

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

No one longs to be away from the noise and clamor of the moment in order to find the stillness in which God dwells. While one person admires another and admires him because he is just like all the rest, no one longs for the solitude in which one worships God. No one in longing for the standard of eternity rejects this cheap exemption from the highest!

If you have never been solitary, then neither have you discovered that God is.

But here in temporality, in the world's appalling prodigality with human beings, here number tempts, here counting is tempting, to count oneself along in the crowd; here one easily becomes dizzy with round numbers. Yes, here in temporality perhaps no single individual will ever succeed—even if he willed the good, he will never succeed in splitting up the crowd. But eternity can do it; eternity takes hold of each one separately with the strong arms of conscience, encircles him as the single individual, sets him apart with his conscience.

Here in temporality the conscience already wants to make each one separately into the single individual, but here in temporality, in the restlessness, in the noise, in the crush, in the crowd, in the jungle of evasions, alas, yes, here even the terrible thing happens that someone completely deafens his conscience — *his* conscience, since he cannot get rid of it; it still is his or, rather, he belongs to it.

To relate to God is precisely to have conscience. Thus a person could not have anything on his conscience if God did not exist, because the relationship between the individual and God, the God-relationship, is the conscience.

What is conscience? In the conscience it is God who looks at a person; so now in everything the person must look at him. This is how God brings us up.

But in Christendom an attempt has been made to eliminate conscience by introducing atonement in the following manner: You have a God who has atoned — now you may really enjoy life. This is the greatest possible relapse.

I thought that the very beginning of the test to become and to be a Christian is to become so turned inward that it seems as if all others do not exist at all for a person, so turned inward that one is quite literally alone in the whole world, alone before God, alone with Holy Scripture as a guide, alone with the prototype before one's eyes.

No, for the poor the gospel is the good news that to be unfortunate in this world (in such a way that one is abandoned by human sympathy, and the worldly zest for life even cruelly tries to make one's misfortune into guilt) is a sign of the God-relationship, that these poor from whom the generation divorces itself even more cruelly by making it a matter of their own guilt—that the good news is precisely for them.

Here the word 'poor' does not mean simply poverty but all who suffer, are unfortunate, wretched, wronged, crippled, lame, leprous, demonic.

Let us speak of a whole life of sufferings, or of those whom nature has wronged from the very beginning, as we humans are tempted to say, those to whom useless sufferings have been assigned from the very beginning—to be a burden to others and almost a burden to themselves—yes, worse yet, to be almost an innate objection to the goodness of Governance.

O you suffering one, you who seem to have been abandoned by the race you belong to, alone in the world—you still have not been abandoned by the God who created you. His intimacy surrounds you everywhere, it is offered to you at every moment.

You are suffering. Alas, to whom shall a person flee but to God? O, but here it comes: the more you become involved with God, the more certain is the suffering.

Because you are a sufferer, therefore God loves you. Because you love God, therefore you must suffer. What God wants is that you love him, and this means that you will, humanly speaking, come to suffer frightfully—just because you have involved yourself with God.

For according to the New Testament the relationship is thus: the pagan will not suffer at all; the Jew will endure a few years of it but will nevertheless be victorious in this world and enjoy this life; the Christian will suffer all his life.

Christianity does indeed proclaim itself to be comfort, cure, and healing—that being so, people turn to it as they turn to a friend in need, thank it as they thank a helper, because by the help of it or by its help they believe they will be able to bear the suffering under which they sigh. And then—then the very opposite happens. They go to the Word to seek help—and then come to suffer on account of the Word. . . . What is Christianity, then, and what is it good for? People seek help from it, are willing to thank it beyond measure, and then the very opposite happens, and they come to suffer on account of it—so there really seems to be nothing for which to give thanks. Now the understanding is brought to a halt at the possibility of offense. The help looks like a torment, the relief a burden; everyone who stands outside must say: He must be mad to expose himself to all that—and the sufferer believed that he was going to be helped.

[God] wills not to be transformed by human beings into a cozy—a human god: he wills to transform human beings, and he wills it out of love.

Now Christianity really begins. From this the transition is to be made to loving God or to be remade into likeness with God. And thus begins what I characterize in this way: God must make you unhappy, humanly speaking, if he is to love you and you are to love him.

There is, namely, an infinite chasmic difference between God and man, and therefore it became clear in the situation of contemporaneity that to become a Christian (to be transformed into likeness with God) is, humanly speaking, an even greater torment and misery and pain than the greatest human torment, and in addition a crime in the eyes of one's contemporaries.

Look at him, the abased one! And when this sight so grips you that you are ready for every suffering with him, then, yes, then I would say to you: You *shall* suffer with him. And to speak this way is blessed.