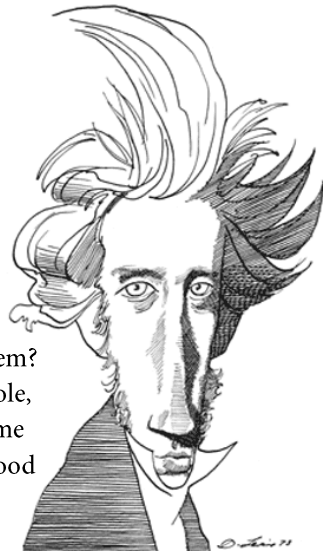


VINTAGE Saints & Sinners

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)



1.

from his *Journal*, at age 22:

What I really lack is to be clear in my mind **what I am to do, not what I am to know**, except in so far as a certain understanding must precede every action. The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes me to do. The thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die.

What would be the use of discovering so-called objective truth, of working through all the systems of philosophy and of being able, if required, to review them all and show up the inconsistencies within each system? What good would it do me to be able to develop a theory of the state and combine all the details into a single whole, and so construct a world in which I did not live, but only held up to the view of others? What good would it do me to be able to explain the meaning of Christianity if it had no deeper significance for me and for my life? What good would it do me if truth stood before me, cold and naked, not caring whether I recognized her or not---and produced in me a shudder of fear, rather than a trusting devotion?

I certainly do not deny that I still recognize an imperative of understanding and that through it one can work upon men, but it must be taken up into my life. That is what I now recognize as the most important thing.” {*The Prayers of Kierkegaard*, 129-130}

2.

It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression “follower.” He never asks for admirers, worshippers, or adherents. No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching but followers of a life Christ is looking for. Christ understood that being a “disciple” was in innermost and deepest harmony with what he said about himself. Christ claimed to be the way and the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6). For this reason, he could never be satisfied with adherents who accepted his teaching – especially with those who in their lives ignored it or let things take their usual course. His whole life on earth, from beginning to end, was destined solely to have followers and to make admirers impossible.

Christ came into the world with the purpose of saving, not instructing it. At the same time – as is implied in his saving work – he came to be the pattern, to leave footprints for the person who would join him, who would become a follower. This is why Christ was born and lived and died in lowliness. It is absolutely impossible for anyone to sneak away from the Pattern with excuse and evasion on the basis that It, after all, possessed earthly and worldly advantages that he did not have. In that sense, to admire Christ is the false invention of a later age, aided by the presumption of “loftiness.” No, there is absolutely nothing to admire in Jesus, unless you want to admire poverty, misery, and contempt.

What then, is the difference between an admirer and a follower? A follower is or strives to be what he admires. An admirer, however, keeps himself personally detached. He fails to see that what is admired involves a claim upon him, and thus he fails to be or strive to be what he admires.

If you have any knowledge at all of human nature, who can doubt that Judas was an admirer of Christ! And we know that Christ at the beginning of his work had many admirers. Judas was precisely such an admirer and thus later became a traitor. It is not hard to imagine that those who only admire the truth will, when danger appears, become traitors. The admirer is infatuated with the false security of greatness; but if there is any inconvenience or trouble, he pulls back. Admiring the truth, instead of following it, is just as dubious a fire as the fire of erotic love, which at the turn of the hand can be changed into exactly the opposite, to hate, jealousy, and revenge....

3.

Imagine a lover who has received a letter from his beloved—I assume that God’s word is just as precious to you as this letter is to the lover. I assume that you read and think you ought to read God’s word in the same way that the lover reads this letter....When you read God’s Word, in everything you read, continually say to yourself: **It is I to whom it is speaking, it is I about whom it is speaking**—this is earnestness, precisely this is earnestness. Not a single one of those to whom the cause of Christianity in the higher sense has been entrusted forgot to urge this again and again as most crucial, as unconditionally the condition if you are to come to see

yourself in the mirror. Consequently, this is what you have to do; while you are reading you must incessantly say to yourself: It is I to whom it is speaking, it is I about whom it is speaking. The history of Christendom, from generation to generation, became a story of steadily scaling down the price of what it is to be a Christian... The imitation of Christ—this has been completely abolished, long, long ago consigned to oblivion.



Prayers of Kierkegaard

4.

Father in Heaven! You have loved us first, help us never to forget that You are love so that this sure conviction might triumph in our hearts over the seduction of the world, over the inquietude of the soul, over the anxiety for the future, over the fright of the past, over the distress of the moment. But grant also that this conviction might discipline our soul so that our heart might remain faithful and sincere in the love which we bear to all those whom You have commanded us to love as we love ourselves.

You have loved us first, O God, alas! We speak of it in terms of history as if You have only loved us first and a single time, rather than that without ceasing You have loved us first many times and every day and our whole life through. When we wake up in the morning and turn our soul toward You—You are the first—You have loved us first; if I rise at dawn and at the same time turn my soul toward You in prayer, You are there ahead of me, You have loved me first. When I withdraw from the distractions of the day and turn my soul toward You, You are the first and thus forever. And yet we always speak ungratefully as if You have loved us first only once.

5.

Father in Heaven! We know indeed that seeking is never without its promise, how then can we fail to seek You, the author of all promises and the giver of all good gifts! We know well that the seeker does not always have to wander far afield since the more sacred the object of his search, the nearer it is to him; and if he seeks You, O God, You are of all things the most near....

6.

Father in Heaven! What are we without You! What is all that we know, vast accumulation though it be, but a chipped fragment if we do not know You! What is all our striving, could it ever encompass a world, but a half-finished work if we do not know You: You are the One, who is one thing and who is all!

So may You give to the intellect, wisdom to comprehend the one thing; to the heart, sincerity to receive this understanding; to the will, purity that wills only one thing. In prosperity may You grant perseverance to will one thing; amid distractions, collectedness to will one thing; in suffering, patience to will one thing. You that gives both the beginning and the completion, may You early, at the dawn of the day, give to the young the resolution to will one thing. As the day wanes, may You give to the old a renewed remembrance of their first resolution, that the first may be like the last, the last like the first, in possession of a life that has willed only one thing...

You that gives both the beginning and the completion, give your victory in the day of need so that what neither our burning wish nor our determined resolution may attain to, may be granted unto us in the sorrowing of repentance: to will only one thing.

Sources: The Prayers of Kierkegaard, edited by Perry D. Lefevre. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

Practice in Christianity Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. | *For Self-Examination* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being & walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it. But by sitting still the more one sits still, the closer one comes to feeling ill. Thus if one just keeps on walking, everything will be all right.

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