To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Christopher A. Hardeman entitled "Is Kierkegaard's Christianity Adequate?" I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.

Rem B. Edwards

Rem B. Edwards, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

David E. Linge

Ralph Norman

Accepted for the Council:

L. Evans Beck

Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

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IS KIERKEGAARD'S CHRISTIANITY ADEQUATE?

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Christopher A. Hardeman

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the adequacy of Soren Kierkegaard's Christianity. Attention was focused specifically upon the question that Kierkegaard raised in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript: How does one become a Christian? It was Kierkegaard's answer to this question that served as the object of evaluation.

The primary source used in this study was Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Although all of Kierkegaard's works have reference to Christianity, the Postscript deals most fully with his Christian thought, and in particular, the question of how one becomes a Christian. Therefore, his treatment of Christianity in the Postscript was given primary status, and his other works used to supplement his thought in the Postscript.

The major finding of this study was that Christianity, in Kierkegaard's opinion, could not be appropriated by rational thought alone. The human race is separated from God, and knowledge of God is beyond the reach of human reason. God must create the condition necessary for faith. This he has done in the Incarnation. An encounter with God's truth as revealed in the Incarnation is able to arouse one's inwardness which serves as the basis for making the leap of faith.

Kierkegaard was correct, I believe, in his assessment of how one becomes a Christian. Faith in Jesus Christ as the God-Man is not commensurate with the objective uncertainty and the offense to our natural conceptions which are encountered when Christianity is considered objectively. Faith must ultimately be the result of an inward condition, and in asserting the need for God to create such a condition, Kierkegaard placed a strong emphasis on grace, which I believe is an essential part of the teaching of Christianity.

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INTRODUCTION

Soren Aabye Kierkegaard, the melancholy Dane (1813-1855), was a theologian, man of letters, religious psychologist, and biblical expositer. He is recognized as the founder of existentialist philosophies and the inspiration at many points behind thinkers such as Brunner, Barth, and Niebuhr. Foremost, however, Kierkegaard was a Christian. His writings reflect vividly his own struggles as a Christian and a great desire to explain Christianity as it was in his day and as he thought it should be.

Kierkegaard expressed the opinion that there was something rotten in Denmark, i.e., Europe or Christendom. He diagnosed the sickness of society as a spiritual and religious malady. Kierkegaard was strongly committed to the Christian faith, and he believed that the Christian faith in his day had become perverted. His chief concern, I believe, was to expose the pseudo-Christianity of his day. His writings were put forth as a corrective; therefore, his chief function was that of a polemicist.

In this study I have attempted to determine the adequacy of Kierkegaard's Christianity. In order to do this, I shall endeavor to focus attention upon Kierkegaard's main emphasis in relation to Christianity which has to do with the personal appropriation of Christianity by individuals. In other words,

Kierkegaard attempted to show the correct mode of becoming a Christian—the mode of faith.

My evaluation of Kierkegaard shall be focused primarily upon his Concluding Unscientific Postscript which, I believe, most fully elucidates his thought. Kierkegaard wrote this work under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, and many of his other works were also done pseudonomously. What was the purpose for this? Kierkegaard presented the Christian faith from the standpoint of an observer. He used indirect communication rather than direct communication for a very specific purpose.

> What then does it mean, "to deceive"? It means that one does not begin directly with the matter one wants to communicate, but begins by accepting the other man's illusion as good money. So (to stick to the theme with which this work especially deals) one does not begin thus: I am a Christian; you are not a Christian . . . . The deception consists in the fact that one talks thus merely to get to the religious theme.[1]

Kierkegaard perceived that something was wrong with the Christianity of his day, but if he were to offer a corrective, then he needed a particular strategy. Christianity was certainly not foreign to Denmark. The people to whom Kierkegaard was addressing his writing thought themselves to be Christians; therefore, the direct approach probably would

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[1]Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View for My Work as an Author, trans. by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 40-41.

have met with hostility. Kierkegaard's strategy, therefore, was maieutic, an attempt to bring the truth to birth subjectively in the life of the reader. This indirect communication makes clarification of Kierkegaard's thought difficult at times. One might wish that he had been more direct.

In dealing with Kierkegaard's Christianity, I shall focus attention upon the main theme of the Postscript: the mode of becoming a Christian. There are many aspects of Kierkegaard's thought in relation to Christianity that would make an intriguing study. This study, however, shall restrict itself to the above-mentioned problem.

CHAPTER 1

KIERKEGAARD'S REACTION TO CHRISTENDOM

Kierkegaard was a Christian who believed that there was something seriously wrong with the Christianity of his day. Kierkegaard's native Denmark was not lacking in a profession of Christianity, for the Lutheran Church was firmly established as the official church of Denmark. Kierkegaard, however, was not satisfied with the spiritual condition of the Church. An outward profession of Christianity was one thing, but a genuine relationship to Christianity was something else. Kierkegaard believed the latter was lacking.

In the Introduction to the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard stated clearly the problem with which he was concerned:

> I, Johannes Climacus, born in this city and now thirty years old, a common ordinary human being like most people, assume there awaits me a highest good, an eternal happiness, in the same sense that such a good awaits a servant girl or professor. I have heard that Christianity proposes itself as a condition for the acquirement of this good, and now I ask how I may establish a proper relationship to this doctrine.[2]

In this statement he made it very clear that he was concerned about the proper relationship to Christianity—the mode of becoming a Christian.

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[2]Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. by David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 19.

Kierkegaard believed that the vast majority of "Christians" were not properly related to Christianity, hence, not Christians at all. It was this erroneous form of Christianity that existed in Kierkegaard's day that shall be referred to as Christendom. In Denmark the Church was a state-church. People were born into the Church, baptized in the Church, married in the Church, and buried by the Church. To be born in Denmark was to be a member of the Church and assumed to be a Christian. Christianity had become confused with nationality. Europe was a "Christian" continent; Denmark was a "Christian" nation; the Danish citizen was a "Christian." Because of this confusion, many individuals who professed Christianity were not really related to Christianity. Kierkegaard wrote of this situation:

> But in times when people became Christians as adults, and were baptized in mature years, one might with some assurance speak as if Christianity had some significance for the baptized. By all means, let God alone judge the secrets of the heart. But when the rite of baptism is relegated to the second week after birth, and when it must be regarded as a convenience to remain nominally a Christian, when to renounce Christianity would bring only trouble and inconvenience in its train, when the judgment of the environment would be, as noted above, that it is flat and stupid and in bad taste to make so much fuss about it: then it is impossible to deny that membership in the visible Church constitutes a very doubtful proof that this member is really a Christian.[3]

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[3]Ibid., p. 326.

The problem, as Kierkegaard saw it, was that personal appropriation of the truth of the Christian faith was not taking place. Generally, people assumed that they were Christians because of their identification with an institution, country, or culture, to put it various ways. Christianity had become culturized (Christendom), and the mode of becoming a Christian was participation rather than appropriation. Kierkegaard made this point quite forcibly in the illustration of a man who was concerned about the quality of his faith and his wife's response to that concern.

> And if he happened to be married, his wife would say to him: "Dear husband of mine, how can you get such notions into your head? Are you not a Dane, and does not the geography say that the Lutheran form of the Christian religion is the ruling religion in Denmark? For you are surely not a Jew, nor are you a Mohammedan; what then can you be if not a Christian? It is a thousand years since paganism was driven out of Denmark, so I know you are not a pagan. Do you not perform your duties at the office like a conscientious civil servant; are you not a good citizen of a Christian nation, a Lutheran Christian state? So then of course you must be a Christian."[4]

Thus, in Kierkegaard's opinion, Christendom had lost the mode of becoming a Christian. Christianity had become equated with culture; it had become a matter of course.

> To be a Christian has become a thing of naught, mere tomfoolery, something which everyone is as a matter of course, something one slips into more

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[4]Ibid., p. 49.

> easily than into the most insignificant trick of dexterity.[5]

Kierkegaard's purpose, therefore, was not to write an apologetic for the Christian faith, but to set forth the correct mode of becoming a Christian, a mode not exemplified in the Christianity of his day.

Kierkegaard reacted strongly against Christendom, but this was not the only target of his criticism. He believed that Christendom had found a philosophical ally in the philosophy of Hegel. The heart of the Hegelianism which he attacked was its interpretation of Christianity as Protestant civilization. Hegel was not to be considered as the cause of the evaporation of Christianity into its culturized form. This great thinker, however, had attempted to give philosophical justification to Christendom. This only added to the problem which Kierkegaard confronted. Stephen Crites wrote of Hegel's relationship to Christendom:

> Yet of course Hegel was not merely the chronicler of this process. Kierkegaard agrees that this cultural process has in truth been brought to full self-consciousness by Hegelian philosophy, which correctly sees itself as the comprehensive philosophical reflection of this new situation. It has been able to reveal the meaning of bourgeois Protestant culture to itself because it is the authentic outgrowth and intellectual distillation of the age. Hegelianism is the spirit of the age

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[5]Soren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 71.

> become conscious of itself, its self-conscious mind. So Kierkegaard's urbane polemics against Hegelianism were the first faint thunder of his stormy denunciation of the "lie" of Protestant Christendom.[6]

Kierkegaard did not totally reject culture or Hegelianism. A sincere appreciation of both can be found in his writings. The point at which Kierkegaard aimed his attack was the equation of Christianity with culture. "What he did totally reject was the 'lie': that bourgeois Protestantism or Hegelian 'spirit' were . . . manifestations of genuine Christianity."[7]

The depth of Hegel's thought far exceeds what can be treated in this brief study, but we can focus attention upon the specific way in which his thought serves as a basis for Christendom. Hegel taught that the totality of reality is the Absolute Spirit, and the sum total of human knowledge is the Absolute Spirit coming to consciousness of itself through the consciousness of human minds. The history of the world is the process of the Absolute Spirit's development. This process is dialectical. In reality there are oppositions and divisions (thesis and antithesis) which are synthesized into a new thesis. Oppositions again appear and the dialectical process goes on. This is the Absolute's development, and our consciousness of the world-historical process is the Absolute

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[6]Stephen Crites, In the Twilight of Christendom (Chambersburg, Pa: American Academy of Religion, 1972), p. 59.

[7]Ibid.

coming to consciousness of itself. This is perhaps an extreme oversimplification, but it is the basic idea of Hegel's thought.

> The truth is the whole. The whole, however is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only at its end is it what it is in very truth; and just in that consists its nature, which is to be actual, subject, or self-becoming, self-development.[8]

Christianity was given an important place in the world-historical process. In fact, Hegel could be descrbied as the Philosopher of Christianity. He gave to Christianity philosophical respectability and made it acceptable to modern man. Crites described the place of Christianity in Hegel's thought:

> it is, not only historically but essentially, the religious basis and the religious expression of Western culture. As such, it is, so to speak, the Weltgeist's own religion . . . . Christianity, like any other expression of the spirit, can only be comprehended in its entire historical development; and the significance of this development is revealed, not in its beginnings, but in its result. . . .[9]

According to Hegel, the New Testament made its own contribution to the development of Christianity, but Christianity is an historical reality, and the cultural phenomenon of Christianity belongs to its essence. Hegel shunned the

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[8]G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Mind, in Hegel Selections, ed. by J. Loewenberg (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 16.

[9]Crites, In the Twilight of Christendom, p. 41.

Christian concept of a transcendental world. His idea of God is completely bound up with this world. Thus Hegel asserted that the highest manifestation of God is to be found in the moral structure of the state. Christianity is, therefore, manifested in culture; hence, Christendom is the expression of Christianity. Thus we find in Hegel's thought a philosophical basis for the justification of Christendom, the equation of Christianity with culture, which is the very thing Kierkegaard opposed.

CHAPTER 2

THE EXISTING INDIVIDUAL

In order to understand fully Kierkegaard's emphasis on personal appropriation of Christianity, we need to examine his view of the existing individual. Kierkegaard's concern with existence was not a cognitive effort to secure an abstract concept, but his intent was to experience existence, to live it rather than define it. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard developed a consistent treatment of the essence of existence.

The most basic property of human existence is that existence is a process, a becoming, and not a state of being. Becoming cannot be systematized by means of logical thought. Man exists and becomes because he freely chooses between many possibilities and realizes his choice. The continuity of human existence is not a continuous development from one reality to another. Human existence is a free, spontaneous inner act; it is a human being's realization of himself. This process of self-realization involves choosing the set of determinates under which one will live.

> My either/or does not in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil; it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil/or excludes them. Here the question is under what determinates one would contemplate the whole of existence and would himself live.[10]

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[10]Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 173.

Kierkegaard wrote of this dialectical process: "Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity. . . ."[11] Kierkegaard's dialectical process of existence involves man's struggle with finitude/infinitude, temporality/eternality, freedom/necessity. It is a struggle to bring these factors into harmony.

Kierkegaard, like Hegel, set up stages of consciousness: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Kenneth Hamilton made the following comparison:

> In his Phenomenology of Mind Hegel elaborated three "stages" of mankind's consciousness: (A) consciousness at the level of sense experience; (B) self-consciousness rising to the appreciation of law and reason; (C) reason, "a stage of mind" aiming to "become completely conscious of its own nature." Kierkegaard proposed his own three stages: (A) the aesthetic (dominated by self-gratification); (B) the ethical (obedient to the absolute as law); (C) the religious (obedient to the absolute as grace). While Hegel thought the stages of consciousness to be strictly successive and working out in the process of world-history, Kierkegaard insisted that there was no "necessity" compelling anyone to go through the three in turn. Everything depended on choice.[12]

In the aesthetic stage of existence, the individual lives in immediacy. The individual is governed by sense, impulse,

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[11]Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 146.

[12]Kenneth Hamilton, The Promise of Kierkegaard (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1969), p. 61.

and emotion. Aesthetic consciousness lacks fixed universal moral standards and determinate religious faith. Kierkegaard wrote of the aesthetic stage:

> The aesthetic view takes account of the personality in its relation to the environment, and the expression for this relation in its repercussion upon the individual is pleasure.[13]

The individual who lives aesthetically is dominated by the desire to partake of the whole range of emotive and sense experience. When one reflects upon this level of existence, he finds that his existence lacks concreteness. Such reflection can bring one into a state of despair. There are only two alternatives: either remain in aesthetic despair or choose to make the transition to the next level—the ethical.

In the ethical stage of existence the individual accepts determinate moral standards and obligations. His life takes on form and consistency. The individual has chosen himself as an end to be realized. Of the ethical stage Kierkegaard wrote:

> So when you choose yourself absolutely you easily discover that this self is not an abstraction or a tautology; at the most it may seem so at the moment of orientation in which one is employed in separating until one finds the most abstract expression for the self, and yet for all that it is an illusion to suppose that the self is entirely abstract and empty, for it is not conscious simply of freedom in general, as thought might conceive

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[13]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, p. 234.

> it, but it was produced by a choice and is conscious of this definite free being who is himself and no other. This self contains a rich concretion, a manifold variety of determinants and characteristics, being the whole aesthetical self which is chosen ethically.[14]

The choice of ethical determinates does not destroy the aesthetic nor render it useless, but it dethrones it from the place of governing an individual's life. The ethical individual is characterized as the good husband and the conscientious citizen who does his duty. The ethical individual is one who believes in his moral sufficiency. When he reflects upon this level of existence, he finds, however, that he is not morally sufficient. He becomes aware of sin and guilt. Thus he despairs. The alternatives are again the same: either remain in ethical despair or move to the next stage of existence—the religious.

Kierkegaard made a distinction between religion A and religion B, the latter being Christianity. I shall not deal with this distinction, but rather the religious stage as it applies to Christianity. When the ethical individual is driven by the despair of sin and guilt, he seeks the mercy and the grace of God. Of this Kierkegaard wrote:

> This then is the formula which describes the condition of the self when despair is completely eradicated: by relating itself to its own self

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[14]Ibid., pp. 226-227.

> and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it.[15]

The existing individual rises above despair and achieves full self-realization, authentic existence, when he has come to God, and God becomes the determinate by which his life is guided. The individual then can achieve the fullest self-realization possible as an individual before God.

We have here a very clear dialectical process. There is a tension between finitude and infinitude. The individual who lives aesthetically suffers from lack of finitude; there is no concreteness, no definiteness. On the other hand, the individual who lives ethically is a very concrete being; however, there is a lack of infinitude, of possibilities to be actualized. How is the individual to find harmony between his finitude and infinitude? The answer is by being "grounded transparently in the Power which posited it," grounded in God. Every person is a mixture of finitude and infinitude. Considered as finite, human beings are separated from God, but considered as infinite, human beings move toward God. In God the individual achieves a harmony between finitude and infinitude. As a creature he is a finite being, but in God he has an infinite value and infinite potentiality. In God the individual is able to return unto himself, as it

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[15]Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, p. 147.

were, and function in the finite realm. Despair can be viewed as the antithesis to aesthetic consciousness, and the despair of sin and guilt as the antithesis to ethical consciousness. The ultimate synthesis is relating oneself to God.

With existence viewed in this manner, it is no wonder that Kierkegaard reacted so strongly to Christendom. The process of becoming a Christian which we have just examined calls for reflection upon one's condition, tension and despair, awareness of sin and guilt, and personal appropriation. How different this was from Christendom which equated being a Christian with participation in culture.

CHAPTER 3

THE OBJECTIVE PROBLEM

Kierkegaard was opposed to Christendom because personal appropriation of Christianity was lacking. Having seen the problem which he confronted, let us now examine Christianity as Kierkegaard conceived of it. Kierkegaard called attention to the objective problem of Christianity.

> From an objective standpoint Christianity is a *res in facto posita*, whose truth it is proposed to investigate in a purely objective manner, for the accomodating subject is much too objective not to leave himself out; or perhaps he even unhesitatingly counts himself in, as one who possesses faith as a matter of course. The truth in this objective sense may mean, first, the historical truth; second, the philosophical truth. Viewed as historical, the truth of Christianity must be determined through a critical examination of the various sources, and so forth; in short, in the same manner that historical truth generally is determined. When the question of the philosophical truth is raised, the object is to determine the relationship of the doctrine thus historically given and verified, to the eternal truth.[16]

Kierkegaard was calling attention to the problems that are involved when one inquires into the truthfulness of Christianity.

First of all, there is the historical approach in which one investigates the historical evidence for the truthfulness

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[16]Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 23.

of Christianity. This investigation concentrates upon the Bible or upon the Church.

Kierkegaard maintained that it is fruitless to try to prove the divine authority of the Bible. Anyone who engages in a critical examination of the scriptures without being a believer cannot expect to have inspiration emerge as a result.

> Anyone who posits inspiration, as a believer does, must consistently consider every critical deliberation, whether for or against, as a misdirection, a temptation for the spirit. And anyone who plunges into these critical inquiries without being a believer, cannot possibly intend to have inspiration emerge as a result.[17]

There is simply no way for empirical investigation to establish with certainty that the Bible is God's word. At best, this type of investigation can only render a degree of probability.

Some who realize this difficulty may turn to the existence of the Church as proof. Its eighteen hundred years of existence and its present establishment are viewed as a direct link to the Christian truth revealed in the first century. The problem with the Church-theory is the same as with the Bible. Kierkegaard pointed out that the Church is an institution that has a historicity just like the Bible. Thus the question is raised of whether or not the Church is essentially the same in the present as in the past. We again

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[17]Ibid., pp. 27-28.

are faced with nothing more than approximation. Kierkegaard insisted that an approximation is not commensurate with personal appropriation of the Christian faith.

> for nothing is more readily evident than the greatest attainable certainty with respect to anything historical is at best an approximation. And an approximation, when viewed as a basis for eternal happiness is wholly inadequate.[18]

Kierkegaard's point can be illustrated in the following way: Suppose an individual examines the available historical evidence for Christianity. The evidence, though not certain, seems strong; he becomes a Christian. Suppose, however, that new evidence is uncovered which seems to weaken Christianity. Based upon the evidence, this individual ceases to be a Christian. The issue, therefore, is what kind of faith could he have had if it could be shaken so easily? Faith is not commensurate with an approximation. Objectively considered, Christianity offers no certainty, and if there is a measure of doubt, then how is one to give himself without reservation to Christianity? How can personal appropriation take place? Thus Kierkegaard has called attention to a very serious problem inherent in Christianity. It offers the hope of eternal happiness, but it demands appropriation of that which is objectively uncertain.

Secondly, there is the philosophical approach. The one who approaches Christianity in this way seeks to determine

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[18]Ibid., p. 25.

the relationship of the Christian doctrine to the eternal truth.

> From the speculative standpoint, Christianity is viewed as an historical phenomenon. The problem of its truth therefore becomes the problem of so interpenetrating it with thought, that Christianity at last reveals itself as the eternal truth.[19]

Christianity is assumed as historically given, but the speculative approach is concerned with contemplation of Christianity in order to interpenetrate it with speculative thought and not an individual's relationship to Christianity. Kierkegaard wrote of this, "philosophy in its objectivity is wholly indifferent to his and my and your eternal happiness."[20]

Thus the objective problem of Christianity is that when one approaches Christianity historically or speculatively, personal appropriation is not commensurate with either. In the historical approach, one confronts an objective uncertainty, and in the speculative approach, there is indifference about one's relationship to the truth, and yet Christianity calls for personal appropriation. It calls for one to be a subject in the truth.

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[19]Ibid., p. 49.

[20]Ibid., p. 53.

CHAPTER 4

THE ABSOLUTE PARADOX

Kierkegaard stressed personal appropriation of Christianity. Such appropriation, however, was not without great tension and difficulty. Kierkegaard focused attention upon what the individual must confront when considering the Christian faith—the Absolute Paradox.

Kierkegaard called attention to the central truth of Christianity—the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the doctrine that God became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. Kierkegaard referred to the eternal truth by saying:

> God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, precisely like any other individual human being, quite indistinguishable from other individuals.[21]

According to Kierkegaard, when one confronts Christianity, one must confront the God-Man. This confrontation brings about great tension and difficulty because the Incarnation is the Absolute Paradox.

> Christianity has declared itself to be the eternal essential truth which came into being in time. It has proclaimed itself as the Paradox, and it has required of the individual the inwardness of faith in relation to that which stamps itself as an offense to the Jews and a folly to the Greeks—and an absurdity to the understanding.[22]

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[21] Ibid., p. 188.

[22] Ibid., p. 191.

It should be pointed out that Kierkegaard was not asserting that Christianity is an impossibility, but that it seems paradoxical, difficult to believe, as we encounter it on the level of existence. "But the eternal essential truth is by no means in itself a paradox; it becomes paradoxical by virtue of its relationship to an existing individual."[23]

Let us now examine this paradoxical character of the Incarnation. In Training in Christianity Kierkegaard wrote,

> 'The offence' in the strictest sense...has to do therefore with the God-Man, and it has two forms. It has either to do with loftiness--one is offended at the fact that an individual man says of himself that he is God, or speaks in such a way as to betray this thought...or it has to do with lowliness--that He who is God is this lowly man, suffering like a lowly man. . . .In the first form, the offence arises in such a way that I am not in the least offended at the lowliness of the man but at the fact that he wants me to believe that he is God. And if I have believed this, the offence then arises from the other side, and consists in the fact that such a one as He should be God, this lowly, helpless man who when it comes to a test has no power to do anything.[24]

Kierkegaard maintained that the Incarnation was an offense to reason because it was a radical confusion of categories. God is not man, and man is not God, and yet in the Incarnation this distinction is obscured. We must confront the idea of the God-Man. Furthermore, the eternal is not temporal, and the temporal is not eternal, and yet in the

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[23]Ibid., p. 183.

[24]Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 84.

Incarnation the eternal God enters into temporal existence. In short, it is difficult to conceive of God as a man.

> The God-Man is the unity of God and an individual man. That the human race is or should be akin to God is ancient paganism; but that an individual man is God is Christianity, and this individual man is the God-Man. There is neither in heaven, not in the aberrations of the most fantastic thinking, the possibility of a (humanly speaking) more insane combination.[25]

A second aspect of the offense is that should God have become a man, how could he have been this lowly, abused, and finally crucified man, Jesus? Accepting the idea that God became a man is hard enough, but a man who suffered and died is too much! One is naturally to equate the suffering of Christ with tragedy, failure, and impotency. How could one possibly imagine that this was God?

Thus Christianity, i.e., the Incarnation, offends our natural conceptions. Alastair McKinnon wrote of Kierkegaard's view:

> It reflects his assumption that there is an implacable opposition between the goals of Christianity and those of natural man. . . . For Kierkegaard, Christianity is a contradiction of the natural self and hence can only be experienced and accepted as paradoxical in the sense of self-contradictory. Kierkegaard is not saying that Christianity actually is logically contradictory in and of itself. His point is simply that, as a new view, it necessarily conflicts with the would-be believer's earlier conceptions. . . .[26]

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[25]Ibid.

[26]Alastair McKinnon, "Paradox and Irrationalism," in Essays on Kierkegaard, ed. by Jerry H. Gill (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1969), p. 107.

Christianity, when properly conceived, presents an offense to our natural conceptions. It is the Absolute Paradox. In the doctrine of the Incarnation, there is a great tension between the concept of the infinite and of the finite, the eternal and the temporal, which are alleged to be in unity in Jesus Christ—the God-Man.

Equating Christianity with culture and considering oneself to be a Christian through participation as in Christendom avoided this tension. Christianity in this sense was easy. Christendom had not truly confronted Christ; he had been merely known about rather than believed in. Christendom had accepted the net result of his life as manifested in eighteen hundred years of Christian history.

Kierkegaard insisted that the Incarnation is the Absolute Paradox, and when confronted properly, it is not easy to accept. The Paradox must be confronted contemporaneously. One must not merely accept eighteen hundred years of Christianity as a matter of course; one must confront the moment in which the eternal appeared in time.

> And so it will always prove when becoming a Christian in truth comes to mean to become contemporary with Christ[27]

> no relationship with the God-Man is possible except by beginning with the situation of contemporaneousness.[28]

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[27]Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 67.

[28]Ibid., p. 84.

When approached, the Absolute Paradox must be confronted in its positivity without the benefit of historical perspective. When confronted in this manner, the Incarnation remains offensive, a contradiction to logical thought. Kierkegaard was trying to show that the Incarnation of Christ was, is, and always shall be an object of faith. It is not an event that can be made rational. God becoming a man, the eternal in time, is an idea that is not compatible with our natural conceptions. If the Absolute Paradox was to be turned into an easily comprehended idea, then where is the faith? Christianity would be just a matter of course, and that is precisely what Kierkegaard reacted to.

> it was just as difficult for Christ's contemporaries to believe in him as it was for later generations. The incarnation of Christ contains a contradiction for logical thought—the contradiction being this, that a man, subject to all the laws of corruption, claims to be God. Christ's contemporaries, as well as later generations could accept Christ as the Son of God only with the eyes of faith. When Christ came into the world, he was "a sign of contradiction," and this he will remain for all time.[29]

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[29]Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Way to the Truth, trans. by Mary Michelsen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 69.

CHAPTER 5

TRUTH IS SUBJECTIVITY

Kierkegaard was dealing with the question of how one becomes a Christian. He opposed the idea of culture Christianity—becoming a Christian on the basis of identification with culture or participation in culture. Becoming a Christian, according to Kierkegaard, involves reflection upon one's condition, despair of sin and guilt, and personal appropriation. This brings us to Kierkegaard's well-known and often criticized view that truth is subjectivity.

> Only in subjectivity is there decisiveness, to seek objectivity is to be in error. It is the passion of the infinite that is the decisive factor and not its content, for its content is precisely itself. In this manner subjectivity and the subjective "how" constitute the truth.
> . . . . . .
> Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.[30]

Kierkegaard has been attacked for the assertion that truth is subjectivity as the following examples will show:

> For when faith loses its concern for objective truth, it loses its transcendent reference and that means it also loses its transcendent object. Only subjectivity is left. . . . The remaining question is whether the substitute now offered—subjectivity—

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[30]Kierkegaard, Postscript, pp. 181-182.

> is one that a man of faith, in the more usual sense of that term, can accept as the proper goal of his religious quest.[31]
>
> Christianity does include beliefs, and it insists rightly or wrongly that these beliefs are true in the common and ancient sense. To adopt Kierkegaard's new sense, peculiar to himself and inconsistently held, which reduces to passionate commitment of feeling and will, would not save Christianity; on the contrary, it would largely destroy it. For it implies that there are no common principles by which their lives may be guided, indeed no common Deity for them to contemplate and worship. The Kierkegaardian subjectivity would dissolve these things away into a set of processes in individual minds where there would be as many Christianities as there were persons to exercise their "inwardness" and their passion.[32]

As these examples show, Kierkegaard is interpreted by many as having had no regard for the objectivity of truth. He is interpreted as having maintained that the object of belief is justified by the passion of belief. In my opinion this is completely inaccurate. It is a confusion of subjectivity with subjectivism. When Kierkegaard referred to the truth as subjectivity, he was describing not the what of truth but the how of truth. Kierkegaard was not dealing with the truthfulness of Christianity's content but with the mode of becoming a Christian. Kierkegaard was saying that Christianity (which he assumed as true) is subjective, meaning that it calls for

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[31]Arthur Murphy, "Kierkegaard's Subjectivity," in Essays on Kierkegaard, p. 99.

[32]Brand Blanshard, "Kierkegaard on Faith," in Essays on Kierkegaard, p. 120.

the individual to be a subject in the truth. Kenneth Hamilton wrote of this,

> Kierkegaard never for one moment imagined that our decisions, however passionate, justified themselves. It is astonishing to find how widespread even now is the notion that his stand on "subjectivity" meant he thought every man must reject solutions other men have worked out for life's problems, but must insist upon making his own choices in his own way. The principle of what's-right-for-me's-not-right-for-you-for-you're-not-me was the last one Kierkegaard ever would have agreed to, since his whole authorship was dedicated to advancing the very opposite. In brief, whatever else he said, he said very clearly that Christianity was for everybody, and that Christianity was not what people thought it might be but was what it was and always had been.[33]

Kierkegaard made a distinction between types of knowledge. Essential knowledge is that which has an effect upon an individual's existence. It calls for the individual to be related to that knowledge.

> All essential knowledge relates to existence, or only such knowledge as has an essential relationship to existence is essential knowledge. All knowledge which does not inwardly relate itself to existence, in the reflection of inwardness, is, essentially viewed, accidental knowledge; its degree and scope is essentially indifferent. . . . But it means that knowledge has a relationship to the knower, who is essentially an existing individual, and that for this reason all essential knowledge is essentially related to existence. Only ethical and ethico-religious knowledge has an essential relationship to the existence of the knower.[34]

Christianity is essential knowledge because it relates to the existence of the individual. It is necessary to be related to the truth of Christianity if it is to have any transforming

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[33]Hamilton, The Promise of Kierkegaard, p. 28.

[34]Kierkegaard, Postscript, pp. 176-177.

effect upon the individual. In Kierkegaard's dialectical process of existence, Christianity is the highest stage, the stage in which one achieves authentic existence. This stage is not reached, however, unless there is reflection, despair, and choice. Thus the truth of Christianity is the type of truth that calls for subjectivity.

Scientific truth, on the other hand, allows one to be detached, for such truth has no import for the individual's existence. It calls for no response. Kierkegaard did not deny that there is objective truth. Christianity, which he believed in, had its objective truth. The objective what of Christianity did, indeed, matter to Kierkegaard. What Kierkegaard was attacking was the viewing of Christian truth as impersonal truth.

> But such a scientific method becomes especially dangerous and pernicious when it would encroach also upon the sphere of the spirit. Let it deal with plants and animals and stars in that way; but to deal with the human spirit in that way is blasphemy, which only weakens ethical and religious passion.[35]

Reidar Thomte gave an excellent explanation of the way in which Kierkegaard distinguished beween subjective and objective truth:

> In any scientific account of the truth, the truth exists independently of the individual, and subjectivity, the personal equation, is the enemy to be feared. Kierkegaard, however, does not deal with the objective or scientific search for truth. He

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[35]Ibid., p. xv.

> is concerned with the ethico-religious relationship of the individual. He maintains that ethico-religious truth is not an addition to our intellectual furniture, but that such truth lies in the personal appropriation. The emphasis is upon how rather than upon the "what."[36]

Perhaps much of the confusion over Kierkegaard's view of objectivity has arisen because Kierkegaard asserted that Christianity is not a doctrine but rather a type of existence. To many this implies that Christianity is not an objective truth, but this is not at all what Kierkegaard meant. In a note to page 339 of the Postscript, Kierkegaard fully elucidated the distinction he was making.

> Now if only I might escape the fate of having a facile thinker explain to a reading public how stupid my entire book is, as is more sufficiently evident from my willingness to be responsible for such an assertion as that Christianity is not a doctrine. Let us try to understand one another. Surely it is one thing for something to be a philosophical doctrine which desires to be intellectually grasped and speculative understood, and quite another thing to be a doctrine that proposes to be realized in existence. . . . Christianity is a doctrine of this kind.[37]

Thus Kierkegaard's apparent disdain for objectivity and his emphasis on subjectivity must be understood as referring to the kind of response for which they call. To accuse Kierkegaard of having no concern for the objectivity of truth is simply a failure to understand the issue with which he was

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[36]Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (New York: Glenwood Press Publishers, 1969), p. 114.

[37]Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 339.

concerned—being related to the truth. If he had no concern for the objectivity of truth, then his great concern for Christianity seems pointless.

Kierkegaard's assertion that truth is subjectivity applies to the mode of becoming a Christian. It is a mode in which the subject must be related to the truth of Christianity and not merely know about Christianity. It is a mode that involves inward reflection upon one's condition, despair and consciousness of sin, and, finally, personal appropriation of Christian truth. One chooses not be to governed by immediacy or moral self-sufficiency, but rather the individual chooses to become himself before God—"transparently grounded in the Power which posited it."

CHAPTER 6

HOW ONE BECOMES A CHRISTIAN

Kierkegaard asserted that Christianity is subjective. In other words, to be a Christian one must be a subject in the truth. There must be personal appropriation of the truth into the existence of the individual. Now we ask, how is this to come about? Kierkegaard pointed out the difficulty inherent in Christianity. When one considers becoming a Christian, he confronts an objective uncertainty. Furthermore, the nature of Christianity, i.e., the Incarnation, seems paradoxical. It is an offense to natural conceptions, an absurdity. In light of these difficulties, how can one base his eternal happiness upon Christianity? This brings us to Kierkegaard's dialectic of faith which is the explanation of how one becomes a Christian. It is a description of the process of coming to faith.

One naturally thinks of the eternal as higher than anything historical, for the eternal is regarded as the basis of all things. Christianity promises to bestow eternal happiness upon the believer, but the eternal happiness which it promises is based upon something historical—the Incarnation. With respect to anything historical, knowledge, at best, is an approximation. Herein lies a dialectical

contradiction, that an eternal happiness is based upon something historical, something that is an objective uncertainty.

Now if one were engaged in an historical or scientific investigation, an objective uncertainty would pose no problem, for this type of knowledge is not essential knowledge; it has no effect upon the individual's existence. In Christianity, however, it poses a serious problem. The individual is asked to base his eternal happiness, his eternal destiny, on something of which he cannot be sure. Christianity demands a commitment on the part of the individual that possesses certainty, and yet from the point of view of the individual, there is only uncertainty. That is a dialectical contradiction.

> The contradiction first emerges in the fact that the subject in the extremity of such subjective passion (in the concern for an eternal happiness) has to base this upon an historical knowledge which at its maximum remains an approximation. The investigator lives calmly on; in his subjective being and existing he is entirely unconcerned about that which occupies him objectively and scientifically. In case it is supposed that a person is in one way or another absorbed by a subjective passion and that his task is to give this up, then with this the contradiction will also vanish. But to require the greatest possible subjective passion, to the point of hating father and mother, and then to put this together with an historical knowledge, which at its maximum can only be an approximation—that is the contradiction.[38]

Another form of dialectical contradiction is that not only is the historical fact an objective uncertainty, but it

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[38]Ibid., p. 510.

is a fact whose nature is absurd. The historical assertion that God came into being at a specific moment in time as a man, Jesus Christ, is the Absolute Paradox. It seems to be a confusion of categories, a confusion of the temporal and eternal, the infinite and finite. Chrsitianity demands not only faith in an objective uncertainty, but in an objective absurdity.

> The dialectical contradiction that the historical fact here in question is not a simple historical fact, but is constituted by that which only against its nature can become historical, hence by virtue of the absurd.[39]

Thus the one who confronts Christianity experiences a dialectical tension. On the subjective side there is a desire to find eternal happiness, and that desire is intensified by the fact that Christianity promises to bestow eternal happiness. On the objective side, however, there is only uncertainty and absurdity. In light of this we ask, how then does one become a Christian?

Kierkegaard defined becoming a Christian as follows:

> The decision lies in the subject. The appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness which is specifically different from all other inwardness. The thing of being a Christian is not determined by the what of Christianity but by the how of the Christian. This how can only correspond with one thing, the absolute paradox. There is therefore no vague talk to the effect that being a Christian is to accept, and to accept, and to accept, and to accept quite differently, to appropriate, to believe, to appropriate by faith quite differently (all of them purely rhetorical and fictitious definitions); but

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[39] Ibid., p. 512.

> to believe is specifically different from all other appropriation and inwardness. Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree.[40]

This definition of faith consists of two basic aspects. On one hand there is the existential self with passionate existential pathos, and on the other hand, there is the divine revelation—the Absolute Paradox. The individual who seeks eternal happiness is possessed by a passion to find it. When this individual is told that Christianity will bestow this eternal happiness upon him, his passion is aroused. When he confronts Christianity, however, there is uncertainty and absurdity. The divine revelation intensifies the passion because of its uncertainty and offense. The divine revelation is the occasion for the existential passion. It causes faith to reach its most passionate heights, because human existence comes into contact with divine revelation. The problem of becoming a Christian could not arise if man did not come within the sphere of influence of divine revelation or if this revelation did not appear within the horizon of human experience.

Divine revelation appears as an historical fact, but it appears incognito. It appears as something absurd, offensive, and uncertain. Because Jesus is the incognito of God, this historical fact exerts a stimulus upon our inner existence. God brings us into a situation in which we meet with God in

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[40]Ibid., p. 540.

the person of Christ. This situation is not under our control; it controls us. It is established by God. It requires that we confront it and demands that we choose an existential position with respect to it. Unbelievers reject it as an offense and retain their sovereignty. Believers accept it. Denying themselves, they seek their salvation, the truth of their being outside themselves. To reject it is to remain in a state of inauthentic existence which is sin. The truth of faith consists of the fact that one commits himself, risks his eternal happiness, for a truth he does not possess, but which is posited by the commitment itself.

> The existing individual who chooses to pursue the objective way enters upon the entire approximation-process by which it is proposed to bring God to light objectively. But this is in all eternity impossible, because God is a subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness. The existing individual who chooses the subjective way apprehends instantly the entire dialectical difficulty involved in having to use some time, perhaps a long time, in finding God objectively; and he feels this dialectical difficulty in all its painfulness, because every moment is wasted in which he does not have God. That very instant he has God, not by virtue of any objective deliberation, but by virtue of the infinite passion of inward-ness.[41]

Thus becoming a Christian is based upon the fact that God creates the condition for faith to occur. The power to convert lies in the Paradox. There is no way to become a Christian apart from the condition God created. From the

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[41]Ibid., pp. 178-179.

perspective of human reason, there is no logically compelling reason to become a Christian. The revelation of the Paradox has the power to intensify the subjectivity of the individual, the inwardness, the passion for eternal happiness. It is confrontation with the Absolute Paradox that intensifies inward passion to its highest, and it is this inward passion that ultimately serves as the basis for becoming a Christian.

> It becomes clear rather that the only way in which an existing individual comes into relation with God, is when the dialectical contradiction brings his passion to the point of despair, and helps him to embrace God with the "category of despair" (faith). [42]

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[42] Ibid., p. 179.

CHAPTER 7

AN EVALUATION OF KIERKEGAARD'S CHRISTIANITY

Having now covered the basic areas of Kierkegaard's thought in relation to Christianity, I shall now offer several observations in an attempt to define and evaluate Kierkegaard's Christianity.

First of all, let us examine the significance of faith upon existence in Kierkegaard's thought. Kierkegaard dealt with an important aspect of life which I believe has been somewhat ignored by many philosophers, theologians, and Christian ministers. That aspect is our actual existence, i.e., having aspirations, facing possibilities, experiencing tension between finite and infinite aspects, the process of choosing, and the uncertainty and the anxiety that are involved with these factors.

There are times when Kierkegaard, in his own peculiar way, seemed to see much deeper into life than many of his more philosophically orthodox opponents. At times he seemed to have a more profound understanding of human experience than other philosophers have had.

> From one point of view this factor of his philosophy constitutes its weakness. That is to say, his thought may appear too subjective, too hostile to objectivity. In fact, some would refuse it the name of philosophy at all. But from another point of view the intensely personal character of

> Kierkegaard's thought constitutes its strength. For it gives to his writing a degree of seriousness and depth which sets it entirely outside the scope of philosophy as a game or as an academic pastime for those who have the requisite aptitude and inclination.[43]

Kierkegaard's philosophy was a lived philosophy, as it were, a philosophy that dealt with the problems of our actual existence.

Kierkegaard's concern with our actual existence is manifested in his view of faith. Faith is to have a transforming effect upon the existence of the individual. Kierkegaard was disgusted with the cold, dead Christian orthodoxy of his day. He was disgusted with Christendom which had turned Christianity into a matter of course. Kierkegaard believed that if faith is to be of any value, then it ought to generate a significant influence upon the individual's life. Faith is to be rooted in the "inner man" and not to be merely an external relationship to an institution.

> Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness.[44]

In Kierkegaard's concept of existence, religious faith is not merely an aspect of existence, a comforting notion

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[43]Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, VII, Part II (Garden City: Image Books, 1963), p. 107.

[44]Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 33.

when convenient, or a crutch in a time of need. Faith and existence are essentially related. Faith is the level of existence in which one can become an authentic individual. It is faith that determines the quality of existence. In short, if religious faith is worth having, then it ought to have a significant effect upon existence.

Secondly, we can observe in Kierkegaard's thought an emphasis on our egocentric predicament. We desire to find eternal truth, but when we seek for it we must face uncertainty. By the power of human reason there is simply no way to have a certain knowledge of eternal truth.

Kierkegaard stressed the transcendence of God in a most radical way. The transcendence of God is not spatial but existential. It describes the absolute difference between God and man, a difference of such character that God cannot be known by any rational, objective, or empirical way. Thus Kierkegaard espoused an absolute dichotomy between knowledge and faith. Human reason can never fathom truth about God unless aided by God. Jerry Gill wrote of this,

> One simply cannot, according to Kierkegaard, expect pure, speculative reason to perform beyond its inherent limitations. By means of human reason there is no way to obtain knowledge of reality, nor to break out of the limitations of the egocentric predicament.[45]

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[45]Jerry H. Gill, "Kant, Kierkegaard, and Religious Knowledge," in Essays on Kierkegaard, p. 65.

Thirdly, we can observe in Kierkegaard's thought a well-developed concept of original sin. From his dialectic of existence, it is clear that human beings are not what they should be from God's perspective. They are not in an harmonious state of existence, and they cannot be until they reach the Christian stage of existence. In the dialectic of existence, the individual has an inauthentic existence until he reaches the stage of Christianity, and inauthentic existence is sin. If one is to become a Christian, there must be despair—awareness of this inauthentic existence. Despair is the driving force behind the movement to Christiantiy, or as Kierkegaard put it, "it is my sincere conviction that it is a man's true salvation to despair."[46]

Fourthly, Kierkegaard's Christianity contains a well-developed concept of grace. By grace I mean that Christian faith cannot come about without the activity of God. If human beings are unable to break out of their egocentric predicament, then in order to have knowledge of God, God must take the initiative and do something that enables human beings to possess this knowledge. The Incarnation is the divine revelation. This revelation is an objective uncertainty and paradoxical, so how is one able to believe? The answer is in the Absolute Paradox itself. The Absolute Paradox has the

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[46]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, p. 225.

power to arouse inner passion to its highest. It has the power to draw human beings. Thus it is God who creates the condition of faith.

> Now if the learner is to acquire the Truth, the Teacher must bring it to him; and not only so, but he must also give him the condition necessary for understanding it.[47]

In Kierkegaard's thought there is a gulf between God and the human race. Human reason is not able to take one across that gulf, but God is able to take one across. He does this by directing his revelation at the individual's subjectivity. He can intensify the passion of the one who seeks eternal happiness by confronting him with the Paradox. It is very clear that becoming a Christian is a matter of grace, and grace cannot be put into a nice little logical system.

There are many more observations that could be made of Kierkegaard's Christianity. I have chosen these because I believe they go together to form a consistent answer to the question of how one becomes a Christian. Kierkegaard assumed the truth of Christianity in his writing, and since the purpose of this evaluation is to determine the adequacy of Kierkegaard's Christianity and not Christianity itself, I grant him that assumption.

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[47]Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, trans. by David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 17.

Kierkegaard deals with sin, not as in a systematic theology, but as it relates to existence. Sin is inauthentic existence. Kierkegaard's view of existence implies that the human race is existentially separated from God. If the human race is separated from God in this way, then we have an egocentric predicament. The human race may seek for eternal truth, but it is not to be found. The acquisition of such truth requires that God must reveal it, and this he did in Christ. If human beings do not have the truth, however, then how would they recognize it when they saw it? From the point of view of an observer, the individual would not recognize it. Kierkegaard pointed out this fact in the paradoxical and uncertain nature of Christianity's claims. The individual's natural conceptions are offended, and there is no way to establish the truthfulness of Christianity. Thus if one is to have knowledge of the eternal truth, he must experience it. This is why Christianity is subjective; it requires that one be in the truth in order to know the truth. How is one to experience this, however, since there is objective uncertainty and absurdity? The force that leads one to become a Christian is inwardness—a condition that God must create, and, as Kierkegaard asserted, has created in the revelation of the Paradox which acts upon one's subjectivity yielding inwardness. Grace is necessary, grace in which God creates the condition for faith. Thus in Kierkegaard's scheme, sin or

Objections

c existence implies existential separation which
lits in an egocentric predicament which requires that God create the condition for faith.

The purpose of this study was to determine the adequacy of Kierkegaard's Christianity. By this I meant an evaluation of his answer to the question he posed: How does one become a Christian? In asserting that Kierkegaard's treatment of this question was consistent, I also am asserting that he answered the question accurately. In my opinion, Kierkegaard's description of how one becomes a Christian is very adequate.

Having reached the above conclusion, I shall deal with two basic objections to Kierkegaard's Christian thought. I shall not discuss the opinion that Kierkegaard had no regard for the objectivity of truth because I have done so already.

First of all, Kierkegaard has been accused of having no justification for Christianity.

> True Christian faith rests on content. It is not a vague thing which takes the place of real understanding, nor is it the strength of belief which is of value. The true basis for faith is not the faith itself, but the work which Christ finished on the cross.[48]

This statement, which was made as a criticism of Kierkegaard, implies that Christianity's justification resides in historical evidence; hence, Kierkegaard had no justification for Christianity.

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[48]Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 133.

There are two points that need to be kept in mind: (1) Kierkegaard was concerned with how one becomes a Christian; (2) Kierkegaard assumed the truthfulness of Christianity in his writings. Kierkegaard's purpose was not to write an apologetic for Christianity; therefore, it is not legitimate to criticize him for something he was not dealing with. There is a big difference between how someone becomes a Christian and why one believes Christianity is true.

The latter issue was not even relevant for Kierkegaard. He was writing to a society that was a professing Christian society. Christendom's problem was not a failure to accept Christianity as true but a failure to relate to Christianity in existence. If Kierkegaard had been addressing an audience that was not sympathetic to Christianity, perhaps he would have resorted to some sort of apologetic in dealing with specific objections. As Kierkegaard pointed out, however, objective proofs do not give certainty. Christianity cannot be proven, and individuals are not transformed on the basis of an approximation. Christian transformation results from a desire to find eternal happiness, a confrontation with the Absolute Paradox, and experiencing inner passion. The element of grace—God's activity—is essential, and yet this cannot be demonstrated in a nice logical system. Therefore it is my contention that Kierkegaard would not have used the standard proofs-for-Christianity type of apologetic to justify

Christianity simply because Christianity cannot be justified in this way. Having attended a Bible college and conservative seminary, my observation of many Christians is that practically none of them became Christians on the basis of objective proofs, but on the basis of an inner conviction occasioned by hearing the gospel.

If Kierkegaard had attempted to deal with a group unsympathetic to Christianity, I believe he would have employed the same maieutic strategy that he used with Christendom. He would have been concerned that the individual confront Christianity. God must give the condition for faith, but it is necessary that the individual confront the Absolute Paradox.

Thus the objection that Kierkegaard had no justification for Christianity is weak for two reasons. First, he wrote a polemic and not an apologetic; and secondly, justification for Christianity on objective grounds is weak in itself; thus, Kierkegaard placed a strong emphasis on the power of God rather than the rational sufficiency of man. This view is consistent with the Christian notion that human beings are fallen.

The second objection which is very much related to the first is that construing the Incarnation as an absurdity is not commensurate with faith.

> But if we are told that although a belief is both unintelligible and self-contradictory, we shall

> see that it is absolutely true and certain if we commit ourselves to it passionately enough, we can only question whether the proposer knows what he is asking of us. The law of contradiction is not a principle that is valid in some cases and not in others . . . .[49]

> Kierkegaard frequently speaks of faith, as he understands it, as a God-relationship. The propriety of this description is questionable at least. It seems rather to be a self-relationship in which the believer, through the repulsion of the paradox, is driven back into himself . . . .[50]

This objection fails to take into account that individuals are existentially separated from God; they are not rationally sufficient to obtain the knowledge of eternal truth on their own. In Kierkegaard's scheme people do not become Christians on their own terms, but on God's. God creates the condition for faith by "driving the individual back into himself" as Murphy said. The Paradox heightens the individual's subjectivity precisely because it does offend. One is driven back into himself and into despair, because he cannot fathom eternal truth by his own mental ability. Although many people will not choose to believe, the point is that if anyone is to believe, this condition is necessary for faith. It is the Paradox that intensifies the passion necessary for faith. An analogy to this can be seen

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[49]Brand Blanshard, "Kierkegaard on Faith," in Essays on Kierkegaard, p. 119.

[50]Arthur Murphy, "Kierkegaard's Subjectivity," in Essays on Kierkegaard, p. 99.

in Luther's attacks on works righteousness. As long as the individual clings to his moral sufficiency, he is not in a condition for faith to occur. It is only when he despairs of his inability that he can appropriate the grace of God. Thus the Paradox guards against the idea that one can become a Christian on his own terms. The Paradox can only be apprehended by faith. The idea of the Incarnation as the Absolute Paradox fits right in with the idea of the human race being existentially separated from God and in need of God's aid if they are to bridge the gulf.

By way of summary, Kierkegaard's way of truth, the way in which one becomes a Christian, is derived from his assumption that the human race is existentially separated from God, and as a result, existence is inauthentic. The goal of Christianity is transformation from inauthentic existence to authentic existence, a level of existence in which the self achieves harmony through a relationship to God. God has established the direction—Christ. God has set forth the terms—faith. God himself creates the condition—inwardness.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Kierkegaard certainly has not been without his share of criticism. One source of criticism that is of special interest to me is that which has come from Christians. It has been my observation that Kierkegaard has received a great deal of criticism from Christians. The particular type of Christianity that I have in mind is the type which labels itself as "conservative" or "evangelical." In my opinion he has not been received well by this group.

This type of Christianity is of special interest to me because I spent five years in conservative Christian schools, and my background is in this environment. This type of Christianity is very biblically oriented for the derivation of its theology, and there is a strong emphasis on sin and separation, inner conviction and transformation, grace and faith. I find the fact that Kierkegaard has not been received well somewhat strange. Kierkegaard did not express himself in the manner of a systematic theologian; he applied Christianity more in a psychological context, but nevertheless, I find basically the same emphasis in Kierkegaard's thought as in conservative Christianity. The themes of sin and separation, inner conviction and transformation, grace and faith are all present in Kierkegaard's thought. Perhaps

he did not express them in the same way, and perhaps his understanding of them was somewhat different, but nevertheless, Kierkegaard was devoted to Christ and took biblical themes very seriously. Kierkegaard wrote a great deal of devotional material as well as polemical, and his devotion to Christ seemed beyond question. My point in mentioning this is not to put a label on Kierkegaard but to express my opinion that Kierkegaard should be received as a very astute Christian thinker, a friend of the faith and not a foe.

Perhaps the reason that Kierkegaard has not been received well is because he dealt with an area that is difficult and somewhat uncomfortable to many. That area is our actual existence. This is the realm of aspirations, possibilities, choices, uncertainty, tension, and despair. It is not easily placed into a nice logical system. As Kierkegaard pointed out, religious faith does not conform to a logical system either. It involves the existing individual in his existence and thus does not lend itself to rational, objective explanations. The fact that Kierkegaard called attention to this was bound to cause much reaction.

But if this is Kierkegaard's cause for criticism, then it is also his cause for praise. I believe that Kierkegaard's most significant contribution to Christianity is the fact that he did focus attention upon existence. He dealt with Christianity as it is encountered on the level of existence

and not as it might be ideally expressed by those who are already in the faith. This is why the pseudonomous authorship of Climacus in the Postscript is so significant. An attempt is made to present Christianity from the would-be believer's perspective.

Kierkegaard desired a Christianity that had an effect upon one's existence, a Christianity that transformed one's existence, a Christianity that was real. In his attempt to present such a Christianity, however, Kierkegaard did not reduce Christianity to a goal that could be reached by the rational abilities of man. He opposed the idea of rational sufficiency in relation to faith and promoted the necessity of God's help, the necessity of something outside of the individual. In the final analysis could any Christian ask for more?

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VITA

Christopher A. Hardeman was born in Union City, Indiana on March 19, 1948. He grew up near Dayton, Ohio and graduated from Trotwood Madison High School in June 1966. After graduation from high school, he served three years in the United States Army which included tours of duty in Vietnam and West Germany.

The author entered Columbia Bible College in September 1971. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Biblical Studies, he entered Covenant Theological Seminary and earned a Master of Arts degree in Biblical Studies. He entered the Graduate School of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in September 1976.

The author has served in the pastoral ministry and has been the guest speaker in several churches. After graduation Mr. Hardeman will pursue the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Philosophy, his ultimate goal being a teaching position at a church college or seminary.

He is married to the former Anita Bacon of Knoxville and is the father of two sons, Chad and Joshua.