

Kierkegaard and the Church

by HOWARD A. JOHNSON

Kierkegaard, combating the Church, claimed for himself nothing more than that he was merely "the corrective," and he said:

"The corrective works confusion only when it is not held in the context of that to which it is a corrective".¹

I

"It is the peculiarity of the human race," wrote Kierkegaard, "that just because the individual is created in the image of God 'the individual' is above the race. This can be wrongly understood and terribly misused: *concedo*. But that is Christianity. And *that* is where the battle must be fought."²

One of the ways in which the Kierkegaardian stress on 'the individual' has been misunderstood and misused is in the contention, constantly recurring, that Kierkegaard had no essential place in his thought for the Church. I too maintain that, measured by the New Testament conception of the Church, Kierkegaard's ecclesiology is defective. But to assert that his doctrine of the Church is defective is different from asserting that he had no doctrine at all.

It must be admitted that in his last months Kierkegaard, breaking a life-long custom, did cease attending public worship and besought others to do likewise. One Danish biographer gives us the picture (how well authenticated I know not) of Kierkegaard on a Sunday morning, at the hour of High Mass (Højmesse), deliberately taking up a position at a sidewalk café opposite a church and there conspicuously reading a newspaper so that all the pious en route to service might see. Such a picture pains me, for I am a priest. The prophets of Israel

¹ *Papirer*, XI¹ A 28; cp. A 198; XI² A 305.

² Dru, *Selections from the Journals of Kierkegaard*, No. 1050 = X² A 426.

stood *with* the people God had commanded them to condemn. They continued to identify themselves with the community under judgment. As Troeltsch said: "The prophets predicted that the lightning was about to fall – and were struck down by the same lightning which felled their people." To the extent that Kierkegaard, at the very last, dissociated himself from the Established Church, he was, in my judgment, something less than the prophets of Israel – though still a prophet.

II

There is little to be gained, however, in discussing Kierkegaard's ecclesiology in terms of his eccentricities. Already too much of Kierkegaardian research has preferred the man's idiosyncrasies to his ideas, his biography to his beliefs – perhaps because the former are easier to handle. Of biographical considerations, it must suffice to mention three. The facts are these:

(1) Except for the final few months, Kierkegaard went regularly to church, himself preached in churches on occasion, and as a humble suppliant received the Sacrament of the Altar. One has only to read his "Discourses for the Communion on Fridays" to see how exalted a conception he had of the Lord's Supper.³ Repeatedly and ardently he longed to be ordained. He was hindered in this either because of the emergence of some new crisis (e. g., the affair of "The Corsair" at which time he conceived that God was calling him to remain on the front lines of the battle and not to retreat to a country parish) or because of the lack of encouragement from the Primate who was growingly displeased with Kierkegaard's literary output. Kierkegaard long delayed the publication of some of his later decisively Christian writings because of an agonizing apprehension that they, being offensive to his bishop, might preclude forever the possibility of his ordination.

When commentators would point to the fact that the Kierkegaardian literature does not often and explicitly deal with the doctrine of the Church, and would deduce from that that he was not interested in the Church and found

³ Although many of his discourses were not actually spoken from a pulpit, where are they imagined as being delivered? Precisely *in* church, *in* the context of public worship. One should read – and pray too – S. K.'s touching Prayer for the Whole State of Christ's Church in the seventh discourse in *Training in Christianity*.

little meaning in it, we must reply: *On the contrary!* Here was a loyal son of the Church, longing to serve it a priest, who – far from depreciating it – was so immersed in its life that he simply *assumed* it. He assumed as a matter of course the existence of the Church with its liturgies, orders, buildings, ceremonies, vestments, sacraments. Like St. Thomas Aquinas (or any other theologian until recent times), he is so living *in* the sacramental, ecclesiological reality that it rarely becomes a topic for special study. All of the "equipment," the whole of the "Christian inventory," he could safely presuppose – bell, book, and candle. In Kierkegaard, as in Danish Lutheranism, there was no disposition to topple altars, break stained glass, strip the sanctuary bare, decapitate sculptures of saints. He reiterates a hundred times: "I have no proposal with respect to a change in externals."⁴ The doctrine is all right.⁵ The hymnal doesn't need revision.⁶ Above all, the man who is called to be the critic of the Establishment (*det Bestaaende*, literally that which stands) must himself stand within it and love it.⁷ In short, the State Church of Denmark was part of S. K.'s culture, part

⁴ Cf., e. g., X³ A 187, X⁵ B 40 (p. 259), X⁵ B 107 (p. 293), X⁵ B 144. In the *Papirer*, at X¹ A 537, we read: "What in our time needs reforming is not the system of Church government and such – but the concept: Christendom."

⁵ Cf. X⁴ A 204 and *Journals*, 1185, 1187.

⁶ "Alle have travlt med hvad Tiden fordrer, Ingen synes at bryde sig om, hvad den Enkelte behøver. Muligen behøves der slet ikke en ny Psalmebog. Hvorfor hitter dog ingen paa et Forslag, der ligger saa nær, nærmere maaskee end Mangen tror: at man gjorde et midlertidigt Forsøg med at lade den gamle indbinde paa en ny Maade, om ikke den forandrede Indbinding skulde gjøre det, især hvis man tillod Bogbinderen at sætte bag paa: den nye Psalmebog. Vel lod der sig indvende, at det var Synd for det gamle gode Binds Skyld, thi, besynderligt nok, skal Menighedens Exemplar af den gamle Psalmebog være særdeles vel conditioneret, formodentligen fordi Bogen bruges saa lidt, samt at det nye Bind var en aldeles overflødig Udgift; men mod denne Indvending maa der svares med en dyb Stemme, med en dyb Stemme vel at mærke: enhver alvorlig Mand i vor alvorligen-bekymrede Tid indseer, at Noget maa der gøres – saa forsvinder enhver Indvending som Intet." S. V. VII, p. 468 ff.

⁷ Cf. VII B 235, p. 64: "The one chosen [to recall the Church to its vocation] must *love* the Establishment." Again, in X¹ A 598, the theme is repeated. No external changes are wanted. The sole necessity is to draw attention to the fact that "every individual must seek a primitive [i. e., original, first-hand] relationship to God." Cf. also X⁴ A 26, 30, 33, 204. One of S. K.'s most trenchant defenses of the Establishment as against the »numerical« appears in X⁴ A 363: At forsvare et Bestaaende, med polemisk Sigte paa det Numeriske, Mængde, Publikum, det Uorganiske, Masse, det Onde i Samfundet: det var min Opgave.

Naar Embedsmænd forsvare det Bestaaende, saa er her let en Tvetydighed, at det er fordi det er deres Næringsvej og Carriere. Fremdeles forsvare de det ofte nok slet nok, nemlig ved Hjælp af at faae det Numeriske paa deres Side, eller i en lidt tidligere Tid ved fysisk Magt. Jeg derimod udtrykker Idealitetens Fægtning. Som jeg i sin Tid sagde

of the standard, necessary environment for making life supportable, the element in which he lived and moved and had his being. His attack arose only when he felt the Church was *in a wrong way* a part of the culture, succumbing to a culture, instead of so relating itself to eternity that it would be in possession of a transcendental principle of criticism by which to judge the culture to which God would have it responsibly related. Kierkegaard never attacked the Church *qua* Church. He inveighed against the Church only when he feared that it was in danger of becoming a culture-religion, a too simple identification of Church and State, a marriage of convenience wherein the government was more than willing to pay clerical stipends and provide for the maintenance of church fabrics out of the public treasury in return for the modest, reciprocal favor that,

til Christian d. VIII, da han ønskede at trække mig nærmere til sig: lykkedes dette Dem, saa er jeg væsentligen gjort afmægtig, thi Pointen er just, at det er en Privatiserende. En Privatiserende, En, som er Ingenting forholder sig, ideelt, tydeligst til Idealitet – derfor er jeg i een Forstand mindst blevet forstaaet.

Men fordi jeg saaledes qua Extraordinair har forpligtet et Bestaaende, deraf følger ikke, at jeg ganske udenvidere skulde være enig med det Bestaaende, det vil sige, med de faktisk givne Embeds- og Regjeringsmænd og deres Taktik. Idet jeg da hovedsagelig er rykket frem mod det Numeriske (det var der Slaget skulde staae) har jeg ikke udenvidere og ligefrem knyttet mig til de faktiske Repræsentanter for det Bestaaende, det er, jeg har ikke bestemt mig eensartet med dem. Tværtimod der har endog været en Antydning af en Mulighed af en Uenighed med dem, men heller ikke mere. Det vil sige, jeg har maattet operere saaledes, at idet jeg tog deres Opgave, og rykkede mod det Onde i Staten, det Numeriske, jeg tillige maatte indirecte faae det gjort aabenbart, hvori det Feile i det Bestaaendes Taktik ligger, de respektive Repræsentanter maatte komme til at forløbe sig i at dømmе mig, forløbe sig saaledes, at det blev aabenbart, at de egentlig ikke ret har fattet Tanken "et Bestaaende", men i Grunden blot timeligt og verdsligt fægter for hvad der er deres Fordeel, det Bestaaende. Dette er ogsaa lykkedes mig, saaledes at faae disse Repræsentanterne gjort aabenbare, lige indtil den sidste: Mynster per Goldschmidt.

Men paa hele dette Mellemværende skulde der efter min Idee ikke henledes Opmærksomhed; thi her skulde Slaget ikke staae. Først naar hele min Operation staaer klar, først saa kan der være Tale om, saa smaat at lade dem indfrie disse Beter, men dog mere som et privat Mellemværende med dem.

Dette er Operationen. Prof. Nielsen skulde nu gjøre det bedre. Min Hovedtanke har han aldeles ikke caperet: at forsvare et Bestaaende (det vil da sige ideelt, ikke ved Hjælp af højere Embedsstilling og Politie Magt, og saaledes ideelt at forsvare det er igjen identisk med ideelt at være Opvækkelse) mod det Numeriske. Saa troede han, (idet han nemlig indbilde sig ypperligt at have forstaaet mig, at jeg angreb det Bestaaende, eller dog dettes Repræsentanter) at det var en Underlighed af mig, ikke ligefrem at angribe f. E. Martensen o: s: v: Saa skulde han da være den Alvorlige, der gjorde Alvor heraf. Jo, jeg takker, han vilde, hvis han maatte have raadet, hjulpet min Sag lige saa godt, som naar en Divisionair fører sine Tropper i Slag et par Timer for tidlig eller et par Miil for langt borte, han vilde hjælpe til, at Slaget kom til at staae paa et ganske andet Punkt. See derfor har jeg bestandigt sagt ham, at jeg fra mit Synspunkt misbilligede Angrebet paa Martensen.

on political and social issues, the Church remain irrelevant and confine itself to "Quiet Hours." In the nineteenth century, to have been born on Danish soil made you, as a Dane, automatically a Christian (unless you were so unfortunate as to be an unconverted Jew, Turk, or Mohammedan – or, even uglier, a Baptist).⁸ Church and State became virtual equivalents. People, whatever their profession of religious belief or lack thereof, constituted the parish. Resorting to an old cliché, Christianity in Kierkegaard's Denmark (with notable exceptions of deep spirituality) was reduced to the three experiences of being "hatched, matched, dispatched." It was religion at which three things were thrown at you. Water at baptism, rice at marriage, earth at burial. For the rest, most people felt free to go about their business, not feeling much pressure upon their conscience. Even if one deigned to take a pew on the principal feast days, the pulpit seldom pummeled you. The consolations of religion were admirably set forth. Of its possible perturbations, little was to be heard. An ominous silence reigned. *This* is the kind of set up Kierkegaard was attacking. He took his stand not against Christianity but against "the blinding illusion of Christendom," the "geographical Christianity" he so witheringly described in *The Book on Adler*. He opposed the equation: *Mængden* = *menighed* (the crowd is identical with the congregation, the Church the same as the State, Christianity coterminous with the world).⁹

(2) In intention, at least, Kierkegaard was not a sectarian, although many splinter groups have sought to claim him as such.¹⁰ It would be no arduous task

⁸ "Hvis et Menneske simpelt og eenfoldigt vilde sige, at han var bekymret for sig selv, at det ikke hang rigtigt sammen med at han kaldte sig en Christen: saa vilde han – ikke blive forfulgt eller henrettet, men man vilde see vredt til ham og sige: "det er ret kjedeligt med det Menneske, at han skal gjøre Ophævelse over ingen Ting; hvorfor kan han ikke være ligesom vi Andre, der alle ere Christne; det er ligesom med F. F., der ikke kan gaae med en Hat som vi Andre, men skal være aparte." Var han gift, vilde hans Kone sige til ham: lille Mand, hvor kan Du nu faae saadanne Indfald; skulde Du ikke være en Christen? Du er jo Dansk; staaer der ikke i Geographien, at den luthersk-christelige Religion er den herskende i Danmark? For en Jøde er Du da ikke, en Mahomedaner heller ikke, hvad skulde Du vel saa være? Det er jo 1000 Aar siden, at Hedenskabet blev fortrængt, saa veed jeg da, Du er ingen Hedning. Passer Du ikke Dit Arbejde i Contoiret som en god Embedsmand, er Du ikke en god Undersaat i en christelig, i en luthersk-christelig Stat: saa er Du jo en Christen." See, saa objektive ere vi blevne, at selv en Embedsmands Kone argumenterer fra det Totale, fra Staten, fra Samfunds-Ideen, fra Geographiens Videnskabelighed til den Enkelte." S. V. VII, p. 41 ff.

⁹ Cf., e. g., X³ A 574, X¹ A 533, X¹ A 552, X⁵ B 111 (p. 306) and X⁵ B 208 (p. 392), XI² A 264, 410.

¹⁰ A fascinating and responsible book brought out by the Princeton University Press by an

to collect from his works a bundle of utterances exhibiting the "Godfearing satire" he poured upon "pietistic severity," "party-movements," and "bungling efforts at reforming" the Church, whether from within or without. The evils of the Established Church seemed less dangerous to Kierkegaard than "this evil lust, this flirting with the will to reform."¹¹ When Kierkegaard, towards the last, launched his attack, he who had been largely ignored suddenly found himself the darling not only of sectarians but of some politicians as well. Their champion had arisen at last! But with consummate polemical skill this »damned explosive Dane« rose up to smite down those who wanted to uphold him. Although himself fighting the Establishment, he *would* not lend his name or prestige to an anti-Church campaign motivated by political or sectarian hostility. He wanted the *Bestaaende* – the Standing Church – to *stand* – but only on the terms he thought the New Testament would authorize.¹²

able scholar shows the many affinities between S. K. and the convictions held dear by the Brethren. Yet there is another side to Kierkegaard in which the Brethren would find little comfort or support. S. K. was ill-disposed towards sects, though he often defended their rights to worship in accordance with their conscience.

¹¹ Cf. "The Moral" in *Judge for Yourselves!* Other references: X³ A 647, 658, 799, 800; X⁴ A 26, 345; *Journals*, 1184. These all demonstrate S. K.'s detestation of the "reforming zeal" of his period. Kierkegaard believed that he had provided an ideal defense of the Establishment. If only the State Church would make the humble admission that somehow it was something less than what the New Testament requires, then all right. Let it stand. It is, in any case, to be preferred to "parties and sects." He puts his foot flat down against "wrecking the Establishment in favor of parties and sects" (Cf., X⁵ B 117). He often said that he would sponsor no movement in the direction of "pietistic severity." (Cf. X³ A 519; cp. 571, 658). A by now familiar theme reoccurs in X³ A 527: "A corrective has not the assignment to push the Establishment out and make himself a new kind of establishment, but, if possible, to make the Establishment more spirited, more inward" (X³ A 527). Of many references, I cite only one more. In X³ A 647 he says that one way he supports the Establishment with his insistence on 'the individual' is his opposition to parties and sects. Yet one more point: In X⁶ B 218 (p. 346) S. K. says straight out that if the Establishment will but make the confession that it falls short of what the New Testament expects of Christ's Church, it is to be preferred to all other alternatives. Cp. X⁵ A 125.

¹² Cf., e. g., X² A 193 in which S. K. remarks that his task is not to blow up the Establishment but rather to try to blow into it some spirited inwardness. He also says in X¹ A 92: "I am in the service of the Establishment. I have not collided with *it* but with the universal human. The extraordinary feature is that, so far from my having introduced something new I am, quite to the contrary, designed to help preserve the Establishment." (Cp. X¹ A 74, X⁴ A 204 (points 3 and 4), and X⁴ A 218). But S. K. laments that "the corrective" has a hard time of it. He does *not* want to found a party or a sect; yet, this so easily happens. On this point, cf. X³ A 798. In a score of passages he disclaims being a *Sværmer*, i. e., an "enthusiast" or near fanatic. No, he says, "I am only a corrective. I have nothing new to bring." Cp. X³ A 647, X³ A 527.

While not blind to practical questions of reform nor oblivious to the desirability of certain eventual alterations in the Church's structure and praxis, Kierkegaard knew that this is not the place to start. This is wrong end to. Kierkegaard desired essentially not the remodelling of the Church but its revival. "For Revival and Increase of Inwardness" is the sub-title of *Training in Christianity*.¹³ This phrase might well serve as the motto for Kierkegaard's whole endeavor in relation to the Established Church. His position is clearly stated in the following Journal entry from 1850 (X³ A 415):

From the Christian standpoint, in the highest sense there is no established Church, only a militant one.

That is the first consideration.

Yet the second consideration is that there is, empirically and in fact, an established Church. By no means should anyone want to bowl that over or knock it out cold. No. Yet over the Establishment must hang the higher ideality as a quickening possibility: that in strongest Christian terms there is, essentially, no established Church.

This has happened with me by the help of a pseudonym [Anti-Climacus, author of *Training in Christianity, For Self-Examination, and Judge for Yourself!*]: that everything might be purely a movement of the spirit. There is not at shred of proposal with respect to changing churchly externals.

And as the pseudonym lifts his hand to strike this tremendous blow, I step in as a buffer, so that the whole force of it falls on me, that I am such a poor Christian – I who nevertheless remain in the established Church. In this way, everything is movement of the spirit.

In the margin to this entry Kierkegaard adds:

Even in the case of an established Church made up of *earnest* Christians, it would need to be reminded that, from an ideal Christian point of view, there is no such thing as an established Church but only a militant one. Yet this must not be said except from the vantage point of ideality in its distance from the establishment. If it should then happen that an established Church would not tolerate that this be said even under the stated condition, then it is a sign that such a Church is in error and that a direct attack is called for. (X³ A 416).

¹³ Cp. X¹ A 162.

Here, forcefully announced in 1850, is the principle on which Kierkegaard in 1855 justified to himself his direct attack.

(3) When the time came, the attack came. No one who knows Kierkegaard's papers can suppose that the bombardment of incendiary pamphlets was the haste-work of a hot-head. It cost him the agony of endless soulsearching, for he was attacking something he loved. The point to be secured is this: in attacking the Establishment, S. K. was well aware of the one-sided character of the attack:

"He who must apply a "corrective" must study accurately and profoundly the weak side of the Establishment, and then vigorously and one-sidedly present the opposite. Precisely in this consists the corrective, and in this too the resignation of him who has to apply it. The corrective will in a sense be sacrificed to the established order.

"If this is true, a presumably clever pate can reprove the corrective for being one-sided. Ye gods! Nothing is easier for him who applies the corrective than to supply the other side; but then it ceases to be the corrective and becomes the established order." (X¹ A 640).

What could be clearer? Deliberately S. K. suppresses all that he could have said in favor of the Establishment. With conscious exaggeration he hammers on its weaknesses. Over the years he had been writing books with stronger and ever more stringent criticism of the Church – often hesitating to publish them for fear of the consequences. But what happened? Nothing. Not a ripple. He once said, "It is as if my books had never been written." It was then that he conceived that he must teach by "the irritational method." His formulation of a new program was: "Henceforth I will write in such wise as to *irritate* people into facing the issues. I can compel no man to agree with my opinions, but at least I can compel him to have an opinion."¹⁴ Kierkegaard did not abandon the

¹⁴ VIII² B 193 (p. 301) gives us an insight into S. K.'s conception of how the "irritational method" might work. In this place he is reflecting on his recurrent stress on the importance of the individual. "I willingly admit that I sometimes . . . have pushed the case as far out in peculiarity as possible – veritably not out of peculiarity. On the contrary, I have in high degree been conscious of what I did, that I acted responsibly, conscious of my responsibility, that not to do so would have been irresponsible. I did it . . . because it was important to me to irritate men into fixing their attention on this point – something one can accomplish neither with ten volumes which develop the doctrine of the individual nor with ten lectures thereon, but in these times exclusively by getting people to laugh at you."

pen for the sword, but we might say that, towards the last, he laid aside the rapier in favor of a less subtle instrument, the sledgehammer.

III

Entirely apart from all biographical considerations, and abstracting from the accidentalities of his particular historical situation, let us ask how Kierkegaard *in principle* conceived the Church.

A Church there will be, *of course*. When God touches an individual, that touch always brings him into touch with all other individuals similarly touched. The Church is a congregation composed of such individuals. By "individual" (*Den Enkelte*) Kierkegaard means the man who, standing before God as he is revealed in Christ, knows himself judged, forgiven, restored to fellowship, taken out of "the world," and sent back into the world as witness for service.

The Christian congregation, a religious concept, "lies on the other side of 'the individual'" and is "by no means to be confounded with what may have *political* validity: the public, the crowd, the numerical, &c."¹⁵ *Menigheden* and *Mængden*, as noted before, are qualitatively different. What constitutes this difference? The congregation, says Kierkegaard, "is a society which lies on the hinter side of human society, a little society which has an inward bond of cohesion – viz., that of being believers; i. e., by accepting and having dedicated their whole life to the Absurd, they have said goodbye to the world and broken with the world. . . . The Christian congregation is a society which consists of qualitative individuals; the inwardness of the society is conditioned (1) by its faith in the Absurd and (2) by its polemical position in relation to the great human society."¹⁶ But the whole difficulty, as Kierkegaard sees it, is that, in the course of time this thing of being a Christian became identical with being a man. "Thus it came about that the Christian congregation was supposedly one and the same thing as the human race. Good night, nurse! Nowadays the Christian congregation equals *Publikum*."¹⁷ Again: "Religiously (in contradistinction to the 'Public,' the 'Masses,' etc., which politically may have their

¹⁵ *The Point of View*, p. 153.

¹⁶ X² A 478.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

validity) there are only individuals. And still less from the point of view of the Christian Religion can there be such a thing as the 'Masses' . . . because 'the possibility of offense,' which Christianly is encountered in becoming a Christian, unconditionally makes men first, qualitatively, 'individuals,' whereby this concept secures the 'Christian congregation' as something qualitatively different from the 'Public,' the 'Masses', etc., while naturally unconditionally every man can be the 'individual'".¹⁸ In the same entry we read: "'The individual' must in a decisively ethical way have gone between as an intermediate determinant in order to secure that the 'congregation' is not taken in vain as synonymous with the 'Public,' the 'Masses'; while yet it must be remembered, as is well known, that it is not the individual's relationship to the congregation which determines his relationship to God but his relationship to God which determines his relationship to the congregation."

The same note is struck again and again. One more instance will suffice: "In the highest religious form, the individual relates himself first to God and then to the congregation; but this first relationship is the highest, though the individual does not neglect the latter."¹⁹ In this connection Kierkegaard calls attention to a passage in the *Unscientific Postscript*²⁰ where he contends that "the task is not to begin with the individual and arrive at the race, but to begin with the individual and through the race (the universal) arrive at the individual again." If here we read "Church" for "race," I doubt if Kierkegaard would object. The task, accordingly, is: from the individual through the Church to reach the individual. For of course S. K. knows that the Church, under divine appointment, is the chief agency by which individuals are rescued either from isolated subjectivity or else from faceless anonymity in the public, and *through* the ministrations of the Church are made individuals, qualitatively understood. However poorly the Church may historically have fulfilled her vocation, she is nonetheless *ecclesia docens*, the principal bearer of revelation, the Mother of Christians. Kierkegaard has no fault to find with the definition of the Church contained in the Augsburg Confession: the Church is the communion of saints, in the which the pure

¹⁸ X⁵ A 208, p. 392.

¹⁹ VII A 20.

²⁰ Page 383 = S. V. VII, p. 418.

Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered.²¹ *The Book on Adler*, among other writings, makes evident how clear it is to Kierkegaard that Christianity, though it is far more than doctrine (being, in fact, a way of life), is none the less a definite doctrine which must first be taught and accepted passionately before there can be any question of embarking on that life.²² When an historical Church fails in the task assigned, the Deity is not helpless, not thrown for a loss. He of course finds other ways of getting through to men. Yet normatively (and even in practice, despite all her faults) the Church, with her ordained ministry, common worship, etc., is the *way* God seeks to establish contact with men to win them out from isolated subjectivity or out from engulfment in the masses and into "a primitive God-relationship."²³

²¹ X⁴ A 246.

²² Cf., e. g., VII B 235, pp. 198–210; cp. VIII B 82, 13 and B 83 to 89.

²³ II A 172. S. K.'s respect for the authority of ordination is well known. It gets expression repeatedly in his unwillingness to call his discourses "sermons." For him, the sermon implies ordination and authority. His category was "without authority." He was a layman. *The Book on Adler* is in English called *On Authority and Revelation*. Much of that is germane to the present discussion. Cf. also X³ A 267. In *The Present Age* Kierkegaard gives us good reasons for his distrust of "the collective idea" and "the principle of association", the logic of which is: Individually we are nothing, but by the strength of united effort we shall attain the goal. Reverting to this topic almost to the point of monotony, S. K. tells us that this principle may well have its validity in connection with material and political interests, but that the principle extended to ethical and religious concerns is disastrous. How disastrous it is he makes clear in this statement: "It does away with God and eternity and with man's kinship with Deity." (Cf. the entire passage in *The Point of View*, p. 113; cp. *Journals*, 1050) — This is why he says: "It is quite impossible for the community or the idea of association to save our age Dialectically the position is this: the principle of association by strengthening the individual, enervates him; it strengthens numerically, but ethically that is a weakening. It is only after the individual has acquired an ethical outlook, in the face of the whole world, that there can be any suggestion of really joining together. Otherwise the association of individuals who are in themselves weak, is just as disgusting and as harmful as the marriage of children" (*The Present Age*, pp. 61 f.) — Thus the Christian Association, the Church, lies *beyond* all human associations — through individuals. Individuals, each of whom has a God-relationship, may perfectly well exist in the association called the Church. On page 112 of *The Point of View* S. K. remarks: "Perhaps it may be well to note here, although it seems to me almost superfluous, that it naturally could not occur to me to object to the fact, for example, that preaching is done or that the truth is proclaimed, even though it were to an assemblage of hundreds of thousands. Not at all." — Finally, this passage from the *Samlede Værker*, VIII, p. 68: "Where the individuals (each one severally) in essential passion relate themselves to an idea, and thereupon in association essentially relate themselves to the same idea, there the relationship is perfect and normal. The relationship is individually distinguishing (each has himself for himself) and ideally uniting. In this way the individuals never come too close to one another, bestially understood, precisely because they are united on the basis of ideal distance. This unity of difference is the well instrumented, rich orchestration of complete music."

"The individual," Kierkegaard insists, "is *in* the congregation," not a hermit or a recluse.²⁴ Naturally he goes to church – three times every Sunday! The reason for that Kierkegaard gives with deep human understanding and delightful humor: "The infinitely reflective religious man does the same as the immediately religious man, goes to church three times every Sunday, but conceives it humoristically and with a willingness to repent it at once: Humoristically, that he can't help going to church, that he can never tire of hearing God's Word and being in God's House; half repentantly, that it should still be true of him that he needs again and again new incitement in his God-relationship."²⁵ And in church the individual receives, to his great and endless comfort, the Sacrament of the Altar.²⁶ The Church is the powerhouse which generates our zeal, impells us out into the world. There we suffer defeats. This drives us back to the Church. Within its walls we confess our shortcomings, experience the miracle of forgiveness, get up from our knees, and having been set on our feet again, we go out to tackle the world once more. The dialectic between Christ the Redeemer whom we adore and Christ the Pattern, whom out of love and gratitude, we would imitate, is exhaustively and beautifully explored in many of Kierkegaard's books, particularly those of his last period. Adoration and imitation – an *in* to the church and an *out* to the world, then back again and out again: this is the permanent rhythm of the Christian life.

Now that we have seen something of what S. K.'s "individualism" imports – that it is not anti-ecclesiastical – we can begin to draw some conclusions. Once again we must be sure we understand Kierkegaard's distinction between *Mængden* (the crowd, the masses, *das Man* of Heidegger) and *Menigheden* (congregation, the assembled People of God). We can afford to hear out our Danish rebel another time.

In 'the Public' and such like the individual is nothing, there is no individual; the numerical is the constitutive factor, and the law for coming into being, a

²⁴ X² A 390. How absurd it is to find that some translators have rendered *den Enkelte* or *hiin Enkelte* as "That solitary individual."

²⁵ VI A 52.

²⁶ The best commentary on this statement is to be found in S. K.'s moving "Discourses at the Communion on Fridays." Cp. X⁵ A 101 and 103.

generatio aequivoca. Apart from 'the Public' the individual is nothing and neither is he anything, more deeply understood, *in* the Public.

The [authentic] individual is in the congregation; the individual is dialectically decisive as *prius* for forming the congregation, and in the congregation the individual is qualitatively an essential factor, can consequently become at any moment higher than the 'congregation' as soon, that is, as 'the others' fall away from the idea. The cohesive power for the congregation is that each is an individual, and so the idea. The 'togetherness' of the public or perhaps its dissolution lies in the notion that the numerical is everything. Every individual in the congregation guarantees the congregation. The public is a chimera. The individual in the congregation is a microcosm which qualitatively respects the macrocosm. Here applies, in a good sense, *unum noris omnes*. In the public there is no individual, the whole is nothing. Here it is impossible to say *unum noris omnes*, for here is no "one." — "The congregation' is indeed more than a sum, but in truth it is a sum of *one's*."²⁷

"More than a sum." Does Kierkegaard tell us what this "more" is? Not explicitly. But hints there are. The most important one is tucked away in a footnote in the *Postscript*, p. 492. In the text Kierkegaard has been making his favorite point that "Religiously regarded, the species is a lower category than the individual, and to thrust oneself under the category of the species is evasion." The context here is a discussion of an individual's eternal recollection (i. e., consciousness of) his total guilt. But now, what if he retreats in cowardly fashion from this consciousness? What if, to exonerate himself, he takes refuge in a doctrine of Original Sin, as popularly misunderstood? Or what if he flees to a Greek tragic position to complain whimperingly that "I couldn't help myself. I'm just a dead-end kid. Born on the wrong side of the tracks. Never had enough Vitamin C., etc., etc. I am only a member of an ill-starred race, eventually an animal race."²⁸ This, thinks Kierkegaard, is an evasion, a craven flight to the temple of aesthetics, a hunt for cover against the relentless scrutiny of ethics. No, ethically and religiously, he and he alone must assume full

²⁷ X² A 390.

²⁸ Painstakingly S. K. has been over all this ground in Volume I of *Either/Or*.

responsibility. For ethically and religiously the individual is higher than the race.

In this setting comes the footnote from the *Postscript* so important for a doctrine of the Church:

Only in the final definition of the religious as the paradox-religious does the race become higher, but then it is only in virtue of the paradox, and one must have had the intermediate definition of the religious which makes the individual higher than the species, if the spherical differences are not to coagulate and people to prate aesthetically about the paradox-religious.

This being interpreted means: In the paradox-religious sphere (i. e., Christianity), the Church is higher than the individual – yet in such a way that the absolute importance of each individual severally is not cancelled, and that Christian ethical responsibility is laid more heavily on each and every one – but always with the help of grace. [cf. X² A 489] Each person must stand up on his own two feet and take his own medicine – the bitter dosage of ethics. This done, he may then discover in the church the sweet medicine, the Elixer of Immortality.

The point is clear. The mystery of the Church is this: it is a fellowship which, far from suppressing individuality, nurtures it, brings it to full flower. It produces an individuality in *anden Potens*, in second potentiality, as Kierkegaard liked to put it. The Church may be compared to the mystery of marriage: bride and bridegroom, the two of them, become one flesh, and yet this is a oneness which does not annul the twoness. The man and wife are individuals still, each with separate duties, yet the duties become more supportable in the situation of comradeship.²⁹

I have had to leave out a hundred relevant quotations, but I submit a little catena of three in conclusion:

Rightly used, the category 'the individual' can never be harmful to the Establishment. Used in peacetime, its function will be: without changing any externals, to awaken inwardness to increased life in the Establishment; and in

²⁹ Judge William has something to say about all this in *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*.

an unsettled time its function will be more that of supporting the Establishment by leading the individuals to indifference to proposed alterations in externals and thus to supporting the Establishment.³⁰ A remark of Kofoed-Hansen in a sermon on Monday in Whitsun Week struck me today. "One might ask why God, who disrupted the proceedings at Babel (consequently desired to split people up), nevertheless willed to create the Church (consequently unity)." This struck me with reference to my small-scale religious operation: that I want to do away with the public, and yet, if possible, to have *everyone* become the "individual" – *in unity*. The hallmark of the religious is always, to begin with, a negative determinant. The first is always something hit upon by men or worldliness (Babel, the public, etc.); the religious negates this, and then brings forward in its truth that which men wanted in untruth.³¹

Christianity is also designed for *et Folk* – a people, a land. [And Kierkegaard hesitates not at all in adding]: Twelve men united on being Christians have recreated the face of the world. In actuality there is, therefore, only one danger for a people in Christendom – that the individuals no longer are Christians.³²

IV

In the light of his attack upon Christendom, people often ask, "What would Kierkegaard have become had he lived longer?" A Roman Catholic? More than a few have suggested that. A sectarian? There are those prepared to make a place for him in their hagiographic calendar. An agnostic or an atheist? This I doubt. Perhaps something like the so-called "Non-Church Christians" to be found in Japan? Interesting questions! And speculation is not to be forbidden. But yet, how un-Kierkegaardian, how non-existentialist these speculations are! The question posed by Kierkegaard is not what *he* would have become. The rude, actual question is: what are *you* to become?

³⁰ IX B 66. Cp. IX B 63, p. 362: "When the 'Missionary' comes he will not seek to overthrow the Establishment but will use the category 'the individual' to strengthen the Establishment."

³¹ X³ A 63.

³² VIII² B 122.

Perhaps it was providential that he died when he did. By prodigious industry he had said at the age of only forty-two all that he had to say. He said it powerfully. He challenged the whole lot of us with astringency that none but the obtuse can evade. Kierkegaard had his pride, like St. Paul. Yet there was a Pauline humility too. He claimed nothing more for himself than that he was a "corrective" – and he repeated a thousand times that the corrective, no matter how needed, must never become the normative. The corrective is only "the necessary pinch of spice." No stew can be made of spice alone. With even more humility, he added the prediction that "the next generation will need the opposite of 'the corrective.'"³³

Valdemar Amundsen, a great professor of the University of Copenhagen, put the matter right when succinctly he said of the enigmatic Dane: "Where Kierkegaard was wrong, that is between him and God. Where Kierkegaard was right, that is between God and *us*."

³³ X⁵ A 106.