

**Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), *Practice in Christianity***

Christendom has abolished Christianity without really knowing it itself. As a result, if something must be done, one must attempt again to introduce Christianity into Christendom.

Rather than that every generation must begin from the beginning with Christ and then set forth his life as the paradigm, Christendom has taken the liberty of construing the whole thing altogether historically, of beginning with letting him be dead—and then one can triumph!

[Christ] does not want to be judged humanly by the results of his life, that is, he is and wants to be the sign of offense and the object of faith; to judge him according to the results of his life is blasphemy. As God, his life, that he lived and has lived, is infinitely more decisive than all the results of it in history.

What ungodly thoughtlessness that makes sacred history into profane history, Christ into a human being! Can one, then, come to know something of Jesus Christ from history? By no means. Jesus Christ is the object of faith: one must either believe in him or be offended; for to “know” simply means that it is not about him. Thus history can indeed richly communicate knowledge, but knowledge annihilates Jesus Christ.

History you can read and hear about as about the past; here you can, if it so pleases you, judge by the outcome. But Christ’s life on earth is not a past; it did not wait at the time, eighteen hundred years ago, and does not wait now for the assurance of any outcome. . . . His life on earth accompanies the human race and accompanies each particular generation as the eternal history; his life on earth has the eternal contemporaneity.

Thus every human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living—and then with one more, with Christ’s life upon earth, for Christ’s life upon earth, the sacred history, stands alone by itself, outside history.

If you cannot prevail upon yourself to become a Christian in the situation of contemporaneity with him, or if he cannot move you and draw you into the situation of contemporaneity, then you will never become a Christian. You can honor, praise, thank, and reward with all earthly goods the person who deludes you into thinking that you are nevertheless a Christian—he is deceiving you.

Just as the concept “faith” is an altogether distinctively Christian term, so in turn is “offense” an altogether distinctively Christian term relating to faith. The possibility of offense is the crossroad, or it is like standing at the crossroad. From the possibility of offense, one turns either to offense or to faith, but one never comes to faith except from the possibility of offense. Essentially offense is related to the composite of God and man, or to the God-man.

The God-man is not the union of God and man—such terminology is a profound optical illusion. The God-man is the unity of God and an individual human being. . . . Offense in the strictest sense, therefore, relates to the God-man and has two forms. It is either in relation to the loftiness that one is offended, that an individual human being claims to be God, acts or speaks in a manner

that manifests God, or the offense is in relation to the lowliness, that the one who is God is this lowly human being, suffering as a lowly human being. . . . In the one case the qualification “man” is presupposed and the offense is at the qualification “God”; in the second case, the qualification “God” is presupposed and the offense is at the qualification “man.” The God-man is the paradox, absolutely the paradox. Therefore, it is altogether certain that the understanding must come to a standstill on it.

[The first form of offense] “*Go tell John what you have seen and heard. . . . And blessed is he who is not offended at me* (Matt 11:2-6).” The miracle can demonstrate nothing, for if you do not believe him to be who he says he is, then you deny the miracle. The miracle can make you aware—now you are in the tension, and it depends upon what you choose, offense or faith; it is your heart that must be disclosed.

Pay attention to the situation of contemporaneity; if you do not pay attention to that, then you deceive yourself into a delusion. The point is that in Christendom one has only a fantasy picture of Christ, a fantasy God-picture, directly related to the performing of miracles. But this is an untruth; Christ never looked like that.

[The second form of offense] is in relation to lowliness, that he, the loftily exalted one, the Father’s only begotten Son, that he should suffer in this manner, that he should be surrendered powerless into the hands of his enemies. . . . What causes Peter to be quite besides himself, what hits him like a stroke, is that he had believed that Christ was the Father’s only begotten Son. That a human being falls into the power of his enemies, and then does nothing, that is human. But that the one whose almighty hand had done signs and wonders, that he now stands there powerless and paralyzed—precisely this is what brings Peter to deny him.

When we see him nailed to the cross like a criminal, we may say that never has anyone, humanly speaking, accomplished so little, and never has any cause, humanly speaking, been so lost as he and his cause are at this moment. We forget the horror, in the horror we forget “the horror”; that his enemies and evil gained power over him—well, humanly speaking, we cannot therefore say that his coming into the world was futile. But at the moment when all were offended at him, even Peter—humanly speaking, did not his whole life seem futile! He wanted to save all, literally all—and all were offended at him, literally all! . . . Ah, abysmal suffering, unfathomable to human understanding—to have to be the sign of offense in order to be the object of faith!

[Third form of offense] 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 they 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. . . . Now the understanding is brought to a halt at the possibility of offense. . . . Now the issue is: will you be offended or will you believe? If you will believe, then you push through the possibility of offense and accept Christianity on any terms. So it goes; then forget the understanding; then you say: Whether it is a help or a torment, I want only one thing, I want to belong to Christ, I want to be a Christian.