

# Adult Catechism

February 3, 2019

Søren Kierkegaard

# **From the Litany of Saints**

For Lancelot Andrewes, John Wesley, Charles Simeon, Martin Johnson, Andrew Unger, Mary Baker, Joy Unger, Rob Lewis, and Søren Kierkegaard, and for all who preach the word of God:

**Thanks be to God.**

# A Prayer of Kierkegaard

Father in heaven! Thou hast loved us first; let us never forget that Thou art love so that this sure conviction may triumph in our hearts over the seduction of the world, over the disquietude of the soul, over our anxiety for the future, over our fright of the past, over the distress of the moment. But grant also that this conviction may discipline our soul so that our heart remains faithful and sincere in the love that we bear to all those whom Thou hast commanded us to love as we love ourselves.

# A Prayer of Kierkegaard

Father in heaven! Thou hast loved us first; let us never forget that Thou art love so that this sure conviction may **triumph in our hearts** over the seduction of the world, over the disquietude of the soul, over our anxiety for the future, over our fright of the past, over the distress of the moment. But grant also that this conviction may **discipline our soul** so that our heart remains faithful and sincere in the love that we bear to all those whom Thou hast commanded us to love as we love ourselves.

Two effects of the **conviction** that God is love:

- Our wellbeing and happiness (eternal happiness)
- Our love of others

In each case, through a process of **edification** by contemplating the **thought**.

# Kierkegaard as an Existentialist?

Jean-Paul Sartre in *Existentialism is a Humanism*:

In human beings, “Existence precedes essence.”  
That is, human beings choose our own nature.  
Prior to choosing our nature, we are without a  
nature. Human nature is whatever we make it.

# Kierkegaard's view of human nature

The [human] self is a synthesis of the **temporal and the eternal**, the **finite and the infinite**, of **necessity and freedom**, and cannot choose itself “in its eternal validity” without surrendering to “**the Power that posited it**” (God). Furthermore, it cannot do even that without God's help.

So, Kierkegaard is not an existentialist.

# Two Tracks of K's Missionary Writings

- The “aesthetic” works (attributed to pseudonyms)

Johannes the Seducer (in *Either/Or*)

Johannes de Silentio (*Fear and Trembling*)

“A” and Judge William (*Either/Or*)

Constantine Constantius (*Repetition*)

Vigilius Haufniensis (*The Concept of Anxiety*)

Hilarius Bookbinder (compiler of *Stages on Life's Way*)

Frater Taciturnus (one of the parts of *Stages on Life's Way*)

Johannes Climacus (*Philosoph Fragments & Concluding Unscientific Postscript*)

Johannes Anti-Climacus (*Sickness Unto Death and Practice in Christianity*)

# Two Tracks of K's Missionary Writings

The “religious” works (attributed to Kierkegaard)

—*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*

—*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*

—*Christian Discourses*

—*For Self-Examination, Judge for Yourselves!*

—*Works of Love*

—*Book on Adler*

Kierkegaard is a missionary,  
a specialist in explosive thoughts.

“Like the unfortunate madman who says he’ll climb down into Dovrefjell to blow up the whole world **with a syllogism**, what was needed was someone who could, to everyone’s knowledge, climb really deep down into the whole world of **mediation, mediocrity, and spiritlessness** to plant there, for all to see, the explosive either/or.”





# A Peculiar Mission: Re-introducing Christianity to Christendom

- The “monstrous illusion” that prevents people from taking Christianity seriously (the **mediation**, **mediocrity**, and **spiritlessness**)
- **First**, explode the illusion (indirect communication, the “aesthetic” pseudonymous works)
- **Second**, train in Christianity (direct communication, the “religious” signed works)

# The goal of “preaching”

- To enable the “hearer” to **appropriate to her or his living** the distinctive Christian conceptual framework.
- To be **shaped in character** by the Christian concepts.
- To **understand ourselves emotionally** in Christian terms (rejoicing, lamenting, fearing, hoping, etc.)

These are three ways of saying the same thing.

Two devices of “preaching”

“Poetry” (art)

“Dialectic” (rigorous thinking)

Kierkegaard: a “poet-dialectician”

The task of becoming a Christian is “pathetic-dialectic”

# The word ‘dialectical’

- From *dia* (through) + *logizesthai* (think)
- Dialogue: thought that “travels” (progresses) through exchange of thoughts

Having to do with logic, conceptual thought

Involving contradiction (say, by a discussion partner who offers an objection)

# Choice

Freedom and necessity, Temporal and eternal

Deliberation & choice (“weighing” options, ‘libra’ = a balance, a pair of scales) express freedom, are bounded by “necessity,” and take into consideration the temporal and the eternal. For a human being, the eternal properly has the “overweight.” But in Christendom, many people have “forgotten what it means to exist,” and so their choices are made entirely in terms of the temporal.

## Example of Kierkegaard's "Poetics"

When the well-to-do person is riding comfortably in his carriage on a dark but starlit night and has the lanterns lit — well, then he feels safe and fears no difficulty; he himself is carrying along the light, and it is not dark right around him. But just because he has the lanterns lit and has a strong light close by, he cannot see the stars at all. His lanterns darken the stars, which the poor peasant, who drives without lanterns, can see gloriously in the dark but starlit night.

Continued. . .

The deceived live this way in temporality: busily engaged with the necessities of life, they are either too busy to gain the extensive view, or in their prosperity and pleasant days they have, as it were, the lanterns lit, have everything around them and close to them so safe, so bright, so comfortable — but the extensive view is lacking, the extensive view, the view of the stars (UDVS 310).