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KIERKEGAARD  
ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Robert Bretall



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behind; for the existing individual is not an abstract X, who passes through something and then goes on further, if I may so express myself, undigested through life. The existing individual becomes concrete in his experience, and in going on he still has his experience with him, and hence may at any moment lose it; he has it with him not as something one has in a pocket, but his having it constitutes a definite something by which he is himself specifically determined, so that by losing it he loses his own specific determination. As a consequence of having made a decision in existence, the existing individual has attained a more specific determination of what he is; if he lays it aside, then it is not he who has lost something; he does not have himself while happening to have lost something, but he has lost himself and must now begin from the beginning.

The religious individual has thus got over his illness, though tomorrow perhaps it may return as a result of a little carelessness. He strengthens himself perhaps by means of the edifying consideration that God who made man must Himself know best all the many things that may seem impossible to bring into connection with the thought of God, all this earthly distress, all the confusion in which he may be involved, and the necessity of diversion, of rest, as well as of the night's sleep.

It follows of itself that we do not here have reference to that indulgence which is proclaimed in the world, where one man comforts himself by appealing to another, where men console themselves mutually and leave God out of account. Every human being is gloriously constituted, but what ruins so many is, among other things, also this wretched tittle-tattle between man and man about that which should be suffered and matured in silence, this confession before men instead of before God, this hearty communication between this man and that about what ought to be secret and exist only before God in secrecy, this impatient craving for intermediary consolation. No, in suffering the pain of his annihilation, the religious individual has learned that human indulgence profits nothing, and therefore refuses to listen to anything from that side; but he exists before God and exhausts the suffering of being human and at the same time existing before God. Therefore it cannot comfort him to know what the human crowd knows, man with man, what men know who have a shopkeeper's notion of what it means to be a man, and a facile gossipy notion at seventeenth hand of what it means to exist before God. From God he must derive his consolation, lest his entire religiosity be reduced to a rumor. That is not



est thinkable, namely to stand related to God in an absolutely decisive manner, and to be unable to find any decisive external expression for this (for a happy love between human beings expresses itself externally in the union of the lovers). This inability is rooted in the necessary relativity of the most decisive external expression, in its being both too much and too little; it is too much because it involves a certain presumptuousness over against other men, and it is too little because it is after all a worldly expression.

There are thus two ways disclosed to deliberation: the way of humble diversion and the way of desperate exertion, the way to the Deer Park and the way to the cloister. To the Deer Park? Oh, yes, let me mention only this, though I might just as well name much else that comes under the same classification. A fool will doubtless laugh at this thought, and a priggish religious individual will feel offended, and both will serve as proof that the thought has its validity. But why mention such a thing as an outing in the Deer Park? It is much more elegant to talk on Sunday in very indeterminate and vague Sunday-decorous expressions about these innocent pleasures—and then on week-days to talk about them in commonplace terms. Of course it is more elegant, and I can suspect the degree of embitterment which will be aroused in the breast of a fastidious man by the very word 'Deer Park' in this connection; because in this connection it serves perhaps as an indirect reminder of the sense in which the religiosity of our time is more advanced than the medieval, and because it is unpleasant to have the religious by means of such a word brought so near home, instead of glimpsing it from afar, as when saying *nothing, everything, always, never, daily watchfulness*.

Our religious individual chooses the way to the Deer Park, and why? Because he does not dare to choose the way to the cloister. And why does he not dare? Because it is too high-flown. So then he takes the outing. "But he does not enjoy himself," someone will say. Oh yes, he certainly does. And why does he enjoy himself? Because it is the humblest expression for his God-relationship to admit his humanity, and because it is human to enjoy oneself. If a woman can succeed in wholly transforming herself merely that she may please her husband, why should not the religious individual in his relation to God succeed in enjoying himself, when this is the humblest expression for the God-relationship? . . .

Up to this point I have kept my exposition still somewhat abstract, and shall now refer to my problem as if it were an occurrence of today,

the suffering of inwardness to the truth. But meddlesomeness and noise are signs of error, signs of an abnormal condition, like wind in the stomach, and this thing of stumbling by chance upon getting executed in a tumultuous turn of affairs is not the sort of suffering which essentially characterizes inwardness.

It is said to have chanced in England that a man was attacked on the highway by a robber who had made himself unrecognizable by wearing a big wig. He falls upon the traveler, seizes him by the throat and shouts, "Your purse!" He gets the purse and keeps it, but the wig he throws away. A poor man comes along the same road, puts it on and arrives at the next town where the traveler had already denounced the crime, he is arrested, is recognized by the traveler, who takes his oath that he is the man. By chance, the robber is present in the court-room, sees the misunderstanding, turns to the judge and says, "It seems to me that the traveler has regard rather to the wig than to the man," and he asks permission to make a trial. He puts on the wig, seizes the traveler by the throat, crying, "Your purse!"—and the traveler recognizes the robber and offers to swear to it—the only trouble is that already he has taken an oath.

So it is, in one way or another, with every man who has a "what" and is not attentive to the "how": he swears, he takes his oath, he runs errands, he ventures life and blood, he is executed—all on account of the wig.

## THE PRESENT AGE: A LITERARY REVIEW

BY S. KIERKEGAARD (1846)

TRANSLATED BY ALEXANDER DRU

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After the individual has given up every effort to find himself outside himself in existence, in relation to his surroundings, and when after that shipwreck he turns toward the highest things, the absolute, coming after such emptiness, bursts upon him not only in all its fullness, but in the responsibility which he feels.

Had I to carve an inscription on my grave I would ask for none other than "the individual."—THE JOURNALS

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SHORTLY after the appearance of the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard published a very lengthy review of a now forgotten novel, *The Two Ages*. The novel, like many a preacher's text, was little more than a peg on which S.K. proceeded



to hang his own ideas about the essential difference between "antiquity" and the modern era. By the latter S.K. means primarily his own century, in which he says the "leveling" tendency and the rule of "the public" as predominant; in contrast to a society dominated by *individuals* (those who precisely are *not* "like everybody else"). In the passage here presented, however, he makes a threefold division: antiquity, dominated by the principle of *leadership*; Christendom, of which the ruling idea is *representation*; and the present age, which "tends towards *equality*."

It can hardly be maintained that Kierkegaard's sympathies were democratic. Unlike Thomas Mann, he remained an "unpolitical man" to the end of his life, in the sense that the value of individuality was for him supreme and could neither be enhanced, nor on the other hand impaired, by any change of social organization. Thus in the important conclusion to his article he makes it clear that "the development" (toward numerical equality) "is, in spite of everything, a progress"; not, however, for the reason the social uplifters consider it such, but on the contrary because it renders the plight of the individual more desperate. When the leveling process is completed, "then the time has come for work to begin, for every individual must work for himself, each for himself. No longer can the individual, as in former times, turn to the great for help when he grows confused. That is past; he is either lost in the dizziness of unending abstraction, or saved forever in the reality of religion."

The chief organ of the public is the *press*, which by its very nature appeals to humanity's lowest common denominator. (Cf. p. 265.) At the time of writing *The Present Age* Kierkegaard's judgment of the Press was not the most objective imaginable, for the impudent *Corsair* had just launched against him its campaign of ridicule. Cartoons played up S.K.'s physical peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, which were many. Everybody in Copenhagen read the *Corsair*, and S.K. became a household word; small boys hooted at him and followed him in the streets, when he tried to take his beloved walks. The "common people," whom S.K. (like many other professing aristocrats) sincerely loved and with whom he had been accustomed to mingle freely, were alienated from him and began treating him as an amiable lunatic. In view of all this, some of his priceless remarks about journalism (See pp. 430-431) become all the more understandable; but his attitude toward both Press and Public antedates the *Corsair* episode and was only strengthened thereby.

The relation between Kierkegaard and latter day chroniclers of social decay such as Oswald Spengler, Ortega y Gasset, and Denis de Rougemont cannot be discussed here; but unquestionably he was one of the first to call attention to the concrete danger of newspapers—and to foreshadow many other points of modern social diagnosis. What is not quite so clear, from the passage here reproduced, is the deeper psychological setting of S.K.'s ideas.

"Our age is essentially one of understanding and *reflection*, without passion, momentarily bursting into enthusiasm and shrewdly relapsing into repose." By "reflection" Kierkegaard means not the exercise of our intellectual faculties as such, but rather the tendency to feel one's reality as "reflected" in something external to oneself—and specifically not in another person (this would be love or religion), but in some collective organization. It is important to bear this in mind, for "reflection" is the principal category of *The Present Age*, just as—with the ambivalence typical of all Kierkegaard's categories—it was also the salient mark of his own attitude and personality.

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### THE INDIVIDUAL AND "THE PUBLIC"

THE dialectic of antiquity tended towards *leadership* (the great individual and the masses—the free man and the slaves); so far the dialectic of Christendom tends toward *representation* (the majority sees itself in its representative and is set free by the consciousness that it is the majority which is represented, in a sort of self-consciousness); the dialectic of the present age tends toward *equality*, and its most logical—though mistaken—fulfillment is leveling, as the negative relationship of the particular units to one another.

It must be obvious to everyone that the profound significance of the leveling process lies in the fact that it means the predominance of the category "generation" over the category "individuality." In antiquity the total number of the individuals was there to express, as it were, the value of the outstanding individual. . . . The individual in the masses had no importance whatsoever; the outstanding individual signified them all. The present age tends toward a mathematical equality in which it takes so and so many to make one individual. Formerly the outstanding individual could allow himself everything and the individual in the masses nothing at all. Now everyone knows that so and so many make an individual, and quite consistently people add themselves together (it is called joining together, but that is only a polite euphemism) for the most trivial purposes. Simply in order to put a passing whim into practice a few people add themselves together, and the thing is done—then they dare do it. For that reason not even a preeminently gifted man can free himself from reflection,<sup>1</sup> because he very soon becomes conscious of himself as a fractional part in some quite

<sup>1</sup> I.e. from viewing himself as *reflected* in a collective entity of some sort.



trivial matter, and so fails to achieve the infinite freedom of religion.

The fact that several people united together have the courage to meet death does not nowadays mean that each, individually, has the courage, for even more than death the individual fears the judgment and protest of reflection upon his wishing to risk something on his own. The individual no longer belongs to God, to himself, to his beloved, to his art or to his science; he is conscious of belonging in all things to an abstraction to which he is subjected by reflection, just as a serf belongs to an estate. That is why people band together in cases where it is an absolute contradiction to be more than one. The apotheosis of the positive principle of association is nowadays the devouring and demoralizing principle which in the slavery of reflection makes even virtues into *vitia splendida*. There is no other reason for this than that eternal responsibility and the religious singling out of the individual before God is ignored. When corruption sets in at that point, people seek consolation in company, and so reflection catches the individual for life. And those who do not realize even the beginning of this crisis are engulfed without further ado in the reflective relationship.

The leveling process is not the action of an individual, but the work of reflection in the hands of an abstract power. It is therefore possible to calculate the law governing it in the same way that one calculates the diagonal in a parallelogram of forces. The individual who levels down is himself engulfed in the process, . . . and while he seems to know selfishly what he is doing, one can only say of people *en masse* that they know not what they do; for just as collective enthusiasm produces a surplus which does not come from the individual, there is also a surplus in this case. A demon is called up over whom no individual has any power, and though the very abstraction of leveling gives the individual a momentary, selfish kind of enjoyment, he is at the same time signing the warrant for his own doom. Enthusiasm *may* end in disaster, but leveling is *eo ipso* the destruction of the individual. No age, and therefore not the present age, can bring the skepticism of that process to a stop, for as soon as it tries to stop it, the law of the leveling process is again called into action. It can therefore only be stopped by the individual's attaining the religious courage which springs from his individual religious isolation.

I was once the witness of a street fight in which three men most shamefully set upon a fourth. The crowd stood and watched them with indignation; expressions of disgust began to enliven the scene; then

several of the onlookers set on one of the three assailants and knocked him down and beat him. The avengers had, in fact, applied precisely the same rules as the offenders. . . . I went up to one of the avengers and tried by argument to explain to him how illogical his behavior was; but it seemed quite impossible for him to discuss the question: he could only repeat that such a rascal richly deserved to have three people against him. The humor of the situation would have been even more apparent to someone who had not seen the beginning of the brawl and so simply heard one man saying of another (who was alone) that he was three against one, and heard the remark just when the very reverse was the case—when they were three to one against him. In the first place it was humorous because of the contradiction which it involved, as when the policeman told a man standing in the street “to kindly disperse.” Secondly it had all the humor of self-contradiction. But what I learned from it was that I had better give up all hope of putting a stop to that skepticism, lest it should turn upon me.

No single individual (I mean no outstanding individual—in the sense of leadership and conceived according to the dialectical category “fate”) will be able to arrest the abstract process of leveling, for it is negatively something higher, and the age of chivalry is gone. No society or association can arrest that abstract power, simply because an association is itself in the service of the leveling process. Not even the individuality of the different nationalities can arrest it, for on a higher plane the abstract process of leveling is a negative representation of *humanity pure and unalloyed*. The abstract leveling process, that self-combustion of the human race, produced by the friction which arises when the individual ceases to exist as singled out by religion, is bound to continue, like a trade wind, and consume everything. But through it each individual for himself may receive once more a religious education and, in the highest sense, be helped by the *examen rigorosum* of the leveling process to an essentially religious attitude. For the younger men who, however strongly they personally may cling to what they admire as eminent, realize from the beginning that the leveling process is evil in both the selfish individual and in the selfish generation, but that it can also, if they desire it honestly and before God, become the starting-point for the highest life—for them it will indeed be an education to live in the age of leveling. Their age will, in the very highest sense, develop them religiously and at the same time educate them aesthetically and intellectually, because in this way the comic will receive its absolute expression. The highest form of the comic arises precisely



when the individual comes directly under the infinite abstraction of "pure humanity," without any of those intermediary qualifications which temper the humor of man's position and strengthen its pathos, without any of the concrete particulars of organization which the leveling process destroys. But that again is only another expression of the fact that man's only salvation lies in the reality of religion for each individual.

And it will add fuel to their enthusiasm to understand that it is in fact through error that the individual is given access to the highest, if he courageously desires it. But the leveling process will have to continue and must be completed, just as scandal had to come into the world, though woe to them by whom it comes.

It has often been said that a reformation should begin with each man reforming himself. That, however, is not what actually happened, for the Reformation produced a hero who paid God high enough for his position as hero. By joining up with him directly people buy cheap, indeed at bargain prices, what he had paid for so dearly; but they do not buy the highest of all things. The abstract principle of leveling, on the contrary, like the biting east wind, has no personal relation to any individual, but has only an abstract relationship which is the same for everyone. There no hero suffers for others, or helps them; the taskmaster of all alike is the leveling process, which itself takes on their education. And the man who learns most from the leveling and himself becomes greatest does not become an outstanding man or a hero—that would only impede the leveling process, which is rigidly consistent to the end; he himself prevents that from happening because he has understood the meaning of leveling: he becomes a man and nothing else, in the complete equalitarian sense. That is the idea of religion. But, under those conditions, the equalitarian order is severe and the profit is seemingly very small; seemingly, for unless the individual learns in the reality of religion and before God to be content with himself, and learns, instead of dominating others, to dominate himself, content as priest to be his own audience, and as author his own reader—if he will not learn to be satisfied with that as the highest, because it is the expression of the equality of all men before God and of our likeness to others, then he will not escape from reflection. It may be that for one deceptive moment it will seem to him, in relation to his gifts, as though he were leveling, but in the end he will sink down beneath the leveling process. There is no good calling upon a Holger Danske or a Martin Luther; their day is over, and at bottom it is only the individual's lazy-

ness which makes a man long to have them back, a worldly impatience which prefers to buy something cheap, second-hand, rather than to buy the highest of all things very dear and first-hand. It is worse than useless to found society after society, because negatively speaking there is something above them, even though the short-sighted member of the society cannot see it.

The principle of individuality in its *immediate* and beautiful formation symbolizes the generation in the outstanding and eminent individual; it groups subordinate individualities around the representative. This principle of individuality, in its *eternal* truth, uses the abstraction and equality of the generation to level down, and in that way co-operates in developing the individual religiously into a real man. For the leveling process is as powerful where temporary things are concerned as it is impotent where eternal things are concerned. Reflection is a snare in which one is caught but, once the "leap" of enthusiasm has been taken, the relation is a different one and it becomes a noose which drags one into eternity. Reflection is and remains the hardest creditor in existence; hitherto it has cunningly bought up all the possible views of life, but it cannot buy the essentially religious and eternal view of life; on the other hand, it can tempt people astray with its dazzling brilliance and dishearten them by reminding them of all the past. But, by leaping into the depths, one learns to help oneself, learns to love others as much as oneself, even though one is accused of arrogance and pride—because one will not accept help—or of selfishness, because one will not cunningly deceive people by helping them, i.e. by helping them to escape their highest destiny. . . .

Throughout many changes the tendency in modern times has remained a leveling one. These changes themselves have not, however, all of them been leveling, for they are none of them abstract enough, each having a certain concrete reality. To some extent it is true that the leveling process goes on when one great man attacks another, so that both are weakened, or when one is neutralized by the other, or when an association of people, in themselves weak, grow stronger than the eminent. Leveling can also be accomplished by one particular caste, e.g. the clergy, the bourgeois, the peasants, or by the people themselves. But all that is only the first movement of an abstract power within the concreteness of individuality.

In order that everything should be reduced to the same level it is first of all necessary to procure a phantom, a spirit, a monstrous abstraction, an all-embracing something which is nothing, a mirage—and

has  
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that phantom is *the public*. It is only in an age which is without passion, yet reflective, that such a phantom can develop itself with the help of the Press which itself becomes an abstraction. In times of passion and tumult and enthusiasm, even when a people desire to realize a fruitless idea and lay waste and destroy everything—even then there is no such thing as a public. There are parties and they are concrete. The Press, in times such as those, takes on a concrete character according to the division of parties. But just as sedentary professional people are the first to take up any fantastic illusion which comes their way, so a passionless, sedentary, reflective age, in which only the Press exhibits a vague sort of life, fosters this phantom. The public is, in fact, the real leveling-master rather than the actual leveler, for whenever leveling is only approximately accomplished it is done by something, but the public is a monstrous nothing. The public is a concept which could not have occurred in antiquity because the people *en masse in corpore* took part in any situation which arose and were responsible for the actions of the individual, and, moreover, the individual was personally present and had to submit at once to applause or disapproval for his decision. Only when the sense of association in society is no longer strong enough to give life to concrete realities is the Press able to create that abstraction, "the public," consisting of unreal individuals who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organization—and yet are held together as a whole.

The public is a host, more numerous than all the peoples together, but it is a body which can never be reviewed; it cannot even be represented, because it is an abstraction. Nevertheless, when the age is reflective and passionless and destroys everything concrete, the public becomes everything and is supposed to include everything. And that again shows how the individual is thrown back upon himself.

The real moment in time and the real situation of being simultaneous with real people, each of whom is something—that is what helps to sustain the individual. But the existence of a public produces neither a situation nor simultaneity. The individual reader of the Press is not the public, and even though little by little a number of individuals or even all of them should read it, the simultaneity is lacking. Years might be spent gathering the public together, and still it would not be there. This abstraction, which the individuals so illogically form, quite rightly repulses the individual instead of coming to his help. The man who has no opinion of an event at the actual moment accepts the opinion of the majority or, if he is quarrelsome, of the minority. But it must be remem-

bered that both majority and minority are real people, and that is why the individual is assisted by adhering to them. A public, on the contrary, is an abstraction. To adopt the opinion of this or that man means that one knows that they will be subjected to the same dangers as oneself, that they will go astray with one if the opinion goes astray. But to adopt the same opinion as the public is a deceptive consolation, because the public is only there *in abstracto*. Whilst, therefore, no majority has ever been so certain of being right and victorious as the public, that is not much consolation to the individual, for a public is a phantom which forbids all personal contact. And if a man adopts public opinion today and is hissed tomorrow, he is hissed by the public.

A generation, a people, an assembly of the people, a meeting, or a man are responsible for what they are and can be made ashamed if they are inconstant and unfaithful; but a public remains a public. A people, an assembly or a man can change to such an extent that one may say: they are no longer the same; a public on the other hand can become the very opposite and still be the same—a public. But it is precisely by means of this abstraction and this abstract discipline that the individual will be formed (insofar as the individual is not already formed by his inner life), if he does not succumb in the process: taught to be content, in the highest religious sense, with himself and his relation to God, to be at one with himself instead of being in agreement with a public which destroys everything that is relative, concrete and particular in life; educated to find peace within himself and with God, instead of counting hands; and the absolute difference between the modern world and antiquity will be: that the totality is not concrete and is therefore unable to support the individual, or to educate him as the concrete should (though without developing him absolutely), but is an abstraction which by its abstract equality repels him and thus helps him to be educated absolutely—unless he succumbs in the process. The *taedium vitae* so constant in antiquity was due to the fact that the outstanding individual was what others *could not be*; the inspiration of modern times will be that any man who finds himself, religiously speaking, has only achieved what *everyone can achieve*.

A public is neither a nation, nor a generation, nor a community, nor a society, nor these particular men, for all these are only what they are through the concrete. No single person who belongs to the public makes a real commitment; for some hours of the day, perhaps, he belongs to the public—at moments when he is nothing else, since when he really is what he is, he does not form part of the public. Made up



of such individuals, of individuals at the moments when they are nothing, a public is a kind of gigantic something, an abstract and deserted void which is everything and nothing. But on this basis anyone can arrogate to himself a public, and just as the Roman Church chimerically extended its frontiers by appointing bishops *in partibus infidelium*, so a public is something which everyone can claim, and even a drunken sailor exhibiting a "peep-show" has dialectically absolutely the same right to a public as the greatest man; he has just as logical a right to put all those many noughts *in front* of his single number.

A public is everything and nothing, the most dangerous of all powers and the most insignificant: one can speak to a whole nation in the name of the public and still the public will be less than a single real man, however unimportant. The qualification "public" is produced by the deceptive juggling of an age of reflection, which makes it appear flattering to the individual, who in this way can arrogate to himself this monster in comparison with which concrete realities seem poor. The public is the fairy story of an age of understanding, which in imagination makes the individual into something even greater than a king above his people; but the public is also a gruesome abstraction through which the individual will receive his religious formation—or sink.

. . . More and more individuals, owing to their bloodless indolence, will aspire to be nothing at all—in order to become the public, that abstract whole formed in the most ludicrous way, by all participants becoming a third party (an onlooker). This indolent mass which understands nothing and does nothing itself, this gallery, is on the look-out for distraction and soon abandons itself to the idea that everything that anyone does is done in order to give it (the public) something to gossip about. That indolent mass sits with its legs crossed wearing an air of superiority, and anyone who tries to work, whether king, official, school teacher or the better type of journalist, the poet or the artist, has to struggle to drag the public along with it, while the public thinks in its own superior way that it is the horse.

If I tried to imagine the public as a particular person . . . I should perhaps think of one of the Roman emperors, a large well-fed figure, suffering from boredom, looking only for the sensual intoxication of laughter, since the divine gift of wit is not earthly enough. And so for a change he wanders about, indolent rather than bad, but with a negative desire to dominate. Everyone who has read the classical authors knows how many things a Caesar could try out in order to kill time. In the same way the public keeps a dog to amuse it. That dog is literary

scum.<sup>2</sup> If there is some one superior to the rest, perhaps even a great man, the dog is set on him and the fun begins. The dog goes for him, snapping and tearing at his coat-tails, allowing itself every possible ill-mannered familiarity—until the public tires, and says it may stop. That is an example of how the public levels. Their betters and superiors in strength are mishandled—and the dog remains a dog which even the public despises. The leveling is therefore done by a third party; a non-existent public leveling with the help of a third party which in its insignificance is less than nothing, being already more than leveled. And so the public is unrepentant, for it was after all not the public that acted, but the dog; just as one says to children—the cat's mother did it. The public is unrepentant—it was not really belittling anyone; it just wanted a little amusement. . . .

The public is unrepentant, for it is not they who own the dog—they only subscribe. They neither set the dog on anyone, nor whistle it off—directly. If asked, they would answer: the dog is not mine, it has no master. And if the dog had to be killed, they would say: it was really a good thing that bad-tempered dog was put away, everyone wanted it killed—even the subscribers.

Perhaps someone, familiarizing himself with such a case, and inclined to fix his attention upon the outstanding individual who suffered at the hands of the public, may be of the opinion that such an ordeal is a great misfortune. I cannot at all agree with such an opinion, for anyone who really wishes to be helped to attain the highest is in fact benefited by undergoing such a misfortune, and must rather desire it, even though people may be led to revolt. The really terrible thing is the thought of the many lives that are or easily may be wasted. I will not even mention those who are lost, or at any rate led completely astray—those who play the part of the dog for money—but the many who are helpless, thoughtless and sensual, who live superior lazy lives and never receive any deeper impression of existence than this meaningless grin, and all those bad people who are led into further temptation because in their stupidity they even become self-important by commiserating with the one who is attacked, without even understanding that in such a position the person attacked is always the stronger, without understanding that in this case the terrible and ironical truth applies: Weep not over him, but over yourselves.<sup>3</sup>

That is the leveling process at its lowest, for it always equates itself

<sup>2</sup> E.g. *The Corsair*.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 23: 28.



(though not published until later) being representative of Kierkegaard in his intellectual and spiritual maturity.

*The Sickness unto Death*, the first of these works to be published, takes high rank among S.K.'s books, although its author complains of one "difficulty" connected with it: that it is "too dialectical to permit of the employment of rhetoric, . . . of moving effect." Many readers, however, will find this rigorous treatment of the "despair" which pervades all human life—this "anatomy of melancholy"—more impressive than any rhetoric. Personally I have found it so, and it is my favorite of all of S.K.'s works; I have therefore permitted myself the luxury of quoting from it more extensively, in proportion to its length, than from any of the other books; the sections reproduced amounting to almost one-third of the whole and to about three-fifths of Part One, with its masterly analysis of the different gradations of despair.

The reader has been spared some of the bleaker stretches of S.K.'s dialectic—for example the notorious opening passage, which may be quoted here for the edification of all:

"Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation which accounts for it that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but consists in the fact that the relation relates itself to its own self. Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded, man is not yet a self."

Here we have S.K., almost with tongue in cheek, expressing himself with great precision in the terminology of that Hegelianism which he hated above all else. Manipulating the jargon with great ease, he gives us a definition of "spirit" or "selfhood" which, after all, is a just and adequate one—but whose sting lies in the little concluding sentence: "So regarded, man is not yet a self." This dramatic letdown (which made a friend of mine want to send the whole passage to the *New Yorker's* "Words of One Syllable" department) brings out exactly the difference between S.K. and the Idealist philosophers, whose definition of man he can adopt in principle, but upon which he immediately throws a different light by insisting that man is actually not at all what he is in principle—that his *existence* is not only at variance with his ideal nature, but really its polar opposite. Man is not a unity, but a disunity; he is not his true self, which means that he is not a *self* at all. *The Sickness unto Death* is an investigation of this corruption in human nature, which of course is what the Church calls *sin*, but which Kierkegaard, in accordance with the "psychological" viewpoint here adopted, chooses to call *despair*.

That the choice is by no means arbitrary, the whole development of modern clinical psychology attests. In view of the remarkable passage, "Despair

is 'the Sickness unto Death,' it is clear that Kierkegaard understood the "death instinct" fifty years before Freud. Indeed, the whole murky realm of the subconscious is here opened up in so illuminating a fashion as to prove Kierkegaard one of the fathers of "depth psychology," even though his interest in this realm is always a religious and more specifically a Christian one. This is shown by the pseudonym which he adopts—"Anti-Climacus," meaning that while Johannes Climacus described Christianity without recommending it or even conceding that it was possible as a way of life, the author of the *Sickness* definitely commits himself to it as the only cure for the mortal disease which infects every soul, whether that soul is aware of it or not. Every individual—whether by "not willing to be himself," or by "willing despairingly to be himself," or by remaining "despairingly unconscious of having a Self and an eternal Self"—has in reality willed to "tear his self away from the Power which constituted it." This is sin; and its opposite is not virtue, but *faith*:

"By relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power which constituted it. . . ." The Christian heroism . . . is to venture wholly to be oneself, as an individual man, this definite individual man, alone before the face of God, alone in this tremendous exertion and this tremendous responsibility. . . ." (pp. 216; 4).

### DESPAIR IS "THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH"

THE concept of the sickness unto death must be understood in a peculiar sense. Literally it means a sickness the end and outcome of which is death. Thus one speaks of a mortal sickness as synonymous with a sickness unto death. In this sense despair cannot be called the sickness unto death. For in the Christian understanding of it, death itself is a transition unto life. In view of this, there is from the Christian standpoint no earthly, bodily sickness unto death. For death is doubtless the last phase of the sickness, but death is not the last thing. If in the strictest sense we are to speak of a sickness unto death, it must be one in which the last thing is death, and death the last thing. And this precisely is despair.

Yet in another and still more definite sense despair is the sickness unto death. It is indeed very far from being true that, literally understood, one dies of this sickness, or that this sickness ends with bodily death. On the contrary, the torment of despair is precisely this: not to be able to die. So it has much in common with the situation of the moribund when he lies and struggles with death, and cannot die. So to be sick *unto* death is, not to be able to die—yet not as though there



were hope of life; no, the hopelessness in this case is that even the last hope, death, is not available. When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life; but when one becomes acquainted with an even more dreadful danger, one hopes for death. So when the danger is so great that death has become one's hope, despair is the disconsolateness of not being able to die.

It is in this last sense that despair is the sickness unto death, this agonizing contradiction, this sickness in the self, everlastingly to die, to die and yet not to die, to die the death. For dying means that it is all over, but dying the death means to live to experience death; and if for a single instant this experience is possible, it is tantamount to experiencing it forever. If one might die of despair as one dies of a sickness, then the eternal in him, the self, must be capable of dying in the same sense that the body dies of sickness. But this is an impossibility; the dying of despair transforms itself constantly into a living. The despairing man cannot die; no more than "the dagger can slay thoughts" can despair consume the eternal thing, the self, which is the ground of despair, whose worm dieth not, and whose fire is not quenched. Yet despair is precisely *self-consuming*, but it is an impotent self-consumption which is not able to do what it wills; and this impotence is a new form of self-consumption, in which again, however, the despairer is not able to do what he wills, namely, to consume himself. This is despair raised to a higher potency, or it is the law for the potentiation. This is the hot incitement, or the cold fire in despair, the gnawing canker whose movement is constantly inward, deeper and deeper, in impotent self-consumption. The fact that despair does not consume him is so far from being any comfort to the despairing man that it is precisely the opposite, this comfort is precisely the torment, it is precisely this that keeps the gnawing pain alive and keeps life in the pain. This precisely is the reason why he despairs—not to say despaired—because he cannot consume himself, cannot get rid of himself, cannot become nothing. This is the potentiated formula for despair, the rising of the fever in the sickness of the self.

A despairing man is in despair over *something*. So it seems for an instant, but only for an instant; that same instant the true despair manifests itself, or despair manifests itself in its true character. For in the fact that he despaired of *something*, he really despaired of himself, and now would be rid of himself. Thus when the ambitious man whose watchword was "Either Caesar or nothing" does not become Caesar,

he is in despair thereat. But this signifies something else, namely, that precisely because he did not become Caesar he now cannot endure to be himself. So properly he is not in despair over the fact that he did not become Caesar, but he is in despair over himself for the fact that he did not become Caesar. This self which, had he become Caesar, would have been to him a sheer delight (though in another sense equally in despair), this self is now absolutely intolerable to him. In a profounder sense it is not the fact that he did not become Caesar which is intolerable to him, but the self which did not become Caesar is the thing that is intolerable; or, more correctly, what is intolerable to him is that he cannot get rid of himself. If he had become Caesar he would have been rid of himself in desperation, but now that he did not become Caesar he cannot in desperation get rid of himself. Essentially he is equally in despair in either case, for he does not possess himself, he is not himself. By becoming Caesar he would not after all have become himself but have got rid of himself, and by not becoming Caesar he falls into despair over the fact that he cannot get rid of himself. Hence it is a superficial view (which presumably has never seen a person in despair, not even one's own self) when it is said of a man in despair, "He is consuming himself." For precisely this it is he despairs of, and to his torment it is precisely this he cannot do, since by despair fire has entered into something that cannot burn, or cannot burn up, that is, into the self.

So to despair over something is not yet properly despair. It is the beginning, or it is as when the physician says of a sickness that it has not yet declared itself. The next step is the declared despair, despair over oneself. A young girl is in despair over love, and so she despairs over her lover, because he died, or because he was unfaithful to her. This is not a declared despair; no, she is in despair over herself. This self of hers, which, if it had become "his" beloved, she would have been rid of in the most blissful way, or would have lost—this self is now a torment to her when it has to be a self without "him"; this self which would have been to her her riches (though in another sense equally in despair) has now become to her a loathsome void, since "he" is dead, or it has become to her an abhorrence, since it reminds her of the fact that she was betrayed. Try it now, say to such a girl, "Thou art consuming thyself," and thou shalt hear her reply, "Oh, no, the torment is precisely this, that I cannot do it."

... A despairing man wants despairingly to be himself. But if he



despairingly wants to be himself, he will not want to get rid of himself. Yes, so it seems; but if one inspects more closely, one perceives that after all the contradiction is the same. That self which he despairingly wills to be is a self which he is not (for to will to be that self which one truly is is indeed the opposite of despair); what he really wills is to tear his self away from the Power which constituted it. But notwithstanding all his despair, this he is unable to do; notwithstanding all the efforts of despair, that Power is the stronger, and it compels him to be the self he does not will to be. But for all that he wills to be rid of himself, to be rid of the self which he is, in order to be the self he himself has chanced to choose. To be *self* as he wills to be would be his delight (though in another sense it would be equally despair), but to be compelled to be *self* as he does not will to be is his torment, namely, that he cannot get rid of himself.

Socrates proved the immortality of the soul from the fact that the sickness of the soul (sin) does not consume it as sickness of the body consumes the body. So also we can demonstrate the eternal in man from the fact that despair cannot consume his self, that this precisely is the torment of contradiction in despair. If there were nothing eternal in a man, he could not despair; but if despair could consume his self, there would still be no despair.

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 the sickness of 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 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.

## FORMS OF DESPAIR

With every increase in the degree of consciousness, and in proportion to that increase, the intensity of despair increases: the more consciousness, the more intense the despair. This is everywhere to be seen, most clearly in the maximum and minimum of despair. The devil's despair is the most intense despair, for the devil is sheer spirit, and therefore absolute consciousness and transparency; in the devil there is no obscurity which might serve as a mitigating excuse, his despair is therefore absolute defiance. This is the maximum of despair. The minimum of despair is a state which (as one might humanly be tempted to express it) by reason of a sort of innocence does not even know that there is such a thing as despair. So when consciousness is at its minimum the despair is least; it is almost as if it were a dialectical problem whether one is justified in calling such a state despair.

(a) *The Despair which is Unconscious that it is Despair, or the Despairing Unconsciousness of having a Self and an Eternal Self*

... It is far from being the case that men in general regard relationship to the truth, the fact of standing in relationship to the truth, as the highest good, and it is very far from being the case that they Socratically regard being under a delusion as the greatest misfortune; for their sensuous nature is generally predominant over their intellectuality. So when a man is supposed to be happy, he imagines that he is happy (whereas viewed in the light of the truth he is unhappy), and in this case he is generally very far from wishing to be torn away from that delusion. On the contrary, he becomes furious, he regards the man who does this as his most spiteful enemy, he considers it an insult, something near to murder, in the sense that one speaks of killing joy. What is the reason for this? The reason is that the sensuous nature and the psycho-sensuous completely dominate him; the reason is that he lives in the sensuous categories agreeable/disagreeable, and says goodbye to truth etc.; the reason is that he is too sensuous to have the courage to venture to be spirit or to endure it. However vain and conceited men may be, they have nevertheless for the most part a very lowly conception of themselves, that is to say, they have no conception of being spirit, the absolute of all that a man can be. . . . In case one were to think of a house, consisting of cellar, ground-floor and *premier étage*, so tenanted, or rather so arranged, that it was planned for a distinction



may do if he likes, because it concerns nobody else. If from a pagan point of view one were to warn against self-slaughter, it must be by a long detour, by showing that it was breach of duty toward one's fellow men. The point in self-slaughter, that it is a crime against God, entirely escapes the pagan. One cannot say, therefore, that the self-slaughter was despair, which would be a thoughtless *hysteron proteron*; one must say that the fact that the pagan judged self-slaughter as he did was despair.

Nevertheless there is and remains a distinction, and a qualitative one, between paganism in the narrowest sense, and paganism within Christendom. The distinction (as Vigilius Haufniensis has pointed out in relation to dread) is this, that paganism, though to be sure it lacks spirit, is definitely oriented in the direction of spirit, whereas paganism within Christendom lacks spirit with a direction away from it, or by apostacy, and hence in the strictest sense is spiritlessness.

(b) *The Despair which is Conscious of being Despair, as also it is Conscious of being a Self wherein there is after all something Eternal, and then is either in despair at not willing to be itself, or in despair at willing to be itself.*

A distinction, of course, must be made as to whether he who is conscious of his despair has the true conception of what despair is. Thus a man may be right, according to the conception he has, in asserting that he is in despair, it may be true that he is in despair, and yet this is not to say that he has the true conception of despair. It may be that one who contemplated this man's life in the light of the true conception would say, "You are far more in despair than you are aware, the despair lies far deeper." So with the pagan (to recall the foregoing instance), when in comparison with others he considered himself in despair, he doubtless was right in thinking that he was in despair, but he was wrong in thinking that the others were not; that is to say, he had not the true conception of despair.

So then, for conscious despair there is requisite on the one hand the true conception of what despair is. On the other hand, clearness is requisite about oneself—insofar, that is to say, as clearness and despair are compatible. How far complete clarity about oneself, as to whether one is in despair, may be united with being in despair, whether this knowledge and self-knowledge might not avail precisely to tear a man out of his despair, to make him so terrified about himself that he would

cease to be in despair—these questions we shall not decide here, we shall not even attempt to do so, since later we shall find a place for this whole investigation. But without pursuing the thought to this extremest point, we here merely call attention to the fact that, although the degree of consciousness as to what despair is may be very various, so also may be the degree of consciousness touching one's own condition, the consciousness that it is despair. Real life is far too multifarious to be portrayed by merely exhibiting such abstract contrasts as that between a despair which is completely unconscious, and one which is completely conscious of being such. Most frequently, no doubt, the condition of the despairing man, though characterized by multiform nuances, is that of a half obscurity about his own condition. He himself knows well enough in a way up to a certain point that he is in despair, he notices it in himself, as one notices in oneself that one is going about with an illness as yet unpronounced, but he will not quite admit what illness it is. At one moment it has almost become clear to him that he is in despair; but then at another moment it appears to him after all as though his indisposition might have another ground, as though it were the consequence of something external, something outside himself, and that if this were to be changed, he would not be in despair. Or perhaps by diversions, or in other ways, e.g. by work and busy occupations as means of distraction, he seeks by his own effort to preserve an obscurity about his condition, yet again in such a way that it does not become quite clear to him that he does it for this reason, that he does what he does in order to bring about obscurity. Or perhaps he even is conscious that he labors thus in order to sink the soul into obscurity, does this with a certain acuteness and shrew calculation, with psychological insight, but is not in a deeper sense clearly conscious of what he does, of how despairingly he labors, etc. For in fact there is in all obscurity a dialectical interplay of knowledge and will, and in interpreting a man one may err, either by emphasizing knowledge merely, or merely the will.

But, as was pointed out above, the degree of consciousness potentiates despair. In the same degree that a man has a truer conception of despair while still remaining in it, and in the same degree that he is more conscious of being in despair, in that same degree is his despair more intense. He who with the consciousness that suicide is despair, and to that extent with the true conception of what despair is, then commits suicide—that man has a more intense despair than the man who commits suicide without having the true conception that suicide is despair; con-



versely, the less true his conception of suicide is, the less intense his despair. On the other hand, the clearer consciousness of himself (self-consciousness) a man has in committing suicide, the more intense is his despair, in comparison with that of the man whose soul, compared with his, is in a confused and obscure condition.

In what follows I shall go on to examine the two forms of conscious despair, in such a way as to display at the same time a heightening of the consciousness of what despair is, and of the consciousness of the fact that one's own condition is despair—or, what is the same thing and the decisive thing, a heightening of the consciousness of the self. But the opposite of being in despair is believing; hence we may perceive the justification for what was stated above as the formula which describes a condition in which no despair at all exists, for the same formula is also the formula for believing: by relating itself to its own self, and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power which constituted it.

(1) In despair at not willing to be oneself, the despair of weakness.

When this form of despair is called the despair of weakness, there is already contained in this a reflection upon the second form (2), in despair at willing to be oneself. So the contrast here is only relative. No despair is entirely without defiance: in fact defiance is implied in the very expression, "not to will to be." On the other hand, even the extremest defiance of despair is after all never without some weakness. The difference is therefore only relative. The one form is, so to speak, the despair of womanliness, the other of manliness.

(i) *Despair over the earthly or over something earthly.* This is pure immediacy, or else an immediacy which contains a quantitative reflection. Here there is no infinite consciousness of the self, of what despair is or of the fact that the condition is one of despair; the despair is passive, succumbing to the pressure of the outward circumstance, it by no means comes from within as action. It is, if I may say so, by an innocent misuse of language, a play upon words, as when children play at being soldiers, that in the language of immediacy such words as the *self* and *despair* occur.

The *immediate* man (insofar as immediacy is to be found without any reflection) is merely soulishly determined, his self or he himself is a something included along with "the other" in the compass of the temporal and the worldly, and it has only an illusory appearance of

possessing in it something eternal. Thus the self coheres immediately with "the other," wishing, desiring, enjoying, etc., but passively; even in desiring, the self is in the dative case, like the child when it say "me" for I. Its dialectic is: the agreeable and the disagreeable; its concepts are: good fortune, misfortune, fate.

Now then there *happens*, befalls (falls upon) this immediate self something which brings it to despair; in no other way can this come about, since the self has no reflection in itself. That which brings it to despair must come from without, and the despair is merely passive. That wherein immediacy has its being, or (supposing that after all it has a little bit of reflection in itself) that part thereof to which it especially clings, a man is deprived of by "a stroke of fate," in short he becomes, as he calls it, unfortunate, that is, the immediacy in him receives such a shock that it cannot recover itself—he despairs. Or (to mention a case which is more rarely to be seen in real life, but which dialectically is entirely correct) this despair of immediacy occurs through what the immediate man calls an all-too-great good fortune; for it is a fact that immediacy as such is prodigiously fragile, and every *quid nimis* which demands of it reflection brings it to despair.

So then he despairs, that is to say, by a strangely preposterous attitude and a complete mystification with regard to himself, he calls this despair. But to despair is to lose the eternal—and of this he does not speak, does not dream. The loss of the earthly as such is not the cause of despair, and yet it is of this he speaks, and he calls it despairing. What he says is in a certain sense true, only it is not true in the sense in which he understands it; he stands with his face inverted, and what he says must be understood inversely: he stands and points at that which is not a cause of despair, and he declares that he is in despair, and nevertheless it is quite true that despair is going on behind him without his knowing it. It is as if one were to stand with one's back toward the City Hall and the Court House, and pointing straight before him were to say, "There is the City Hall and the Court House." The man is right, there it is—if he turns around. It is not true, he is not in despair, and yet he is right when he says it. But he calls himself "in despair," he regards himself as dead, as a shadow of himself. But dead he is not; there is, if you will, *life* in the characterization. In case everything suddenly changes, everything in the outward circumstances, and the wish is fulfilled, then life enters into him again, immediacy rises again, and he begins to live as fit as a fiddle. But this is the only



way immediacy knows how to fight, the one thing it knows how to do: to despair and swoon—and yet it knows what despair is less than anything else. It despairs and swoons, and thereupon it lies quite still as if it were dead, like the childish play of “lying dead”; immediacy is like certain lower animals which have no other weapon or means of defense but to lie quite still and pretend they are dead.

Meanwhile time passes. If outward help comes, then life returns to the despairer, he begins where he left off; he had no self, and a self he did not become, but he continues to live on with only the quality of immediacy. If outward help does not come, then in real life something else commonly occurs. Life comes back into him after all, but “he never will be himself again,” so he says. He now acquires some little understanding of life, he learns to imitate the other men, noting how they manage to live, and so he too lives after a sort. In Christendom he too is a Christian, goes to church every Sunday, hears and understands the parson, yea, they understand one another; he dies; the parson introduces him into eternity for the price of \$10—but a self he was not, and a self he did not become.

This form of despair is: in despair at not willing to be oneself; or still lower, in despair at not willing to be a self; or lowest of all, in despair at willing to be another than himself. Properly speaking, immediacy has no self, it does not recognize itself, so neither can it recognize itself again; it terminates therefore preferably in the romantic. When immediacy despairs it possesses not even enough self to wish or to dream that it had become what it did not become. The immediate man helps himself in a different way: he wishes to be another. Of this one may easily convince oneself by observing immediate men. At the moment of despair no wish is so natural to them as the wish that they had become or might become another. In any case one can never forbear to smile at such a despairer, who, humanly speaking, although he is in despair, is so very innocent. Usually such a despairer is infinitely comic. Think of a self (and next to God there is nothing so eternal as a self), and then that this self gets the notion of asking whether it might not let itself become or be made into another than itself. And yet such a despairer, whose only wish is this most crazy of all transformations, loves to think that this change might be accomplished as easily as changing a coat. For the immediate man does not recognize his self, he recognizes himself only by his dress, he recognizes (and here again appears the infinitely comic trait)—he recognizes that he has a self only by externals. There is no more ludicrous confusion,

for a self is just infinitely different from externals. When then the whole of existence has been altered for the immediate man and he has fallen into despair, he goes a step further, he thinks thus, this has become his wish: "What if I were to become another, were to get myself a new self?" Yes, but if he did become another, I wonder if he would recognize himself again! It is related of a peasant who came cleanly shaven to the Capital, and had made so much money that he could buy himself a pair of shoes and stockings and still had enough left over to get drunk on—it is related that as he was trying in his drunken state to find his way home, he lay down in the middle of the highway and fell asleep. Then along came a wagon, and the driver shouted to him to move or he would run over his legs. Then the drunken peasant awoke, looked at his legs, and since by reason of the shoes and stockings he didn't recognize them, he said to the driver, "Drive on, they are not my legs." So in the case of the immediate man, when he is in despair it is impossible to represent him truly without a touch of the comic. . . .

*When immediacy is assumed to have self-reflection*, despair is somewhat modified: there is somewhat more consciousness of the self, and therewith in turn of what despair is and of the fact that one's condition is despair; there is some sense in it when such a man talks of being in despair; but the despair is essentially that of weakness, a passive experience. Its form is, in despair at not wanting to be oneself.

The progress in this case, compared with pure immediacy, is at once evident in the fact that the despair does not always come about by reason of a blow, by something that happens, but may be occasioned by the mere reflection within oneself, so that in this case despair is not a purely passive defeat by outward circumstances, but to a certain degree is self-activity, action. Here there is in fact a certain degree of self-reflection, and so a certain degree of observation of oneself. With this certain degree of self-reflection begins the act of discrimination whereby the self becomes aware of itself as something essentially different from the environment, from externalities and their effect upon it. But this is only to a certain degree. Now when the self with a certain degree of self-reflection wills to accept itself, it stumbles perhaps upon one difficulty or another in the composition of the self. For as no human body is perfection, so neither is any self. This difficulty, be it what it may, frightens the man away shudderingly. Or something happens to him which causes within him a breach with immediacy deeper than he has made by reflection. Or his imagination discovers a possibility



which, if it were to come to pass, would likewise become a breach with immediacy.

So he despairs. His despair is that of weakness, a passive suffering of the self, in contrast to the despair of self-assertion; but, by the aid of relative self-reflection which he has, he makes an effort (which again distinguished him from the purely immediate man) to defend his self. He understands that the thing of letting the self go is a pretty serious business after all, he is not so apoplectically muddled by the blow as the immediate man is, he understands by the aid of reflection that there is much he may lose without losing the self; he makes admissions, is capable of doing so—and why? Because to a certain degree he has dissociated his self from external circumstances, because he has an obscure conception that there may even be something eternal in the self. But in vain he struggles thus; the difficulty he stumbled against demands a breach with immediacy as a whole, and for that he has not sufficient self-reflection or ethical reflection; he has no consciousness of a self which is gained by the infinite abstraction from everything outward, this naked, abstract self (in contrast to the clothed self of immediacy) which is the first form of the infinite self and the forward impulse in the whole process whereby a self infinitely accepts its actual self with all its difficulties and advantages.

So then he despairs, and his despair is: not willing to be himself. On the other hand, it strikes him as ridiculous to want to be another; he maintains the relationship to his self—to that extent reflection has identified him with the self. He then is in just such a situation with regard to the self as a man may be with regard to his dwelling-place. The comic feature is that a self certainly does not stand in such a casual relation to itself as does a man to his dwelling-place. A man finds his dwelling-place distasteful, either because the chimney smokes, or for any other reason whatsoever; so he leaves it, but he does not move out, he does not engage a new dwelling, he continues to regard the old one as his habitation; he reckons that the offense will pass away. So it is with the despairer. As long as the difficulty lasts he does not dare to come to himself (as the common phrase expresses it with singular pregnancy), he does not want to be himself—but that surely will pass by, perhaps things will change, the dark possibility will surely be forgotten. So meanwhile he comes to himself only once in a while, as it were on a visit, to see whether the change has not occurred, and so soon as it has occurred he moves home again, “is again himself,” so

he says. However, this only means that he begins again where he left off; he was to a certain degree a self of a sort, and he became nothing more.

But if no change occurs, he helps himself in another way. He swings away entirely from the inward direction which is the path he ought to have followed in order to become truly a self. The whole problem of the self in a deeper sense becomes a sort of blind door in the background of his soul, behind which there is nothing. He accepts what in his language he calls his self, that is to say, whatever abilities, talents, etc. may have been given him; all this he accepts, yet with the outward direction toward what is called life, the real, the active life; he treats with great precaution the bit of self-reflection which he has in himself, he is afraid that this thing in the background might again emerge. So little by little he succeeds in forgetting it; in the course of years he finds it almost ludicrous, especially when he is in good company with other capable and active men who have a sense and capacity for real life. *Charmant!* He has now, as they say in romances, been happily married for a number of years, is an active and enterprising man, a father and a citizen, perhaps even a great man; at home in his own house the servants speak of him as "him"; in the city he is among the *honoratiores*; his bearing suggests "respect of persons," or that he is to be respected as a person; to all appearance he is to be regarded as a person. In Christendom he is a Christian (quite in the the same sense in which in paganism he would have been a pagan, and in England an Englishman), one of the cultured Christians. The question of immortality has been often in his mind, more than once he has asked the parson whether there really was such an immortality, whether one would really recognize oneself again—which indeed must have for him a very singular interest, since he has no self.

It is impossible to represent truly this sort of despair without a certain admixture of satire. The comical thing is that he will talk about having been in despair; the dreadful thing is that after having, as he thinks, overcome despair, he is then precisely in despair. It is infinitely comic that at the bottom of the practical wisdom which is so much extolled in the world, at the bottom of all the devilish lot of good counsel and wise saws and "wait and see" and "put up with one's fate" and "write in the book of forgetfulness"—that at the bottom of all this, ideally understood, lies complete stupidity as to where the danger really is and what the danger really is. But again this ethical stupidity is the dreadful thing.



Despair over the earthly or over something earthly is the commonest sort of despair, especially in the second form of immediacy with a quantitative reflection. The more thoroughly reflected the despair is, the more rarely it occurs in the world. But this proves that most men have not become very deep even in despair; it by no means proves, however, that they are not in despair. There are very few men who live even passably in the category of spirit; yea, there are not many even who so much as make an attempt at this life, and most of those who do so, shy away. They have not learned to fear, they have not learned what "must" means, regardless, infinitely regardless of what it may be that comes to pass. Therefore they cannot endure what even to them seems a contradiction, and which as reflected from the world around them appears much more glaring, that to be concerned for one's own soul and to want to be spirit is a waste of time, yes, an inexcusable waste of time, which ought if possible to be punishable by law, and at all events is punished by contempt and ridicule as a sort of treason against men, as a froward madness which crazily fills up time with nothing. Then there is a period in their lives (alas, their best period) when they begin after all to take the inward direction. They get about as far as the first difficulties, there they veer away; it seems to them as though this road were leading to a disconsolate desert—*und rings umher liegt schöne grüne Weide*.<sup>4</sup> So they are off, and soon they forget that best period of theirs; and, alas, they forget it as though it were a bit of childishness. At the same time they are Christians, tranquilized by the parson with regard to their salvation.

This despair, as I have said, is the commonest, it is so common that only thereby can one explain the rather common opinion . . . that despair is something belonging to youth, which appears only in youthful years, but is not to be found in the settled man who has come to the age of maturity and the years of wisdom. This is a desperate error, or rather a desperate mistake, which overlooks (yes, and . . . what it overlooks is pretty nearly the best thing that can be said of a man, since far worse often occurs)—it overlooks the fact that the majority of men do never really manage in their whole life to be more than they were in childhood and youth, namely, immediacy with the addition of a little dose of self-reflection. No, despair verily is not something which appears only in the young, something out of which one grows as a matter of course—"as one grows out of illusion." But neither is illusion something one grows out of, though people are foolish enough to think so.

<sup>4</sup> *Faust*, I, 1479. (L)

2 forms of illusion for youth & age.

On the contrary, one encounters grown men and women and aged persons who have as much childish illusion as any youth. People overlook the fact that illusion has essentially two forms: that of hope, and that of recollection. But just because the older person is under illusion, he has also an entirely onesided conception of what illusion is, thinking that it is only the illusion of hope. And this is natural. The older man is not plagued by the illusion of hope, but he is, on the other hand, by the whimsical idea of looking down at the illusion of youth from a supposedly superior standpoint which is free from illusion. The youth is under illusion, he hopes for the extraordinary from life and from himself. By way of compensation one often finds in an older man illusion with respect to the recollections of his youth. An elderly woman who has now supposedly given up all illusions is often found to be as fantastic in her illusion as any young girl, with respect to how she remembers herself as a girl, how happy she once was, how beautiful, etc. This *fuimus*<sup>5</sup> which is so often heard from old people is fully as great an illusion as the futuristic illusion of the youth. They both are lying or poetizing.

But far more desperate than this is the mistake that despair belongs only to youth. In the main it is a great folly, and precisely a lack of sense as to what spirit is, and moreover it is failure to appreciate that man is spirit, not merely an animal, when one supposes that it might be such an easy matter to acquire faith and wisdom, which come with the years as a matter of course, like teeth and a beard and such like. No, whatever it may be that a man as a matter of course comes to, and whatever it may be that comes to a man as a matter of course—one thing it is not, namely, faith and wisdom. But the thing is this: with the years man does not, spiritually understood, come to anything; on the other hand, it is very easy with the years to go from something. And with the years one perhaps goes from the bit of passion, feeling, imagination, the bit of inwardness which one had, and goes as a matter of course (for such things go as a matter of course) under triviality's definition of the understanding of life. This prearranged condition, which true enough has come about with the years, he now in despair regards as a good, he readily assures himself (and in a certain satirical sense there is nothing more sure) that now it never could occur to him to despair—no, he has assured himself against this, yet he *is* in despair, spiritually in despair. Why, I wonder, did Socrates love youths—unless it was because he knew men!

<sup>5</sup> *Aeneid* II, 325. (L)



And if it does not so happen that a man with the years sinks into the most trivial kind of despair, from this it does not by any means follow that despair may belong only to youth. If a man really develops with the years, if he ripens into essential consciousness of the self, he may perhaps despair in a higher form. And if he does not essentially develop with the years, neither does he sink into sheer triviality, that is to say, if he remains pretty much a young man, a youth although he is mature, a father and gray-haired, retaining therefore something of the good traits of youth—then indeed he will be exposed also to the possibility of despairing as a youth over the earthly or over something earthly.

So a difference there may well be between the despair of an older man and of a youth, but no essential difference, only a fortuitous one. The youth despairs over the future, as a present tense *in futuro*; there is something in the future he is not willing to accept, hence he is not willing to be himself. The older man despairs over the past, as a present *in praeterito*, which refuses to become more and more past—for so desperate he is not that he succeeds entirely in forgetting it. This past is perhaps something even which repentance should have taken in hand. But if repentance were to emerge, one would first have to despair completely, to despair out and out, and then the spirit-life might break through from the very bottom. But desperate as he is, he dare not let the thing come to such a pass. So there he remains standing, time goes on—unless he succeeds, still more desperately, by the help of forgetfulness, in healing it, so that instead of becoming a penitent he becomes his own accomplice. But such despair, whether it be of the youth or of the man, is essentially the same: it does not reach any metamorphosis in which the consciousness of the eternal in the self breaks through, so that the battle might begin which either potentiates despair to a higher power, or leads to faith.

But is there no essential difference between the two expressions hitherto used as identical: to despair over the earthly (the determinant of totality), and to despair over something earthly (the particular)? Indeed there is. When with infinite passion the self by means of imagination despairs over something earthly, this infinite passion transforms this particular, this something, into the earthly *in toto*, that is to say, the determinant of totality inheres in and belongs to the despairer. The very nature of the earthly and temporal is to fall apart into discrete particulars. It is impossible actually to lose or be deprived of all that is earthly, for the determinant of totality is a thought-determinant. So

the self first increases infinitely the actual loss, and then it despairs over the earthly *in toto*. But as soon as this distinction (between despairing over the earthly and over something earthly) is essentially affirmed, there is also an essential advance made in the consciousness of the self. This formula, "to be in despair over the earthly," is a dialectic first expression for the next form of despair.

(ii) *Despair about the eternal or over oneself*. Despair over the earthly or over something earthly is really despair also about the eternal and over oneself, insofar as it is despair, for this is the formula for all despair.<sup>6</sup> But the despairer, as he was depicted in the foregoing, did not observe what was happening behind him, so to speak; he thinks he is in despair over something earthly and constantly talks about what he is in despair over, and yet he is in despair about the eternal; for the fact that he ascribes such great value to the earthly, or, to carry the thought further, that he ascribes to something earthly such great value, or that he first transforms something earthly into everything earthly, and then ascribes to the earthly such great value, is precisely to despair about the eternal.

This despair represents quite an advance. If the former was the despair of *weakness*, this is *despair over his weakness*, although it still remains as to its nature under the category "despair of weakness," as distinguished from defiance in the next section. So there is only a relative difference. This difference consists in the fact that the foregoing form has the consciousness of *weakness* as its final consciousness, whereas in this case consciousness does not come to a stop here, but potentiates itself to a new consciousness, a *consciousness* of its weakness. The despairer understands that it is weakness to take the earthly so much to heart, that it is weakness to despair. But then, instead of veer-

<sup>6</sup> Therefore it is linguistically correct to say, "in despair *over* the earthly" (the occasion), and "*about* the eternal," but "*over* oneself," because this is again another expression for the occasion of despair, which in its concept is always *about* the eternal, whereas that *over* which one despairs may be of the most various sorts. One despairs *over* that which fixes one in despair, over one's misfortune, for example, over the earthly, over the loss of one's fortune; but *about* that which, rightly understood, releases one from despair, therefore about the eternal, about one's salvation, about one's own power, etc. In relation to the self one employs both words: to despair *over* and *about* oneself, because the self is doubly dialectic. And herein consists the obscurity, especially in all lower forms of despair, and in almost all despairers, that with such passionate clearness a man sees and knows *over* what he is in despair, but *about* what it is escapes his notice. The condition requisite for healing is always this *about-face*, and from a purely philosophical point of view it might be a subtle question whether it is possible for one to be in despair with full consciousness of what it is *about* which one despairs. (K)



ing sharply away from despair to faith, humbling himself before God for his weakness, he is more deeply absorbed in despair and despairs over his weakness. Therewith the whole point of view is inverted, he becomes now more clearly conscious of his despair: recognizing that he is in despair about the eternal, he despairs over himself that he could be weak enough to ascribe to the earthly such great importance, which now becomes his despairing expression for the fact that he has lost the eternal and himself.

Here is the scale of ascent. First, in consciousness of himself: for to despair about the eternal is impossible without having a conception about the self, that there is something eternal in it, or that it has had something eternal in it. And if a man is to despair over himself, he must indeed be conscious also of having a self; that, however, is the thing over which he despairs—not over the earthly or over something earthly, but over himself. Moreover, there is in this case a greater consciousness of what despair is; for despair is precisely to have lost the eternal and oneself. As a matter of course there is greater consciousness of the fact that one's condition is that of despair. Furthermore, despair in this case is not merely passive suffering, but action. For when the earthly is taken away from the self and a man despairs, it is as if despair came from without, though it comes nevertheless always from the self, indirect-directly from the self, as counter-pressure (reaction), differing in this respect from defiance, which comes directly from the self. Finally, there is here again . . . a further advance. For just because this despair is more intense, salvation is in a certain sense nearer. Such a despair will hardly forget, it is too deep; but despair is held open every instant, and there is thus the possibility of salvation.

For all that, this despair is to be referred to the formula: in despair at not willing to be oneself. Just as a father disinherits a son, so the self is not willing to recognize itself after it has been so weak. In its despair it cannot forget this weakness, it hates itself in a way, it will not humble itself in faith under its weakness in order to gain itself again; no, in its despair it will not hear of itself, so to speak, will not know anything about itself. But there can be no question of being helped by forgetfulness, no question of slipping by the aid of forgetfulness under the determinant of selflessness, and so being a man and a Christian like other men and Christians; no, for this the self is too much a self. As it often was the case with the father who disinherited his son, that the outward fact was of little avail to him, he did not by this get free of his son, at least his thought did not; as is often the case with the

lover's curse upon the hated one (i.e. the loved one), that it does not help much, it almost imprisons him the more—so it is in the case of the despairing self with relation to itself.

This despair is one quality deeper than the foregoing and is a sort which rarely is met with in the world. That blind door behind which there was nothing is in this case a real door, a door carefully locked, to be sure, and behind it sits as it were the self and watches itself employed in filling up time with not willing to be itself, and yet is self enough to love itself. This is what is called *introversion*. And from now on we shall be dealing with introversion, which is the direct opposite of immediacy and has a great contempt for it, in the sphere of thought more especially.

But does there then in the realm of reality exist no such self? Has he fled outside of reality to the desert, to the cloister, to the mad-house? Is he not a real man, clothed like others, or like others clad in the customary outer-garments? Yes, certainly there is! Why not? But with respect to this thing of the self he initiates no one, not a soul, he feels no urge to do this, or he has learned to suppress it. Hear how he talks about it.<sup>7</sup> "After all it's only the purely immediate men—who so far as spirit is concerned are about at the same point as the child in the first period of earliest infancy when, with a thoroughly endearing non-chalance, it lets everything out—it's the purely immediate men who can't retain anything. It is this sort of immediacy which often with great pretentiousness proclaims itself 'truth,' that one is 'a true man and just like people generally are'—which is just as true as it is untrue that a grown man, as soon as he feels a corporal need, at once yields to it. Every self which is even a little bit reflective has surely a notion of what it is to repress the self." And our despairer is introverted enough to be able to keep every intruder (that is, every man) at a distance from the topic of the self, whereas outwardly he is completely "a real man." He is a university man, husband and father, an uncommonly competent civil functionary even, a respectable father, very gentle to his wife and carefulness itself with respect to his children. And a Christian? Well, yes, he is that too after a sort; however, he preferably avoids talking on the subject, although he willingly observes and with a melancholy joy that his wife for her edification engages in devotions. He very seldom goes to church, because it seems to him that most parsons really don't know what they are talking about. He makes an exception in

<sup>7</sup> It is S.K. himself talking in the days of his despair—e.g. through the mouth of the "young friend" of Judge William in the second part of *Either/Or*. (L)

introversion  
opposite  
immediacy



the case of one particular priest, of whom he concedes that he knows what he is talking about, but he doesn't want to hear him for another reason, because he has a fear that this might lead him too far.

On the other hand, he often feels a need of solitude, which for him is a vital necessity—sometimes like breathing, at other times like sleeping. The fact that he feels this vital necessity more than other men is also a sign that he has a deeper nature. Generally the need of solitude is a sign that there is spirit in a man after all, and it is a measure for what spirit there is. The purely twaddling inhuman and too-human men are to such a degree without feeling for the need of solitude that, like a certain species of social birds (the so-called love birds), they promptly die if for an instant they have to be alone. As the little child must be put to sleep by a lullaby, so these men need the tranquilizing hum of society before they are able to eat, drink, sleep, pray, fall in love, etc. But in ancient times as well as in the Middle Ages people were aware of the need of solitude and had respect for what it signifies. In the constant sociability of our age people shudder at solitude to such a degree that they know no other use to put it to but (oh, admirable epigram!) as a punishment for criminals. But after all it is a fact that in our age it is a crime to have spirit, so it is natural that such people, the lovers of solitude, are included in the same class with criminals.

The introverted despairee thus lives on *horis succesivis*, through hours which, though they are not lived for eternity, have nevertheless something to do with the eternal, being employed about the relationship of one's self to itself—but he really gets no further than this. So when this is done, when the need for solitude is satisfied, he goes outside as it were—even when he goes in or converses with wife and children. That which as a husband makes him so gentle and as a father so careful, is, apart from his good-nature and his sense of duty, the admission he has made to himself in his most inward reserve concerning his weakness.

If it were possible for anyone to be privy to his introversion and were to say to him, "This is in fact pride, thou art proud of thyself," he would hardly be likely to admit it to another. When he was alone with himself he would likely admit that there was something in it; but the passionateness with which his self had pictured his weakness would quickly make him believe again that it could not possibly be pride, for it was in fact precisely over his weakness he was in despair—just as if it were not pride which attached such prodigious weight to

weakness, just as if it were not because he wanted to be proud of himself that he could not endure this consciousness of weakness.—If one were to say to him, “This is a strange complication, a strange sort of knot; for the whole misfortune consists in the way thought is twined; otherwise the direction is quite normal, it is just this path you must travel through the despair of the self to faith. It is true enough about the weakness, but it is not over this you must despair; the self must be broken in order to become a self, so cease to despair over it.” If one were to talk to him thus, he would perhaps understand it in a dispassionate moment, but soon passion would again see falsely, and so again he takes the wrong turn into despair.

As I have said, such despair is rather rare. If it does not stay at that point, merely marking time, and if on the other hand there does not occur a radical change in the despairer so that he gets on the right path to faith, then such despair will either potentiate itself to a higher form and continue to be introversion, or else break through to the outside and demolish the outward disguise under which the despairing man has been living in his incognito. In the latter case such a despairer will then plunge into life, perhaps into the distractions of great undertakings, he will become a restless spirit which leaves only too clear a trace of its actual presence, a restless spirit which wants to forget, and inasmuch as the noise within is so loud, stronger means are needed, though of a different sort than those which Richard III employs in order not to hear his mother’s curses.<sup>8</sup> Or he will seek forgetfulness in sensuality, perhaps in debauchery; in desperation he wants to return to immediacy, but constantly with consciousness of the self, which he does not want to have. In the first case, when despair is potentiated it becomes defiance, and it now becomes manifest how much truth there was in this notion of weakness, it becomes manifest how dialectically correct it is to say that the first expression of defiance is precisely despair over one’s weakness.

However, let us in conclusion take another little look at the introvert who in his introversion marks time on the spot. If this introversion is absolutely maintained, *omnibus numeris absoluta*, then suicide will be the danger nearest to him. The common run of men have of course no presentiment of what such an introvert is capable of bearing; if they were to come to know it, they would be astonished. If on the other hand he talks to someone, if to one single man he opens his heart, he is in all probability strained to so high a tension, or so much let down,

<sup>8</sup> Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, Act IV, Scene 4. He ordered trumpets to be blown. (L)



that suicide does not result from introversion. Such an introvert, with one person privy to his thought, is a whole tone milder than the absolute case. He probably will shun suicide. It may happen, however, that he falls into despair just for the fact that he has opened his heart to another; it may be that he thinks it would have been infinitely preferable to maintain silence rather than have anyone privy to his secret. There are examples of introverts who are brought to despair precisely because they have acquired a confidant. So after all suicide may be the consequence. Poetically the catastrophe (assuming *poetice* that the protagonist was e.g. a king or emperor) might be fashioned in such a way that the hero had the confidant put to death. One could imagine such a demoniacal tyrant who felt the need of talking to a fellow man about his torment, and in this way consumed successively a whole lot of men; for to be his confidant was certain death.—It would be the task for a poet to represent this agonizing self-contradiction in a demoniac man who is not able to get along without a confidant, and not able to have a confidant,<sup>9</sup> and then resolving it in such a way as this.

(2) The despair of willing despairingly to be oneself—defiance.

As it was shown that one might call the despair dealt with in section 1 the despair of weakness, so one might call the despair now to be considered the despair of manliness. In connection with the kind just described it may be called: despair viewed under the determinant of spirit. Thus manliness belongs more precisely under the determinant of spirit, and womanliness is a lower synthesis.

The despair described in section 1 (ii) was despair over one's weakness: the despairer does not want to be himself. But if one goes a single dialectical step further, if despair thus becomes conscious of the reason why it does not want to be itself, then the case is altered, then defiance is present, for then it is precisely because of this that a man is despairingly determined to be himself.

First comes despair over the earthly or something earthly, then despair over oneself about the eternal. Then comes defiance, which really is despair by the aid of the eternal, the despairing abuse of the eternal in the self to the point of being despairingly determined to be oneself. But just because it is despair by the aid of the eternal it lies in a sense very close to the true, and just because it lies very close to the true

<sup>9</sup> S.K. was precisely such a person.

between  
despair  
(rejection)  
and  
faith

it is infinitely remote. The despair which is the passageway to faith is also by the aid of the eternal: by the aid of the eternal the self has courage to lose itself in order to gain itself. Here on the contrary it is not willing to begin by losing itself, but wills to be itself.

In this form of despair there is now a mounting consciousness of the self, and hence greater consciousness of what despair is and of the fact that one's condition is that of despair. Here despair is conscious of itself as a deed, it does not come from without as a suffering under the pressure of circumstances, it comes directly from the self. And so after all defiance is a new qualification added to despair over one's weakness.

In order to will in despair to be oneself there must be consciousness of the infinite self. This infinite self, however, is really only the abstractest form, the abstractest possibility of the self, and it is this self the man despairingly wills to be, detaching the self from every relation to the Power which posited it, or detaching it from the conception that there is such a Power in existence. By the aid of this infinite form the self despairingly wills to dispose of itself or to create itself, to make itself the self it wills to be, distinguishing in the concrete self what it will and what it will not accept. The man's concrete self, or his concretion, has in fact necessity and limitations, it is this perfectly definite thing, with these faculties, dispositions, etc. But by the aid of the infinite form, the negative self, he wills first to undertake to refashion the whole thing, in order to get out of it in this way a self such as he wants to have, produced by the aid of the infinite form of the negative self—and it is thus he wills to be himself. That is to say, he is not willing to begin with the beginning, but with "in the beginning."<sup>10</sup> He is not willing to attire himself in himself, nor to see his task in the self given him; by the aid of being the infinite form he wills to construct it himself.<sup>11</sup>

If one would have a common name for this despair, one might call it Stoicism—yet without thinking only of this philosophic sect. And to illuminate this sort of despair more sharply one would do well to distinguish between the active and the passive self, showing how the self is related to itself when it is active, and how it is related to itself in suffering when it is passive, and showing that the formula constantly is: in despair to will to be oneself.

If the despairing *self* is *active*, it really is related to itself only as experimenting with whatsoever it be that it undertakes, however great

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:1.

<sup>11</sup> Compare Faust's effort to achieve a universal experience.



it may be, however astonishing, however persistently carried out. It acknowledges no power over it, hence in the last resort it lacks seriousness and is able only to conjure up a show of seriousness when the self bestows upon its experiments the utmost attention. Like the fire which Prometheus stole from the gods, so does this mean to steal from God the thought which is seriousness, that God is regarding one, instead of which the despairing self is content with regarding itself, and by that it is supposed to bestow upon its undertakings infinite interest and importance, whereas it is precisely this which makes them mere experiments. For though this self were to go so far in despair that it becomes an experimental god, no derived self can by regarding itself give itself more than it is: it nevertheless remains from first to last the self, by self-duplication it becomes neither more nor less than the self. Hence the self, in its despairing effort to will to be itself, labors itself into the direct opposite, it becomes really no self. In the whole dialectic within which it acts there is nothing firm; what the self is does not for an instant stand firm, that is, eternally firm. The negative form of the self exercises quite as much the power of loosing as of binding, every instant it can quite arbitrarily begin all over again, and however far a thought may be pursued, the whole action is within a hypothesis.<sup>12</sup> It is so far from being true that the self succeeds more and more in becoming itself, that in fact it merely becomes more and more manifest that it is a hypothetical self. The self is its own lord and master, so it is said, its own lord, and precisely this is despair, but so also is what it regards as its pleasure and enjoyment. However, by closer inspection one easily ascertains that this ruler is a king without a country, he rules really over nothing; his condition, his dominion, is subjected to the dialectic that every instant revolution is legitimate. For in the last resort this depends arbitrarily upon the self.

So the despairing self is constantly building nothing but castles in the air, it fights only in the air. All these experimented virtues make a brilliant showing; for an instant they are enchanting, like an oriental poem: such self-control, such firmness, such ataraxia, etc., border almost on the fabulous. Yes, they do, to be sure; and also at the bottom of it all there is nothing. The self wants to enjoy the entire satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself, of being itself; it wants to have the honor of this poetical, this masterly plan according to which it has understood itself. And yet in the last resort it is a riddle how it understands itself; just at the instant when it seems to be nearest to

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Judge William's argument against the secular view of marriage: *supra*, pp. 84-85.

having the fabric finished, it can arbitrarily resolve the whole thing into nothing.

If the despairing self is a *passive* sufferer, we have still the same formula: in despair at willing to be oneself. Perhaps such an experimenting self which in despair wills to be itself, at the moment when it is making a preliminary exploration of its concrete self, stumbles upon one or another hardship of the sort that the Christian would call a cross, a fundamental defect, it matters not what. The negative self, the infinite form of the self, will perhaps cast this clean away, pretend that it does not exist, want to know nothing about it. But this does not succeed, its virtuosity in experimenting does not extend so far, nor does its virtuosity in abstraction; like Prometheus, the infinite, negative self feels that it is nailed to this servitude. So then it is a passively suffering self. How then does the despair which despairingly wills to be itself display itself in this case?

Note that in the foregoing the form of despair was represented which is in despair over the earthly or over something earthly, so understood that at bottom this is and also shows itself to be despair about the eternal, i.e. despair which wills not to let itself be comforted by the eternal, which rates the earthly so high that the eternal can be of no comfort. But this too is a form of despair: not to be willing to hope that an earthly distress, a temporal cross, might be removed. This is what the despair which wills desperately to be itself is not willing to hope. It has convinced itself that this thorn in the flesh<sup>13</sup> gnaws so profoundly that he cannot abstract it—no matter whether this is actually so, or whether his passion makes it true for him,<sup>14</sup> and so he is willing

<sup>13</sup> This word is enough to make the reader who knows S.K. alert to the fact that he is dealing here with his most intimate experience, which he often described mysteriously by this term. (L)

<sup>14</sup> From this standpoint, it is well to note here, one will see also that much which is embellished by the name of resignation is a kind of despair, that of willing despairingly to be one's abstract self, of willing despairingly to be satisfied with the eternal and thereby be able to defy or ignore suffering in the earthly and temporal sphere. The dialectic of resignation is commonly this: to will to be one's eternal self, and then, with respect to something positive wherein the self suffers, not to will to be oneself, contenting oneself with the thought that after all this will disappear in eternity, thinking itself therefore justified in not accepting it in time, so that, although suffering under it, the self will not make to it the concession that it properly belongs to the self, that is, it will not humble itself under it in faith. Resignation regarded as despair is essentially different from the form, "in despair at not willing to be oneself," for it wills desperately to be itself—with exception, however, of one particular, with respect to which it wills despairingly not to be itself. (K)



to accept it as it were eternally. So he is offended by it,<sup>15</sup> or rather from it he takes occasion to be offended at the whole of existence; in spite of it he would be himself, not despitely be himself without it (for that is to abstract from it, and that he cannot do, or that would be a movement in the direction of resignation); no, in spite of or in defiance of the whole of existence he wills to be himself with it, to take it along, almost defying his torment. For to hope in the possibility of help, not to speak of help by virtue of the absurd, that for God all things are possible—no, that he will not do. And as for seeking help from any other—no, that he will not do for all the world; rather than seek help he would prefer to be himself—with all the tortures of hell, if so it must be.

And of a truth it is not quite so true after all when people say that "it is a matter of course that a sufferer would be so glad to be helped, if only somebody would help him"—this is far from being the case, even though the opposite case is not always so desperate as this. The situation is this. A sufferer has one or more ways in which he would be glad to be helped. If he is helped thus, he is willing to be helped. But when in a deeper sense it becomes seriousness with this thing of needing help, especially from a higher or from the highest source—this humiliation of having to accept help unconditionally and in any way, the humiliation of becoming nothing in the hand of the Helper for whom all things are possible, or merely the necessity of deferring to another man, of having to give up being oneself so long as one is seeking help—ah, there are doubtless many sufferings, even protracted and agonizing sufferings, at which the self does not wince to this extent, and which therefore at bottom it prefers to retain and to be itself.

But the more consciousness there is in such a sufferer who in despair is determined to be himself, all the more does despair too potentiate itself and become demoniac. The genesis of this is commonly as follows. A self which in despair is determined to be itself winces at one pain or another which simply cannot be taken away or separated from its concrete self. Precisely upon this torment the man directs his whole passion, which at last becomes a demoniac rage. Even if at this point God in heaven and all his angels were to offer to help him out of it—no, now he doesn't want it, now it is too late, he once would have given everything to be rid of this torment but was made to wait, now

<sup>15</sup> The "offense" of Christianity was to be the theme of S.K.'s next great book, the *Training in Christianity*.

than these, so draw Thou us now more strongly to Thee. We call Thee our Saviour and Redeemer, since Thou didst come to earth to redeem us from the servitude under which we were bound or had bound ourselves, and to save the lost. This is Thy work, which Thou didst complete, and which Thou wilt continue to complete unto the end of the world; for since Thou Thyself hast said it, therefore Thou wilt do it—lifted up from the earth Thou wilt draw all unto Thee.

JOHN 12: 32. AND I, IF I BE LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH, WILL  
DRAW ALL UNTO MYSELF

*From on high He will draw all unto Himself.*

Devout hearer, 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. Now this "something higher" may be something very various; but if it is to be truly capable of drawing, and at every instant, it must not itself be subject to "variableness or the shadow of turning," but must have passed triumphantly through every change and become transfigured like the transfigured life of a dead man.<sup>2</sup> And now, as there is only one name that is named among the living, the Lord Jesus Christ, so also there is only one dead man who yet lives, the Lord Jesus Christ. He from *on high* will draw all unto Himself. See, therefore, how rightly oriented is the Christian life, directed toward that which is above, toward Him who from on high will draw Christians unto Himself—in case the Christians remember Him, and he who does not is surely no Christian. And thou, my hearer, thou to whom this discourse is addressed, thou art come here today in *remembrance* of Him.

It follows as a matter of course that if He is to be able from on high to draw Christians unto Himself, there is much that has to be forgotten, much that has to be looked away from, much that has to be died from. How can this be done? Oh, in case thou, in deep distress, perhaps in distress for thy future, thy life's happiness, hast ever heartily wished to forget something: a disappointed expectation, a shattered

<sup>2</sup> Doubtless S.K. was thinking of his father's life as it was transfigured for him.



hope, a bitter and embittering memory; or in case thou, in anxiety, alas, for thy soul's salvation, hast wished still more heartily to forget something: anguish at some sin which constantly confronts thee, a terrifying thought which will not leave thee—then thou hast surely experienced how empty is the advice the world gives when it says, "Try to forget it!" That indeed is only a hollow mockery, if it is anything at all. No, if there is something thou art fain to forget, try to get something else to remember, and then it will succeed. Therefore if Christianity requires Christians to forget something, and in a certain sense to forget everything, to forget the multifarious, it also recommends the means: to remember something else, to remember one thing, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore in case thou art aware that the world's pleasures enthrall thee and thou art fain to forget, in case thou art aware that earthly anxieties distress thee so that thou art fain to forget, in case thou art aware that the bustle of life carries thee away as the current carries the swimmer, and thou art fain to forget, in case the dread of temptation overpowers thee and thou art heartily fain to forget—then remember Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it will succeed. If indeed it might be possible for thee—as now today thou eatest bread and drinkest wine in remembrance of Him—if it might be possible for thee to have Him in remembrance every day as thy constant thought in everything thou undertakest to do—with this thou wouldst also have forgotten everything that ought to be forgotten, thou wouldst be as forgetful as a feeble old man with regard to everything that ought to be forgotten, as oblivious to it all as one who in a foreign land has forgotten his mother tongue and babbles without meaning, as oblivious as the absent-minded—thou wouldst be completely drawn to the heights with Him who from on high will draw all unto Himself.

*From on high He will draw all unto Himself.*

*From on high*—for here upon earth He went about in lowliness, in the lowly form of a servant, in poverty and wretchedness, in suffering. This indeed was Christianity, not that a rich man makes the poor rich, but that the poorest of all makes all men rich, both the rich and the poor. And this indeed was Christianity, not that it is the happy man who comforts the afflicted, but that it is He who of all men is the most afflicted.—He will draw all to Himself—*draw* them to Himself, for He would *entice* no one. To draw to Himself truly, means in *one* sense to repel men. In thy nature and in mine and in that of every man there

is something He would do away with; with respect to all this He repels men. Lowliness and humiliation are the stone of stumbling, the possibility of offense, and thou art situated between His humiliation which lies behind, and the exaltation—this is the reason why it is said that He draws to Himself. To entice is an untrue way of drawing to Himself; but He would entice no one; humiliation belongs to Him just as essentially as exaltation. In case there was one who could love Him only in His exaltation—such a man's vision is confused, he knows not Christ, neither loves Him at all, but takes Him in vain. Christ was the truth [in His humiliation] and is the truth. If then one can love Him only in His exaltation, what does that signify? It signifies that he can love the truth . . . only when it has conquered, when it is in possession of and surrounded by power and honor and glory. But while it was in conflict it was foolishness, to the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks a foolish thing. So long as it was scorned, ridiculed, and (as the Scripture says) spat upon, he desired to hold himself aloof from it. Thus he desired to keep the truth from him, but this in fact means precisely to be in untruth. It is as essential for "the truth" to suffer in this world as to triumph in another world, the world of truth—and Christ Jesus is the same in His humiliation as in His exaltation. But, on the other hand, in case one could feel himself drawn to Christ and able to love Him only in His humiliation, in case such a man would refuse to hear anything about this exaltation when power and honor and glory are His—in case (oh, pitiable perversity!), with the impatience of an unstable mind, tired (as he would express it) of Christendom's triumphant boast of "seeing good days," he longs only for the spectacle of horror, to be with Him when He was scorned and persecuted—such a man's vision also is confused, he knows not Christ, neither loves Him at all. For melancholy is no closer to Christianity than light mindedness,<sup>3</sup> both are equally worldly, equally remote from Christianity, both equally in need of conversion.

My hearer, thou to whom my discourse is addressed, thou who today art come in His remembrance, our Lord Jesus Christ's, art come hither as drawn by Him who from on high will draw all unto Himself. But it is precisely on this day thou art reminded of His humiliation, His suffering and death, so that it is He that draws thee to Him. Though He is raised up on high, He has not forgotten thee—and thou

<sup>3</sup> *Tungsind/Letsind*—literally, heavy-minded/light-minded. Here S.K. evidently condemns his own melancholy, which in its darkest periods disposed him to a gloomy and "perverse" view of Christianity. (L)



art not forgetful of His humiliation, dost love Him in His humiliation, but at the same time dost love His glorious revelation.

*From on high He will draw all unto Himself.*

It is now eighteen centuries since He left the earth and ascended up on high. Since that time the form of the world has undergone more than one change, thrones have been erected and overthrown, great names have cropped up and been forgotten; and on a smaller scale, in thy daily life, changes regularly occur, the sun rises and sets, the wind shifts in its courses, now something new is sought out and soon is forgotten again, and again something new—and from Him, in a certain sense, we hear nothing. And yet He has said that from on high He will draw all unto Himself. So also on high He is not resting, but He works hitherto, employed and concerned with drawing all unto Himself. Amazing! Thus thou beholdest in nature all about thee the many forces stirring; but the power which supports all thou dost not behold, thou seest not God's almightiness—and yet it is fully certain that He also works, that a single instant without Him, and the world is nothing. So likewise He is invisible on high, yet everywhere present, employed in drawing all unto Himself—while in this world, alas, there is worldly talk about everything else but Him, as though He did not exist. He employs the most various things as the way and the means of drawing unto Himself—but this we cannot dwell upon here, least of all today, when a period unusually short is prescribed for the address, because the sacred action predominates and the Communion is our divine service. But though the means He employs are so many, all ways come together at one point, the consciousness of sin—through this passes “the way” by which He draws a man, the repentant sinner, to Himself.

My hearer, thou to whom my discourse is addressed, thou who today art come hither in remembrance of Him to partake of a holy feast, the Lord's Supper—today thou didst go first to confession before coming to the altar. From on high He hath drawn thee to Himself, but it was through the consciousness of sin. For He will not entice all to Himself, He will draw all to Himself.

*From on high He will draw all unto Himself.*

My hearer, thou to whom my discourse is addressed! Today He is indeed with thee, as though He were come nearer, as though He were touching the earth. He is present at the altar where thou seekest Him; He is present—but only in order to draw thee from on high unto Him-

self. For because thou dost feel thyself drawn to Him, and therefore art come hither today, it does not necessarily follow that thou mayest venture to conceive that He has already drawn thee entirely to Himself. "Lord, increase my faith." He who made that prayer was not an unbeliever but a believer; and so it is also with this prayer, "Lord, draw me entirely to Thee"; for he who rightly makes this prayer must already feel himself drawn. Ah, and is it not true that precisely today, and precisely because thou dost feel thyself drawn, thou wilt today be ready to admit how much is still lacking, how far thou art from being drawn entirely to Him—drawn up on high, far from all the base and the earthly which hold thee back? Ah, it is not I, my hearer, nor any other man, that says this to thee, or might presume to say it. No, every man has enough to do with saying this to himself. I do not know, my hearer, who thou art, how far He has perhaps already drawn thee to Himself, how far perhaps thou art advanced beyond me and many another in the way of being a Christian—but God grant that this day, whoever thou art, and whereuntosoever thou hast attained, thou who art come hither today to partake of the holy feast of the Lord's Supper—that this day may be to thee truly blessed; God grant that at this sacred moment thou mayest thyself be entirely drawn to Him and be sensible of His presence. He is there—He from whom in a sense thou dost separate when thou departest from the altar, but who nevertheless will not forget thee if thou dost not forget Him; yea, will not forget thee even when, alas, thou dost sometimes forget Him, who from on high continues to draw thee unto Himself, until the last blessed end when thou shalt be by Him and with Him on high.

## TWO DISCOURSES AT THE COMMUNION ON FRIDAYS

BY S. KIERKEGAARD (1851)

TRANSLATED BY WALTER LOWRIE

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When the thought of God does not remind him of his sin but that it is forgiven, and the past is no longer the memory of how much he did wrong, but of how much he was forgiven—then man rests in the forgiveness of sins.—THE JOURNALS

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LITTLE need be said about this brief discourse save that it forms a complement to the treatment of the same text in *The Works of Love* (see pp. 306–323), as S.K. himself points out. The subject here is "the divine initiative," whereas



the negative sense, the newspapers, "dons," parsons and professors. The editor of this volume recalls with some embarrassment hearing "A Sad Reflection" read as a fitting introduction to his lecture on Kierkegaard! What S.K. will think of my latest offense I know only too well—unless the other world has softened him.

## PRAYER

LORD JESUS CHRIST! A whole life long didst thou suffer that I too might be saved: and yet thy suffering is not yet at an end; but this too wilt thou endure, saving and redeeming me, this patient suffering of having to do with me, I who so often go astray from the right path, or even when I remained on the straight path stumbled along it or crept so slowly along the right path. Infinite patience, suffering of infinite patience. How many times have I not been impatient, wished to give up and forsake everything, wished to take the terribly easy way out, despair: but thou didst not lose patience. Oh, I cannot say what thy chosen servant says: that he filled up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh; no, I can only say that I increased thy sufferings, added new ones to those which thou didst once suffer in order to save me.

. . . What a curious, yet profound turn of phrase which makes it possible to say: in this case there is no question of a *choice*—I choose this and this. To continue: Christianity says to a man: you shall choose the one essential thing but in such a way that there is no question of a choice—if you drivel on any longer then you do not in fact choose the one essential thing; like the Kingdom of God it must be chosen *first*.

So there is consequently something in regard to which there may not be, and in thought cannot be, a choice and nevertheless it is a choice. Consequently, the very fact that in this case there is no *choice* expresses the tremendous passion or intensity with which it must be *chosen*. Could there be a clearer expression of the fact that the liberty of choice is only a qualified form of freedom? . . . However astonishing it may seem, one is therefore obliged to say that only "fear and trembling, only constraint, can help a man to freedom." Because "fear and trembling" and compulsion can master him in such a way that there is no longer any question of choice—and then one chooses the right thing. At the hour of death most people choose the right thing.

Now how are the sciences to help? Simply not at all, in no way whatsoever. They reduce everything to calm and objective observation

—with the result that freedom is an inexplicable something. Scientifically Spinoza is the only one who is consistent.

. . . Freedom really only *exists* because the same instant it (freedom of choice) exists it rushes with infinite speed to bind itself unconditionally by choosing resignation, in the choice of which it is true that there is no question of a choice. . . . But alas, man is not so purely spirit. It seems to him that since the choice is left to him he can take time and *first of all* think the matter over *seriously*. What a miserable anti-climax. "Seriousness" simply means to choose God at once and "first." In that way man is left juggling with a phantom: freedom of choice—with the question whether he does or does not possess it, etc. And it even becomes scientific. He does not notice that he has thus suffered the loss of his freedom. For a time perhaps he delights in the thought of freedom until it changes again, and he becomes doubtful whether he is free or not. Then he loses his freedom of choice. He confuses everything by his faulty tactics (militarily speaking). By directing his mind toward "freedom of choice" instead of choosing, he loses both freedom and freedom of choice. Nor can he ever recover it by the use of thought alone. If he is to recover his freedom it can only be through an intensified "fear and trembling" brought forth by the thought of having lost it.

The most tremendous thing which has been granted to man is: the choice, freedom. And if you desire to save it and preserve it there is only one way: in the very same second unconditionally and in complete resignation to give it back to God, and yourself with it. If the sight of what is granted to you tempts you, and if you give way to the temptation and look with egoistic desire upon the freedom of choice, then you lose your freedom. And your punishment is: to go on in a kind of confusion priding yourself on having—freedom of choice, but woe upon you, that is your judgment: You have freedom of choice, you say, and still you have not chosen God. Then you will grow ill, freedom of choice will become your *idée fixe*, till at last you will be like the rich man who imagines that he is poor, and will die of want: you sigh that you have lost your freedom of choice—and your fault is only that you do not grieve deeply enough or you would find it again. . . .

#### FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE, FREEDOM OF BELIEF

Ideally speaking it may be perfectly true that every man should be given freedom of conscience and freedom of belief, etc.



## THE ATTACK UPON "CHRISTENDOM" (1854-1855)

TRANSLATED BY WALTER LOWRIE

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Most people believe that the Christian commandments are intentionally a little too severe—like putting the clock on half an hour to make sure of not being late in the morning. (1837)

. . . The most terrible fight is not when there is one opinion against another, the most terrible is when two men say the same thing—and fight about the interpretation, and this interpretation involves a difference of quality.—THE JOURNALS

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ALREADY we have had occasion to remark that the external events of Kierkegaard's life were incommensurable with the results they produced. In no case is this more evident than in the incident which provoked the last phase of his authorship, the sharp and even brutal attack on the established religion of his native land. Bishop Mynster, the primate of all Denmark, died on January 30, 1854; and a few days afterward Professor Martensen (who afterward succeeded to the bishopric) preached a sermon in the Court church in which the late Bishop was eulogized as "a genuine witness to the Truth," a member of "that holy line which like a great chain stretches back to the Apostles." Lesser men than Mynster have certainly received more fulsome praise; but to S.K., who heard Martensen's sermon, it was not only grossly untrue, but a dangerous and abominable untruth.

S.K.'s reaction becomes harder to understand when we realize that Bishop Mynster was no worldly ecclesiastic, but a wise and able administrator, and a man of some intellectual power and spiritual discernment, whose sermons S.K. had listened to with profit. Moreover, he was a man who had greatly influenced S.K.'s father. It was not that Kierkegaard despised the Bishop; on the contrary, he had a very high regard for him—within limits. But it was just these limits which to S.K. were all-important. In the upright Bishop Mynster there was something lacking—something which S.K. regarded as the very essence of a "witness to the Truth," a successor to the Apostles.

This something may be described as the upholding of the Christian *ideal* of life, with consequent humility in the recognition of how utterly we have failed to live up to this ideal. Reading parts of the *Attack*, one may get the impression that Kierkegaard was a perfectionist, but nothing could be farther from the truth—unless by "perfectionism" one means holding forth the *ideal* in all its purity and severity. This Kierkegaard insisted upon; he would not have the Christian law of love and self-denial watered down to a comfortable code of *bourgeois* ethics. But he did not assume the possibility of fulfilling

this law completely; least of all did he assume that he himself had fulfilled it. Over and over again he insists that all he wants from the Church is an *admission* of its mediocrity—in order that it might then "take refuge in Grace" and receive strength for making a step or two, at least, in the right direction. But this admission the Church steadily refused to make.

Strictly speaking, however, we may say that "S.K.'s criticism was not directed against the Church as such, but against 'Christendom,' the established order of things in a presumably 'Christian land' and 'a Christian world'" (Lowrie). Part of his polemic—the part dealing with "the King's functionaries," i.e. the evils of Establishment—is inapplicable to America today and many of these passages have been omitted from the following selections. But as Lowrie says, it is surprising how much *is* applicable today and how much is applicable with even greater point than in S.K.'s Denmark.

In an article on Kierkegaard a few years ago I made the remark that in his assault on established Christianity S.K. for once became "undialectical," seeing only one side of the question and magnifying that side out of its true proportion. This was rather a fatuous observation, since exaggeration and one-sidedness are of the very nature of satire. A deathbed conversation between S.K. and Pastor Boisen has been recorded, in which the latter objected that the "attack" "did not correspond with reality, it was more severe"; to which S.K. replied, "So it must be; otherwise it does not help." Thus "the corrective," itself one-sided, has the sacrificial function of restoring the general balance.

As satire *The Attack* is magnificent even when it is most offensive, as in the section (not reproduced here) in which "the priests" are shown to be cannibals, or in the one entitled "Confirmation and the Wedding." Here we have not merely a protest against the routinized practice of these sacraments, but a "transvaluation of values" with respect to the institutions themselves. S.K. sees only too clearly how Protestantism has glossed over the New Testament ideal of celibacy set forth by St. Paul, and he sees how the Catholic-Lutheran formalism reduces conversion to a pretty ceremony gone through "before one is dry behind the ears." I hope that many will be as shocked as I am at this and other passages; for S.K.'s object was precisely to shock—into reflection, repentance, and action.

Whatever one may think of this ultimate phase of S.K.'s authorship, it cannot be denied that he spent himself to the utmost. Nine months after the first article<sup>1</sup> was published, he fell sick on the street while carrying home from the bank the very last of his considerable inheritance. Taken to the hospital, he died two months later of a malady vaguely diagnosed. He went without the Sacrament at the last, because he would not receive it from a

<sup>1</sup> S.K.'s invective was published partly in the form of articles in *The Fatherland* and partly in a series of pamphlets entitled *The Instant*. "The Attack upon 'Christendom'" is merely the title of the English edition which gathers all this material together.



priest—only from a layman. The pamphlets had created a furor, and a riot almost took place at the funeral. A group of University students formed a guard of honor, and order was preserved by the tactfulness of S.K.'s brother Peter, who preached the funeral sermon. Even so, there was a last-minute outburst at the grave from one of S.K.'s sympathizers, who inveighed against the hypocrisy of the Church in appropriating this man who had denounced it, and insisted on reading from the Apocalypse the passage about the church of the Laodiceans. "No doubt it was very shocking," says Lowrie; "but S.K. was at peace, and I cannot think that his peace would be disturbed by knowing that the fire he had kindled continued to burn."<sup>2</sup>

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### FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

O THOU, whosoever thou art under whose eye this falls—when I read in the New Testament the life of our Lord Jesus Christ here on earth, and see what he meant by being a Christian—and when I reflect that now we are Christians by the millions, just as many Christians as we are men, that from generation to generation Christians by the millions are handed over for inspection by eternity—frightful! For that there is something wrong with this, nothing can be more certain. Say for thyself what good it does—even if it were ever so pious and well-meant!—what good it does to wish (lovingly?) to confirm thee in the vain conceit that thou art a Christian, or to wish to alter the definition of what it is to be a Christian, in order presumably that thou mayest more securely enjoy this life; what good it does thee, or rather is not this precisely to do thee harm, since it is to help thee to let the temporal life go by unused in a Christian sense—until thou art standing in eternity where thou art not a Christian, in case thou wast not one, and where it is impossible to become a Christian? Thou who readest this, say to thyself: Was I not in the right, and am I not, in saying that first and foremost everything must be done to make it perfectly definite what is required in the New Testament for being a Christian; that first and foremost everything must be done in order that at least we might become attentive?

### THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION

IN the New Testament the situation is this: the speaker, our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself absolutely expressing opposition, stands in a world which in turn absolutely expresses opposition to Him and to His teach-

<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard, p. 587.

ing. When of the individual Christ requires faith, then (and with this we have a sharper definition of what He understands by faith), then by reason of the situation this is not feasible without coming into a relationship with the surrounding world which perhaps involves mortal danger; when Christ says, "Confess me before the world," "Follow me," or when He says, "Come unto me," etc., etc., then, by reason of the situation which furnishes the more express understanding, the consequences will always be exposure to danger, perhaps to mortal danger. On the other hand, where all are Christians, the situation is this: to call oneself a Christian is the means whereby one secures oneself against all sorts of inconveniences and discomforts, and the means whereby one secures worldly goods, comforts, profit, etc., etc. But we make as if nothing had happened, we declaim about believing ("He who knows best, that is our priest"<sup>1</sup>), about confessing Christ before the world, about following Him, etc., etc.; and orthodoxy flourishes in the land, no heresy, no schism, orthodoxy everywhere, the orthodoxy which consists in playing the game of Christianity.

. . . We are what is called a "Christian" nation—but in such a sense that not a single one of us is in the character of the Christianity of the New Testament, any more than I am, who again and again have repeated, and do now repeat, that I am only a poet. The illusion of a Christian nation is due doubtless to the power which number exercises over the imagination. I have not the least doubt that every single individual in the nation will be honest enough with God and with himself to say in solitary conversation, "If I must be candid, I do not deny that I am not a Christian in the New Testament sense; if I must be honest, I do not deny that my life cannot be called an effort in the direction of what the New Testament calls Christianity, in the direction of denying myself, renouncing the world, dying from it, etc.; rather the earthly and the temporal become more and more important to me with every year I live." I have not the least doubt that everyone will, with respect to ten of his acquaintances, let us say, be able to hold fast to the view that they are not Christians in the New Testament sense, and that their lives are not even an effort in the direction of becoming so. But when there are 100,000, one becomes confused.

They tell a ludicrous story about an innkeeper, a story moreover which is related incidentally by one of my pseudonyms,<sup>2</sup> but I would

<sup>1</sup> A Danish jingle which every child knew. (L)

<sup>2</sup> Vigilius Haufuiensis in *The Concept of Dread*. (L)



use it again because it has always seemed to me to have a profound meaning. It is said that he sold his beer by the bottle for a cent less than he paid for it; and when a certain man said to him, "How does that balance the account? That means to spend money," he replied, "No, my friend, it's the big number that does it"—big number, that also in our time is the almighty power. When one has laughed at this story, one would do well to take to heart the lesson which warns against the power which number exercises over the imagination. For there can be no doubt that this innkeeper knew very well that one bottle of beer which he sold for 3 cents meant a loss of 1 cent when it cost him 4 cents. Also with regard to ten bottles the innkeeper will be able to hold fast that it is a loss. But 100,000 bottles! Here the big number stirs the imagination, the round number runs away with it, and the innkeeper becomes dazed—it's a profit, says he, for the big number does it. So also with the calculation which arrives at a Christian nation by adding up units which are not Christian, getting the result by means of the notion that the big number does it. For true Christianity this is the most dangerous of all illusions, and at the same time it is of all illusions precisely the one to which every man is prone; for number (the high number, when it gets up to 100,000, into the millions) tallies precisely with the imagination. But Christianly of course the calculation is wrong, and a Christian nation composed of units which honestly admit that they are not Christians, *item* honestly admit that their life cannot in any sense be called an effort in the direction of what the New Testament understands by Christianity—such a Christian nation is an impossibility. On the other hand, a knave could not wish to find a better hiding-place than behind such phrases as "the nation is Christian," "the people are making a Christian endeavor," since it is almost as difficult to come to close quarters with such phrases as it would be if one were to say, "N. N. is a Christian, N. N. is engaged in Christian endeavor."

But inasmuch as Christianity is spirit, the sobriety of spirit, the honesty of eternity, there is of course nothing which to its detective eye is so suspicious as are all fantastic entities: Christian states, Christian lands, a Christian people, and (how marvelous!) a Christian world. And even if there were something true in this talk about Christian peoples and states—but, mind you, only when all mediating definitions, all divergencies from the Christianity of the New Testament, are honestly and honorably pointed out and kept in evidence—yet it is certain

that at this point a monstrous criminal offense has been perpetrated, yea, everything this world has hitherto seen in the way of criminal affairs is a mere bagatelle in comparison with this crime, which has been carried on from generation to generation throughout long ages, eluding human justice, but has not yet got beyond the arm of divine justice.

### WHAT DO I WANT?

March 1855.

S. Kierkegaard.

QUITE simply: I want honesty. I am not, as well-intentioned people<sup>1</sup> represent (for I can pay no attention to the interpretations of me that are advanced by exasperation and rage and impotence and twaddle), I am not a Christian severity as opposed to a Christian leniency.

By no means. I am neither leniency nor severity: I am—a human honesty.

The leniency which is the common Christianity in the land I want to place alongside of the New Testament in order to see how these two are related to one another.

Then, if it appears, if I or another can prove, that it can be maintained face to face with the New Testament, then with the greatest joy I will agree to it.

But one thing I will not do, not for anything in the world. I will not by suppression, or by performing tricks, try to produce the impression that the ordinary Christianity in the land and the Christianity of the New Testament are alike.

Behold, this it is I do not want. And why not? Well, because I want honesty. Or, if you wish me to talk in another way—well then, it is because I believe that, if possibly even the very extremest softening down of Christianity may hold good in the judgment of eternity, it is impossible that it should hold good when even artful tricks are employed to gloss over the difference between the Christianity of the New Testament and this softened form. What I mean is this: If a man is known for his graciousness—very well then, let me venture to ask him to forgive me all my debt; but even though his grace were divine grace, this is too much to ask, if I will not even be truthful about how great the debt is.

And this in my opinion is the falsification of which official Christianity is guilty: it does not frankly and unreservedly make known the

<sup>1</sup> Professor Nielsen, who had defended him. (L)



Christian requirement—perhaps because it is afraid people would shudder to see at what a distance from it we are living, without being able to claim that in the remotest way our life might be called an effort in the direction of fulfilling the requirement. Or (merely to take one example of what is everywhere present in the New Testament): when Christ requires us to save our life eternally (and that surely is what we propose to attain as Christians) and to hate our own life in this world, is there then a single one among us whose life in the remotest degree could be called even the weakest effort in this direction? And perhaps there are thousands of "Christians" in the land who are not so much as aware of this requirement. So then we "Christians" are living, and are loving our life, just in the ordinary human sense. If then by "grace" God will nevertheless regard us as Christians, one thing at least must be required: that we, being precisely aware of the requirement, have a true conception of how infinitely great is the grace that is shown us. "Grace" cannot possibly stretch so far, one thing it must never be used for, it must never be used to suppress or to diminish the requirement; for in that case "grace" would turn Christianity upside down.

Or, to take an example of another kind: A teacher is paid, let us say, several thousand. If then we suppress the Christian standard and apply the ordinary human rule, that it is a matter of course a man should receive a wage for his labor, a wage sufficient to support a family, and a considerable wage to enable him to enjoy the consideration due to a government official—then a few thousand a year is certainly not much. On the other hand, as soon as the Christian requirement of poverty is brought to bear, family is a luxury and several thousand is very high pay. I do not say this in order to deprive such an official of a single shilling, if I were able to; on the contrary, if he desired it, and I were able, he might well have double as many thousands: but I say that the suppression of the Christian requirement changes the point of view for all his wages. Honesty to Christianity demands that one call to mind the Christian requirement of poverty, which is not a capricious whim of Christianity, but is because only in poverty can it be truly served, and the more thousands a teacher of Christianity has by way of wages, the less he can serve Christianity. On the other hand, it is not honest to suppress the requirement or to perform artful tricks to produce the impression that this sort of business career is simply the Christianity of the New Testament. No—let us take money, but for God's sake not the next thing: let us not wish to gloss over the Christian requirement, so that by suppression or by falsification we may bring about an ap-

pearance of decorum which is in the very highest degree demoralizing and is a sly death-blow to Christianity.

Therefore I want honesty; but till now the Established Church has not been willing of its own accord to go in for that sort of honesty, and neither has it been willing to let itself be influenced by me. That does not make me, however, a leniency or a severity; no, I am and remain quite simply a human honesty.

### THE COMFORTABLE—AND THE CONCERN FOR AN ETERNAL BLESSEDNESS

[April 11.]

It is these two things—one might almost be tempted to say, what the deuce have these two things to do with one another?—and yet it is these two things that official Christianity, or the State by the aid of official Christianity, has jumbled together, and done it as calmly as when, at a party where the host wants to include everybody, he jumbles many toasts in one.

It seems that the reasoning of the State must have been as follows. Among the many various things which man needs on a civilized plane and which the State tries to provide for its citizens as cheaply and comfortably as possible—among these very various things, like public security, water, illumination, roads, bridge-building, etc., etc., there is also—an eternal blessedness in the hereafter, a requirement which the State ought also to satisfy (how generous of it!), and that in as cheap and comfortable a way as possible. Of course it will cost money, for without money one gets nothing in this world, not even a certificate of eternal blessedness in the other world; no, without money one gets nothing in this world. Yet all the same, what the State does, to the great advantage of the individual, is that one gets it from the State at a cheaper price than if the individual were to make some private arrangement, moreover it is more secure, and finally it is comfortable in a degree that only can be provided on a big scale. . . .

Far be it from me to speak disparagingly of the comfortable! Let it be applied wherever it can be applied, in relation to everything which is in such a sense a thing that this thing can be possessed irrespective of the way in which it is possessed, so that one can have it either in this way or in the other; for when such is the case, the convenient and comfortable way is undeniably to be preferred. Take water for example:



water is a thing which can be procured in the difficult way of fetching it up from the pump, but it can also be procured in the convenient way of high pressure; naturally I prefer the more convenient way.

But the eternal is not a thing which can be had regardless of the way in which it is acquired; no, the eternal is not really a thing, but is the way in which it is acquired. The eternal is acquired in *one* way, and the eternal is different from everything else precisely for the fact that it can be acquired only in one single way; conversely, what can be acquired in only one way is the eternal—it is acquired only in one way, in the difficult way which Christ indicated by the words: "Narrow is the gate and straitened the way that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it."

That was bad news! The comfortable—precisely the thing in which our age excels—absolutely cannot be applied with respect to an eternal blessedness. When, for example, the thing you are required to do is to walk, it is no use at all to make the most astonishing inventions in the way of the easiest carriages and to want to convey yourself in these when the task prescribed to you was—walking. And if the eternal is the way in which it is acquired, it doesn't do any good to want to alter this way, however admirably, in the direction of comfort; for the eternal is acquired only in the difficult way, is not acquired indifferently both in the easy and the difficult way, but is the way in which it is acquired, and this way is the difficult one. . . .

## A EULOGY UPON THE HUMAN RACE OR A PROOF THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT IS NO LONGER TRUTH

IN the New Testament the Saviour of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ, represents the situation thus: The way that leadeth unto life is straitened, the gate narrow—few be they that find it!

—Now, on the contrary, to speak only of Denmark, we are all Christians, the way is as broad as it possibly can be, the broadest in Denmark, since it is the way in which we all are walking, besides being in all respects as convenient, as comfortable as possible; and the gate is as wide as it possibly can be, wider surely a gate cannot be than that through which we all are going *en masse*.

*Ergo* the New Testament is no longer truth.

All honor to the human race! But Thou, O Saviour of the world, Thou didst entertain too lowly a notion of the human race, failing to foresee the sublime heights to which, perfectible as it is, it can attain by an effort steadily pursued!

To that degree therefore the New Testament is no longer truth: the way the broadest, the gate the widest, and all of us Christians. Yea, I venture to go a step further—it inspires me with enthusiasm, for this, you must remember, is a eulogy upon the human race—I venture to maintain that, on the average, the Jews who dwell among us are to a certain degree Christians, Christians like all the others—to that degree we are all Christians, in that degree is the New Testament no longer truth. . . . I venture to go a step further, without expressing, however, any definite opinion, seeing that in this respect I lack precise information, and hence submit to persons well informed, the specialists, the question whether among the domestic animals, the nobler ones, the horse, the dog, the cow, there might not be visible some Christian token. That is not unlikely. Just think what it means to live in a Christian state, a Christian nation, where everything is Christian, and we are all Christians, where, however a man twists and turns, he sees nothing but Christianity and Christendom, the truth and witnesses to the truth—it is not unlikely that this may have an influence upon the nobler domestic animals, and thereby in turn upon that which, according to the judgment of both the veterinary and the priest, is the most important thing, namely, the progeny. Jacob's cunning device is well known, how in order to get speckled lambs he laid speckled rods in the watering troughs, so that the ewes saw nothing but speckles and therefore gave birth to speckled lambs. It is not unlikely—although I do not presume to have any definite opinion, as I am not a specialist, and therefore would rather submit the question to a committee composed, for example, of veterinaries and priests—it is not unlikely that it will end with domestic animals in "Christendom" bringing into the world a Christian progeny.

I am almost dizzy at the thought; but then, on the greatest possible scale—to the honor of the human race—will the New Testament be no longer truth.

Thou Saviour of the world, Thou didst anxiously exclaim, "When I come again, shall I find faith on the earth?" and then didst bow Thy head in death; Thou surely didst not have the least idea that in such a



measure Thine expectations would be surpassed, that the human race in such a pretty and touching way would make the New Testament untruth and Thine importance almost doubtful. For can such good beings truthfully be said to need, or ever to have needed, a saviour?

### MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS

A MAN becomes thinner and thinner day by day; he is wasting away. What can the matter be? He does not suffer want. "No, certainly not," says the physician, "it doesn't come from that, it comes precisely from eating, from the fact that he eats out of season, eats without being hungry, uses stimulants to arouse a little bit of appetite, and in that way he ruins his digestion, fades away as if he were suffering want."

So it is religiously. The most fatal thing of all is to satisfy a want which is not yet felt, so that without waiting till the want is present, one anticipates it, likely also uses stimulants to bring about something which is supposed to be a want, and then satisfies it. And this is shocking! And yet this is what they do in the religious sphere, whereby they really are cheating men out of what constitutes the significance of life, and helping people to waste life.

For this is the aim of the whole machinery of the State Church, which under the form of care for men's souls cheats them out of the highest thing in life, that in them there should come into being the concern about themselves, the want, which verily a teacher or priest should find according to his mind; but now, instead of this, the want (and precisely the coming into being of this want is life's highest significance for a man) does not come into being at all, but having been satisfied long before it came into being, it is prevented from coming into being. And this is thought to be the continuation of the work which the Saviour of the human race completed, this bungling of the human race! And why? Because there are now as a matter of fact so and so many royal functionaries who, with families, have to live off this, under the name of—the cure of souls!

### THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE SPIRITUAL MAN / THE CHRISTIANITY OF US MEN

THERE are two points of difference between the spiritual man and us men, to which I would especially draw attention, and thereby in turn

illustrate the difference between the Christianity of the New Testament and the Christianity of "Christendom."

(1) The spiritual man differs from us men in the fact that (if I may so express it) he is so heavily built that he is able to endure a duplication in himself. In comparison with him we men are like frame walls in comparison with the foundation wall, so loosely and frailly built that we cannot endure a duplication. But the Christianity of the New Testament has to do precisely with a duplication.

The spiritual man is able to endure a duplication in himself: by his understanding he is able to hold fast to the fact that something is contrary to the understanding, and then will it nevertheless; he is able to hold fast with the understanding to the fact that something is an offense, and yet to will it nevertheless; that, humanly speaking, something makes him unhappy, and yet to will it, etc. But the New Testament is composed precisely in view of this. We men on the other hand are not able to support or endure a duplication within ourselves; our will alters our understanding. Our Christianity therefore, the Christianity of "Christendom," takes this into account: it takes away from Christianity the offense, the paradox, etc., and instead of that introduces probability, the plainly comprehensible. That is, it transforms Christianity into something entirely different from what it is in the New Testament, yea, into exactly the opposite; and this is the Christianity of "Christendom," of us men.

(2) The spiritual man differs from us men in being able to endure isolation, his rank as a spiritual man is proportionate to his strength for enduring isolation, whereas we men are constantly in need of "the others," the herd; we die, or despair, if we are not reassured by being in the herd, of the same opinion as the herd, etc.

But the Christianity of the New Testament is precisely reckoned upon and related to this isolation of the spiritual man. Christianity in the New Testament consists in loving God, in hatred to man, in hatred of oneself, and thereby of other men, hating father, mother, one's own child, wife, etc., the strongest expression for the most agonizing isolation.—And it is in view of this I say that such men, men of this quality and caliber, are not born any more.

The Christianity of us men is, to love God in agreement with other men, to love and be loved by other men, constantly the others, the herd included.

Let us take an example. In "Christendom" this is what Christianity is: a man with a woman on his arm steps up to the altar, where a



smart silken priest, half educated in the poets, half in the New Testament, delivers an address half erotic, half Christian—a wedding ceremony. This is what Christianity is in "Christendom." The Christianity of the New Testament would be: in case that man were really able to love in such a way that the girl was the only one he loved and one whom he loved with the whole passion of a soul (yet such men as this are no longer to be found), then, hating himself and the loved one, to let her go in order to love God.—And it is in view of this I say that such men, men of such quality and caliber, are not born any more.

### WHEN ALL ARE CHRISTIANS, CHRISTIANITY *EO IPSO* DOES NOT EXIST

WHEN once it is pointed out, this is very easily seen, and once seen it can never be forgotten.

Any determinant which applies to all cannot enter into existence but must either underlie existence or lie outside as meaningless.

Take the determinant man. We are all men. This determinant therefore does not enter into human existence, for the human race as a whole is subsumed under the generic term "man." This determinant lies before the beginning, in the sense of underlying. We are all men—and then it begins.

This is an example of a determinant which applies to all and is underlying. The other alternative was that a determinant which applies to all, or by the fact that it applies to all, is meaningless.

Assume (and let us not haggle over the fact that it is a strange assumption, we shall have the explanation), assume that we are all thieves, what the police call suspicious characters—if that's what we all are, this determinant will *eo ipso* have no effect upon the situation as a whole, we shall be living just as we are living, each will then count for what he now counts, some (suspicious characters) will be branded as thieves and robbers, i.e. within the definition that we are all suspicious characters; others (suspicious characters) will be highly esteemed, etc.; in short, everything even to the least detail will be as it is, for we are all suspicious characters, and so the concept is annulled (Hegel's *aufgehoben*); when all are that, then to be that = 0; this is not to say that it does not mean anything much; no, it means nothing at all.

It is exactly the same with the definition that we are all Christians.

If we are all Christians, the concept is annulled, being a Christian is something which lies before the beginning, outside—and then it begins, we live then the merely human life, exactly as in paganism; the determinant Christian cannot in any way manage to enter in, for by the fact that we all are this it is precisely put outside.

God's thought in introducing Christianity was, if I may venture to say so, to pound the table hard in front of us men. To that end He set "individual" and "race," the single person and the many, at odds, set them against one another, applied the determinant of dissension; for to be a Christian was, according to His thought, precisely the definition of dissension, that of the "individual" with the "race," with the millions, with family, with father and mother, etc.

God did it that way, *partly* out of love; for He, the God of love, wanted to be loved, but is too great a connoisseur of what love is to want to have to order men to love Him by battalions or whole nations, as the command, "One, two, three," is given at the church parade. No, the formula constantly is: the individual in opposition to the others. And *partly* He did it as the ruler, in order to keep men in check and educate them. This was His thought, even though we men might say, if we dared, that it was the most annoying caprice on the part of God to put us together in this way, or cut us off in this way from what we animals regard as the true well-being, from coalescing with the herd, everyone just like the others.

God succeeded in this, he really overawed men.

But gradually the human race came to itself and, shrewd as it is, it saw that to do away with Christianity by force was not practicable—"So let us do it by cunning," they said. "We are all Christians, and so Christianity is *eo ipso* abolished."

And that is what we now are. The whole thing is a knavish trick; these 2,000 churches, or however many there are, are, Christianly considered, a knavish trick; these 1,000 priests in velvet, silk, broadcloth, or bombazine, are a knavish trick—for the whole thing rests upon the assumption that we are all Christians, which is precisely the knavish way of doing away with Christianity. Therefore it is a very peculiar sort of euphemism too when we reassure ourselves with the thought that we all will attain blessedness, or say, "I shall become blessed, just like all the others"; for when forwarded to heaven with this address, one is not received there, does no more go to heaven than one reaches New Holland by land.



## SHORT AND SHARP

IN the magnificent cathedral the Honorable and Right Reverend *Geheime-General-Ober-Hof-Prädikant*, the elect favorite of the fashionable world, appears before an elect company and preaches *with emotion* upon the text he himself elected: "God hath elected the base things of the world, and the things that are despised." And nobody laughs.

When a man has a toothache the world says, "Poor man"; when a man's wife is unfaithful to him the world says, "Poor man"; when a man is in financial embarrassment the world says, "Poor man"; when it pleased God in the form of a lowly servant to suffer in this world the world says, "Poor man"; when an Apostle with a divine commission has the honor to suffer for the truth the world says, "Poor man."—Poor world!

## WHAT SAYS THE FIRE CHIEF?

THAT when in any way one has what is called a cause, something he earnestly wishes to promote—and then there are others who propose to themselves the task of counteracting it, hindering it, harming it—that he then must take measures against these enemies of his, this everyone is aware of. But not everyone is aware that there is such a thing as honest good-intention which is far more dangerous and as if especially calculated with a view to preventing the cause from becoming truly serious. . . .

So also in the case of a fire. Hardly is the cry of "Fire!" heard before a crowd of people rush to the spot, nice, cordial, sympathetic, helpful people, one has a pitcher, another a basin, the third a squirt, etc., all of them nice, cordial, sympathetic, helpful people, so eager to help put out the fire.

But what says the Fire Chief? The Fire Chief, he says—yes, generally the Fire Chief is a very pleasant and polite man; but at a fire he is what one calls coarse-mouthed—he says, or rather he bawls, "Oh, go to hell with all your pitchers and squirts." And then, when these well-meaning people are perhaps offended and require at least to be treated with respect, what then says the Fire Chief? Yes, generally the Fire Chief is a very pleasant and polite man, who knows how to show everyone the respect that is due him; but at a fire he is rather different—he says, "Where the deuce is the police force?" And when some police-

men arrive he says to them, "Rid me of these damn people with their pitchers and squirts; and if they won't yield to fair words, smear them a few over the back, so that we may be free of them and get down to work."

So then at a fire the whole way of looking at things is not the same as in everyday life. Good-natured, honest, well-meaning, by which in everyday life one attains the reputation of being a good fellow, is at a fire honored with coarse words and a few over the back.

And this is quite natural. For a fire is a serious thing, and whenever things are really serious, this honest good-intention by no means suffices. No, seriousness applies an entirely different law: either/or. Either thou art the man who in this instance can seriously do something, and seriously has something to do/or, if such be not thy case, then for thee the serious thing to do is precisely to get out. If by thyself thou wilt not understand this, then let the Fire Chief thrash it into thee by means of the police, from which thou mayest derive particular benefit, and which perhaps may after all contribute to making thee a bit serious, in correspondence with the serious thing which is a fire.

But as it is at a fire, so also it is in matters of the mind. Wherever there is a cause to be promoted, an undertaking to be carried out, an idea to be introduced—one can always be sure that when he who really is the man for it, the right man, who in a higher sense has and must have command, he who has seriousness and can give to the cause the seriousness it truly has—one can always be sure that when he comes (if I may so put it) to the spot, he will find there before him a genial company of twaddlers who, under the name of seriousness, lie around and bungle things by wanting to serve the cause, promote the undertaking, introduce the idea; a company of twaddlers who of course regard the fact that the person in question will not make common cause with them (precisely indicating his seriousness) as a certain proof that he lacks seriousness. I say, when the right man comes he will find things thus. I can also give this turn to it: the fact that he is the right man is really decided by the way he understands himself in relation to this company of twaddlers. If he has a notion that it is they who are to help, and that he must strengthen himself by union with them, he *eo ipso* is not the right man. The right man sees at once, like the Fire Chief, that this company of twaddlers must get out, that their presence and effect is the most dangerous assistance the fire could have. But in matters of the mind it is not as at a fire, where the Fire Chief merely has to say to the police, "Rid me of these men."



in his business. He also has a religion in addition to this, and his opinion is that especially every tradesman ought to have one. "A tradesman," says he, "even if he has no religion, ought never to let that be noticed, for that may readily be harmful to him by casting, possibly, suspicion upon his honesty; and preferably a tradesman ought to have the religion which prevails in the land." As to the last point, he explains that the Jews always have the reputation of cheating more than the Christians, which, as he maintains, is by no means the case; he maintains that the Christians cheat just as well as the Jews, but what injures the Jews is the fact that they do not have the religion which prevails in the land. As to the first point, namely, the profit it affords to have a religion, with a view to the countenance it gives to cheating—with regard to this he appeals to what one learns from the priests; he maintains that what helps the priests to cheat more than any other class in society is precisely the fact that they are so closely associated with religion. If such a thing could be done, he would gladly give a good shilling to obtain ordination, for that would pay brilliantly.

So two or four times a year this man puts on his best clothes—and goes to communion. Up comes a priest, a priest (like those that jump up out of a snuffbox when one touches a spring) who jumps up whenever he sees "a blue banknote."<sup>2</sup> And thereupon the priest celebrates the Holy Communion, from which the tradesman, or rather both tradesmen (both the priest and the honest citizen) return home to their customary way of life, only that one of them (the priest) cannot be said to return home to his customary way of life, for in fact he had never left it, but rather had been functioning as a tradesman.

And this is what one dares to offer to God under the name of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Communion in Christ's body and blood!

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper! It was at the Last Supper that Christ, Who from eternity had been consecrated to be the Sacrifice, met for the last time before His death with His disciples, who also were consecrated to death or to the possibility of death, if they truly followed Him. Hence for all the festal solemnity it is so shudderingly true, what is said about His body and blood, about this blood-covenant which has united the Sacrifice with His few faithful—blood-witnesses, as they surely were willing to be.

And now the solemnity is this: to live before and after in complete worldliness—and then a ceremony. However, for good reasons the

<sup>2</sup> The \$5 notes were blue. (L)

priests take care not to enlighten people about what the New Testament understands by the Lord's Supper and the obligation it imposes. Their whole business is based upon *living off* the fact that others are sacrificed; their Christianity is, *to receive sacrifices*. If it were proposed to them that they themselves should be sacrificed, they would regard it as a strange and unchristian demand, conflicting violently with the *wholesome* doctrine of the New Testament, which they would prove with such colossal learning that the span of life of no individual man would suffice for studying all this through.

### CONFIRMATION AND THE WEDDING: A CHRISTIAN COMEDY—OR SOMETHING WORSE

CONSCIENCE (in so far as there can be any question of that in this connection) seems to have smitten "Christendom" with the reflection that this thing after all was too absurd, that this purely bestial nonsense wouldn't do—the notion of becoming a Christian by receiving as an infant a drop of water on the head administered by a royal functionary, the family then arranging a party, a banquet, for the occasion, to celebrate this festivity.

This won't do, thought "Christendom," there must also be an expression of the fact that the baptized individual *personally* undertakes to perform the baptismal vow.

This is the purpose of confirmation—a splendid invention, if one makes a double assumption: that divine worship is in the direction of making a fool of God; and that its principal aim is to provide an occasion for family festivities, parties, a jolly evening, and a banquet which differs in this respect from other banquets, that this banquet (what a refinement!) has "also" a religious significance.

"The tender infant," says "Christendom," "cannot personally take the baptismal vow, for which a real *person* is requisite." And so (is this genius or ingenious?) they have chosen the period from fourteen to fifteen years of age, the age of boyhood. This real person—there can be no objection, he's man enough to undertake to perform the baptismal vows made in behalf of the tender infant.

A boy of fifteen! In case it were a question of ten dollars, the father would say, "No, my boy, that can't be left to your discretion, you're not yet dry behind the ears." But as for his eternal blessedness, and when a real personality must concentrate the seriousness of personality



upon what in a deeper sense could not be called seriousness, namely, that a tender infant is bound by a vow—for that the age of fifteen years is the most appropriate.

The most appropriate—ah, yes, if, as was previously remarked, divine worship is assumed to have a double aim: in a delicate way (if one can call it that) to treat God as a fool; and to give occasion for family festivities. Then it is extraordinarily appropriate, as is everything else on that occasion, including the Gospel appointed for the day, which, as everyone knows, begins thus: "When the doors were shut"<sup>1</sup>—and is peculiarly appropriate on a Confirmation Sunday. . . .

Confirmation then is easily seen to be far deeper nonsense than infant baptism, precisely because confirmation claims to supply what was lacking in infant baptism: a real personality which can consciously assume responsibility for a vow which has to do with the decision of an eternal blessedness. On the other hand, this nonsense is in another sense shrewd enough, ministering to the egoism of the priesthood, which understands very well that, if the decision with regard to religion is postponed to the mature age of man (the only Christian and the only sensible thing), many would perhaps have character enough not to want to be feignedly Christian. Hence the priest seeks to take possession of people in young and tender years, so that in maturer years they might have the difficulty of breaking a "sacred" obligation, imposed to be sure in boyhood, but which many perhaps may feel superstitious about breaking. Therefore the priesthood takes possession of the child, the boy, receives from him sacred vows, etc. And what the "priest," this man of God, proposes to do is surely a godly undertaking. Otherwise analogy might require that, just as there is a police ordinance prohibiting the sale of liquor to boys, so there might also be issued a prohibition against taking solemn vows concerning an eternal blessedness—from boys, a prohibition to insure that the priests, because they are perjurers, should not for this reason be allowed to work in the direction of bringing about (for their own consolation) the greatest possible *commune naufragium*, namely that the whole community should become perjured; and letting boys of fifteen take a solemn vow concerning an eternal blessedness is as though calculated to this end.

So then confirmation is in itself far deeper nonsense than infant baptism. But not to neglect anything which might contribute to make confirmation the exact opposite of that which it gives itself out to be,

<sup>1</sup> John 20: 19-31, the Gospel for the First Sunday after Easter, the day which in S.K.'s time was appointed for Confirmation in Copenhagen. (L)

this ceremony has been associated with all finite and civil ends, so that the significance of confirmation really is the certificate issued by the priest, without which the boy or girl in question cannot get along at all in this life.

The whole thing is a comedy—and taking this view of it, perhaps something might be done to introduce more dramatic illusion into this solemnity, as, for example, if a prohibition were published against anyone being confirmed in a jacket, *item* an ordinance that upon the floor of the church male confirmants must wear a beard, which of course could fall off at the family festivities in the evening, and perhaps be used for fun and jest. . . .

#### THE WEDDING

True worship of God consists quite simply in doing God's will.

But this sort of worship was never to man's taste. That which in all generations men have been busied about, that in which theological learning originated, becomes many, many disciplines, widens out to interminable prolixity, that upon which and for which thousands of priests and professors live, that which is the content of the history of "Christendom," by the study of which those who are becoming priests and professors are educated, is the contrivance of another sort of divine worship, which consists in—having one's own will, but doing it in such a way that the name of God, the invocation of God, is brought into conjunction with it, whereby man thinks he is assured against being ungodly—whereas, alas, precisely this is the most aggravated sort of ungodliness.

An example. A man is inclined to want to support himself by killing people. Now he sees from God's Word that this is not permissible, that God's will is, "Thou shalt not kill." "All right," thinks he, "but that sort of worship doesn't suit me, neither would I be an ungodly man." What does he do then? He gets hold of a priest who in God's name blesses the dagger. Yes, that's something different.

In God's Word the single state is recommended. "But," says man, "that sort of worship doesn't suit me, and I am certainly not an ungodly man either. Such an important step as marriage [which, be it noted, God advises against, and thinks that not taking this "important step" is the important thing] I surely ought not to take without assuring myself of God's blessing. [Bravo!] That is what this man of God, the priest, is for; he blesses this important step [the importance of which



Christianly one must say that precisely the fact that the priest takes part is the worst thing in the whole affair. If you want to marry, seek rather to be married by a blacksmith; then it might perhaps (if one may speak thus) escape God's notice; but when a priest takes part it cannot possibly escape God's notice. Remember what was said to a man who in a tempest invoked the gods: "Don't for anything let the gods observe that you are in the party!"<sup>2</sup> And in the same way one might say, "Take care at all events not to have a priest take part." The others, i.e. the blacksmith and the lovers, have not taken an oath to God upon the New Testament, so (if I may speak thus) the thing goes better than when the priest intervenes with his—holy presence.

What every religion in which there is any truth aims at, and what Christianity aims at decisively, is a total transformation in a man, to wrest from him through renunciation and self-denial all that, and precisely that, to which he immediately clings, in which he immediately has his life. This sort of religion, as "man" understands it, is not what he wants. The upshot therefore is that from generation to generation there lives—how equivocal!—a highly respected class in the community, the priests. Their *métier* is to invert the whole situation, so that what man likes becomes religion, on the condition, however, of invoking God's name and paying something definite to the priests. The rest of the community, when one examines the case more closely, are seen to be egoistically interested in upholding the estimation in which the priests are held—for otherwise the falsification cannot succeed.

To become a Christian in the New Testament sense is such a radical change that, humanly speaking, one must say that it is the heaviest trial to a family that one of its members becomes a Christian. For in such a Christian the God-relationship becomes so predominant that he is not "lost" in the ordinary sense of the word; no, in a far deeper sense than dying he is lost to everything that is called family. It is of this Christ constantly speaks, both with reference to himself when he says that to be his disciple is to be his mother, brother, sister, that in no other sense has he a mother, a brother, a sister; and also when he speaks continually about the collision of hating father and mother, one's own child, etc. To become a Christian in the New Testament sense is to loosen (in the sense in which the dentist speaks of loosening the tooth from the gums), to loosen the individual out of the cohesion to which he clings with the passion of immediacy, and which clings to him with the same passion.

<sup>2</sup> By Diogenes Laertius (I, 86) this story is ascribed to Bios. (L)

This sort of Christianity was never—no more now, precisely no more than in the year 30—to man's taste, but was distasteful to him in his inmost heart, mortally distasteful. Therefore the upshot is that from generation to generation there lives a highly respected class in the community whose *métier* is to transform Christianity into the exact opposite.

The Christianity of the priests, by the aid of religion (which, alas, is used precisely to bring about the opposite), is directed to cementing families more and more egoistically together, and to arranging family festivities, beautiful, splendid family festivities, e.g. infant baptism and confirmation, which festivities, compared for example with excursions in the Deer Park and other family frolics, have a peculiar enchantment for the fact that they are "also" religious.

"Woe unto you," says Christ to the "lawyers" (the interpreters of Scripture), "for ye took away the key of knowledge, ye entered not in yourselves [i.e. into the kingdom of heaven, cf. Matthew 23:13], and them that were entering in ye hindered." (Luke 11:52.)

### ONE LIVES ONLY ONCE

THIS saying is so often heard in the world, "One lives only once; therefore I could wish to see Paris before I die, or to make a fortune as soon as possible, or in fine to become something great in the world—for one lives only once."

More rarely we encounter, but it may be encountered nevertheless, a man who has only one wish, quite definitely only one wish. "This," says he, "I could wish; oh, that my wish might be fulfilled, for alas, one lives only once."

Imagine such a man upon his deathbed. The wish was not fulfilled, but his soul clings unalterably to this wish—and now, now it is no longer possible. Then he raises himself on his bed; with the passion of despair he utters once again his wish: "Oh, despair, it is not fulfilled; despair, one lives only once!"

This seems terrible, and in truth it is, but not as he means it; for the terrible thing is not that the wish remained unfulfilled, the terrible thing is the passion with which he clings to it. His life is not wasted because his wish was not fulfilled, by no manner of means; if his life is wasted, it is because he would not give up his wish, would not learn from life anything higher than this consideration of his only wish, as though its fulfillment or non-fulfillment decided everything.



The truly terrible thing is therefore an entirely different thing, as for example if a man upon his deathbed were to discover, or upon his deathbed were to become clearly aware, of that which all his life long he had understood more obscurely but had never been willing to understand, that the fact of having suffered in the world for the truth is one of the requisites for becoming eternally blessed—and one lives only once, that once which now is for him already past! And he had it indeed in his power! And eternity cannot change, that eternity to which in dying he goes as to his future.

We men are prone by nature to regard life in this way: we consider suffering an evil which in every way we strive to avoid. And if we succeed in this, we think that when our last hour comes we have special reason for thanking God that we have been spared suffering. We think that everything depends upon slipping through life happily and well—and Christianity thinks that all that is terrible really comes from the other world, that the terrible things of this world are as child's play compared with the terrors of eternity, and that it distinctly does not depend upon slipping through this life happily and well, but upon relating oneself rightly by suffering to eternity.

One lives only once. If when death comes thy life is well spent, that is, spent so that it is related rightly to eternity—then God be praised eternally. If not, then it is irremediable—one lives only once.

One lives only once. So it is here upon earth. And while thou art living this once, the extension of which in time diminishes with every fleeting hour, the God of love is seated in heaven, fondly loving thee, too. Yes, loving. Hence He would so heartily that thou finally mightest will as He for the sake of eternity would that thou shouldst will, that thou mightest resolve to will to suffer, that is, that thou mightest resolve to will to love Him, for Him thou canst love only by suffering, or, if thou lovest Him as He would be loved, thou wilt have suffering. Remember, one lives only once. If that is let slip, if thou hast experienced no suffering, if thou hast shirked it—it is eternally irremediable. Compel thee—no, that the God of love will not do at any price. He would by that attain something altogether different from what He desires. How could it occur to love to wish to use compulsion to be loved? But Love He is, and it is out of love He wills that thou shouldst will as He wills; and in love He suffers as only infinite and almighty love can, as no man is capable of comprehending, so it is He suffers when thou dost not will as He wills.

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." The next instant, when the understanding comes, "This means to experience suffering"—frightful! "Yes, but it is out of love God wills this, it is because He would be loved; and that He would be loved by thee is the expression of His love to thee"—Well, well then! The next instant, so soon as the suffering becomes serious—frightful! "Yes, but it is out of love; thou hast no notion how He suffers, because He knows very well what pain suffering involves; yet He cannot change, for then He must become something else than love"—Well, well then! The next instant, so soon as the suffering becomes very serious—frightful!

Yet beware, beware lest time perhaps go by unprofitably in unprofitable suffering; remember, one lives only once. If this may help thee, view the case thus: be assured that God suffers more in love than thou dost suffer, though by this He cannot be changed. But above all remember, one lives only once. There is a loss which is eternally irremediable, so that—still more frightful—eternity, far from effacing the recollection of the loss, is an eternal recollection of it.

### THE DIVINE JUSTICE

IF ever you have paid any attention to how things go in this world, you have probably like others before you turned away from the whole thing and said to yourself mournfully, "Is this a just rule? What has become of divine justice?" Encroachment upon the property of others, thievery, fraud, in short, everything that has to do with money (the god of this world) is punished, punished severely in this world. Even what hardly can be called felony, that a poor man, it may be only by a look, implores a passerby, is punished severely—so severely are crimes punished in this "righteous" world! But the most dreadful crimes, such as taking the holy in vain, taking the truth in vain, and in such a way that the man's life is every day a continuous lie—in this situation no retributive justice is seen to interfere with him. On the contrary, he has leave to expand without hindrance, to spread his toils about a larger or smaller circle of people, perhaps a whole community, which in its adoring admiration rewards him with all earthly goods. Where then is divine justice?

To this the answer may be made: It is the divine justice precisely which in its frightful severity permits things to go on thus. It is present,



stand it, etc., and that if He doesn't do this, it is a proof that thou hast succeeded in hoaxing Him. O man, shudder at thy success!

Yea, in His exaltation God Himself disposes the situation in such a way that it is as easy as possible for a man, if he will, to hoax God. That is, He disposes it in such a way that those whom He loves and who love Him must suffer dreadfully in this world, so that everyone can see that they are forsaken of God. The deceivers, on the other hand, make a brilliant career, so that everyone can see that God is with them, an opinion in which they themselves are more and more confirmed.

So superior is God; so far He is from making it difficult, so infinitely easy it is to deceive Him, that He Himself even offers a prize to him who does it, rewards him with everything earthly. Tremble, O man!

THE PRIEST NOT ONLY PROVES THE TRUTH  
OF CHRISTIANITY, BUT  
HE DISPROVES IT AT THE SAME TIME

THERE is only one relation to revealed truth: believing it.

The fact that one believes can be proved in only one way: by being willing to suffer for one's faith. And the degree of one's faith is proved only by the degree of one's willingness to suffer for one's faith.

In that way Christianity came into the world, being served by witnesses who were willing absolutely to suffer everything for their faith, and who actually had to suffer, to sacrifice life and blood for the truth.

The courage of their faith makes an impression upon the human race, leading it to the following conclusion: What is able thus to inspire men to sacrifice everything, to venture life and blood, must be truth.

This is the proof which is adduced for the truth of Christianity.

Now, on the contrary, the priest is so kind as to wish to make it a livelihood. But a livelihood is exactly the opposite of suffering, of being sacrificed, in which the proof consists: it is the opposite of proving the truth of Christianity by the fact that there have lived men who have sacrificed everything, ventured life and blood for Christianity.

Here then is the proof and the disproof at the same time! The proof of the truth of Christianity from the fact that one has ventured everything for it, is disproved, or rendered suspect, by the fact that the priest who advances this proof does exactly the opposite. By seeing the glorious ones, the witnesses to the truth, venture everything for Christianity, one is led to the conclusion: Christianity must be truth. By considering

the priest one is led to the conclusion: Christianity is hardly the truth, but profit is the truth.

No, the proof that something is truth from the willingness to suffer for it can only be advanced by one who himself is willing to suffer for it. The priest's proof—proving the truth of Christianity by the fact that he takes money for it, profits by, lives off of, being steadily promoted, with a family, lives off of the fact that others have suffered—is a self-contradiction; Christianly regarded, it is fraud.

And therefore, Christianly, the priest must be stopped—in the sense in which one speaks of stopping a thief. And as people cry, "Hip, ho!" after a Jew, so, until no priest is any more to be seen, they must cry, "Stop thief! Stop him, he is stealing what belongs to the glorious ones!" What they deserved by their noble disinterestedness, and what they did not get, being rewarded by unthankfulness, persecuted and put to death, that the priest steals by appropriating their lives, by describing their sufferings, proving the truth of Christianity by the willingness of these glorious ones to suffer for it. Thus it is the priest robs the glorious ones; and then he deceives the simple-minded human multitude, which has not the ability to see through the priest's traffic and perceive that he proves the truth of Christianity and at the same time disproves it.

What wonder, then, that Christianity simply does not exist, that the notion of "Christendom" is galimatias, when those who are Christians are such in reliance upon the priest's proof, and assume that Christianity is truth in reliance upon the priest's proof: that something is truth because one is willing enough to make profit out of it, or perhaps even (by a greater refinement) to get the extra profit of protesting that he is willing to suffer. To assume the truth of Christianity in reliance upon this proof is just as nonsensical as to regard oneself as an opulent man because much money passes through one's hands which is not one's own, or because one possesses a lot of paper money issued by a bank which is insolvent.

### MY TASK

THE point of view which I have to indicate again and again is of such a singular sort that in the eighteen hundred years of "Christendom" I have nothing to hold on to, nothing that is analogous, nothing that corresponds to it. So also in this respect, with regard to the eighteen hundred years, I stand literally alone.



The only analogy I have before me is Socrates. My task is a Socratic task, to revise the definition of what it is to be a Christian. For my part I do not call myself a "Christian" (thus keeping the ideal free), but I am able to make it evident that the others are that still less than I.

Thou noble simpleton of olden times, thou, the only *man* I admirably recognize as teacher: there is but little concerning thee that has been preserved, thou amongst men the only true martyr to intellectuality, just as great *qua* character as *qua* thinker; but this little, how infinitely much it is! How I long, afar from these battalions of thinkers which "Christendom" puts into the field under the name of Christian thinkers (for after all, apart from them, there have in the course of the centuries lived in "Christendom" several quite individual teachers of real significance)—how I long, if only for half an hour, to be able to talk with thee!

It is in an abyss of sophistry that Christianity is lying—far, far worse than when the Sophists flourished in Greece. These legions of priests and Christian docents are all Sophists, living (as was said of the Sophists of old) by making those who understand nothing believe something, then treating this human-numerical factor as the criterion of what truth, what Christianity is. . . .

O Socrates, if with kettledrums and trumpets thou hadst proclaimed thyself the most knowing man, the Sophists would soon have had the better of thee. No, thou wast the ignorant man; but thou didst possess at the same time the confounded quality of being able, precisely by the aid of the fact that thou thyself wast ignorant, to make it evident that the others knew still less than thou, did not even know that they were ignorant. . . .

Nevertheless it is as I say: in the eighteen hundred years of "Christendom" there is absolutely nothing corresponding to my task, nothing analogous to it; it is the first time in "Christendom."

That I know, and I know too what it has cost, what I have suffered, which can be expressed, however, in a single word: I was never like others. Oh, in the days of youth it is of all torments the most frightful, the most intense, not to be like others, never to live a single day without being painfully reminded that one is not like others, never to be able to run with the herd, which is the delight and the joy of youth, never to be able to give oneself out expansively, always, so soon as one would make the venture, to be reminded of the fetters, the isolating peculiarity which, isolatingly to the border of despair, separates one from everything which is called human life and merriment and joy.

True, one can by a frightful effort strive to hide what at that age one understands as one's dishonor, that one is not like the others; to a certain degree this may succeed, but all the same the agony is still in the heart, and after all it succeeds only to a certain degree, so that a single incautious movement may revenge itself frightfully.

With the years, it is true, this pain diminishes more and more; for as more and more one becomes spirit, it causes no pain that one is not like others. Spirit precisely is this: not to be like others.

And so at last there comes the instant when the Power which once did thus—yea, so it seems sometimes—ill-treat one, transfigures itself and says, "Hast thou anything to complain of? Does it seem to thee that in comparison with what is done for other men I have been partial and unjust? Though—out of love—I have embittered for thee thy childhood and both thine earlier and later youth, does it seem to thee that I have duped thee by what thou didst get instead?" And to this there can only remain the answer, "No, no, Thou infinite Love"—though nevertheless the human crowd doubtless would emphatically decline with thanks to be what I have become in such an agonizing way.

For by such torture as mine a man is trained to endure to be a sacrifice; and the infinite grace which was shown and is shown to me is that I should be selected to be a sacrifice, selected to this end, and then one thing more, that I should be developed under the combined influence of omnipotence and love to be able to hold fast the truth that this is the highest degree of grace the God of love can show toward anyone, and therefore shows only to His loved ones. . . .

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Thou plain man! The Christianity of the New Testament is infinitely high; but observe that it is not high in such a sense that it has to do with the difference between man and man with respect to intellectual capacity, etc. No, it is for all. Everyone, absolutely everyone, if he absolutely wills it, if he will absolutely hate himself, will absolutely put up with everything, suffer everything (and this every man can if he will)—then is this infinite height attainable to him.

Thou plain man! I have not separated my life from thine; thou knowest it, I have lived in the street, am known to all; moreover I have not attained to any importance, do not belong to any class egoism, so if I belong anywhere, I must belong to thee, thou plain man, thou who



once (when one profiting by thy money<sup>1</sup> pretended to wish thee well), thou who once wast too willing to find me and my existence ludicrous, thou who least of all hast reason to be impatient or ungrateful for the fact that I am of your company, for which the superior people rather have reason, seeing that I have never definitely united with them but maintained a looser relationship.

Thou plain man! I do not conceal from thee the fact that, according to my notion, the thing of being a Christian is infinitely high, that at no time are there more than a few who attain it, as Christ's own life attests, if one considers the generation in which He lived, and as also His preaching indicates, if one takes it literally. Yet nevertheless it is possible for all. But one thing I adjure thee, for the sake of God in heaven and all that is holy, shun the priests, shun them, those abominable men whose livelihood it is to prevent thee from so much as becoming aware of what Christianity is, and who thereby would transform thee, befuddled by galimatias and optical illusion, into what they understand by a true Christian, a paid member of the State Church, or the National Church,<sup>2</sup> or whatever they prefer to call it. Shun them. But take heed to pay them willingly and promptly what money they should have. With those whom one despises, one on no account should have money differences, lest it might perhaps be said that it was to get out of paying them one avoided them. No, pay them double, in order that thy disagreement with them may be thoroughly clear: that what concerns them does not concern thee at all, namely, money; and on the contrary, that what does not concern them concerns thee infinitely, namely, Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> Goldschmidt, editor of *The Corsair*.

<sup>2</sup> "National Church" is what Grundtvig preferred to call it. (L)