

# GRUNDTVIG AND KIERKEGAARD

## THEIR VIEWS OF THE CHURCH

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Every reader of Søren Kierkegaard knows that his main writings as well as his posthumous papers contain many, for the most part polemical or derisive, remarks about his older contemporary, N. F. S. Grundtvig, the great hymn writer, the national poet and historian, the greatest renewer of Danish Church life, and the most distinctive pedagogue of the nineteenth century, who is particularly known abroad as the Father of the Folk Schools. So often has Kierkegaard concerned himself with Grundtvig that his writings, as remarked by Carl Koch, contain the "outline of a whole book about Grundtvig".

The picture which emerges from Kierkegaard's critical remarks is, however, extremely vague and deficient. It presupposes that the reader is familiar with those ideas of Grundtvig which are under attack, and it suffers from Kierkegaard's failing ability to view others objectively. This latter trait he admitted in a conversation with the philosopher Brøchner, and it is a well-known theme from his notes: "Great geniuses cannot really read a book; during their reading they are apt to develop themselves rather than to understand the author". Grundtvig's view of human living and of Christianity were thus important for Kierkegaard primarily as a constantly recurring irritation which motivated the reflection of the younger philosopher.

### I

Even before Kierkegaard was born Grundtvig had won scholarly renown through his epochal study, *Nordic Mythology*, 1808. In his trial sermon, "Why has the Word of God disappeared from his house?", 1810, and in subsequent biblical sermons he points to the "malady" of the Church. He cries out that the age "would like to have faith, if it could get it by yawning, and that it would like to be preached into heaven by the power of the cross, but that it did not want to be crucified with Christ".

In 1825, under the influence of Irenaeus, Grundtvig arrived at a new view of the Church. Despite all changes and malformations of the Church he finds that its original confession of faith has survived in a confessing Christian laity which therefore should be safeguarded against the changing modes of theology and the encroachments of the state church. He then began his long "Church battle" against the dominant rationalism of the professors of theology and against the stagnancy and compulsion of the state church.

Young Kierkegaard observed with interest the further development of this struggle during the eighteen thirties<sup>1</sup>). He concedes that Grundtvig "was a genius, yes, a genius, for a genius is one who has made a discovery, and this Grundtvig has truly done". "The wonderful thing about him", says Kierkegaard, is that he is "tossed about and moved by an immediate passion" and that he "like the salmon knows how to go against the current".

But Kierkegaard was angered by the fact that Grundtvig, even though he for a long period of years did not serve as a minister (1826—39), never left the state church, a step which Kierkegaard, for that matter, never took himself, not even during his titanic attack upon the Church, upon "official Christianity", which sapped his life blood. And Kierkegaard, who was very careful not to write "one word in the direction of a change in externals", despised the fact that Grundtvig, during several periods as a member of parliament, worked for the introduction of ecclesiastical and civic freedom.

Absorbed in his intense and profound penetration into the inner life of the individual, Kierkegaard did not understand Grundtvig's wide-awake interest in the life of society. Neither did he appreciate the magnificent perspective of history which Grundtvig contributed as an historian, nor the contribution as a lecturer and poet which he made to the national struggle of the people. The bitterest comment which Kierkegaard wrote about Grundtvig is found in the manuscript of the issue of "The Moment" which death prevented him from publishing: "Is Grundtvig some sort of an apostle, is this the truth?", a rabid counterpart to the well-known attack upon Bishop Mynster.

While Kierkegaard concerned himself with the person of Grundtvig to his dying day, the latter never found Kierkegaard's personal attacks worthy of an answer. Only when Kierkegaard proceeded with an open attack upon the Church did Grundtvig speak. The back-

<sup>1</sup>) Cf. P. G. Lindhardt: *Grundtvig. An Introduction*. London, S. P. C. K., 1951, pp. 29 ff.; and Johannes Knudsen: *Danish Rebel. The Life of N. F. S. Grundtvig*. Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1955.

ground for one of his rare personal remarks about Kierkegaard: "This had to end in disaster", is found in the fact that Kierkegaard, many years before his "attack upon the Church", had confided to "old Grundtvig" that he intended to attack the Church, when Mynster "had been buried with all honors". For Grundtvig, who always proceeded openly and directly, Kierkegaard's procedure was a psychological puzzle.

The personal relationship between Grundtvig and Kierkegaard<sup>2)</sup> was thus characterized by an increasing frustration and bitterness on the part of the latter. His violent sorties against Grundtvig's work in the people of Denmark, against his preaching and his hymns, are legion. Grundtvig's tremendous and joyful song of praise, intended to be sung by the people, was so radically new that the authorities for a long time prevented the inclusion of his hymns in the official hymnal. (Now these hymns are sung by everyone in the Danish church.) Kierkegaard derides Grundtvig as "a bellowing blacksmith" without understanding of "the true tone of a hymn", which in Kierkegaard's opinion should give expression to the intimate suffering of the individual as he in quiet sorrow becomes reconciled to God. "Grundtvig is, was, and continues to be a noise-maker who will be unpleasant to me even in eternity".

The cardinal point of difference between Grundtvig and Kierkegaard, and the only one which has objective theological interest today, is, however, their more and more fundamentally differing views of the Christian Church. This is the matter upon which we shall concentrate our investigation<sup>3)</sup>).

## II

The common point of departure for Grundtvig and Kierkegaard is their common concern for the extreme decline of protestantism in their day and their passionate desire that Christianity should again

<sup>2)</sup> Last treated in Carl Weltzer: *Grundtvig og Søren Kierkegaard*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1952.

<sup>3)</sup> In the following pages a constant difficulty of translation arises. Grundtvig's key-word, when speaking of the christian *ecclesia*, is "menighed" (German: Gemeinde), but this word cannot be translated by "congregation", which has a narrow and local sense, whereas "menighed" by Grundtvig means the universal, historic Church. His reason for preferring the word "menighed" instead of "Kirke" (Church), is, that the first stresses the common body of believers, while the word "Church" often is misunderstood in clerical sense, stressing the hierarchy. As there is no equivalent in English for "menighed", the word "Church" must be used in several cases where Grundtvig says "menighed".

be fully proclaimed. Although they were deeply rooted in Lutheran Christianity, they both found that a radical revision of protestantism's view of the Church was a compelling necessity. But their attempts to find new ways are decisively different in form and results. It seems as if they were destined to go in different directions, just as the two largest rivers of Jutland have their source in the same small copse on the highlands but on different sides of the watershed, so that one travels east and the other west. Grundtvig fought the battle directly, and the result was that he used all his efforts to strengthen and renew that view of the Church (menighed, *ecclesia*) which he considered to be originally apostolic. Kierkegaard's approach is mostly indirect, and he reaches the conclusion that the category "Church" must be combatted, must be negated, as the real hindrance to the appropriation of what he calls "New Testament Christianity".

After his Christian awakening, during the winter of 1810—11, Grundtvig had laboured to overcome the prevailing stagnancy in the Church through an energetic return to Luther and the Holy Scriptures. He was convinced that "where the spirit of Luther was living and present, there and only there is the Church of Christ". The Lutheran church, it seemed to him, had declined so that it was only a school-room where, for the most part, disbelieving teachers of religion ruled. "The Church needs quick help in order to shed the yoke of the rationalistic papacy", he writes in his treatise *Concerning True Christianity*.

The farther he penetrated into the history of Lutheranism, however, the more he became aware that the unhappy development of the post-Reformation period, up to the low ebb of his own age, had its origin in the Reformers themselves. Out of an easily understandable fear of the Catholic hierarchical falsification of the Church they had hesitated to give body to an evangelical view of the Church. They had therefore as dogmaticians, though fortunately not also in practice, based everything on scripture alone. For this reason, Grundtvig maintains, the Lutheran concept of the Church has become "so cryptic, so vague, and so confused that we, like the children, hardly could hear the name of the Church without seeing ghosts and saying: Here comes the bogey-man, i. e. the pope, to grab us."

By "Church" Grundtvig understands the Christian fellowship of faith, created at baptism and embracing all who confess their baptismal faith. The true, evangelical concept of the Church "encompasses both clergy and congregation". The false concept is characterized by the fact that bishops and priests assume authority. They wish to

keep the Church for themselves; they even wish *to be the Church*. As ecclesiastics (spirituals) they place themselves over and above “those of the flesh”, “the laity”, “the unconsecrated congregation”. Luther opposed, and justly so, this hierarchical concept of the Church and rejected the authority it gave to the clergy, by the power of which it developed a tradition contrary to scripture.

Thus the pope scared us away from the Church; and the false tradition, resting on the self-assumed authority of the clergy, frightened us away from the realization that we do have a sure and true tradition to follow. This true tradition is the public, oral, and dependable testimony at baptism and communion of the whole Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. This tradition, which has not been handed down by the clergy alone but by the whole Church, is the foundation which has been laid by the Lord himself, *traditio dominica*. The joint testimony of the Lord and the Church at baptism and communion is older and more reliable, and certainly more central and unified, than the testimony of both scripture and scribes. The Lord has a more powerful and alert regent on earth than scripture and its interpreters, namely the Holy Spirit, who by the word in the name of the Lord, with which we administer baptism and communion, makes Christianity known to friends as well as foes. The apostolic confession of faith, which is an inseparable element of baptism, thereby assumes a vital role in Grundtvig’s theology as “the covenant word” which is spoken when we are taken into the body of Christ.

Concerning the way in which he arrived at this view of the oral tradition in the sacraments as “the chain which unites the believing Church of all ages with the apostolic”, Grundtvig has this to say: “I should, as a matter of course, have sought the great witness to the true character of my Christian faith where I myself first had heard and believed, where I was baptized, confessed my faith, and was nourished in my Christian life . . . i. e. in the Christian Church and Congregation”. Instead, as a Lutheran scribe, he searched in the scripture. But despite the riches which he there found, he did not find help to liberate the Church from the oppressive new hierarchy, which had been revived in the Church via the scripture principle, and which had completely eliminated the universal priesthood. According to the scripture principle the theologians were guarantors of the faith. As specialists in scripture the clergy had assumed guardianship for the Church, whose faith and confession in no way rested on their varying exegesis. Thereby the Church had been subjected to the “exegetical papacy”. “Then, finally, a good angel whispered

to me: Why do you seek the living among the dead? Are you a teacher of Israel and do not know where to find the Christian people, when you wish to hear them witness to their faith?"

In *Elemental Christian Teachings* he writes: "In a way we must blindly presume that Christ has a Church (menighed) on earth and that it is reliable when it confesses its faith by and in the acts instituted by the Lord". When he is received into the Church of Christ, and when he lives in its fellowship, the individual becomes a Christian, i. e. a real member on the body of Christ with a share and a part in His life. The Church is *corpus Christi* in which the Lord speaks and where he is present in his word and with his spirit, when he establishes and nourishes his covenant with us.

The reformers therefore misunderstood the nature of the Church. They overlooked the fact that it rested "on the living testimony which had been given from mouth to mouth" in the acts instituted by the Lord and not on scripture which neither can nor should defend the Church. It is the Church which is to defend the scripture. "We have not found the Church in scripture but scripture in the Church". The Bible is the Church's priceless treasure-house but not its foundation. "We must not place the Bible under the table, which stands firmly on its own legs, but we must place the Lord's book opened on the Lord's table, so that all the guests may learn where they shall get the bread and how they shall try the wine to see whether it is genuine".

The problem, "what in the Church of Jesus Christ is original and unchangeable, where we find it, and how we in a living way assimilate it", thus found its solution in the conviction that the Lord in his goodness and wisdom "gave the eternal word of life into the mouth of the Church, where it can easily be found, instead of burying it in scripture or among the servants".

Like Luther (cf. his *Large Catechism*, the Third Article) Grundtvig prefers to use the biblical word "congregation" (*ecclesia*, Matth. 16: 18. Danish: "Menighed"; German: "Gemeinde") instead of "the foreign and artificial word 'Church'", which has been "a refuge for the pope and all those who wish to assume the place of the Holy Spirit and to be mediators between the Spirit and the congregation". This usage, which easily sneaks into the vernacular, where *Church* means clergy and *congregation* means laity, originates in the hierarchical concept of the Church. "It always was, and still is, the greatest sin of bishops and priests, when they, due to their consecration or their scriptural learning, or both, halfway separated themselves as

persons from the congregation and desired to be its lords rather than its servants”.

This means that Grundtvig makes a complete break with the concept of the Church as a clerical institution which appears as the guardian of peoples and states, either through power-politics or through ideological guidance. The calling of the Church is to be the home of the Spirit and the Gospel of the Lord. Its task is exclusively determined by the fact that it is the body of Christ. It is the fellowship of all those who have been taken into Christ, and therefore it has not been established to rule but to serve. “The voice of the Church” is neither to be sought in Roman declarations *ex cathedra* nor in official resolutions on church-meetings, but is to be found where it has always been heard: in the Church where the Lord creates and upholds his people in baptism and communion in order to save it by his gospel.

Thus Grundtvig was led to give the word “Church” (“Menighed”) a high quality and from the understanding of this word to present an evangelical concept of the Church which is decisively different from that of Catholicism and Protestantism. In the sacraments and in the confession of faith at baptism he saw the permanent foundation, the rock upon which the Lord builds his Church, even as he gave it his promise that the gates of hell should not prevail over it.

### III

Kierkegaard's attitude toward the concept of the Church is determined by the strictness with which he carries through his basic view: one becomes a Christian by becoming an *individual*, and the way goes through “the religious” which is earnestness. Throughout his entire authorship he warns against the dangers which the Church presents for “the development of individuality”. With tireless wit he turns against “those people in our day and age who gad about with loose talk concerning the idea of the Church” (*Fear and Trembling*). He declares: “Because of the concern for the idea of the state, of sociability, of the Church, and of society, God can no longer lay hold of the individual” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*). Despite this alert criticism he nevertheless refrained from proposing any reforms of the Church, not to speak of the separation of Church and state or even of resigning from the state church.

For his contemporaries it was therefore a shock when Magister Kierkegaard, who was known to be in constant attendance at the church, toward the end of his life suddenly exhorted everyone to

flee or to avoid the worship and the sacraments of the Church. He did this in a series of pamphlets, *The Moment*, whose richly faceted irony and extremely ingenious scorn equal anything produced by styl-ists like Voltaire and Nietzsche.

The careful reader of his earlier writings was not unprepared for this "attack upon the Church", however. Kierkegaard himself maintained that he was only taking the full consequences of the point of view which he had upheld all the time. Like Grundtvig he recognized that, through the concept of the Church, human ambition had attempted to use Christianity as a means of political or ideological power in the world. Worst of all, according to Kierkegaard, membership in the Church gave the individual a false sense of security. While Grundtvig saw the necessity of breaking through the dogmatic positions of Protestantism as well as of Catholicism, he did this only to seek a better concept of the Church. But Kierkegaard's criticism resulted in the rejection of any and all forms of the Church. "From the Christian point of view Protestantism is simply an untruth. It is a dishonesty which falsifies doctrine, the world view of Christianity, as soon as it is to be a principle of Christianity and not a necessary correction at a given time and place. Still, for that reason to join the Catholic church would be a precipitance of which I shall not be found guilty. . . . No, but one can well be a Christian by himself . . . for the sake of Christian caution: the fewer the better. For, ultimately, the very concept "church" contains the basic confusion of Christendom, in Protestantism as well as Catholicism".

Therefore, says Kierkegaard, it had to be his very special task to "cry alarm" against this confusion and to make a radical revision of what it means to be a Christian. "The point of view which I have to demonstrate, and which I do demonstrate, is so unique that I literally have not found an analogy in the eighteen hundred years of Christianity, nothing comparable to which I can relate myself"<sup>4</sup>). The uniqueness of this view he has defined thus:

"My authorship has to this degree had a special mark that it has immediately been given the stamp: "The individual — I am not a Christian". This has not previously occurred in the 1800 years of Christianity, during which everything has been stamped: "The church — I am a true Christian".

<sup>4</sup>) Elsewhere, however, Kierkegaard makes a qualification of his condemnation of the Church's use of the sacraments: "It is thus true, and the truest word which has been spoken about Christendom, what *Pascal* says, that it is a fellowship of people who, by the help of some sacraments, emancipate themselves from the duty to love God".



According to this late characterization by Kierkegaard of his own production it was the negative intention of his authorship to explode the concept "Church". The blasting takes place in order to posit the category "the individual" in its absolute purity. If this characterization is correct, then the accomplishment, which has no precedence in all Christianity, lies in the consistency with which his view, that subjectivity is the truth, is operative. The inevitable result of this view is the complete dissolution of the concept of the Church. Certainly, no philosopher has ever placed as much dynamite under the concept of the Church as Søren Kierkegaard.

Is it true, however, that his authorship was *immediately* characterized by this scepticism toward the concept of the Church which separates it from all other Christian thought? In Kierkegaard's dissertation, *Concerning the Concept of Irony With Constant Reference to Socrates*, it is maintained that irony, as a point of view, "helps us to push off from the bare sandbanks of empiricism and to venture out upon the ocean". Irony liberates the individual from the immediately given fellowship and keeps him thereafter, to change the metaphor, soaring freely in the air like, in the legend, Mohammed's casket between two magnets. With plain reference to Grundtvig, "a virtuosis on the horn of the living word", who eagerly seeks the fellowship of people and of religion, Kierkegaard says this about his own age: "It hates isolation, and how could it possibly tolerate that a man got the desperate idea of going through the world alone, this age which itself, hand in hand and arm in arm like itinerant craftsmen and soldiers, lives for the idea of the Church"?

It must be admitted that the "stamp" of his authorship here is quite plain. Even his fictional works contain unmistakable traces of the "view". The second part of *Either-Or* thus contains a unique prelude to the later clash between the category of the individual and the category of the Church. Judge William discusses the marriage ceremony of the Church with the aesthete, and he recapitulates the latter's thoughts about the Church in this manner: "The Church (as you see it), the blessed Church which in all its variety still is a moral person. Just as it has all a moral person's boresome features, I wish that it had a good one: that it was only one head upon one neck. Then I would know what to do". The judge maintains, on the contrary, that the Church cannot be identified with "an honored public", and he remarks:

"You know that there was a madman who had the fixation that the room in which he lived was filled with flies so that he was in danger of suffocation. In utter despair and in a frenzy of fear he battled for

his life. Thus also you seem to battle for your life against a similar swarm of flies, against what you call the Church”.

The madness of Caligula and Domitian is marshalled as a warning against the radical distrust of the Church. This poetic and ingenious dialogue seems to reflect the latent conflict in Kierkegaard’s mind between his growing animosity against the Church and his energetic attempts to curb his ever smouldering suspiciousness. The quotation gives posterity a foreboding of the last act in Kierkegaard’s life-drama, when he wished to gather all the heads, the Bishops Mynster, Martensen, and Grundtvig, “plus the 100 royal, lying preachers”, on one neck, the neck of present-day Christendom, and then strike his one blow: “Christianity does not exist”.

#### IV

From *Either-Or* no one could have foretold, however, the explosive outcome of this movement of reflection, which is the nerve of his authorship, and whose course is: *from the public to the individual*, as he expresses it in *Concerning My Authorship* (1851). This movement came to a head only around 1850. Up to that time there is yet a certain real understanding of church life, even though his sarcasm is constantly aimed against the “triumphant”, the “yawning”, or the “bungling” Church.

In *Stages On Life’s Way* he snaps at Grundtvig, who is called a “yodling saint” who “prophetically heralds a new day in history” and who “blesses mankind with matchless discoveries in the religious field”. Grundtvig’s basic mistake is that he resorts to history as a support for the faith. “Now the speaker says that this is certain because it is historic, and the faithful congregation believes everything, even that the speaker knows what he is talking about”.

This attack on Grundtvig, which up to now has only been suggested, is unfolded in great style in the well-known and significant passage in the first part of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Chapter 1, Nos. 2—3. Kierkegaard reviews Grundtvig’s “Church-theory” thus: “As the Bible previously was alleged to determine what Christianity is, so the Church is now to be the certain, objective resort. More specifically, it is the living word in the Church, the confession of faith and the word in the sacraments”. Kierkegaard concedes that Grundtvig’s theory has merit, insofar as it is based on the Church as a present and not on the Bible as a past factor, i. e. as a document whose content successive interpreters never can determine more

closely than with changing approximation. "The Church therefore exists. From it . . . we can determine what essentially is Christian, for this is what the Church confesses". Correct! But now it is added "concerning this Church, the present one, that it is the apostolic Church, and that it is the same Church which has existed through eighteen centuries". Thereby it has been removed from the category of existence and placed in history, in the category of approximation. (The same thing was done when the Bible was made the basis.) As Kierkegaard expresses it dramatically: "The living word proclaims the existence of the Church. Right! This even Satan cannot take away from anyone. But the living word does not proclaim that the Church has existed for eighteen centuries, that it is essentially the same, and that it has existed unchanged etc."

In Grundtvig's reference to "that which is objective" the spokesman for "subjectivity" sees only "the need for a basis in superstition", "something magic to which to relate himself". But it is "a mistake to seek objective certainty and thereby avoid the risk with which passion chases". While Grundtvig regarded baptism as the act by which Christ receives us and by which we become members of his body, Kierkegaard asks, whether it is not unchristian to settle the problem of eternal salvation by means of "this magic baptism".

This conflict in the view of baptism points to the decisive contrast between Kierkegaard and Grundtvig. For Kierkegaard the emphasis lies upon the fact that *we receive Christ*, as the example whom we do not resemble, and as the atoner who is pure mercy, when we humble ourselves. "In our striving to reach the example, the example in return helps us". Grundtvig also knows this rhythm and uses it, as Peter and John did in the New Testament. But in Grundtvig's opinion all of Christianity cannot be contained in this dimension. There is a fundamental significance in the fact that we are *received into Christ*, and it became Grundtvig's life-work to present this basic view. It was therefore impossible for him to remain within the Christian idealism whereby the individual strives to receive Christ.

With reference to communion Kierkegaard still has a positive position in his *Christian Sermons* (1848). In the failing relation to the Church this tie remains intact longer than anything else. Only during the last three years of his life did he stay away from communion. The third sermon "At communion on Friday", mentions as a matter of course that God has commanded Sunday worship. When, however, the congregation assembles in great numbers, self-deceit can easily be practiced, as if the individual was hidden in the multitude. At communion on Friday there is no multitude. The individuals

come, driven by an inward desire. In this sermon Kierkegaard even says, and this is in the spirit of Grundtvig, that even though a sermon shall witness to Christ, "a sermon is not *His* voice. At the altar, however, you shall hear *His* voice".

Another sermon, "Guard Your Feet When You Go to the House of the Lord", portrays the secure atmosphere in the Church and cautions quietly: "How calming, how soothing, alas, and how great a danger in this security". It is, of course, "right, defensible, and even a duty again and again to invite" to worship. But that speech is untrue which constantly, and never otherwise than invitingly, alluringly, and winningly speaks of the visit to the house of the Lord. From the human point of view faith is constant fear and trembling.

This is a memento to the worship of the Church, and, if you please, a commentary to Grundtvig's hymn of the Church, "Hyggelig, rolig, Gud, er din Bolig". It is not a rejection of the Church. From another point of view, from the heavenly, faith is the blessed assurance, and therefore also "that speech is untrue which ultimately ends by frightening people away from the house of the Lord. For from this point of view the blessing is this: One day in the house of God is better than a thousand others". Seven years later Kierkegaard himself ended up exactly in this statement: "It is my duty to say this: No matter who you are and no matter what your life otherwise is, if you refrain from taking part in public worship, as it is now, you are guilty of one less, and grave, sin".

This last phase is prepared in *Introduction Into Christianity* (1850). Here Kierkegaard sharpens his criticism of "the existing Christendom", and the concept of Church (ecclesia) is reduced to the local corollary of this great delusion. Having turned against Grundtvig, who is accused of attempting "in a humanly irresponsible manner to bungle Christianity into history", he states: "A concept such as Church, which occupies so many these days, is, when applied to this life, an impatient pre-grasping of eternity. The counterpart of suffering is "the individual". . . . "Fellowship" is a lower definition than "the individual", which everyone can and must be". Our present life is one of struggle and trial. Therefore 'the Church' does not belong in time but in eternity".

This theological motivation for the reduction of "the Church" to an eschatological concept is mentioned in connection with the sharpening of his view of Christianity as *imitatio Christi*. The life of Christ in lowliness, suffering, and persecution is the example, the test for all men. With the ascension began the "period of examination". The whole existence of the Church on earth is only a paren-

thesis. With the ascent of Christ to glory the content of the parenthesis begins, and with his return it is concluded. What the interim, i. e. the Church, says about Christ is immaterial. As a result the individual, without becoming confused by existing Christianity, must attempt, at his own risk, to find "the Christianity of the New Testament".

## V

Kierkegaard had previously used the expression that *the Church is an historic concept*. Therefore, no majority, no matter how great, can force through an understanding of the Christian faith which is different from the historic one. This was Grundtvig's point of view. For Kierkegaard, however, the historicity of Christianity is limited to the New Testament, and more narrowly speaking, to the Christ picture of the Gospels as he understood it. The result of this method is, according to Grundtvig, pure arbitrariness, for "a man reads as he is". We must seek the ground of Christianity outside of ourselves. Christianity is not only historically revealed; it has come to us through history.

In *Elementary Christian Teachings* Grundtvig criticizes the one-sidedness which is the result of Kierkegaard's definition of Christianity. "The excellent hair-splitter" misunderstands the whole concept of covenant. "The new covenant in baptism is established, and has been established from the beginning, without consideration of the New Testament. When our Lord and the apostles instituted baptism and established the new covenant, they could impossibly consider a Scripture which did not exist. Furthermore, the apostolic writings did not claim to be "the new covenant" or the basis for Christianity. On the contrary, scripture constantly refers to an oral word of God, to a covenant of the heart, and to a living foundation".

Grundtvig's concept of the Church is related to his understanding of the Church as "the covenant people of God", as the new Israel, which Jesus brought into the world. The Church is at the same time an historic, a present and an eschatological concept, because it is his body who was and is and is to come. Without a Church here, in time, there can be no Church in eternity. Without the Church there is no salvation, for where there is no body, no member can live. Over against Kierkegaard's exclusively future and transcendental concept of the Church, in which the Church is so far beyond the individual that it can only be created at the return of Christ, in eternity, Grundtvig maintained that the Church was Christ's real relation to the

world. Kierkegaard's fundamental mistake is that his thoughts about the Church are determined by the philosophical distinction of the Greeks between time and eternity, which cannot contain the reality of the Incarnation.

For Kierkegaard the Church is a numerical concept and not a Christian concept, a psychological definition with an inferiority complex. For Grundtvig the Church is a soteriological concept, and this is its basic Christian definition. He does not regard the Church as a society, as an organization, in which numbers are important. It is the organism which is created by the existence of God's Spirit and by the voice of God's Word, sounding there. Thereby it becomes the central prerequisite for the Christianity of the individual.

Thus points of view face points of view in sharp distinction. The dictatorial individualism of Kierkegaard says: Religiously speaking there is no community, only the individual. Grundtvig claims that the Church is the God-given pre-supposition for the work of the Holy Spirit, who implants the individual in Christ so that we may die and live with him, as baptism destines us. In the Church we are "one with our King and with one another". Without this double fellowship Christianity cannot be lived.

Attempts to mediate these two authorships would only confuse both. Consideration of both means a voyage between Scylla and Charybdis. We must be on guard against the dangerous security of objectivity (sacramentalism) as well as against the deadly isolation of subjectivity.