

ing the gap between experienced reality and Christian doctrine: he readily acknowledges the progressive de-spiritualization and devastation of nature and the cosmos, the vanishing humanity of humankind.

Borrowing KIERKEGAARD's term, he speaks of God as being "incognito"—as if we were still in the seventh day of creation, when God is resting and the cosmos is temporarily being sustained by human efforts. As we are hopelessly

inadequate for the task, this period is marked by war and poverty, hatred and despair.

But in the coming spiritual epoch there is hope: "The religion of the Spirit is the expectation that a new human and humane sociality will be revealed, radiating love and charity. It is also the expectation of the revelation of a new relationship between man and the cosmos, of cosmic transfiguration. The pro-

cess of the decomposition of the cosmos ... is nearing its end."

The Eighth Day of Creation, BERDY-AEV's creative epoch, is imminently upon us. The end of the epic has not yet been written; there is still time for a dramatic reversal. We as human beings, created in the likeness of God, must join together with God in writing the final act—the Demiurge must redeem himself along with his creation.

Roman KRÁLIK

The Social Dimension of KIERKEGAARD's Ethics:

KIERKEGAARD's Understanding of the Term "Neighbour"

The Danish philosopher Søren KIERKEGAARD (1813-1855) often dwelled on diverse aspects of the relation between human and human in his writings. It is because of this emphasis that he is regarded as one of the greatest Christian psychologists.

GREATNESS IN SMALLNESS

For the self-identification of small countries, KIERKEGAARD's way of thinking is of invaluable importance, e.g. from the perspective of the historical experiences or current position of the "small nations" small due to their territory and total number of inhabitants. To understand the psyche and life activities of "small nations," their philosophy and culture is one of the indispensable preconditions of spiritual greatness of these nations. It is precisely in this that the greatness in smallness and smallness in greatness lies.

In the historical mission of small nations, mutual respect and understanding of one another boosts their spiritual greatness and leads them towards a specific understanding of the historical mission of big nations, especially by giving birth to exceptional personalities who become important world-wide precisely because of their originality, creative thinking and perception of the world. They can create universal values of timeless validity and they abolish the unnatural differentiation between the "small" and the "great" pointing out the absurdity of the opposition great vs. small.

One of the basic teachings of Christianity is that one shall love all her or his neighbours. KIERKEGAARD interprets this teaching radically. A human in relation to any other human is her or his neighbour. With this conception he wants to demonstrate that man should, or even *must*, regard all other humans as her or his neighbours: hence not only her or his own family, acquaintances, friends, or nation, but all people.

It is certainly interesting that some of KIERKEGAARD's researchers have been trying to interpret this concept of his and connect it (incorrectly) with radical leftist, almost Marxist ideas. These ideas were, however, adopted by KIERKEGAARD neither from Marx nor the Communist Manifesto, but from literature that originated well before the XIXth century.

THE DUTY TO LOVE

It is the duty of a human being to love people neighbours, all of those one sees and meets at work or in private life. The one who loved all of humanity is KIERKEGAARD's model of the love for a neighbour. That *ideal* is Jesus Christ the "reward" of humanity was his crucifixion and death. In KIERKEGAARD's conception of relation to a neighbor, it is a *conditio sine qua non* to imitate Christ in his love for the world.

To love one's neighbour means to love her or him unconditionally, without expecting to have our requests met in return. He who sets up conditions does not love and does not meet the Christian commandment: you shall love. If

love (Jesus Christ) asks us and demands from us to love our neighbour, this love is to be boundless and unchangeable. If one's love towards her or his neighbour shall be perfect, it means one must love the concrete person the way one sees her or him, i.e. with all her or his imperfections and weaknesses.

But KIERKEGAARD goes even further. One's neighbour remains her or his neighbour even if she or he has cheated, betrayed or hated one. Thus KIERKEGAARD presents himself to us as a man who goes beyond his limits the limits of his own self, beyond his ego.

THE INFINITE DEBT OF LOVE

Our duty is not only that we shall love our neighbour, but that we even shall remain in a debt of love towards one another. The love towards one's neighbour is always and ultimately an infinite debt. A person stricken by love recognizes the fact that she or he is thus brought into an endless debt within the relationship to her or his neighbour. If we want to (and we have to) cultivate the love of our neighbour, we have to be awake, constantly, determinedly, so that our love does not *compare* and is not satisfied with the deeds we have performed.

Love is eternal, inexhaustible and limitless. Love is the base, a cornerstone, a building. Love builds up and educates and there is nothing that could shake or destroy her. Destruction is, however, the fate of a sensuous person, whose





relationships are based on lust and are without any real love for her or his neighbour.

Christianity turns our attention away from the external and directs it inwardly, transforming each of our relations to our neighbour into a relation to God. Thus a question arises for everyone who claims to be Christian, which KIERKEGAARD tried to define by his notion: Is your relation to God represented by your love to your neighbour? Our attitude to God is a prism, so to speak, through which one should recognize how genuine one's love for her or his neighbours is.

Love is the greatest kindness and at the same time the greatest strictness. One who does not respect his neighbour decreases the requirements set upon one's Christian faith and thus makes one's conscience weaker. Love is *a matter of conscience* and hence it has to pour out from a transparent heart and an honest faith. Faith and a clean heart are far, far from any speculation, a decision made by rationalization or calculation.

KIERKEGAARD emphasizes that the love towards one's neighbour, love for all people, is the only and true sign of one's being a Christian not even a sincere profession of faith in truth would suffice.

THE CHOICE AS AN ACT

By whom or by what teaching was KIERKEGAARD inspired? Among the answers one can count mainly KIERKEGAARD's relation to pietism, to mystics. When trying to understand KIERKEGAARD it is very important to take into account KIERKEGAARD's interpretation of the Bible, which he read literally. It is among others also KIERKEGAARD's inner sense of responsibility and his relation to God who punishes sins to the fourth generation.

Kierkegaard did not long for the celebration of his person and he refused to be labelled as "a witness to the truth" or "martyr." He regarded himself to

be *a corrector* of Christianity. It is because of this precisely that he attacks institu-

tionalized Christianity and demands a return to love, which requires self-denial. If one loves her or his neighbour in KIERKEGAARD's notion, love increases and becomes more transparent. The more one becomes humble in one's relation to her or his neighbour, the deeper becomes one's relation to God in return.

Love does not ascend to heaven, because it is from heaven that it descends and comes to man. One is confronted with a choice this choice is an act of free expression of human love towards God. KIERKEGAARD presents himself here once again as a philosopher of choice.

But how can we connect KIERKEGAARD's concept of neighbour-love to the issues related to the current political and economic situation in the world of our time in the setting of a world fighting against terrorism. What shall be our strategy so that humanity be rescued? How shall we manifest our love towards the enemy on the other side of the barricade? Where is the standpoint of truth and justice, and where do we stand? These are questions that naturally bump into and "buckle" KIERKEGAARD's notion of "neighbour."

TURNING AWAY FROM DESPAIR

The essence of the authenticity of KIERKEGAARD's philosophy dwells in the fact that it does not limit itself to a single point in the flux of time, nor to formulating the philosophical term *existence*. He raised humans where they belong: to the sphere where, in an infinite and unattainable distance, as if in a dream-like apparition of truth, we see, understand and feel something that cannot be obtained either by the knowledge of exact sciences or by a simple philosophical and positivistic summation of individual scientific facts.

KIERKEGAARD is an authentic philosopher and his originality and uniqueness do not follow only from the doomed

atmosphere of his family home but also from his extreme and, for a teleological thinker, troublesome sensitivity, irascibility and passion. At the same time he was indisputably distant from Friedrich NIETZSCHE and other philosophers in his understanding of love.

Simply speaking, his thinking is a manifestation of a unity of sense, intuition, and mystical experience. The base, the essence of "I", is authenticity and identity and KIERKEGAARD presents precisely these elements in his works. Nothing can replace the trials one has to overcome in the course of life. Relation to God is education and God is the educator.

Despite the harsh criticism on the part of the Evangelical-Lutheran church's representatives in the years 1854–1855 (KIERKEGAARD is often incorrectly interpreted as a critic of Christianity as such), KIERKEGAARD very strongly assails current ethics, philosophy, theology and the Church for failing to come back to its mission. This remains within his paradigm of love towards one's neighbour.

KIERKEGAARD was looking for the light because he was well aware of the darkness. Figuratively speaking, KIERKEGAARD's task was to produce mirrors and show them to humans so that they would see their weaknesses and their finiteness, understand themselves more deeply and turn away from despair. It is solely up to us to admit and not only when reading the works of Søren KIERKEGAARD that we are only humans insufficiently reflecting the divine love.

This is the place for the Church which, on one hand, should interpret the Bible to modern people once again and, on the other hand, lead humanity by its own enthusiasm to follow the Bible's teachings, as KIERKEGAARD wrote about them and Dietrich BONHÖFFER lived them. Because if one strives to be perfect in love, one does so to fulfil this mission of love to her or his best ability. One does this through loving one's neighbour while seeing her or his imperfections and weaknesses, loving her or him even when the neighbour turns her or his back on him and one experiences denial and deception. ...

The Christian choice is an act.

Suggested Reading

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