup> "Hegelian philosophy, by failing to define its relation to the existing individual, and by ignoring the ethical, confounds existence."<sup>3</sup>

An entry in the journals shows how Kierkegaard caricatured the philosophers of his day.

. . . . .

1. Thomte: op. cit., p. 8.
2. Ibid.: pp. 8-9.
3. S.A. Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Translated by D.E. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton University Press, 1941, p. 275.

In relation to their systems most systematisers are like a man who builds an enormous castle and lives in a shack close by; they do not live in their own enormous systematic buildings. But spiritually that is the decisive objection. Spiritually speaking a man's thought must be the building in which he lives--otherwise everything is topsy-turvy.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard felt that the philosophers had given new and entirely different meanings to such Christian concepts as "faith", "incarnation", "tradition", and "inspiration." Thus "faith" had become the immediate consciousness; "tradition" was regarded as a certain world experience; "inspiration" was nothing more than the result of God's breathing the spirit of life into man; and "incarnation" was reduced to the presence of one or another idea in one or more individuals.<sup>2</sup> These ideas he could not accept.

The disillusionment with speculative philosophy and his continuing despair sent him back to the Christian faith and founded his settled hostility to objective system-building as a distraction and a delusion. He felt objective system-building to be ruinous to truly philosophical thinking and living because it provides a life-long escape from the real problems of individual existence.<sup>3</sup>

#### b. Socratic Influence

Socrates is a frequent subject among the entries

. . . . .

1. Journals: op. cit., p. 156, #583.
2. Thomte: op. cit., p. 11.
3. H.J. Blackham: Six Existentialist Thinkers, Routledge and Kegan Paul, LTD, London, Third Impression, 1953, p. 3.



of the journals of Kierkegaard. This fact and also the various references throughout his writings indicate that he was greatly influenced by this great teacher. An entry of the journal shows how Kierkegaard felt he had an identification of experience with Socrates:

There is one thought which has been in my soul and occupied it from my earliest years, inexplicably deeply rooted, a thought which has to do with Socrates as a model, the man to whom I have been inexplicably related from my earliest years, long before I really began to read Plato--the thought: how is it that all those who have in truth served the truth have always come out of it badly in this life, (as long as they lived), and as soon as they are dead, then they are deified?

The explanation is quite simple: the mass of mankind can only relate itself to ideas, the good, the true, through the imagination. But a dead man is at a distance, in the imagination. But on the other hand they cannot endure the living who give them reality, they are scandalised by them, put them to death, tread them down...

But there is a more important reason why Socrates is important to Kierkegaard. Socrates exhibited a beautiful synthesis of thought and character, a harmony of words and deeds. Socrates refused to call himself a teacher, or to pose as an authority, because he knew that the truth is a way of life and he doubted that a mode of living could be taught. Therefore, he confined himself to asking questions, thereby puzzling his hearers, and stimulating them to seek the truth in themselves, presupposing that the truth was immanent within them. If the truth is a living and personal

. . . . .

1. Journals: op. cit., pp. 488-489, #1291.

existential reality, it must not be communicated as a doctrine, but as an alternative to be chosen, as a possibility to be realized.<sup>1</sup>

The method of Socrates was the method of Søren Kierkegaard. In his writings he does not dictate answers; he is convinced that existential truth is not a doctrine but a way of life.

In the following paragraph Professor Geismar gives a helpful summary of the method and purpose of Kierkegaard's literary production. The Socratic influence is unmistakably clear.

Each individual book in the Kierkegaardian literature is devoted to some single phase of a life-problem. Taken together all these many books point to the central question for which Christianity offers a solution. This solution consists in nothing less than the restoration of each man's pristine moral integrity through the forgiveness of sins. The only possible appropriation of this solution is through the pathos of an individual moral experience, not through the disinterested objectivity of an abstract-intellectual apprehension. The teacher teaches by doing, and the learner learns by doing.<sup>2</sup>

#### D. Four Important Events

In every man's life there occur those moments of experience which are to him as turning points, or moments of great weight. These were also present in the life of

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1. Eduard Geismar: Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard, Augsburg Publishing House, Second Printing, 1938, cf. pp. 25-26.
2. Ibid.: p. 42.

Søren Kierkegaard. Even though they are a part of the biographical aspects, it is thought well to highlight them here because of their importance. Kierkegaard cannot be fully appreciated without some awareness of the following events.

#### 1. The Religious Experience of 1838

Kierkegaard's earliest relation to the Christian faith was by his own admission ambivalent. He was both filled with dread by Christianity and yet attracted to it. The strict upbringing by the father had its profound effect. Thus, the attempt at rebellion was not to last.

The spring of 1836 was a period of great moral and intellectual stress.<sup>1</sup> His great interest in the legends of Faust, Don Juan, and the Wandering Jew symbolized what was happening to him. The problems of skepticism and doubt, sensuality and despair, were of great concern to him.

Not only had he failed to resolve his ambivalence to the Christian faith through theological study, but he had also moved away from any positive relationship to the faith.<sup>2</sup>

However, as the year progressed he began to move closer to Christianity. By December of 1837 he was seriously thinking about the Christian faith. On December 8 he wrote:

I think that if ever I become seriously Christian I shall be most ashamed of not having done so before,

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1. Cf. Journals: op. cit., p. 67, #244, 245.
2. Perry D. LeFevre: The Prayers of Kierkegaard, The University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 131.

of having wished to try everything else first.<sup>1</sup>

On April 22, 1838 he wrote:

If Christ is to come and take up his abode in me, it must happen according to the title of today's Gospel in the Almanac: Christ came in through locked doors.<sup>2</sup>

These thoughts were a kind of presentiment of things to come. For on May 19, 1838 he had a decisive religious experience which had been brewing. It was an experience which represented the beginning of a kind of prodigal's return both to his earthly father and to Christianity. The following entry tells the story. It is one of the few occasions in which we see Kierkegaard abounding in joy.

May 19. Half-past ten in the morning. There is an indescribably joy which enkindles us as inexplicably as the apostle's outburst comes gratuitously: 'Rejoice I say unto you, and again I say unto you rejoice.'-- Not a joy over this or that but the soul's mighty song 'with tongue and mouth, from the bottom of the heart: 'I rejoice through my joy, in, at, with, over, by, and with my joy'--a heavenly refrain, as it were, suddenly breaks off our other song; a joy which cools and refreshes us like a breath of wind, a wave of air, from the trade wind which blows from the plains of Mamre to the everlasting habitations.<sup>3</sup>

He was soon to write a subsequent resolve:

I mean to labour to achieve a far more inward relation to Christianity; hitherto I have fought for its truth while in a sense standing outside it. In a purely outward sense I have carried Christ's cross, like Simon of Cyrene.<sup>4</sup>

This declaration of intent might well represent the whole direction of Kierkegaard's struggle in the remaining seven-

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1. Journals: op. cit., p. 54, #174.
2. Ibid.: pp. 57-58, #196.
3. Ibid.: p. 59, #207.
4. Ibid.: #211.

teen years of his life.<sup>1</sup>

This religious experience resulted in a deeper father-son relationship than they had before known. A prayer of July 9 indicates something of Kierkegaard's feeling.

How I thank you, Father in Heaven, that you have preserved my earthly father here upon earth for a time such as this when I so greatly need him, a father who, as I hope, will with your help have greater joy in being my father the second time than he had the first time in being so.<sup>2</sup>

The father died in this same year and Kierkegaard keenly felt the loss. Many of his books were dedicated to his father to keep his memory alive. For even though Kierkegaard had criticized him much, he realized he owed him much.

## 2. Engagement to Regine Olsen in 1840

This love affair is one of the most important and yet one of the saddest events of Kierkegaard's life. This story is told in his own words in a rather lengthy entry in the Journals. It must be related here in brief summary fashion.

Regine Olsen had made an impression upon him in 1837 as a girl of fourteen. Even before his father's death in 1838 he had decided upon her. After his theological examination in the summer of 1840 he began to visit

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1. LeFevre: op. cit., p. 133.

2. Journals: op. cit., p. 59, #210.

the family and "approach" Regine. He was deeply in love and on September 10 she consented to marry him. But the melancholy, which was so much a part of his life, convinced him the next day that he had made a false step. He saw in her the fulfillment of life, and yet feared that such a step would not be the divine will for him.

If I...had not been melancholy, my union with her would have made me happier than I had ever dreamed of being.<sup>1</sup>

But there was a divine protest, that is how I understood it. The wedding. I had to hide such a tremendous amount from her, had to base the whole thing upon something untrue.<sup>2</sup>

So he attempted to break off the engagement. When she protested he tried to drive her from him, tried to disillusion her concerning his former intentions. After a struggle on the part of both and many exchanges, the engagement was formally broken even though both remained deeply in love.<sup>3</sup>

This tragic love affair set free in him simultaneously a poetic flare and a religious determination; these two energies combined to produce the unique series of æsthetic and philosophical works that flowed from his pen, some of which were dedicated to her.<sup>4</sup>

This strange kind of unhappy love, where the hindrance was not external, but came from within the mind, made him a poet by the grace of sorrow...<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid.: p. 93, #367.
2. Loc. Cit.
3. Ibid.: cf. pp. 91-96, #367.
4. Geismar: op. cit., p. 8.
5. Ibid.: pp. 9-10.

Another consequence of this tragedy in his life was the predominance in his religious consciousness of a sense of guilt. Yet his consciousness of guilt did not effect in him a forced and unwilling submission; rather, it bound him to God in enthusiastic devotion for time and eternity.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of Regine Olsen to his life is noted by Kierkegaard's testimony: "It is essentially owing to her, to my melancholy and to my money that I became an author."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The "Corsair" Affair

The affair of The Corsair was one of the major events in Kierkegaard's life.<sup>3</sup> The Corsair was a scandal-mongering weekly paper full of gossip and ridicule of the important people of the day. It had been founded by a young Jew, Aaron Goldschmidt, and through his management attained the largest circulation of any paper in Denmark. Goldschmidt flattered himself that he was serving the idea of political liberalism by dragging down the great and revealing that they were not really superior to the vulgar. Many declared the paper to be a scandal, yet secretly read it with malicious enjoyment.<sup>4</sup>

For some time Kierkegaard had been considering

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1. Ibid.: pp. 8-9.

2. Journals: op. cit., p. 235, #748.

3. Lowrie: A Short Life of Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 176.

4. Loc. cit.

leveling an attack at the editors and their policies; not only did he condemn the demoralizing character of the paper, but he resented the praise his own work had received in some of its issues. In December of 1846 one of the editors, P. L. Möller, published a critical review of some of Kierkegaard's writing. Kierkegaard felt this to be more of an attack on him personally than on his work. Kierkegaard replied to this attack effectively, and in so doing he identified Möller as one of the mainstays of the Corsair staff. The bringing of his editorship to light ruined Möller's hopes of becoming professor at the University. The Corsair was quick to reply, and a running exchange began between Kierkegaard and its editors. The Corsair's attack took the form of personal ridicule, and Kierkegaard soon found himself held up as a public joke.<sup>1</sup> He was made the subject of caricature and was the object of the gaping eyes of the street. P. L. Möller died a broken man and when The Corsair had ceased to exist, the persecution it had begun went on of itself.<sup>2</sup>

The country parish, of which he had dreamed, had now become an impossibility.

It attracted me both as an idyllic wish in contrast with a strenuous existence, and also religiously, in order to find time to repose to sorrow rightly for the sins I personally may have committed.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Le Fevre: op. cit., cf. pp. 144-145.
2. Lowrie: A Short Life of Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 180.
3. Ibid.: p. 185.



But such a move would have been regarded by the public as a retreat, an escape. He elected to "stay on the spot."

Through this experience he came to a clear understanding of his own capacity to venture out, to take a stand in action as well as in the realm of ideas; he was confirmed in his conviction that he who speaks the truth will have to suffer for the truth.

What he later came to formulate so incisively under the Christian category of suffering, what had been first introduced to him in his early religious training in terms of the picture of a suffering and humiliated Christ, he now experienced personally with a sharpness unknown to him before.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard made several evaluations of the persecution, one of which follows:

God be praised that the attack of all that is vulgar was made upon me. Now I have had time to learn from within and to assure myself that the desire to live in a country parsonage in order to do penance, remote from the world and forgotten, was really a melancholy idea. Now I stand at my post, decided in quite a different way than I have ever been. Had I not been so thoroughly overhauled by all this scorn, that melancholy idea would always have followed me, for a certain kind of prosperity favours melancholy ideas; if, for example, I had not had means I would, with my disposition so melancholy, never have reached such a degree as I have sometimes done.<sup>2</sup>

A further effect of the attack was that it caused Kierkegaard to take up the pen with a renewed vigor. In the period which followed he produced his most important literature which comprise the works that are decisively Christian.

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1. Le Fevre: op. cit., p. 145.
2. Journals: op. cit., p. 192, #628.

#### 4. The Religious Experience of 1848

On May 5, 1848 Kierkegaard completed his thirty-fifth year. Ten years had passed since his first conversion (the experience of "an indescribable joy") and during this time there was marked progress in his apprehension of Christianity. 1848 was an important year in this apprehension. In an untranslated section of the Journals Lowrie quotes thus:

1848 potentiated me in one sense, in another sense it broke me, that is to say, religiously it broke me, or, as I put it in my Language, God had run me to a standstill.

. . . . .

Economic anxieties come upon me suddenly and all too near. Two such heterogeneous weights as the opposition of the world and anxiety about my subsistence I am unable to lift at the same time. ...I produced more powerfully than ever before, but more than ever before like a dying man.<sup>1</sup>

The thing which threatened Kierkegaard with penury was the war with Germany which began in March 1848 and the great revolution which compelled the king to grant parliamentary government to Denmark. Kierkegaard lost a good part of the price he received for the sale of his house, having invested it in "royal bonds", which subsequently fell in value.<sup>2</sup>

These external circumstances as well as an inward unrest were factors leading to this experience. In 1847, in referring to his resolution not to go off for a brief

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1. Lowrie: op. cit., p. 392.  
2. Ibid.: p. 393.

visit to Berlin, he says:

The fact that I remain at home has a far deeper reason, and I feel impelled to it. Sometime I must begin to accustom myself to do without such strong diversion... I feel now impelled to come to myself in a deeper sense, by coming closer to God in the understanding of myself. I must remain on the spot and be renewed inwardly...I must try to get a better hold upon my melancholy...<sup>1</sup>

The great experience came in Holy Week of 1848. He writes: "My whole being is changed. My reserve and self-isolation is broken--I must speak. Lord give thy grace..."<sup>2</sup> And further: "Now with God's help, I shall be myself. I believe that Christ will help me to be victorious over my melancholy..."<sup>3</sup>

Little by little Kierkegaard came to know God's forgiveness in a deeply personal way. He began to realize that when God forgives He forgets.<sup>4</sup>

As a consequence of this experience he moved into a still more open and direct advocacy of the Christian faith. From this time on he did not resort to pseudonyms in the way that he had previously used them. It became clear to him that the leadership of the Church was either unaware or unwilling to admit how far official Christianity was from the New Testament faith. He would have to speak out and this he did.<sup>5</sup> The year was one of the most pro-

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1. Lowrie: A Short Life of Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 203.
2. Journals: op. cit., p. 235, #747.
3. Ibid.: #748.
4. Le Fevre: op. cit., p. 147.
5. Ibid.

ductive in his literary achievements.

### E. Summary

In many respects the treatment of the subjects of this chapter have been too brief. But perhaps enough has been included to give a kind of impression about Søren Kierkegaard. The troubled age in which he lived, the philosophical climate, the way he lived, his educational experiences, and his religious experiences--all of these were formative influences and each left its impress upon his life and thought. Just how this is true will come into clearer focus in the next chapter.

Perhaps no better summary can be given than to cite a passage from The Point of View. In this work Kierkegaard is interpreting the method and purpose of his authorship. The work is also profoundly autobiographical. The following passage is a personal reflection regarding these formative influences:

An observer will perceive how everything was set in motion and how dialectically: I had a thorn in the flesh, intellectual gifts (especially imagination and dialectic) and culture in superabundance, an enormous development as an observer, a Christian upbringing that was certainly very unusual, a dialectical relationship to Christianity which was peculiarly my own, and in addition to this I had from childhood a training in obedience, obedience absolute, and I was armed with an almost foolhardy faith that I was able to do anything, only one thing excepted, to be a free bird, though but for one whole day, or to slip out of the fetters of melancholy in which another power held me bound.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Kierkegaard: The Point of View, Translated with Introduction and Notes by Walter Lowrie, Oxford University Press, London, 1939, p. 82.

He had the courage to "quote the price of being a Christian," and he himself paid that price. He exhibited in his own life, within all the limitations of his finitude and his sinfulness, what it means to be a Christian.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Martin J. Heineken: Kierkegaard as Christian, The Journal of Religion, Vol. 37, No. 1, Jan. 1957, University of Chicago Press, p. 30.

THE EXISTENTIAL THOUGHT OF KIERKEGAARD  
AS REFLECTED IN HIS WORKS

CHAPTER II

A. Introduction

This chapter in the study will involve a setting forth of the main facets of Kierkegaard's thought. The first step is somewhat extra-Kierkegaardian in that it seeks to be definitive with regard to the general idea of existentialism. Also, some characteristics of Christian existentialism are enumerated with the hope that these will assist the reader in understanding Kierkegaard. The second step involves an examination of the religious and philosophic presuppositions of Kierkegaard. The third and final, which is perhaps the most important for our study, is a survey of the practical outworkings of these presuppositions. Here his ethical principles are treated.

B. The Characteristics of Existential Thinking

1. An Attempted Definition

The indefinite article is purposely used because various definitions are to be found for the term existentialism. Existential philosophers range all the way from the most insolent atheists to the most devout Christians.

Thus, there are two opposite answers to the question. Atheistic existentialists typically equate freedom with human autonomy, insisting that man's self-definition and self-realization are attained only as he learns to master his own destiny without looking to an illusory, invented God for outside help. In this view Sartre declares that "existentialism is humanism."<sup>1</sup> This is an attempt to solve the problem of "being" by a subjective standard of self-knowledge only. History is unimportant. God is unimportant. The important thing is a knowledge of myself as a person in time and space with no accounting of the purpose of history. This is a philosophy which makes substitutes for Christian realities.

Religious existentialists, on the other hand, maintain that human freedom is discovered only by relinquishing this egocentric effort to run life all by oneself, and by finding blessedness in rapport or communion with the living God.<sup>2</sup> This group finds that the implications of human responsibility lead to the necessity of a religious faith. This group attempts to solve the problem of "being" through a combination of revelation, living experience and self-reflection. This view represents a concern with the existing individual within history which has purpose and direction. Abstract thought is not sufficient; thought must re-

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1. Roberts: op. cit., p. 339.  
2. Ibid.

late to the living moment.

In summary then, there is an existential way of living and there is an existential method of interpreting life. The two are reciprocally related and are not to be confused nor separated. The reminder of Berdyaev is quite cogent: "When a philosopher is a believing Christian, it is quite inconceivable that his philosophy should remain unaffected by his religious convictions."<sup>1</sup> This expresses the burden of the Christian existentialist and especially that of Kierkegaard. Belief and life must be inseparably related.

## 2. The Characteristics Enumerated

Perhaps further clarification may be achieved, as to definition, by a listing of some of the general characteristics of existentialism. Such a listing may vary with different philosophers but the following one is suggestive.

First, it is a protest against all forms of rationalism which find it easy to assume that reality can be grasped primarily or exclusively by intellectual means.

Second, existentialism is a protest against all views which tend to regard man as if he were a thing, that is, only an assortment of functions and reactions. In the sphere of philosophical theory it stands against mechanism and naturalism. In the sphere of social theory it stands

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1. Carl Micholson: Christianity and the Existentialists, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1956, p. 19.



against all patterns of human organization in which the mass mentality stifles the spontaneity and uniqueness of the individual person.

Third, it makes a drastic distinction between subjective and objective truth and gives priority to the former. Subjective here is used in the sense in being concerned with truth for myself and my own concrete situation. This involves a difference between knowing about the truth in some detached way and being grasped by the truth in a decisively personal matter.

Fourth, existentialism regards man as fundamentally ambiguous. He is free, yet responsible. He is finite, yet has a strange kinship with eternity.<sup>1</sup>

Fifth, existential thinking is not dispassionate (as philosophy aspires to be) but passionate. Because of this passion existential thinking opens the door to new realms of reality and "faith-knowledge" of which "intellect" can know nothing.

Sixth, existentialism makes much of paradox and dialectical thinking. Existential thinking leads to an abyss which thought cannot cross. Faith remains a "tension". Existential truth is thus a "troubled truth" which points to despair and so to the decision of faith.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Cf. Roberts: op. cit., pp. 6-9;
2. Cf. Melville Channing-Pearce: Soren Kierkegaard: A Study, James Clarke and Co., LTD, London, 1945, pp. 36-42.

These six are perhaps sufficient to give the reader some idea and grasp of the basic characteristics of Christian existentialism. The following paragraph is a good summary from a Kierkegaardian view-point:

In the meaning of Kierkegaard 'existential thinking' is thus a mode of thought which accepts the tension of life and is therefore concrete not abstract, subjective and personal not objective and impersonal, passionate (in the sense of suffering) not dispassionate, which seeks, not rational proof for thought but the assurance of faith for life and claims to explore a dimension of reality closed to the analytical reason, which carries the paradox of life into the process of living thought and employs in that thought a dialectic which the recognition of that paradox requires, which expects its synthesis, not in time and the mind of man, but in eternity and the mind of God.<sup>1</sup>

### C. Basic Concepts in Kierkegaard's

#### Philosophy of Religion

##### 1. Faith and Reflection

Kierkegaard conceives of a persistent tension existing between these two in all stages of existence. He sometimes speaks as though the intellect were positively excluded from the act of faith. Yet all that his opposition to idealism and pantheism requires is that faith be not regarded as the necessary outcome of a demonstrative process, in which reason alone is operative. The basic reason, why religious faith cannot be assimilated to any "rational truth", in the idealistic sense, is that such assimilation depends

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1. Ibid.: p. 41.

upon some sort of dialectical identity between the divine and the human spirit. In this sense the rationality or conceptual adequacy, theism and Christianity belong outside the pole of rational truths and certainties.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard felt that one of the diseases of his day was that people were preoccupied with reflecting at the expense of demonstrating a vital faith.

Because of his own intellectual situation, he deliberately stressed the act or subjective how of faith over the content or objective what of faith, without excluding the latter.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, we are indebted to him for connecting Christian religious faith with the actuality of the God-Man and of man as fallen and redeemed. Instead of following Hegel's lead in reducing the Incarnation to our need to believe in a concrete way, he suggests that the person of Christ in his divine and human natures provides the essential condition for our act of faith. This brings home to us that there is a divine-human someone to appropriate and build ourselves upon.<sup>3</sup>

A journal entry of 1848 is fairly representative of Kierkegaard's handling of the relationship of faith and reflection throughout the other writings. It is marked for special attention in the Journals and is quoted as a

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1. Cf. James Collins: Faith and Reflection in Kierkegaard, The Journal of Religion, Vol. 37, No. 1, July 1957, University of Chicago Press, pp. 13-16.

2. Ibid.: p. 18.

3. Cf. Ibid.: p. 19.

summary to this subject.

It has constantly been maintained that reflection inevitably destroys Christianity and is its natural enemy. I hope, now, that with God's help it will be shown that a godfearing reflection can once again tie the knot at which a superficial reflection has been tugging for so long. The divine authority of the Bible and all that belongs to it has been done away with; it looks as though one had only to wait for the last stage of reflection in order to have done with the whole thing. But behold, reflection performs the opposite service by once more bringing the springs of Christianity into play, and in such a way that it can stand up--against reflection. Christianity naturally remains completely unaltered, not one iota is changed. But the struggle is a different one; up to the present it has been between reflection and simple, immediate Christianity; now it will be between reflection and simplicity armed with reflection.

And that, in my opinion, is sense. The problem is not to understand Christianity but to understand that it cannot be understood. That is the holiness of faith, and reflection is sanctified by being thus used....<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard believed that the orthodox-apologetic effort was mistaken in that it sought to make Christianity plausible. His position was that every defense of Christianity which understands what it would accomplish must behave exactly conversely, maintaining with might and main by qualitative dialectic that Christianity is implausible.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Three Stages

These stages are important, for it is around these that Kierkegaard makes a very suggestive and subtle analysis of human life.

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1. Journals: op. cit., p. 261, #813.
2. Søren Kierkegaard: On Authority and Revelation, Translated by Walter Lowrie, Princeton University Press, 1955, p. 60.

A man's life has various alternatives and these alternatives as depicted by Kierkegaard are sometimes called stages on life's way, sometimes spheres of existence. The levels of life or stages or spheres are three: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. In a way, these spheres of existence are ideal types, though they are meant to depict concrete ways in which individuals may live. No individual is a perfect example of any one type. In every individual the way of life may be mixed and confused, yet the dominant orientation of the life of the individual might be said to be either aesthetic or ethico-religious. Nor is the Kierkegaardian scheme of analysis meant to suggest an absolutely successive order, as if a person first lived on the aesthetic level, then ethical, and finally religious. Yet personal existence must be described as movement toward the religious sphere of existence: it is movement away from the domination of the aesthetic in such a manner that the aesthetic is not rejected but is incorporated in a higher way of life in which the individual realizes himself more fully.<sup>1</sup>

Those who live on the aesthetical level take a spectator view of life. They live for enjoyment. They do not live seriously: they have no real inner life, no real self. For them, life has no special significance. Essentially it is the poet-existence, an escape from the demands of life

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1. Le Fevre: op. cit., p. 151.

and from serious concerned living.<sup>1</sup>

To exist as an ethical individual is to give one's life an absolute direction toward the highest good, the absolute telos. He is the acting individual looking to the Absolute for the purpose of shaping his life in accordance with it. Yet he discovers failure; a fundamental imperfection in the self.<sup>2</sup>

A person living on the religious level incorporates the ethical but goes beyond. He comes to an existential knowledge of a God relationship which is private and peculiar to each individual. This means that the individual's whole inner life should be transformed in terms of the absolute God-relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Some comprehension of the stages is necessary to understand the nature and purpose of Kierkegaard's authorship. Even though he wrote a group called "Aesthetic Works", they are religious in purpose. He felt that the greater number of people in Christendom only imagine themselves to be Christians, while in reality they lived in aesthetic, or, at the most, in aesthetic-ethical categories.<sup>4</sup> Thus he designed his authorship to meet them on their level, for the purpose of leading them higher.

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1. Ibid.: p. 153.
2. Geismar: op. cit., p. 51.
3. Le Fevre: op. cit., p. 163.
4. The Point of View: op. cit., p. 25.

### 3. God

Kierkegaard believed that the fundamental error of modern times (which runs into logic, metaphysics, dogmatics, and the whole of modern life) lay in the fact that the yawning abyss of quality in the difference between God and man had been removed.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his works he is constantly seeking to restore this difference.

Initial faith in the existence of God in human history and in his own individual experience is, for Kierkegaard, his datum; he accepts it as axiomatic and beyond either proof or dispute; it is, not rational, but faith-knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Yet God is real and he is eternal. He sustains a relationship to man and man cannot escape. In eternity he will demand a reckoning, an accounting between God and the individual.<sup>3</sup>

God is Love. Never was there born a man whom this thought does not overwhelm with indescribable bliss, especially when it comes close to him in the sense that 'God is love' signifies 'Thou art Loved'.<sup>4</sup>

This is the central thought in Kierkegaard's conception of God.

In 1851 Kierkegaard preached a sermon on The Unchangeableness of God in which he gathers up his remaining

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1. Cf. Journals: op. cit., p. 222, #712.
2. Channing-Pearce: op. cit., p. 31.
3. Kierkegaard: Attack Upon "Christendom", Translated by Walter Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1946, p. 245.
4. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard: Purity of Heart, Translated by Douglas V. Steere, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1948, p. 185.

important concepts regarding God. Part of this sermon is quoted as follows:

God is unchangeable. In His omnipotence He created this visible world--and made Himself invisible. He clothed Himself in the visible world as in a garment; He changes it as one who shifts a garment--Himself unchanged. Thus in the world of sensible things. In the world of events He is present everywhere in every moment; in a truer sense than we can say of the most watchful human justice that it is present everywhere, God is omnipresent, though never seen by any mortal; present everywhere, in the least event as well as in the greatest, in that which can scarcely be called an event and in that which is the only event, in the death of a sparrow and in the birth of the Saviour of mankind. In each moment every actuality is a possibility in His almighty hand; He holds all in readiness, in every instant prepared to change everything: the opinions of men, their judgments, human greatness and human abasement; He changes all, Himself unchanged!<sup>1</sup>.....

God is faithful, holy, and dependable. His greatness lies in forgiving and in showing mercy. His greatness in showing mercy is a secret which has to be believed.<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard felt personally that there was the element of divine governance in back of his entire authorship.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Man

In his Sickness unto Death Kierkegaard drew his reflections about man into something approximating a systematic account.

Early in this work he states that "man is a synthesis

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1. Søren Kierkegaard: For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself, Translated by Walter Lowrie, Oxford University Press, New York, 1941, pp. 230-231.
2. Søren Kierkegaard: Christian Discourses, Translated by Walter Lowrie, Oxford University Press, London, 1939, pp. 298-299.
3. The Point of View: op. cit., p. 73.



of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis."<sup>1</sup> Because man is not self-sufficient, and because he can achieve true selfhood only by being related aright to God, he falls into despair in connection with his estrangement from God, the estrangement being the result of sin. This despair takes two basic forms: (a) despair at not willing to be oneself, and (b) despair at willing to be oneself.<sup>2</sup> This is a universal condition among men.<sup>3</sup> This despair manifests man's linkage to eternity in a negative way in that he can consume himself indefinitely without getting rid of the self.<sup>4</sup>

He concludes the first chapter with the following paragraphs:

Thus it is that despair, this sickness in the self, is the sickness unto death. The despairing man is mortally ill. In an entirely different sense than can appropriately be said of any disease, we may say that the sickness has attacked the noblest part; and yet the man cannot die. Death is not the last phase of the sickness, but death is continually the last. To be delivered from this sickness by death is an impossibility, for the sickness and its torment...and death consist in not being able to die.

This is the situation in despair. And however thoroughly it eludes the attention of the despairer, and however thoroughly the despairer may succeed (as in the case of that kind of despair which is characterized by unawareness of being in despair) in losing himself entirely, and losing himself in such a

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1. The Sickness Unto Death: p. 17.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.: p. 32.
4. Cf. *ibid.*: p. 30.

way that it is not noticed in the least--eternity nevertheless will make it manifest that his situation was despair, and it will so nail him to himself that the torment nevertheless remains that he cannot get rid of himself, and it becomes manifest that he was deluded in thinking that he succeeded. And thus it is eternity must act, because to have a self, to be a self, is the greatest concession made to man, but at the same time it is eternity's demand upon him.<sup>1</sup>

These paragraphs reveal a great deal of Kierkegaard's anthropology. Man is eternal, a sinner, helpless, and yet responsible before God. There is no escape, but he can choose an alternative. This hope is presented in Training in Christianity:

If a man's life is not to be led unworthily, like that of the beast which never erects its head, if it is not to be frittered away, being emptily employed with what while it lasts is vanity and when it is past is nothingness, or busily employed with what makes a noise indeed at the moment but has no echo in eternity--if a man's life is not to be dozed away in inactivity or wasted in bustling movement, there must be something higher which draws it.<sup>2</sup>

This "something higher" which draws is God in his forgiving mercy. This requires faith. Therefore the opposite of sin is not "virtue" but faith. Faith is not to be understood as assent to doctrine; rather, it is the condition which man enters into when, in willing to be himself, he is at the same time transparent before and grounded in God.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid: pp. 30-31.
2. Søren Kierkegaard: *Training in Christianity*, Translated by Walter Lowrie, Oxford University Press, New York, 1941, pp. 151-152.
3. *Existentialism and Religious Belief*: op. cit., p. 122.

## 5. Sin

Kierkegaard rejected, emphatically, the Socratic definition--that sin is ignorance. He believed that the concept by which Christianity distinguishes itself qualitatively and most decisively from paganism is the concept of sin, the doctrine of sin; and therefore Christianity assumes quite consistently that neither paganism nor the natural man knows what sin is; yea, it assumes that there must be a revelation from God to make manifest what sin is.<sup>1</sup>

Sin is defiant will.

The truth in this definition must by no means be overlooked, and it needs to be enforced in times such as these which have gone astray in so much flatulent and unfruitful knowledge, so that doubtless now, just as in Socrates' age, only much more, it is advisable that people should be starved a little bit.<sup>2</sup>

. . . . .

So then, Christianly understood, sin lies in the will, not in the intellect; and this corruption of the will goes well beyond the consciousness of the individual. This is the perfectly consistent declaration, for otherwise the question how sin began must arise with respect to each individual.<sup>3</sup>

Kierkegaard believed that sin is not a negative but a position. It is a "Christian dogma that sin is a position--not, however, as though it could be comprehended, but as a paradox which must be believed."<sup>4</sup>

He considered the state of remaining in sin as really

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1. The Sickness Unto Death: op. cit., p. 144.
2. Ibid.: p. 145.
3. Ibid.: p. 155.
4. Ibid.: p. 159.

a greater sin.

The state of remaining in sin is in the deepest sense sin, the particular sins are not the continuation of sin, but they are the expression for the continuation of sin; in the particular new sins the momentum of sin merely becomes more observable.<sup>1</sup>

Sin is despair and there is the sin of despairing over one's sin. Despairing over one's sin is the expression for the fact that sin has become or would become consistent in itself. It will have nothing to do with the good, will not be weak enough to hearken once in a while to another sort of talk. It is an attempt to maintain oneself by sinking still deeper.<sup>2</sup>

Then there is the sin of despairing of the forgiveness of sins. Herein lies the offense of Christianity. This despair is a weakness which being offended does not dare to believe, is that of defiance which being offended will not believe.<sup>3</sup> "So then despair of the forgiveness of sins is offense. And offense is the potentiation of sin."<sup>4</sup>

To Kierkegaard, the greatest sin was the sin of abandoning Christianity in a positive manner, the sin of declaring it falsehood.

This is sin against the Holy Ghost. The self is here most despairingly potentiated; it not merely casts away from itself the whole of Christianity, but it makes it a lie and a falsehood. What a prodigiously despairing conception of itself the self must have!<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid.: p. 173.
2. Cf. *ibid.*: pp. 178-179.
3. *Ibid.*: p. 185.
4. *Ibid.*: p. 204.
5. *Ibid.*: p. 205.

Kierkegaard accepts the dogma that original or inherited sin is guilt, yet he gives his own interpretation to the dogma. The experience of Adam is happening constantly. And only the sense of having brought upon oneself a guilt due to personal sin can issue in true repentance.

It is quite true that every man can say with profound seriousness that he was born in misery and his mother conceived him in sin; but really he can only sorrow rightly over it when he himself has brought sin into the world and brought all this upon himself, for it is a contradiction to sorrow aesthetically over sinfulness.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Christology.

This topic is a vast field for study within the thought of Kierkegaard, so only the essential facets can be given here.

Christ is the means of God's revelation to man. He is a paradox in that he is a synthesis of humanity and deity, of finitude and infinity. This paradox is to be believed; in fact it cannot be proved. Nevertheless, affirmation of the historicity of the God-man--the phrase used throughout his writing--is absolutely central to Kierkegaard's thesis.

Attempts to prove the deity of Christ, like attempts to prove the existence of God are futile. Those who attempt to do so by concentrating upon the historical facts are mistaken because at most, historical facts can show that

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1. Kierkegaard: The Concept of Dread, Translated by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1946, p. 31.

Jesus claimed to be divine, but cannot possibly show that He actually was so. Although His human life was genuinely historical, it was not merely historical, and therefore anyone who tries to confine His approach to the historical events cannot be a disciple.

A further attempt, to prove the deity, is a line of argument which concentrates upon what it calls the "eternal truth" of Christianity, insisting that this is what is really important, rather than historical events about which we can never reach absolute certainty. This group may affirm the historicity of Jesus and the grandeur of His deeds and teaching. But it regards the essence of Christianity as a set of eternally true propositions to which Christ's relationship as teacher and revealer is accidental.

Kierkegaard maintained that what Christ means cannot be apprehended through knowledge of either historical facts or philosophic truths. Faith is essentially related not to the teaching but to the Teacher, and He is neither (a) merely a historical human being nor (b) a universal truth. When the two are combined, as they are in Him, the result is the transformation of both.<sup>1</sup> This is a paradox to be believed.

The true God cannot become directly recognizable. Direct recognizableness is what the merely human, what the men to whom he came, would pray and implore of him as an indescribable relief.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Cf. Roberts: op. cit., pp. 80-83.

2. Training in Christianity: op. cit., pp. 137.

It was out of love that he became man; and yet every instant he must as it were crucify all human sympathy and solicitude--because he can only be the object of faith. All that is called human sympathy has to do with recognizableness.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Christ was, for Kierkegaard, the great Incognito.

The best expression of Kierkegaard's view of the atonement is found in his discourse "The High Priest."

He (Christ) put himself entirely in thy place. For when He, when the suffering and death of the Atoner is the satisfaction for thy sin and guilt--being a satisfaction it assumes in fact thy place, or He, the Substitute, steps into thy place, suffering in thy place the punishment for sin, that thou mightest be saved, in thy place suffering death for thee, that thou mightest live--did He not put Himself entirely in thy place? ...the satisfaction of the atonement signifies that thou dost step aside and that He assumes thy place...

. . . . .

So when retributive justice, either here on earth or hereafter at the Day of Judgment, seeks the place where I a sinner stand with all my guilt--it does not find me, I no longer stand in that place, I have left it, Another stands in my place, Another who entirely puts Himself in my place. For this I thank Thee, Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

It can be readily observed that the substitutionary idea was the dominant one in Kierkegaard's thinking. Based on the idea of Christ as atoner for sin is the more dominant idea, in Kierkegaard's thought, of Christ as Pattern. This concept will receive treatment in the third division of the chapter. However, one statement from Training in Christianity might be appropriate here. "Christ came into the world for

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1. Ibid.
2. Christian Discourses: op. cit., pp. 368-369.

the purpose of saving the world, and at the same time...  
to be 'the pattern'."1

Kierkegaard takes quite literally the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ. Emphasized throughout his authorship is the idea that the God-Man must have the last word. He says:

...Christ lived here on earth, this life of his is the pattern (Forbilledet). Thereupon he ascends up on high and he says to the race directly: 'Now you begin.' And what is it they should begin with? By living in conformity with the Pattern. 'But,' he adds, 'one day at the end of time I shall come again.' This form of existence (if I may so express myself) makes the whole existence of the Church here on earth a parenthesis in Christ's life; the content of this parenthesis begins with Christ's Ascension, and with His second coming it ends. So here the case is dissimilar to every other historical relationship...2

Christ is not only saviour, but he is also judge.<sup>3</sup> He will judge humanity, not en masse, but each alone. Eternity is the judgment and it is always with us, though consummated at the end of time. Judgment is here and now and judgment is coming at the end of time.<sup>4</sup>

## 7. The Church

Kierkegaard's stress on faith as inward and individual is so pronounced that many feel he does less than justice to the Church. His thesis was that "Christianity does not exist."<sup>5</sup> He felt the Church had reduced the meaning

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1. Training in Christianity: op. cit., p. 232.
2. Ibid.: p. 198.
3. Journals: op. cit., p. 63, #222.
4. T.H. Croxall: Kierkegaard Commentary, James Nisbet and Co. LTD., London, 1956, pp. 217-218.
5. Journals: op. cit., p. 430, #1190.



of Christianity. For him, to press forward beyond the universal demands of ethics, beyond the superficiality of the mob mind, beyond the conventional religiosity which offers a specious security and overlooks the necessity of risk and decision, meant ascending to a height of isolation where the individual stands face to face with God as revealed in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps his best expression of his concept is to be found in the following paragraph:

The Christian combat is always waged by the individual; for this precisely is spirit, that everyone is an individual before God, that 'fellowship' is a lower category and 'the single individual', which everyone can be than should be. And even though the individuals were numbered by thousands and thus were fighting in union, yet, Christianly understood, it is each individual that fights, and in addition to fighting in union, he fights at the same time within himself and shall as an individual give account on the day of Judgment, when his life as an individual shall be on trial. 'The congregation' therefore belongs properly to eternity; 'the congregation' is at rest what 'the individual' is in unrest. But this life is precisely the time of testing, the time of unrest, hence 'the congregation' has not its abiding place in time but only in eternity, where it is the assembly at rest of all the individuals who stood the test of combat and probation.<sup>2</sup>

Thus he is a good Protestant in his profound distrust of all mediatorial agencies except Christ Himself. But he is extreme in assuming that the establishment of an "I-Thou" relationship with God requires a deep break with communal ties. This extremity is no doubt due in part to

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1. Roberts: op. cit., pp. 89-90.
2. Training in Christianity: op. cit., p. 218.

his biographical experiences.

The fragmentary doctrine of the Church that he had approached the idea of "the gathered Church." For he wrote-- "The notion of being a Christian because one is born of Christian parents is the fundamental delusion from which a multitude of others stem..."<sup>1</sup>

Generally, he regarded the Church's existence as natural and justifiable; he participated in public worship and even preached occasionally. But his attitude was colored by the fact that, from his point of view, the most essential aspects of religious struggle and belief could not be communicated directly, and he was always suspicious of anything in which men could participate as a "crowd" instead of as individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard believed that one of the errors of his time was the concept of the Church as being triumphant.

By this we are to understand that the time for contending is past, that the Church, although it is still in this world,<sup>3</sup> has nothing to contend for or to contend about.<sup>3</sup>

He emphasized the militant idea of the Church. "The Church militant is in the process of becoming."<sup>4</sup> He further notes-- "to be a Christian in this militant Church means to express what it is to be a Christian within an environment which is

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1. On Authority and Revelation: op. cit., p. 182.
2. Roberts: op. cit., p. 91.
3. Training in Christianity: op. cit., p. 207.
4. Ibid.: p. 206.

the opposite to Christian."<sup>1</sup> He equated the Church triumphant with the "established Christendom" of his day. The real purpose of the Church is to serve as a certain objective recourse.<sup>2</sup>

## 8. Revelation and History

Kierkegaard believed that God is real and that He has revealed Himself in history in Jesus Christ, apart from what any individual may think, will, or believe. But he refused to refer to the reality of God and historical revelation as "objective" because the latter word connoted for him demonstrable, conceptual knowledge, an abstraction from passionate commitment, personal decision, and the "I-Thou" encounter.<sup>3</sup>

One of his latest works-- On Authority and Revelation --contain his personal insights into this problem.

The two following paragraphs are quoted:

...It is important above all that there be fixed an unshakable qualitative difference between the historical element in Christianity (the paradox that the eternal came into existence once in time) and the history of Christianity, the history of its followers, etc. The fact that God came into existence in human form under the Emperor Augustus: that is the historical element in Christianity, the historical in a paradoxical composition. It is with this paradox that everyone, in whatever country he may be living, must become contemporary, if he is to become a believing Christian. With the history of Christianity he has

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1. Ibid.: p. 207.

2. Postscript: op. cit., p. 37.

3. Cf. Roberts: op. cit., pp. 84-85.

in this respect nothing whatever to do. But the baleful fact in our age is, among others, that it is almost impossible to find a man who has time and patience and seriousness and the passion of thought to be well brought up to respect the qualitative dialectic.<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

The Christian fact has no history, for it is the paradox that God once came into existence in time. This is the offense, but also it is the point of departure; and whether this was eighteen hundred years ago or yesterday, one can just as well be contemporary with it. Like the polar star this paradox never changes its position and therefore has no history, so this paradox stands immovable and unchanged; and though Christianity were to last for another ten thousand years, one would get no farther from this paradox than the contemporaries were. For the distance is not to be measured by the quantitative scale of time and space, for it is qualitatively decisive by the fact that it is a paradox.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporaneity with Jesus offered no crucial advantages, for it is only by means of faith that anyone can be related in time with the Eternal. All men, whether they are contemporary with Jesus or live in a later century, must receive salvation directly from God Himself, not second hand through some other human being.<sup>3</sup>

The revelation of God comes through His word and through the Holy Spirit. This revelation makes clear what sin is and offers a solution.

The essential aspects of his concept of revelation can be summarized as follows:<sup>4</sup>

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1. On Authority and Revelation: op. cit., pp. 58-59.
2. Ibid.: pp. 60-61.
3. Cf. Roberts: op. cit., p. 85.
4. Thompste: op. cit., taken from the untranslated Papirer, pp. 188-189.

- (1) Christian revelation is an objective reality apart from the individual Christian consciousness. It is the touchstone which determines whether or not one is a Christian.
- (2) Christian revelation is no identity of subject and object. Every Christian is conscious of the fact that the revelation did not arise in his own heart.
- (3) If there was not a single person who was aware that God has revealed Himself in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, he has nevertheless revealed Himself. The last statement appears as a contradiction in terminology, but it is not a contradiction of the idea if 'revelation' is regarded as an act on the part of God and apart from the person to whom it is revealed.
- (4) Christian revelation is a transcendent point of departure for the human consciousness and cannot be mediated.

Kierkegaard rejects the deterministic view of history, for man has freedom. Yet history is moving toward the goal of eternity. In eternity each shall render account as an individual. The faithful shall be rewarded and the faithless shall be judged.

#### D. The Ethical Principles of Kierkegaard

This phase of the study will be concerned with the Christian ethics of Søren Kierkegaard. These concerns are treated separately, here, for at least two reasons. One, the practical applications of Christianity are an outgrowth of the religious presuppositions. Therefore, it follows logically. And second, this is the area in which Kierkegaard makes what is perhaps his greatest contribution to Christian thought. He was fairly orthodox in his theological beliefs. But he was very penetrating in the work-

ing out of his ethical expression.

### 1. Truth as Subjectivity

In any scientific account of truth, the truth exists independently of the individual, and subjectivity, the personal equation, is the enemy to be feared. Kierkegaard, however, is not primarily concerned with the objective or scientific search for truth. Indeed, he felt this was the preoccupation of "established Christendom." He is rather concerned with the ethico-religious relationship of the individual. Ethico-religious truth is not an addition to our intellectual furniture, but that such truth lies in the personal appropriation. The emphasis is upon the "how" rather than upon the "what". The emphasis is moved from the dogmatic and objective realm to the subjective and psychological realm of appropriation.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard purposed to get away from the abstract thinking so common to the philosophical thinking of his day and to a personal appropriation by which the individual himself is transformed. This is what he means by truth as subjectivity. This emphasis was found present in every work read.<sup>2</sup> A couple references from original sources will give insights into the problem as Kierkegaard saw it. The first comes from The Sickness Unto Death.

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1. Cf. Thomte: op. cit., p. 114.
2. Cf. Ibid.

...it is enough to provoke both laughter and tears when one sees then that all this knowing and understanding exercises no influence upon the lives of these men, that their lives do not in the remotest way express what they have understood, but rather the contrary. One involuntarily exclaims at the sight of a disproportion at once so sorrowful and so ludicrous. But how in the world is it possible that they have understood it? And is it true that they have understood? Here the ancient ironist and ethicist makes answer: 'My dear man, never believe it, for if they truly had understood, their lives also would have expressed it.' They would have done what they understood.<sup>1</sup>

The former paragraph represents a more negative view. In Training in Christianity is found a more positive statement.

...Christianly understood, the truth consists not in knowing the truth but in being the truth. In spite of the newest philosophy, there is an infinite difference between these two... For knowing the truth is something which follows as a matter of course from being the truth, and not conversely; and precisely for this reason it becomes untruth when knowing the truth is separated from being the truth, or when knowing the truth is treated as one and the same thing as being the truth, since the true relation is the converse of this: to be the truth is one and the same thing as knowing the truth, and Christ would never have known the truth in case He had not been the truth; no man knows more of the truth than what he is of the truth...<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard defines truth (that is, the essential or ethico-religious truth) in its antithesis to objective truth:

An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .

1. The Sickness Unto Death: op. cit., pp. 145-146.
2. Training in Christianity: op. cit., p. 201.
3. Postscript: op. cit., p. 182.

This definition is also regarded as the formula for faith.<sup>1</sup>

A further Kierkegaardian term, related to this topic, is that of reduplication. The true teacher must be what he teaches. That Christianity regards the possession of riches as a possible danger to the soul is something that cannot be preached by a man who clings to his wealth, his comforts, his privileges, as to a personal necessity. Such unre-duplicated teaching leads others to deceive themselves, and transforms Christianity into a myth, its preaching into a theatrical diversion for the imagination.<sup>2</sup>

Since man is a synthesis of soul and body, of the temporal and the eternal, existence is defined as the synthesis of the infinite and the finite. To exist means to realize the task which the synthesis presents, namely to bring the eternal into the temporal.<sup>3</sup> This is what Kierkegaard means by making Christ contemporaneous. He states that "becoming a Christian in truth comes to mean to become contemporary with Christ."<sup>4</sup>

For in relation to the Absolute there is only one tense, the present. Anyone who is not contemporary with the Absolute, for him it has no existence. And since Christ is the absolute, it is easy to see that in relation to him there is only one situation, that of contemporaneity. Christ is not at all a merely historical person, since as Paradox he is an extremely unhistorical person. The difference between poetry and reality is--contemporaneity. History lacks the

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1. Ibid.
2. Geismar: op. cit., p. 49.
3. Postscript: op. cit., pp. 76, 350.
4. Training in Christianity: op. cit., p. 67.



determination which is the determinant of truth (as inwardness) and of all religiousness, the for thee. The past is not reality--for me. What you live with contemporaneously is reality--for you. And thus every man can be contemporary...with Christ's life on earth; for it is sacred history and stands by itself outside history.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporaneousness is a much emphasized idea throughout the thought of Kierkegaard.

## 2. The Christian Life

### a. Decision

It has been observed above that the Christian revelation is not just a set of propositions, but a creative act in the individual who has been prepared to receive it in part by the very discipline of human idealism, and who through this creative act becomes a new creature. But no birth is without birth pangs, and no revelation is without an experience of suffering. The way to Christianity goes through a decision, a crucial decision in the temporal moment; faith is an existential leap. The necessity of this leap is what gives offense to man and to all human idealism.<sup>2</sup>

To get people to decide was one of Kierkegaard's chief missions. He constantly emphasized the importance of each individual making the decision. He maintained the great either-or, and with indecision he would have nothing to do. Either-or is the way of decision, both-and filled

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1. Training in Christianity: op. cit., p. 67 ff.
2. Geismar: op. cit., p. 57.

him with horror.<sup>1</sup> Clear distinctions must be made. To say that Christianity is true to a certain degree was for him the greatest of betrayals and the height of stupidity. The principle of contradiction must be maintained and then, on that basis, the mysteries of God and of man's existence and the absolute paradox which is "the category expressing the relation between the existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth" recognized.<sup>2</sup> The entrance to Christianity is by way of a practical experience of profound pathos, in which the individual yields himself absolutely. To believe in Jesus Christ as God and man is to find in Him the center of one's own life, to owe Him everything, to follow Him in everything. This requires an existential leap of faith which results in forgiveness, obedience, and judgment upon my own imperfection.<sup>3</sup>

Kierkegaard approved of the admiration of things, but not of Christ. For he says:

What, then, is the distinction between 'an admirer' and 'a follower'? A follower is or 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 upon him to be or to strive to be the thing he admires.<sup>4</sup>

He requires a decision which will thrust the individual into a life of becoming Christian. This process goes on throughout the life of the individual. Kierkegaard

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1. Cf. Lowrie: Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 554.
2. Cf. Martin J. Heineken: Kierkegaard as Christian, The Journal of Religion, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 29.
3. Cf. Geismar: op. cit., pp. 61-62.
4. Training in Christianity: op. cit., p. 234.

never made any pretensions of having arrived.

b. Suffering

Kierkegaard blamed the ministry for many of the religious misconceptions of his day. They did not have, in his mind, a proper view of what it means to follow Christ through suffering. He writes the following:

They preach quite Christianly about the necessity of passing through many tribulations to enter into the kingdom of heaven, saying that tribulation must be expected. Admirable! That is genuine Christianity! But listening more closely, one discovers with surprise that these many tribulations are nothing else but illness, financial difficulties, anxiety for the year to come, what one is to eat, or anxiety about, 'what one ate last year--and has not paid for', or the fact that one has not become what one desired to be in the world, or other such fatalities. About these things one preaches Christianly, one weeps humanly, and one crazily connects them with Gethsemane. In case it were through these many tribulations one enters into the kingdom of heaven, the heathen also must enter into the kingdom of heaven, for they also pass through the same.<sup>1</sup>

Real suffering comes when tribulation and persecution arise because of the word. It is the individual believing and living the paradox of the Incarnation and suffering as Christ suffered. It is the offence of the cross.

Eternal blessedness is reserved only for those who strive and suffer, and must not be glibly assumed to be the prerogative of all. The persistence of suffering is the guarantee that the individual is in the correct Christian position, and that he remains in it.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid.: p. 116.

2. Postscript: op. cit., p. 397.

Kierkegaard believed in "The Two ways":

One is to suffer; the other is to become a professor of the fact that another suffered. The first is 'the way'; the second goes round about (the proposition 'about' is so aptly used for lectures and sermons) and perhaps it ends by going down.<sup>1</sup>

Because of his own sufferings, and his emphatic assertions about the necessity of suffering in religion, Kierkegaard has been looked upon as a prophet of doom. Yet he is emphasizing a New Testament truth. The Christian is always up against the scorn of the world, and even its hatred, if he refuses to lower his ideals to worldly standards.<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard did believe in a joyfulness in suffering, yet he was quite cautious in his definition. He states the following warning:

Nevertheless, however true it (joyful suffering) may be let us not exaggerate; a man is, after all, a man; and could, or should, joy in suffering be the same as joy without suffering eternity would be, practically speaking, superfluous.<sup>3</sup>

In the Christian Discourses Kierkegaard develops the idea of suffering at great length. The following paragraph represents a summary of the development:

We suffer only once, but we triumph eternally. So far as that goes, we triumph also only once. Quite true. But the difference is infinite: that the once of suffering is the instant, that of triumph, eternity; the 'once' of suffering, therefore, when it is past,

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1. Journals: op. cit., p. 528, #1362.
2. Cf. Croxall: op. cit., p. 27.
3. Journals: op. cit., pp. 432-433, #1196.

is no time, the 'once' of triumph is, in another sense, no time, for it is never past; the once of suffering is a transition, or a thing we pass through, that of triumph, an eternally enduring triumph.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard's concept of suffering might be summarized as follows: Calvary reveals the fact that the divine love must suffer, in that it arouses the hatred of men. Those who follow Christ must also suffer, since it is an expression for the heterogeneity of the environment. His ideal of the martyr-prophet derives its power and its validity from the picture of the Son of Man, embodying in Himself a divine love for all mankind, and crucified in hatred by human beings whom He loved.<sup>2</sup>

#### c. Guilt

The existential thinker starts with the task of relating himself absolutely to the absolute telos; this requires an inward break with the world; and when one realizes the extent to which he has failed he is aware of being essentially in a condition of guilt. Therefore, he is farther away from reaching the goal than he was when he started. "And yet this backward movement is a forward movement, in so far as going forward means going deeper into something."<sup>3</sup> The individual is led into a deeper recognition of what it means to exist. This then is progress as compared with the

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1. Christian Discourses: op. cit., p. 103.
2. Cf. Geismar: op. cit., p. 73.
3. Postscript: op. cit., p. 469.

sort of philosophizing which contemplates beautiful goals and assumes that man can soar upward to them.<sup>1</sup> While the expression "guilt" seems to go backward, a deepened awareness is an indication of progress in the Christian life.<sup>2</sup>

If man's condition is essentially one of guilt, it might seem that he is forever excluded from being related to eternal happiness. Kierkegaard believed the converse to be true. He states the following:

But how can the consciousness of guilt be the decisive expression for the pathetic relationship of an exister to an eternal happiness, and this in such a way that every exister who has not this consciousness is eo ipso not related to his eternal happiness? One might think that this consciousness is an expression of the fact that one is not related to it, the decisive expression of the fact that one is lost and the relationship is relinquished. The answer is not difficult. Precisely because it is an exister who is to relate himself, while guilt is at the same time the most concrete expression of existence, the consciousness of guilt is the expression for that relationship. The more abstract the individual is, the less is he related to an eternal happiness, and the more remote he is from guilt; for abstraction assumes the indifference of existence, but guilt is the expression for the strongest self-assertion of existence, and after all it is an exister who is to relate himself to an eternal happiness.<sup>3</sup>

God comes into touch with human life and reaches man as he is, i.e. guilty. And the man who is remote from his own guilt is also remote from God, because he is remote from himself. Forgiveness becomes meaningless, for this man, because responsibility has become meaningless.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Cf. Roberts: op. cit., p. 114.
2. Postscript: op. cit., p. 469.
3. Ibid.: p. 470.
4. Cf. Roberts: op. cit., pp. 114-115.

This kind of guilt is on a deeper level than the guilt of specific infractions which can be dealt with by specific punishments or amendments. This is the guilt that comes when the man of faith realizes that nothing he can do, in as much as he is temporal, can remove the blockage which stands between him and eternal happiness.<sup>1</sup>

The restoration of the union between God and man is brought about by a descent of the deity. It is this descent and the incarnation of the deity in the personality of a single individual which constitutes the paradox.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, guilt itself is a paradoxical relationship. There is a release and yet there is not release. The most ardent saint is the most conscious of his sinful condition.

Kierkegaard expressed the individual's relationship to this paradox in the following words:

Every individual ought to live in fear and trembling, and so too there is no established order which can do without fear and trembling. Fear and trembling signifies that one is in process of becoming, and every individual man, and the race as well, is or should be conscious of being in process of becoming... Judaism in the time of Christ had become, precisely by means of the Pharisees and scribes, a self-complacent, self-deified establishment.<sup>3</sup>

#### d. Christ as Pattern

A much emphasized concept, in Kierkegaard's writings, is the idea of Christ as Pattern. This is a concept about

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1. Ibid.

2. Thomte: op. cit., p. 95.

3. Training in Christianity: op. cit., p. 89.

which he felt deeply. He begins to develop this idea in Training in Christianity.

Christ came into the world for the purpose of saving the world, and at the same time (as was implied in His first purpose) to be 'the pattern', to leave behind Him footsteps for those who would attach themselves to Him, who thus might become followers, for 'follower' corresponds to 'footsteps'. Just for this reason He let Himself be born in lowly station, and thereafter lived in poverty, despised and humiliated. Indeed, no man ever lived in such humiliation as He. Even the poorest man, on comparing his own life with His, must come to the conclusion that, humanly speaking, his own life was preferable in comparison with the conditions of His life. Why then was this, why this lowliness and humiliation? It was because He who in truth is to be 'the pattern' and is concerned only with followers must in one sense be located behind men, to drive them on, whereas in another sense He stands before them, beckoning them on. This is the relationship of loftiness and lowliness in 'the pattern'. Loftiness must not be of the direct sort, but it must be of the spiritual sort, and so precisely the negation of worldly and earthly loftiness. Lowliness must be of the direct sort; for the direct (plainly apparent) lowliness, when one has to pass through it, is precisely the way, but at the same time for the worldly and earthly mind it is a detour which ensures that loftiness shall not be taken in vain. 'The pattern' is therefore located infinitely near to man in lowliness, and yet infinitely far away in loftiness, even more remote indeed than if it were simply put at a distance on high; for the fact that a man in order to reach it, to determine his character in likeness to it, must go through lowliness and humiliation, that there is absolutely no other way, constitutes a still greater remoteness, really an infinite remoteness.<sup>1</sup>

This expression of "the pattern" comes into clearer focus when one understands Kierkegaard's analysis of the Christendom of his day. He looked upon Lutheranism as a needed corrective for Luther's day. But the corrective be-

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1. Ibid.: p. 232.



came the norm and the next generation was so confused that what it was meant to correct no longer existed. "Taken by itself, as the whole of Christianity, the Lutheran corrective produces the most subtle type of worldliness and paganism."<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard believed the Christian life was a matter of faith and works; not one or the other. Another Journal entry contains his view of the Christians of his day:

Present-day Christians really live as though the position were that Christ was the great hero and benefactor who once and for all had secured happiness for us, and we only had to enjoy the innocent pleasures of the world and let him do the rest. But Christ is essentially the model, and consequently we should be like him and not merely make use of him.<sup>2</sup>

To follow "the pattern" is to will one thing--"the Good"--which is developed in Purity of Heart . It means that a man cannot serve two masters.<sup>3</sup> "Imitation", which answers to "Christ as the Pattern", must be brought to the fore, applied, recalled to remembrance.<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard felt that this is the point where the human race winces, here it is principally that the difficulty lies, here is where the question really is decided whether one will accept Christianity or not.<sup>5</sup>

There is perhaps no finer way to close the discussion regarding "the pattern" than to quote part of a

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1. Journals: op. cit., p. 495, #1298.
2. Ibid.: p. 219, #698.
3. Cf. For Self Examination: op. cit., p. 161 ff.
4. Ibid.: p. 200.
5. Ibid.: p. 197.

prayer by Kierkegaard. This reveals something of the dynamic conception of Christianity which he embraced.

...Thou who art both the Pattern and the Redeemer, and again both the Redeemer and the Pattern, so that when the striver sinks under the Pattern, then the Redeemer raises him up again, but at the same instant Thou art the Pattern, to keep him continually striving. Thou, our Redeemer, by Thy blessed suffering and death, hast made satisfaction for all and for everything; no eternal blessedness can be or shall be earned by desert--it has been deserved. Yet Thou didst leave behind Thee the trace of Thy footsteps, Thou the holy pattern of the human race and of each individual in it, so that, saved by thy redemption, they might every instant have confidence and boldness to will to strive to follow Thee.<sup>1</sup>

#### E. Summary

Several observations are suggested by way of summarizing this chapter.

First, Kierkegaard was not a systematic theologian nor a dogmatician. He gives no evidence of a systematic zeal to arrange the truth of Christianity into paragraphs. He was primarily interested in the individual and in helping to relate the individual to the truth of Christianity.

Second, his thinking is shot through with an aggressive, powerful, and full-blooded supernaturalism. History has a goal. And at every turn Kierkegaard is careful to preserve the paradoxical relationship of deity and humanity. The "leap" of faith is an inescapable must.

Third, with the New Testament in hand, he invites

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1. Ibid.: p. 161.

his readers to simply believe what the book says. He accepts the tenets of Christianity, and is orthodox therein.

Fourth, he was primarily interested in aiding the individual in self-discovery of truth. Therefore his ethical principles are suggestive rather than definitive. The Socratic method is evident.

Fifth, while the biographical experiences of his life may have influenced him to place an over-emphasis upon some concepts, such as guilt, suffering, and the individual, no one dare question his flaming sincerity. Following "the pattern" involves no price too great to pay.

THE INFLUENCE OF KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT  
UPON RUDOLF BULTMANN

CHAPTER III

A. Introduction

This chapter must, of necessity, include a brief treatment of the theology of Rudolf Bultmann. This in itself is a somewhat provocative assignment. For this theologian has many interpreters and they do not all agree. A further factor is that Bultmann is still a productive theologian and while such a situation exists one can never be sure that he has the complete picture of Bultmann's thought. Nevertheless it is hoped that, from the reading of five or six of his books, a degree of objectivity and representativeness has been attained. The summation of his theological views will at least be sufficient for the purposes of this chapter.

After treating the facts of Bultmann and his thought the chapter seeks to trace the Kierkegaardian influences. Just how is the thought of Kierkegaard reflected in Bultmann? Are there important differences between the two men? These are some of the questions which are of primary importance in this chapter.

## B. Biographical Sketch and Background

Rudolf Bultmann is a German theologian who is gaining increasing attention in theological circles. Little is available about his early life except that he was born in 1884. After studying at Marburg, Tübingen, and Berlin he became Privatdozent (unsalaried teacher) at Marburg in 1912, Extraordinary Professor at Breslau in 1916, and professor at Giessen in 1921. From 1921 until 1951 he was professor of New Testament at Marburg.<sup>1</sup>

The early twentieth century was ablaze with an optimism which was expecting the kingdom of God on earth. Then came the War and with it a changed mood in theological expression. Karl Barth called the church to be obedient to the Word of God as revealed in the Bible rather than bent this way and that by historical, philosophical, and critical considerations. With Barth a new dogmatic of the Bible and the Christian faith came to birth.

Some, however, looked upon the theological extremes to which an uncritical acceptance of the mythological (highly supernatural) elements in the Bible could lead. One such was Rudolf Bultmann. He stands between the old-fashioned conservatism on the one hand and the old-fashioned

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1. F.L. Cross: The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Oxford University Press, London, 1957, Rudolf Bultmann, p. 206.

liberalism on the other. The former he opposes because of its blind and literal acceptance of the mythological elements in the Bible; i.e. the accounts of supernatural invasion both divine and demonic; the liberal draws his fire because of his almost total repudiation of the mythological as of any importance.<sup>1</sup>

To stem the tide of an uncritical acceptance of New Testament mythology and thus save the gospel for modern scientific man is the chief purpose of Bultmann in his de-mythologizing theology. The importance of the New Testament is not in this miracle or in that proof of the resurrection, but the important thing is the kerygma, the proclamation of what God has done for men in Jesus Christ. He feels that the best statement of the basic Christian message occurs in II Corinthians 5:6-6:2. Here we learn that God has done something momentous for mankind in Christ. The proclamation of that event is the kerygma. Through its presentation to men, God encounters them, revealing his nature and will. That dynamic encounter is, however, not mythology, but fact, known to Christian men and women in all centuries from the days of Jesus of Nazareth to the present.<sup>2</sup>

Before going further it is necessary to treat Bultmann's view of the nature and role of myth. According

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1. Cf. G.W. Davis: *Existentialism and Theology*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1957, pp. 1-2.
2. Cf. *ibid*: p. 3.

to him, myth is present wherever the unworldly is spoken of in a worldly way, where one speaks of the gods in a human way, where the transcendental is objectivized. It seems as if the whole problem of myth were narrowed down to a specific way of thinking and speaking. And yet it is more complex than this for he speaks of the intention of the myth. The purpose of mythological speech is not to humanize the gods or to objectivize the transcendental but much more to show the fact that man is dependent on powers beyond his control, that man's problems are answered on a higher level, that his search for the meaning of life is not in vain. Therefore, the intention of myth is fundamentally existential (related to the needs, fears, and hopes of man's life), and it is not speculative or dogmatic or playful.<sup>1</sup> To explain and to understand a myth means to translate its language and contents into such words as are suitable to express man's plight, man's decisions, and man's expectations.<sup>2</sup> Bultmann thinks of Christianity as primarily concerned with human existence. To penetrate to the core of what it says about man's existence, breaking through all the New Testament's obscuring supernatural or mythological claims and presentations, becomes Bultmann's purpose and passion in demythologizing. Thus theology for

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1. Markus Barth: Introduction To Demythologizing, Journal of Religion, Vol. 37, No. 3, July 1957, University of Chicago Press, p. 148.

2. Ibid.

him is an effort to determine the existence-content of the Christian faith and put it into intelligible form so that man may understand it and live by it.<sup>1</sup>

Bultmann conceives of several groups of mythological utterances in the New Testament. The first contains the statements that presuppose the "three-decker concept of the world" (heaven, earth, hell) and that speak, correspondingly, of a coming and going of God or his Son hither or thither; of redemption as removed from one place to another; of a beginning and end of the world in space and time. To the second group belongs what is said about Christ's pre-existence, incarnation, resurrection, ascension, *parousia*, and judgment. A third group is formed by all New Testament utterances that contain a sacrificial view of Christ's death and describe the God-man relationship in juridical terms. A fourth group may be distinguished in the many miracle stories, in which, according to Bultmann, evidence and proof of the divine presence or power are given, in support of faith.<sup>2</sup>

Bultmann believes that the formulation of the kerygma in mythological words was a time-bound attempt to overcome communicative difficulties. The Church was simply using the thought forms which were current in that period.

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1. Davis: *op. cit.*, p. 6.
2. Barth: *op. cit.*, p. 149.



To acknowledge this means to free the church of later periods from the idea that mythological language is the only way to convey the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons then for demythologizing are as follows: First, the Bible reader's mental health. Modern scientific man cannot have the world view of the New Testament period. Second, there is the problem of communication. Christ must be presented to the present generation in understandable terms. Third, demythologizing is necessary whenever and wherever Christians are still concerned for truth. A true statement about God can only be and will always be a statement about the new understanding of ourselves that is given, produced, and sustained by him. The truth of a theological statement will therefore be recognizable by its anthropological implications.<sup>2</sup>

### C. Salient Elements of Bultmann's Theology

All that can be allowed here is a brief treatment of the following topics. Christology, however, must receive more explication than some of the others. For in one's view of Christology is to be found the core of his theology.

#### 1. God

In speaking of God, Bultmann makes much of the

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1. Ibid.: p. 150.  
2. Ibid.: pp. 151-152.

paradox of "God remote and near." This appears to be an attempt to explain immanence and transcendence. He states the following:

God is the remote God, which means first of all: God is not a part of that world which the thought and activity of man can control. God is the near God, which means first of all: God is the Creator of this world of men, which He governs by His providence. This paradox is understandable because the same (apparent) contradiction characterizes the life of man; for man has departed from God, but God has come to man.<sup>1</sup>

Bultmann believes that God is for Jesus not an object of intellectual investigation. Jesus' affirmations of faith about God have not the character of universal truths which are intellectually valid without being grounded in the actual life experience of the believer.<sup>2</sup> Note his view of omnipotence:

The assertion of God's omnipotence is thus no universally valid proposition, to be applied at will, which may be presupposed as a starting-point for a world view. Rather it affirms first and always that God, the determining Power governing my individual life, can be rightly called omnipotent only if I experience this power in my own life, only if God allows me to realize it as fact, if He reveals to me His omnipotence. But this revelation is always a miracle, that is, always an act of the divine will, which is wholly outside my control. The affirmation of faith, that God is Almighty, is then always dependent upon the insight that I cannot perceive and reckon with this omnipotence as a universally valid fact whenever I please, but only if it pleases God. ...Thus there exists indeed to the eye of man a dualism, since for him ordinary events

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1. Rudolf Bultmann: Jesus and The Word, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1934, pp. 194-195.
2. Ibid.: p. 176.

veil God from him and he may perceive God only through a miracle. Nevertheless faith knows that God is almighty--but has this knowledge only because of miracle.<sup>1</sup>

God is one who acts as a person and whose act of mercy is an event in time. He is more than the "irreducible coefficient of the achievement of moral processes in self-consciousness."<sup>2</sup> God is the God of history and therewith always someone new, always the God who comes to men in historical encounters. He is the God who guides history to an end.<sup>3</sup>

Yet elsewhere one reads Bultmann's expression-- "the idea of God."<sup>4</sup> This raises the question as to the nature of the personality with which God is viewed. Nevertheless Jesus' idea of God includes God as creator, a God at hand who has come near as the "Demander". Also the demanding God of judgment is also the merciful God of forgiveness.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus in this thought of God and of man in the light of this thought--"de-historized" God and man; that is, released the relation between God and man from its previous ties to history (history considered as the affairs of nations). God, who stands aloof from the history of nations,

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1. Ibid.: pp. 176-177.

2. Ibid.: pp. 208-209.

3. Rudolf Bultmann: History and Eschatology, Edinburgh, The University Press, 1957, p. 96.

4. Rudolf Bultmann: Theology of the New Testament, Vol. I, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1951, p. 22ff.

5. Ibid.: pp. 23-24.

meets each man in his own little history, his everyday life with its daily gift and demand. De-historized man (i.e. naked of his supposed security within his historical group) is guided into his concrete encounter with his neighbor, in which he finds true history.<sup>1</sup>

One further insight must be noted from Bultmann's Essays. For him, the importance of the New Testament is the kerygma, the proclamation of what God has done for men in Jesus Christ. This has implications for belief in God.

For Christianity belief in God is not belief and trust in God as a general principle, but belief in a definite Word proclaimed to the believer. The event is Jesus Christ, in whom, as the New Testament says, God has spoken, and whom the New Testament itself calls 'the Word'. That is, in what happened in and through Christ God has decisively manifested himself, and on this event a message is based and authenticated which confronts man as God's Word, not teaching him a new concept of God, but giving him the right to believe in the God in whom he would fain believe.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Man

Man consists of body (or flesh) and soul. But soul is not the rational mind which is related to the divine mind. The very nature of man is his will, which can be good or evil. Its goodness consists in obedience to the demands of God: its badness is disobedience and revolt against the will of God. The good or bad will of man mani-

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1. Ibid.: pp. 25-26.

2. Rudolf Bultmann: Essays, Philosophical and Theological, S.C.M. Press LTD. London, 1955, pp. 11-12.

festes itself also in his attitude to God's guidance in history, either thankfully accepting the divine ordinances and praising God, or else resisting and grumbling.<sup>1</sup>

Man can find fulfillment only in relationship to God.

The individual life of man is not annihilated in his relationship to God, but on the contrary is awakened to its own reality, because man is constrained to decision. God Himself must vanish for the man who does not know that the essence of his own life consists in the full freedom of his decision, that through the decision of his will through obedience, he can win fellowship with God.<sup>2</sup>

Through obedience and the miracle of God's delivering act he is delivered to sonship.

Man is also responsible before God. "God demands the whole will of man and knows no abatement in His demand."<sup>3</sup> Man is not master of his life as a creature. He has freedom to rebel against God's will, but he has no freedom to escape the demand of God.

Man, upon whose whole self God's demand is made, has no freedom toward God; he is accountable for his life as a whole--as the parable of the talents teaches. He may not, must not, cannot raise any claim before God, but is like the slave who only has his duty to do and can do no more.<sup>4</sup>

The genuine life of man is always before him; it is always to be apprehended, to be realized. Man is always on

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1. History and Eschatology: op. cit., pp. 96-97.
2. Jesus and The Word: op. cit., pp. 153-154.
3. T.N.T.: Vol. I, p. 13.
4. Ibid.: p. 14.

the way; each present hour is questioned and challenged by its future. He can never, like Goethe's "Faust", say to the moment: "Stand still, thou art so beautiful."<sup>1</sup>

Bultmann conceives of a very close relationship existing between theology and anthropology. The following paragraph indicates this relation and also includes a further insight about man.

Knowledge about God is in the first instance a knowledge which man has about himself and his finitude, and God is reckoned to be the power which breaks through this finitude of man and thereby raises him up to his real nature.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Sin

Bultmann has no thorough going doctrine of sin and guilt in the traditional sense. The real evil in the world is the evil will of men.<sup>3</sup> He discusses Jesus' view of sin as follows:

Jesus does not discuss how large a proportion of mankind is sinful; he evolves no theory that all are sinners, no theory of original sin. For sin is something condemned by God in the concrete present moment, not a universal attribute of human nature theoretically understood apart from time. Sin no more than God can be discussed in general propositions; otherwise I should be able to distinguish myself from my sin, whereas in reality I am myself the sinner. Sin is not a sort of appendage to man; it is the characteristic of sinful humanity. Hence Jesus does not preach that all are sinners, but speaks to sinful men.<sup>4</sup>

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1. History and Eschatology: op. cit., p. 140.
2. Essays: op. cit., p. 98.
3. Jesus and The Word: op. cit., p. 50.
4. Ibid.: pp. 197-198.

"In man--because his substance is flesh--sin slumbers from the beginning."<sup>1</sup> Sin is man's false pursuit of life and this consists in leading one's life "after the flesh", --i.e. living out of the created, the earthly--natural and transitory.<sup>2</sup>

Bultmann's interpretation of the Pauline view is best set forth in "History and Eschatology."

Paul makes clear the real essence of sin when he recognizes boasting as the chief sin. Sin is the striving to stand before God in one's own strength, to secure one's life instead of to receive it--and there-with oneself--purely as a gift from God. Behind this striving lies man's fear of giving himself up, the desire to secure himself and therefore the clinging to that which is at his disposal, be it earthly goods or be it works performed according to the commandments of the law. Lastly it is fear in face of the future, fear in the face of God himself, for God is the ever-coming God.<sup>3</sup>

Sin is the universal enslavement which leads ultimately to death. Release comes by faith in the spoken word of forgiveness.

#### 4. Christology

This facet of Bultmann's theology is most distinct and unique. His views have given occasion to many live debates on the subject and his critics attack him severely at this point. The temptation to "camp" here must be resisted, but a fair sampling of his Christology must be presented.

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1. T.N.T.: Vol. I, op. cit., p. 249.

2. Ibid.: p. 246.

3. History and Eschatology: op. cit., p. 99.

Bultmann believes that the New Testament proclaims that the freedom and the arbitrary nature of God's action is authenticated by the fact that he had acted decisively for all the world and for all time in the person of a concrete, historical man, Jesus of Nazareth. "Through him everyone is addressed and asked if he is willing to hear God's message of forgiveness and grace here. In Jesus Christ the destiny of every man is decided. He is the eschatological act of God!"<sup>1</sup>

In the New Testament Jesus is not presented in literal seriousness as a pre-existent divine being who came in human form to earth to reveal unprecedented secrets. The ideas of pre-existence and incarnation and resurrection are the products of mythological terminology. The mythological terminology is intended to express the absolute and decisive significance of his word--the mythological notion of pre-existence is made to serve the idea of Revelation. His word does not arise from the sphere of human observation and thought, but comes from beyond. It is a word free of all human motivation, a word determined from outside himself.<sup>2</sup>

Why did God choose this particular man, Jesus of Nazareth, as the Revealer? Bultmann believes that this

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1. Essays: op. cit., p. 85.
2. T.N.T. Vol. 2: op. cit., p. 62.



question must not, may not, be answered--for to do so would destroy the offense which belongs ineradicably to the Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

Bultmann turns to John and Paul for his views of Christology. The following is his interpretation of John's teaching:

...The 'facts of salvation' in the traditional sense play no important role in John. The entire salvation-drama--incarnation, death, resurrection, Pentecost, the parousia--is concentrated into a single event: the Revelation of God's 'reality' ( $\alpha\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ ) in the earthly activity of the man Jesus combined with the overcoming of the 'offense' in it by man's accepting it in faith.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the resurrection cannot be an event of special significance. No resurrection is needed to destroy the triumph which death might be supposed to have gained in the crucifixion. For the cross itself was already triumph over the world and its ruler.<sup>3</sup> In fact the resurrection is not an event of past history with a self-evident meaning. It is just the disciples way of expressing the meaning of the cross.

What then is the meaning of the cross for Bultmann? According to him the thought of Jesus' death as an atonement for sin has no place in John, and if it should turn out that he took it over from the tradition of the Church, it

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1. T.N.T. Vol. 1: op. cit., p. 69.
2. Ibid.: Vol. 2: p. 58.
3. Ibid.: p. 56.

would still be a foreign element in his work. The passages mentioning Jesus' blood were inserted by an ecclesiastical editor.<sup>1</sup>

To Bultmann, the crucifixion is a mixture of the historical and the mythological. It is an event tied to an objective setting in history and something fraught with great consequences for human life in the here and now. The crucifixion becomes mythological when men seek to state for mankind the cosmic, redemptive, and eschatological meaning of that particular crucifixion. Mythological language creeps in when the one killed on Calvary is described as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," or as the preexistent Son of God offered up to satisfy the justice and wrath of God.<sup>2</sup>

The mythological meaning of the cross is that Christ's sufferings are not a long way back in history on Calvary, even though they concentrate there historically, but that they are present with me now. The self-giving and suffering of that life cannot be confined to a particular point in history, but are contemporary with us. The cross and passion are viewed as ever-present realities. They are not confined to the events of the first Good Friday. Through such contemporaneity with Christ I am redeemed from

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1. Ibid.: p. 54.
2. Davis: op. cit., p. 57.

a thoughtless, self-centered life and transformed into God's servant in the present age. When the cross is demythologized in this way, it enters our history and our experience, becoming existential-historical rather than merely objective-historical. Thus the cross authentically repeats itself in my experience.<sup>1</sup>

Bultmann believes that the existential interpretation of the cross causes it to become a permanent redemptive fact rather than simply a mythological event.

Jesus' importance as Messiah-Son-of-Man lies not at all in what he did in the past, but entirely in what is expected of him for the future. And once this expectation is fulfilled by the eschatological drama, that event will never become, like the crossing of the Red Sea, a past to which one could look back thankfully, drawing confidence from it, but it will be God's last deed of all, by which he puts history to an end.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, through the cruel death of Jesus a new factor is thrust into history, producing a fresh and enduring situation therein. That new factor is that men and women by the millions are won to crucifixion with Christ today for the good of mankind, a victory which evokes in them a striking quality of experience profoundly affecting their lives and the life of mankind. Without this power to conquer sin and transform self-centered personality into the servant of God and mankind, the cross remains simply

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1. Ibid.: p. 59.

2. T.N.T.: op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 36.

the tragic end of a great man.<sup>1</sup>

It remains for man to accept Jesus as the authentic word of God, as the way of life.

Christ is the end of the law! That means, then, that he is the end of a life, which, sustained by the need for recognition (implying secret dread and hatred of God), seeks to establish its own righteousness. Christ is the end of the law as the end of sin, self-glorying, and reliance on the flesh: he is the end of the law as the way of salvation; he is the means of access to the way of salvation through grace for the true believer, that is, for the man who gives up his own righteousness and surrenders himself completely to the God who leads man from death into life.<sup>2</sup>

Bultmann thinks we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either and are fragmentary and often legendary. He says that Jesus did not believe himself to be the Messiah.<sup>3</sup>

He would by no means have understood, and would certainly never have approved, the tendency to regard his personal power of faith, his enthusiasm, his heroism, and his readiness for sacrifice as attestation of the truth of his word. For all these are human traits, and are included in the realm of human possibilities and human judgment. ...The view of Jesus as a great character or a hero is simply the opposite of Jesus' conception of man; for man as a 'character' has his centre in himself, and the hero relies on himself; in this the greatness of the man consists; this is the aesthetic point of view. Jesus however sees man in his relation to God, under the claim of God.<sup>4</sup>

There is one estimate of Jesus which is consistent

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1. Davis: op. cit., p. 60.
2. Essays: op. cit., p. 54.
3. Jesus and The Word: op. cit., pp. 8-9.
4. Ibid.: p. 216.

with his own view, the estimate of him not as a personality, but as one sent by God, as hearer of the word. In the word he assures man of the forgiveness of God.<sup>1</sup>

## 5. Soteriology

Both sin and forgiveness are considered by Bultmann to be temporal events in the life of men. Even though all men are sinners before God, sin is not a universal characteristic of the existence of man or of human nature such as corporeality, nor is it some magical or mysterious quality of the sinner.

Jesus does not recognize any evil nature; he regards as evil only the evil will of the disobedient man. Therefore the grace of forgiveness is not the infusion into the sinner of a higher nature which in some way transforms him. However remote the sinner is from grace, and however great the transformation to be effected by forgiveness, yet pardon is for him the most comprehensible thing in the world, as easy to understand as a word of love and pardon between man and man, without being in the least something to take for granted.<sup>2</sup>

The following is a statement of Bultmann's view of the salvation-occurrence:

...The salvation-occurrence is no-where present except in the proclaiming, accosting, demanding, and promising word of preaching. A merely 'reminiscent' historical account referring to what happened in the past cannot make the salvation-occurrence visible. It means that the salvation-occurrence continues to take place in the proclamation of the word. The salvation-occurrence is eschatological occurrence just in this fact, that it does not become a fact of the past but constantly takes place anew in the present. It is present not in the after-effect of a significant fact of world-history but in the proclamation of the word, which, unlike world events, does not get absorbed into the

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1. Ibid.: pp. 216-217.

2. Ibid.: p. 210.

evolution of the human mind.<sup>1</sup>

The decision-question which the "word of the cross" thrusts upon the hearer is this: will he acknowledge that God has made a crucified one Lord? And will he thereby acknowledge the demand to take up the cross by the surrender of his previous understanding of himself, making the cross the determining power of his life, letting himself be crucified with Christ?<sup>2</sup>

#### 6. Faith

Does "faith" (or "to believe") indicate a personal relation to the person of Christ, or does it mean only a relation to God on the basis of God's deed in Christ? Bultmann's answer is that faith as a personal relation to the person of Christ is an idea that was at first foreign to the earliest Christian message.<sup>3</sup>

A good place to begin is with the meaning of faith for Jesus. Bultmann describes this in his "Jesus and The Word".

...Faith is for him (Jesus) the power, in particular moments of life, to take seriously the conviction of the omnipotence of God; it is certainly that in such particular moments God's activity is really experienced; it is the conviction that the distant God is really the God near at hand, if man will only relinquish his usual attitude and be ready to see the nearness of God.

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1. T.N.T.: op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 302.
2. Ibid.: p. 303.
3. T.N.T.: op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 91-92.

In the sense of Jesus it is possible to have faith only if one is obedient, and thus every frivolous misuse of faith in God is excluded.<sup>1</sup>

What then is the meaning of faith for the Christian? Faith is the overcoming of the "offense"--the offense that life meets man only in the word addressed to him by a mere man--Jesus of Nazareth. It is the offense raised by a man who claims, without being able to make it credible to the world, that God is encountering the world in him. As victory over this offense, faith is victory over the world (I Jn. 5:4).<sup>2</sup> "Faith" is the acceptance of the kerygma not as mere cognizance of it and agreement with it but as a genuine obedience to the kerygma. This includes a new understanding of one's self. Therefore, it cannot be an act that takes place once and then becomes a thing of the past. "Faith" determines one's living in its manifold historical reality, and there is no moment in which the man of faith is released from the obedience of constantly living out of the "grace" of God.<sup>3</sup> Bultmann phrases the "Life of Faith" in the following quotation:

Existence in faith, then, is a movement between 'no longer' and 'not yet'. 'No longer': The decision of faith has done away with the past; nevertheless, as true decision, the decision must be maintained--that is, made again and again anew. As that which is overcome, the past is always with us, and faith must re-

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1. Jesus and The Word: op. cit., pp. 190-191.
2. T.N.T.: op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 75-76.
3. T.N.T.: op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 324.

member the past as that which constantly threatens. Paul's 'forgetting' does not mean putting the past out of mind, but does mean constantly holding it down, not letting one's self be caught by it again. 'Not yet': giving up that which is past, i.e. surrendering a possession which had given a supposed security, precludes taking a new possession in exchange for it. Viewed from man's side no one can say, 'I have made it my own'; and yet in view of the fact that Jesus Christ has made me his own, it can be said, 'Nevertheless the hoped-for has already occurred!'<sup>1</sup>

## 7. Existential Results of Christian Living

The effects of the kerygma have been hinted at throughout the discussion of the present section. Yet it seems helpful to summarize the characteristics of Christian Living herein.

The first fruitful product of the kerygma is knowledge. The kerygma destroys the understanding dear to pagans that we are self-sufficient for life. We gain an awareness of our insufficiency for life unless God's power and wisdom are granted to us.

A second result is freedom. For the believer, this is essentially freedom from himself. Led by the Spirit, he enjoys a three-fold freedom from the domination of the worldly mass of mankind, the world of things, and the fear and power of death. The Christian's freedom is not a practical freedom, however, but an eschatological freedom; i.e., it is not of his power, but of God's gift. No man can

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1. Ibid.: p. 322.



choose God at will. He chooses only if God empowers.

A third existential result of the life of faith resides in the trilogy of joy, peace, and hope. Christian joy is "eschatological joy", joy in the salvation God has granted in this life and forevermore. This joy expresses itself in the fellowship of Christians and the helpfulness they manifest toward one another. And in hope, Christians look toward the fulfillment of their salvation in Jesus Christ.

The fourth existential result of Christian faith is love. The expression among men of the love of God given for him in Jesus Christ--this is the role of the Christian before his neighbor and his enemy.<sup>1</sup> In the application of this principle Bultmann is a contextualist. He puts the problem as follows:

What man is to do is not revealed to him by an ideal, but by the command to love his neighbour. But the command to love is not, let us say, an ethical principle from which rules can be derived; I myself must at any given time perceive what it demands at any given time. The demand of the good is not made clear to me in a system, or an ideal representation, but confronts me concretely in my encounters with my 'neighbour'.<sup>2</sup>

The Kingdom of God, then, is deliverance for men. It is that eschatological deliverance which ends everything earthly. This deliverance demands of man decision. It

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1. Cf. Davis: op. cit., pp. 76-78.

2. Essays: op. cit., p. 79.

confronts man as an Either-Or. Membership in the kingdom involves a total way of living. And the characteristics enumerated above are the existential manifestations.

## 8. The Church

What is the Church? Bultmann answers with the following:

The preached word calls and gathers men into the ecclesia, the Church, the Congregation of those who are 'called' and 'saints'. It is the eschatological Congregation, and hence its existing belongs to the eschatological salvation-occurrence. As it was called into existence by the proclaimed word, its existence in turn is the foundation of preaching. Only in the ecclesia is there authorized preaching...<sup>1</sup>

The task of the church is set forth in Bultmann's interpretation of John.

He (John) does not consider the task of the Church's proclamation to be the transmitting of the historical tradition about Jesus. The testimony of the Church is the testimony of the Spirit that was given it. The Spirit, as the 'other Counselor,' is Jesus' substitute (14:16). And when the Spirit 'reminds' believers of all that Jesus said (14:26), this reminding is not an evocation of the past by historical reproduction. Rather, it is that which makes present the eschatological occurrence which with him burst into the world (16:8-11). When it is said that the Spirit 'will guide you into the whole truth' (16:13 Blt.), that means that the Spirit teaches the believer by the light of this occurrence to understand each particular present hour.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the reason that there is a Church at all is that the Word of forgiving grace is told and accorded to

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1. T.N.T.: op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 308.
2. T.N.T.: Vol. 2, p. 69.

others through the Church.

## 9. History

Bultmann believes that we cannot claim to know the end and the goal of history.<sup>1</sup> For meaning in history in this sense could only be recognized if we could stand at the end or goal of history and detect its meaning by looking backwards; or if we could stand outside history. Man can only know the essence of history by examining single historical phenomena and single historical epochs. The problem of historicism is solved when two things are realized. First, history is understood as the history of man. The subject of history is man. Secondly, the relativity of every historical situation is understood as having a positive meaning.<sup>2</sup>

The meaning in history lies always in the present, and when the present is conceived as the eschatological present by Christian faith the meaning in history is realized. Man who complains: I cannot see meaning in history, and therefore my life, interwoven in history, is meaningless, is to be admonished: do not look around yourself into universal history, you must look into your own personal history. Always in your present lies the meaning in history, and you cannot see it as a spectator, but only in your responsible decisions. In every moment slumbers the possibility of being the eschatological moment. You must awaken it.<sup>3</sup>

It is the paradox of the Christian message that the

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1. History and Eschatology: op. cit., p. 120.
2. Cf. *ibid.*: pp. 142-143.
3. *Ibid.*: p. 155.

eschatological event, according to Paul and John, is not to be understood as a dramatic cosmic catastrophe but as happening within history, beginning with the appearance of Jesus Christ and in continuity with this occurring again and again in history, but not as the kind of historical development which can be confirmed by any historian. It becomes an event repeatedly in preaching and faith. Jesus Christ is the eschatological event not as an established fact of past time but as repeatedly present, as addressing you and me here and now in preaching.<sup>1</sup>

For Bultmann history is never merely objective in character, but is rather a matter of objectivity and subjectivity in the strictest interdependence. History could not be apart from what happened at a specific time and place. There was a Christ-event tied to persons and locations and time. But the external aspects of history are but a prelude to their inner subjective conclusions. Thus history includes both the objective and the subjective, but its crucial phase lies in its meaning for us. It is not only something past, but equally something present in us at the same time.<sup>2</sup>

#### D. Features of Bultmann's Exposition of Christianity

This step in the study is a drawing together of the main emphases which appear in Bultmann's theology. The intent is not to present additional material, but rather to summarize and set forth the characteristic features of

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1. Ibid.: pp. 151-152.

2. Cf. Davis: op. cit., p. 71.

Bultmann's views which were treated in section "C".

1. Importance of the Kerygma

The concept of the kerygma might be considered the key to Bultmann's theology. It appears that this is the controlling element in his view of scripture. Miracles and proofs of the resurrection are not too important in the New Testament. The core of the New Testament is the kerygmatic proclamation of what God has done for men in Jesus Christ. This act of God does not need the services of his demythologization process. This act of God is no myth! Yet the kerygma is cast in a mythological framework which was employed to give importance to the kerygma fact. This framework needs demythologizing so that modern man might come to the true importance of the Gospel message. Having done this Bultmann emphasizes the importance of the Christian proclamation of the act of God in Christ as of fundamental importance rather than a specific world view.<sup>1</sup>

2. Emphasis Upon Decision

Bultmann's authorship is shot through with the purpose of calling men to decision. This can be observed in almost every facet of his theology. Decision is, therefore, the way by which a man enters into fellowship with God.

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1. Ibid.: p. 74.

Decision is also a means of interpreting the meaning of life. The demands of God arise quite simply from the crisis of decision in which man stands before God. In the crisis of decision, the continuity with the past is abrogated and the present cannot be understood from the point of view of development. The crisis of decision is the situation in which all observation is excluded, for which NOW alone has meaning, which is absorbed wholly in the present moment. NOW must man know what to do and leave undone, and no standard whatsoever from the past or from the universal is available. That is the meaning of decision.<sup>1</sup> Here and elsewhere one may observe Bultmann's subjectivism in interpreting the Christian faith.

### 3. Emphasis Upon the Non-static Quality of Christian Faith

This idea is closely related to "decision", yet is important enough to warrant special mention. Bultmann conceives of the crisis in belief as a constant one for the will to believe is always in a struggle with the self-will which refuses to recognize man's limitations. Belief in God is never something we can have as a possession. On the contrary, it always implies a decision to be taken. Thus, the Christian life is the constant struggle of becoming.<sup>2</sup> Obedience is demanded at every fork in the road.

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1. Jesus and The Word: op. cit., pp. 87-88.  
2. Cf. Essays: op. cit., pp. 14-15.

#### 4. Treatment of the Historic Jesus

Bultmann emphasizes the idea that Jesus Christ as Saviour is a present reality. Christ's Cross and sufferings are therefore present realities. Therefore, the way to come to them is not through the historian's research into the past. Bultmann's central and positive contention is that I meet Christ now, when in the proclamation of the Church He is presented to me and when I have decided for or against Him.<sup>1</sup> The important thing is that Christ is related existentially to the present moment. To be interested in Jesus' personality is to miss the point according to Bultmann.

#### 5. Bultmann's Idea of Eschatology

Throughout his system of thought Bultmann talks about the "future" but never fully defines what this "future" involves. The idea of Christ in a second parousia is wholly lacking.

In Bultmann's understanding, eschatology is that which opens the door to authentic life; that is, to that which overcomes sin and death, making the future sure. In this sense, the coming of Jesus is eschatological in character, as are also his death and resurrection, since these events profoundly affect the life of man both in this world

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1. Ian Henderson: Myth in the New Testament, SCM Press, London, 1952, p. 25.

and in that to come. These existential resultants of eschatology comprise the only kind of eschatology Bultmann is interested in.<sup>1</sup> In his stress on the contemporaneousness of Christ many other elements of the biblical tradition appear to be lost. The kingdom of God is simply a state of human existence in which God's dominion will be universally acknowledged, his name hallowed, and his will operative.<sup>2</sup>

## 6. Man as Being

Bultmann's philosophy is a philosophy of existence. The mythology of the New Testament expresses man's self-understanding. Therefore the New Testament is to be interpreted from the standpoint of the existential self-understanding to which the mythological statements give expression. The following insight may help here:

If it is really true that the New Testament and the proclamation which is based on it speak out of existence and to existence or, in other words, that the faith to which they summon men is a specific existentiell self-understanding, then not only is there the possibility of restating the faith in a demythologized form, but there is also the possibility that faith will finally have been brought to its really adequate expression.<sup>3</sup>

The primary interest then is with the existence-content of the Christian faith. The things of value are those which have meaning for personal existence. The ab-

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1. Davis: op. cit., p. 47.
2. Ibid.: pp. 68-69.
3. Barth: op. cit., pp. 161-162.



solite newness and transcendence of God's self-revelation are definitely limited in Bultmann's development.

#### E. A Tracing of the Kierkegaardian Influences

A complete and thorough treatment of this step of the study would involve an examination of the philosophical work of Martin Heidegger. For the stream of influence runs something like this: Kierkegaard → Heidegger → Bultmann. But such a procedure would carry beyond the bounds of this study. Therefore, the procedure will be to set forth, in a general way, those elements of Bultmann's thought which bear the marks of Kierkegaard's influence. This will be done without any extensive treatment of Heidegger.

##### 1. The Concept of Being and Existence

Kierkegaard's philosophy was a philosophy of existence, and Heidegger's interest is also in being and existence. Heidegger took over Kierkegaard's special use of "existence" as something essentially personal. The basic concept in his ontology is the contrast between Dasein and Vorhandenheit, the being of a person and that of inanimate objects. Heidegger protested against the way in which philosophy has used categories of the former which are really applicable only to the latter. Heidegger stressed two things as characteristic of the being of a person: One, being open to oneself and two, the sense of fortitude

or of being cast into the world. To know our own existence in this way is an essential part of that existence. To understand our being means indeed for Heidegger a real change in our being. It is this which lies behind Bultmann's understanding of Christian faith as a change affected in the Christian.<sup>1</sup>

The primary concern, for both Kierkegaard and Bultmann, is for the things which have to do with man's life, here and now. They are not interested in a system of speculative thought. Therefore, a large place is given to the subjective element. It appears, however, that Kierkegaard remained more rooted to the biblical presuppositions than does Bultmann. Nevertheless Bultmann points back to Kierkegaard via Heidegger in his view that the proper method of interpretation to be used in demythologizing is the existentialist. It is a result of his acceptance of Heidegger's views according to which change in my Dasein (the being of a person) comes about only through a change in my understanding of myself. And this is Heidegger's expression of the Kierkegaardian theme that existence is something that can be understood only as I am concerned with it.<sup>2</sup>

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1. J. Heywood Thomas: The Relevance of Kierkegaard to the Demythologizing Controversary, Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 10, No. 3, Sept. 1957, Oliver and Boyd Ltd., Edinburgh, pp. 243-244.
2. Ibid.: p. 244.

## 2. The Fallenness of Man

Bultmann thinks that Heidegger's idea of the fallenness of man is the same as the Christian idea. Not to understand one's existence is for Heidegger to live unauthentically, and in unauthentic existence one is in a state of fallenness. This state is characterized by the self's failure to find itself. This failure is revealed in the way I think of myself as one of many, which means that I have lost myself among the crowd. In this one can easily discern the influence of such typically Kierkegaardian ideas as the error of objective existence, the distrust of the crowd, and the loneliness of personal existence.<sup>1</sup>

A further influence here can be seen in the definition of sin. Both men define sin as a matter of will. Kierkegaard insists that purity of heart is gained by willing one thing--the good. Bultmann believes that man's goodness consists in obedience to the demands of God. The thing which prevents these manifestations is the will of man. It might be noted in passing, however, that Kierkegaard believed in original sin. Bultmann does not!

## 3. The Emphasis Upon Decision

The emphasis upon decision appears to be one of the most persistent areas of influence. Bultmann appears to

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1. Ibid.

be indebted to Kierkegaard for his basic interpretation of what Christianity is, namely something which the individual must decide for himself. Kierkegaard "plays down" objective truth and the crowd and emphasizes subjective truth and the importance of individual decision. Time and again Bultmann sets aside doctrines which would protect or prevent the Christian from the necessity of coming to a decision. This is in keeping with his purpose in demythologizing. Both men are primarily concerned with presenting men with the "Either-Or" choice. Each man must decide for himself.<sup>1</sup> As a result they minimize objective history, but not to an equal degree.

#### 4. Faith as Eschatological Occurrence

Herein a further mutual emphasis is discernable. Faith is taken out of the speculative and made existential. To both men, faith is a way of life in the here and now. A "faith" unrelated to the present is sheer nonsense in their thinking. A man enters Christianity by yielding himself absolutely.

Both emphasize that faith is not a static experience. The Christian is always in the process of becoming and the process of deciding goes on throughout all of life.

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1. Cf. *ibid.*: pp. 244-245.

## 5. The Centrality of God's Act in Christ

The core of theology for both Kierkegaard and Bultmann revolves around the fact that Christ is the means of God's revelation to man. Both emphasize it greatly. Both are interested in making this act of God contemporaneous with the present situation. And both emphasize the idea of Christ as pattern. But here the similarity ceases. Something of this will be treated later in the study.

Other parallel ideas may be found within the systems of Kierkegaard and Bultmann respectively. But to trace the line of influence would be difficult. Perhaps enough has been given to indicate that these men do have some common emphases and that Bultmann was influenced by Kierkegaard via Heidegger.

### F. Essential Differences Between Kierkegaard's and Bultmann's Thought

Now the other side of the coin is turned up for an examination of some of the essential differences. There are such and they are significant.

#### 1. Hegelian Influence of Bultmann

One of Bultmann's basic assumptions is that I am changed only by understanding myself. It may be argued that there is a very real point in such a statement, and

doubtless it does make man more aware of the interplay of thought and action. Yet in the end it seems indistinguishable from the Hegelian confusion of understanding Christianity and living Christianity. If I am changed only by understanding myself better, then all religion would be in the sphere of immanence as Kierkegaard would have said. This oversimplifies the logical description of religious faith.<sup>1</sup>

Hegel had been so concerned to absorb Christianity into his Socratic System that he was oblivious to the dangers to which this exposed faith. The most important was that the vital distinction between knowing the faith, that is an intellectual grasp of it, and believing the faith, accepting it as one's way of life and living it, could no longer be drawn with any certainty. In the same way Bultmann seems so intent on showing that the existentialist way of interpreting myth is the proper understanding of myth that he leaves no room for the distinction between the knowledge of this interpretation and the living commitment to the message thus obtained.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, for Bultmann, "decision" is a kind of religious self-direction. This is only a pale image of the decision which Kierkegaard describes when he talks of deciding to accept God and of the decision to follow Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid.: p. 246.
2. Ibid.
3. Cf. ante: p. 55f.

## 2. A Too Empirical Understanding of Faith

Another Kierkegaardian criticism of Bultmann is that his interpretation of faith is dangerously like the empirical reduction of the meaning of the word "faith." This was the criticism that Kierkegaard made of Schleiermacher and Hegel. Schleiermacher's "self-consciousness" and Bultmann's "understanding of human life" are practically synonymous. One is driven to ask the question: Does Bultmann have a need for God? If the end we have in view in our activity as religious men is to derive a mode of understanding oneself, there is no need to have any objective constituent to this experience other than ourselves.<sup>1</sup> Bultmann gives little place to the Holy Spirit as a source of dynamic for Christian living. The Holy Spirit is not personal. The Spirit guides the church and the Christian hoes his own row. God the remote only comes near in decision. Faith is only an attitude toward myself and toward life. It is only a conviction that God has acted in Christ.

An observation may help at this point. One of Bultmann's purposes in demythologizing is to remove offensive elements of the gospel. This he does, and in so doing empties faith of much of its meaning. On the other hand, Kierkegaard was interested in preserving the distinct qualities of faith. The offense of faith must be emphasized

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1. Ibid.: pp. 247-248.

and maintained. He opposed vigorously the synthesis of rationalism and Christian faith which is expressed in Hegel and is evident to a degree in Bultmann. Kierkegaard believed that the orthodox-apologetic effort was mistaken in that it sought to make Christianity plausible.<sup>1</sup> He is therefore in fundamental disagreement with Bultmann's intention.

### 3. Translation of Christianity Into a Philosophy

A further question arises regarding the end result of Bultmann's demythologizing project. In his attempt to rid the New Testament of its mythology, has he not translated the mythology and the message enshrined therein into a philosophy? It is by no means clear that Bultmann has avoided the pitfall which was described by Kierkegaard as being the fate of all Hegelian and indeed of all systematic philosophers.<sup>2</sup>

Bultmann believes that the philosopher can very well discover the nature of human existence and that he can express it far more adequately than the New Testament writers possible could. Yet Bultmann attempts to distinguish theology from philosophy. What distinguishes theology from philosophy in Bultmann's view is the fact that theology speaks about a unique act of God in the person and

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1. Cf. ante: p. 34.  
2. Cf. ante: p. 12f.



destiny of Jesus of Nazareth, which, as he says, "first makes possible" the authentic human existence that philosophy also knows about and proclaims as man's original possibility. But can one say that Christian existence is a possibility which belongs to man as such and at the same time go on to say that it first becomes a possibility as the result of a contingent historical occurrence? The logical inconsistency is self-evident.<sup>1</sup> In his demythologizing, Bultmann has translated the Gospel into language which distorts it in a way which Kierkegaard would never have approved.

An example or two may help. When one compares Bultmann's view of atonement with that of Kierkegaard, a striking difference is noted. For Bultmann, mythological language is creeping in when the one killed on Calvary is described as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world", or as the preexistent Son of God offered up to satisfy the justice and wrath of God.<sup>2</sup> Here the reality of the atonement is gone. On the other hand, Kierkegaard had a very positive view of the atonement. Christ put himself in our place. He is the satisfaction for sin and guilt.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Schubert M. Ogden: Bultmann's Project of Demythologization and the Problem of Theology and Philosophy, *Journal of Religion*, op. cit., p. 168.
2. Cf. *intra.*: Chapter III, p. 78.
3. Cf. *ante.*: p. 45.

Related to these opposite views of atonement are diverse views of sin and Christ. For Bultmann, Jesus is little more than an idea to be followed which had an expression in a historical person. Kierkegaard believed in the Deity of Christ and in a personal relationship to Christ in Christian living.

It becomes obvious, in light of the comparisons, that Kierkegaard had a full-blooded supernaturalism within his religious expression which Bultmann would call mythology. Undoubtedly, the "Great Dane" would have criticized Bultmann for his Hegelian tendency to synthesize philosophy and religion.

## SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

### SUMMARY

An attempt was made, in chapter one, to survey the formative influences of Søren Kierkegaard's life. Here it was learned that the prevailing Hegelian philosophy was one of the negative influences. In reacting to Hegelianism, Kierkegaard was put under the compulsion of emphasizing the differentness of the Christian faith. Christianity must not be made plausible. The positive philosophic influence was found to be Socrates and the Socratic method. This is evident in the authorship of Kierkegaard wherein he seeks to be provocative rather than definitive. He suggests rather than commands.

The more personal biographical aspects were studied and were found to be of tremendous importance. The circumstances of his early childhood and family were noted as leaving an unshakeable imprint upon Kierkegaard's life. The severe upbringing, the religious experiences, the broken engagement and the "Corsair" affair were all crossroads on the path of life. These were the moments of life which called forth the past, the lonely man, and the dedicated Christian. These appeared to be some of the elements which enabled Kierkegaard to stand apart from his age and

criticize and challenge it.

In chapter two the literary productions of Kierkegaard were examined with a view toward gathering the essential features of his theology and ethics. The main theological feature appeared to be a healthy supernaturalism which finds a generally orthodox and biblical expression. The distinct Kierkegaardian contribution was found in the ethical principles of the Christian life. Here Kierkegaard takes what often tends to be abstract metaphysical concepts and makes them life-related. He is the true existentialist. Christianity is a way of living and involves the whole of life. Christ is the pattern. To follow Him means "decision" and "suffering."

It was also noted here that the influences of his life resulted in some extreme views regarding the Church, suffering, the individual, and guilt. Yet at the same time, a calling attention to the problems of these subjects was found to be timely and helpful.

In chapter three a brief study was made of Rudolf Bultmann. After the scanty biographical sketch an attempt was made to explain the demythologizing program of Bultmann and the reasoning behind it.

Following this the theology of Bultmann was examined for its outstanding features. The various doctrines were found to have a peculiar Bultmannian stamp in keeping with

his "mythological" presuppositions. The core idea is that God has revealed himself in one, Jesus of Nazareth. Through him comes the word of forgiveness. But what is said about Christ's pre-existence, incarnation, resurrection, ascension and second coming needs to be viewed as mythological elements employed to heighten the importance of God's acting in Jesus. These expressions reflect the thought patterns of an outdated age. Yet they have value in heightening the importance of God's revelation to man. Thus it was observed that Bultmann has some unique positions with regard to the historic doctrines of the Christian faith. One of the emphases discovered was that of making religion life-centered. A strong and recurring subjectivity was noted throughout. The importance of the kerygma, an emphasis upon decision, the non-static quality of the Christian faith, the view of the historic Jesus and the special definition of eschatology were found to be the main features of Bultmann's exposition of Christianity.

The next step led to a tracing of the Kierkegaardian influences. The following areas appear to be points of influence: the concept of being and existence, the fallenness of man, the emphasis upon decision, the non-speculative quality of faith, and the centrality of God's act in Christ.

Some distinct differences also appeared. It was discovered that Kierkegaard would have criticized the fol-

lowing in Bultmann: the Hegelian influence, a too empirical understanding of faith, and the translation of Christianity into a philosophy. The chapter closed by noting that while Bultmann seeks to make Christianity more plausible by removing certain elements, Kierkegaard, on the contrary, maintained that Christianity is implausible and thus sought to preserve its supernatural character more fully than Bultmann.

#### EVALUATIONS

It has been impossible to avoid making evaluations as the study has proceeded, and such avoidance has not been deemed necessary. However, the evaluations already made are not as complete as the author desires. Therefore, this step in the study allows for a more complete expression of personal view-points and observations arising out of the study. The aim here is not to repeat but to make analyses with respect to some important findings in the study.

The reader has doubtless become aware that the author is in deep sympathy with much of the view-point of Søren Kierkegaard. In a time when modern theology seeks to reduce the difference between man and God, the life and authorship of Kierkegaard provides a corrective in calling men to supernatural, biblical, and dynamic faith which is

like a cool breeze on a sultry afternoon. Discovering Kierkegaard is a great aid in discovering what it really means to be a Christian.

Nevertheless, he must be read with discretion. He looked upon his own theology and emphases as a corrective to things as they existed in his own day. In calling people to a correct emphasis in the Christian life, certain exaggerations appear. Some think that Kierkegaard emphasized the transcendence of God at the expense of His immanence.<sup>1</sup> This is partly true. His interpretation of Christianity as essentially a form of suffering, the emphasis upon the individual at the expense of Christian fellowship and a kind of Christian asceticism are other exaggerated emphases. Yet, when these are viewed against the background of the Age and biographical factors of Kierkegaard, these emphases are not as extreme as they often appear at first glance.

A further warning must be stated here. Kierkegaard has been criticized for emphasizing subjective truth to the detriment of objective truth. It must be remembered that he also had a religious and intellectual development. And if one views an early concept as being representative of the whole, then distortion results. Therefore, if his emphasis upon subjectivity in Postscript is to be rightly understood, it must be tempered by his emphasis upon ob-

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1. Cf. H.R. Mackintosh: op. cit., pp. 254ff.

jective revelation which appears in his reply to Adler, which is one of the latest of his works.<sup>1</sup> By this process then, one sees that "subjectivity" in Kierkegaard is far different from subjectivity in Schleiermacher.

Kierkegaard put forth his powers unreservedly in teaching the world that God, the Eternal and Unsearchable One, is not man. In graphic ways he presents the claims of this God upon the life of each man and calls men to decision. Who can say he has not succeeded?

Evaluations regarding the influence of Kierkegaard upon Bultmann have already been made within the development of chapter three. Thus, the remaining evaluations will center upon the general thought and contribution of Bultmann.

Like Kierkegaard, he too is much interested in calling men to decision. Christianity is not a grand-stand experience where one sits to watch the game of life enacted. Man must enter the contest and face the issues of existence and move on toward fulfillment or disaster. Christ must become contemporaneous with us. The spectator view must give way to participation. Objective systems must not stand in the way of reality truth.

Therefore, in order to help Christ become contem-

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1. Compare footnote two, p. 34 for the full title of this work.



poraneous with us he seeks to transpose the "mythological aspects" of the New Testament into concepts which are meaningful for existence in the modern world. The author of this study appreciates what Bultmann is trying to do. But the results of his system are disappointing. Much of the uniqueness of the gospel is removed. The person and work of Jesus Christ are replaced by concepts at many crucial points. And the difference between man and God is greatly reduced.

At least three questions are raised in the author's mind with respect to Bultmann's presentation of Christianity. The first has to do with his presuppositions regarding the development and method of the New Testament scriptures. It is doubted whether these are valid in the light of objective internal and external research and recent archaeological evidence regarding the date of John's gospel.

This leads to the second question: Is there an element of subjectivity in determining the bounds of demythologizing? It appears that this question must be answered in the affirmative. Human opinion appears to reduce the quality of Inspiration of scripture.

A third question is this: Is the assumption, that most all should be understood, correct? In seeking to make Christianity more plausible, Bultmann has, in the author's opinion, reduced its uniqueness by many degrees.

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