

The Religious Sphere Of Kierkegaard's Existence; A Psycho-Therapy For The Individual

¹ONWUNALI KEVIN UGOCHUKWU ²AGUZIE DECLAN .O

¹Department of Philosophy

Imo State University Owerri, Imo State. Nigeria.

+234 803 338 049 71

scholakevin@yahoo.com

²dcagu@yahoo.com

+234 816 035 9636

ABSTRACT

Our major driving force in this region is to discover, mens sana in corpore sano - a healthy mind in a healthy body. Soren Kierkegaard writes in Training in Christianity, that faith is substantiated with reality. Nonetheless, he has been accused of writing texts that have no real value to human existence, this has posed a problem to the academic texts of Kierkegaard. This paper being mindful of this problem, addresses it, discovers a healing value in the texts of Kierkegaard, revealing it meticulously and systematically and establishes the 'psycho-therapy' of faith in actuality, which finally collapses the criticisms leveled against the texts of Kierkegaard.

Keywords; Worries, Sorrows, Therapeutic

1 Introduction

The religious sphere of Kierkegaard has undauntedly revealed that Soren Aabey Kierkegaard is a superman after all. He succinctly ventilates a therapy in his academic text, *Training in Christianity*, which many have failed to see. It eludes the simple hearted and yet emancipates the visionary. There is a lot of pains, sorrows, miseries in this life, arising from no money, no good health, no good food, few good people, harse climate situations, deliberate denial of fundermental human rights, guilt of a crime committed *et cetera*. These difficulties of human endeavors make life unpleasant. The religious sphere of Kierkegaard's way of life's existence offers a psycho-therapy which is of real value to all and sundry, which this academic work has exposed.

2 The Power of Being Indifferent to Worries and Sorrows

Now why should one be indifferent to sorrows? The answer is that, one thing is absolutely too important, and that thing is, to fine forgiveness. Soren Kierkegaard in his book, *Training in Christianity*,(1972:263-264)

explains:

Well, is it for him in whom is found this true sorrow for his sin, so that the fact that all else is indifferent to him, is only the negative expression of the positive fact, that one thing that is absolutely important to him, is a mortal sickness which yet is very far from being unto death, but is precisely a sickness unto life, for life is apparent in this, that one thing is absolutely important to him, namely, to find forgiveness.

The sinful woman had become indifferent to all else, she was concerned about nothing but her sin or every other concern she had was as though it did not exist, because that one concern was absolute. Soren Kierkegaard (1972:265) writes:

And the sinful woman had become indifferent to everything, to everything temporal, earthly, worldly, to pride, honor, prosperity, the future, kindred, friends, man's judgment, and all other cares, whatever name they may have, she could have borne lightly, almost as nothing, for she was concerned absolutely about only one thing, her sin. This is what she sorrowed for and not its consequences, shame, disgrace, humiliation, no she did not mistake the sickness for the medicine.

Should one be convinced not to worry about the environment difficulties, the future, the earthly problems, borrowing a leaf from the sinful woman, would such an individual not feel better and even live better? Being concerned only with his sin? Having to sorrow for only one thing - sin, rather than sorrowing for legions of problems? If one succeeds in adopting this style of living, borrowing a leaf from the sinful woman, will one not received a mental healing? Having only one thing to worry about at a time instead of everything? Definitely, the mental stresses would be greatly minimized. Therefore, this is therapeutic in nature.

3 Forgiving Oneself: a Therapeutic Tool

We can now see that, 'to find forgiveness', is the only thing important, other problems, difficulties, sorrows are over looked. How does an individual encounter this drive of forgiveness? Well, it is through introspection, thinking from within, inwardness of thought, one arrives at the truth, of course through the ladder of faith. This process is a risk, because, it discards objective certitude. Subjectivity is hailed, objectivity is committed to the flames, thus a risk. Walter Kaufmann in his book, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, (1975:117) explaining this process more, writes:

Without risk, there is no faith and the greater the risk, the greater the faith. The more objective security, the less inwardness (for inwardness is precisely subjectivity), and the less objective security, the more profound the possible inwardness. When the paradox is paradoxical in itself, it repels the individual by virtue of its absurdity and the corresponding passion of inwardness is faith. But subjective inwardness, is the truth.

Therefore, through risk we get at inwardness, through inwardness we get at faith, through faith, we get at the truth. When we seek the face of God for forgiveness, why would God forgive us, after all we have done, after all our sins, Kierkegaard says it is because of love. Soren Kierkegaard in his book, *For Self Examination and Judge For Yourself and Three Discourses 1851*, (1994:18) writes:

When it is a question of Christ's love, the word can be taken only in one sense, the fact that, he was love, did not serve to hide what imperfection there was in him - in him the holy one, in whom there was no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, this being inevitably so, because in him there was only love, love in his heart and love only in his every word, in all his works, in his whole life, in his death, until the very last

With love, a multitude of sins are hidden. But its purest form is found in the sacrificial love of Christ.

4 The Helplessness of The Sorrowful one

Another thing we can learn from the sinful woman is what she well understood; that in relation to finding forgiveness, she herself could do nothing at all. Kierkegaard borrowed this idea of an individual's impotency to do anything to deserve salvation from the Lutheran doctrine, but he held it in a Catholic sense as is evident in his essay, *The Works of Love*. Soren Kierkegaard in his book, *Training in Christianity*,(1972:266) writes:

She did not wait before going to that house where she would find salvation. she did not wait until she felt herself worthy. No, she would thus, have remained a long time at a distance, perhaps never gone thither or entered in, she decides to go at once in her unworthiness, it is just the feeling of unworthiness, which impels her, hence the decision is to go at once, thus it is that she herself did nothing or understood that, she herself was able to do nothing.

The sinful woman understands perfectly that she herself is able to do nothing. She therefore, does not abandon herself in her expressions of the passion of self-accusation, self-torment, as though this would bring salvation nearer to her or make her more pleasing to God. No, she does nothing at all, she keeps silent, she weeps. She weeps precisely because, she perfectly understood that with respect to finding forgiveness, she herself was able to do nothing at all. What this signifies however, is something that concerns nobody but her, who perfectly understands that, she is able to do nothing at all, and Him, of whom she perfectly understands that He is absolutely able to do all. Then, she hears Him say, "Your sins, which are many are forgiven". Therefore, her many sins were forgiven her, and she goes home totally healed. This healing in forgiveness, comes with joy, peace, happiness, laughter. Orasion, agrees with Kierkegaard also that the total liberation of an individual is nonetheless beyond 'psycho-therapy', it is in God. According to Marc Orasion in his book, *Illusion and Anxiety*, (1947:68):

.... but this is of itself cannot make him discover the sense of God, which is of an order than the psychic. This is the work of grace. One can certainly refuse this grace, but in that case, it is no longer a neurosis we are dealing with. And if grace is given to all, according to St. Paul, it nevertheless remains true that, it is given in a highly singular way to each, it is in each case the one and only look God can turn on us, a personal call, an initiative ever new that causes us to be, incorporates us into the church and if we are willing to cooperate, saves us.

So, Oraison and Kierkegaard agree that in God one is finally saved. According to Oraison, clinical psychology can study only the mechanisms of the subjects, reactions, psycho-therapy can unravel abnormal processes. But for dialogue with God, for the establishing or re-establishing of their inexpressible exchange, an altogether 'suprapyschological thing' his gratuitous initiative that gives an individual a new relational dimension and enables him to recognized and name God as the subject of dialogue is necessary. This, 'suprapyschological thing' of Oraison, Soren Kierkegaard calls 'leap of faith'. whereas, Oraison says that it is grace that makes an individual have a sense of God, the sinful woman says, it is just the feeling of unworthiness. All in all, Oraison, Soren Kierkegaard, the Woman that was a sinner, agree that the Christian God and Him alone gives eternal rest.

We learn from the sinful woman, though not directly from her, but by reflecting upon our situation in comparison with ours, that we have a comfort which she has not. Soren Kierkegaard in his book, *Training in Christianity*, (1972:269) says:

Perhaps someone may be inclined to say 'yes, it was an easy thing for her to believe in the forgiveness of her sins, for she heard it pronounced by Christ's own lips that, which throughout so many centuries has been experienced by thousands upon thousands, that which through so many generations has been handed down as an experience from generation to generation, the truth that 'one word from him heals for eternity' sensed it, who heard the healing word from his own lips.

Soren Kierkegaard said in the above quotation that, the sinful woman received a healing word from Christ's own lips. It means also that the sinful woman received a psychotherapy from Christ. Christ's word went into her and healed her, beginning from her mentality (psychological composition) and of course, down to her physical constituents. This healing word from the mouth of Christ to the sinful woman is the substance of the psycho-therapeutic function of the Religious sphere of Soren Aabye Kierkegaard's existential philosophy, from which every other individual receives same healing, to the glory of God, the Father. Reason has no place here. Belief (faith) in the Son of God, does the whole miracle. Soren Kierkegaard in his book, *The Diary of Soren Kierkegaard*, (1960:165) preaching with all scholarly authority maintains that:

it is not the reason that motivates belief in the Son of God, but the other way round, belief in the Son of God constitutes the evidence. It is the very motion of infinite, and it cannot be otherwise. Reasons do not motivate conviction, conviction motivates reasons. . . Repose, absolute repose in a conviction, in faith, simply means that faith itself is the evidence, 'the witness', and conviction, the motivation.

5 Comfort of The Sorrowful in Christ

But there is another side of the story here. There is a comfort which did not exist so long as Christ lived, and which He therefore, could not offer to anyone, the comfort of his death as the atonement, as the pledge, that the sins are forgiven. This is what Soren Kierkegaard says about the comfort of the death of Jesus at the atonement of sins, Soren Kierkegaard in his book, *Training in Christianity*, (1972:270) writes:

When Christ preaches Christianity and preaches it as the pattern nobody quite keep up with, they fall away even the Apostles. But then, he dies. And His death alters everything infinitely. Not that his death abolished the fact that at the same time, he is the pattern, no, but his death becomes the infinite guarantee, with which the striver stands out, assurance that infinite satisfaction has been made, that to the doubtful and disheartened, there is tendered the strongest pledge - impossible to find anything more reliable - that Christ died to save him, that Christ's death is the atonement and satisfaction. This comfort the sinful woman did not have, she heard from His own lips, it is true that her sins were forgiven her, but she did not have his death to comfort herself with as the subsequent generations had.

To his contemporaries, Christ could only say, 'I will give myself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world and for thy sins too'. Is this then easier to believe, than when He had done it, when he had actually given his life? Or is the comfort greater, when he says that he will do it than, when he has done it? No love is greater than this, that one gives one's life for another. But when is it easiest to believe and when is the comfort of faith greatest? When the lover says, 'I will do it' or when he has done it. Crystal clear is the points that, we are more privileged today to experience the healing of Christ than the sinful woman of Luke 7:37. The reason is that, as at then the sinful woman received her healing through the 'word of mouth' of Christ, but today we receive the same healing from the act of Christ's death. The death of Christ is the greatest healing - psychological, spiritual, physical, mental, *et cetera*, anybody can receive. These views are the contents of the religious sphere of existence of Soren Kierkegaard, this is why it is a psychotherapy for an individual. But the curious mind may ask, why the Religious sphere, why not the Aesthetic or Ethical spheres? The reason is simple. Experience has shown that religion, in the broadest sense is an absolute essential. Again religious ideas have power which non-religious ideas lack.

Dr. Hadfield, the former Minister of the Kirk Memorial Congregation Church, Edinburgh cited in Leslie D. Weatherhead, *psychology and life*, (1961:17) says:

I am convinced that the Christian religion is one of the most valuable and potent influences, that we possess for producing that harmony and peace of mind and that confidence of soul which are needed to bring health and power to a large proportion of nervous patients. In some cases, I have attempted to cure nervous patients with suggestions of quietness and confidence, but without success, until I have linked these suggestions on to that faith in the power of God, which is the substance of the Christian's confidence and hope, then the patient has become strong.

We may listen further to another Christian medical psychotherapist, Dr. David Yellowless, who explained that, it is a matter of plain historical fact that religion in its highest manifestations gives not only peace of mind but great and increasing powers of endurance, qualities in which the neurotic is sadly lacking. Nothing could be stronger than the evidence of Dr. William Brown, who was a wild reader in mental philosophy at Oxford.

After being analyzed for ninety - two hours, he found his religious convictions were stronger than ever, and his religious feelings purified from sentimental and accidental accompaniments. He explained that, he had become more convinced than ever that religion is the most important thing in life and that it is essential to mental health. What a difference there is, friends after all, between saying, "Everyday in every way , I am getting better and better" and saying with faith in Christ, "In Him that strengthens me, I am able for anything. Have faith!". It is surely all gain that one should have faith in a person who can take his or her broken life and unify it, help him or her harness his or her wild impulses to his plan, and bear the transference which the physician cannot bear forever. For these reasons and more, Soren Kierkegaard, discovered the Religious sphere of existence as having and performing a therapeutic function.

Therefore, the objections raised by some scholars like G. Price, A. Henriksen, P. Mesnard, *et cetera*, are difficult to understand. If G. Price accuses Kierkegaard's works as being 'too idealized and retrospective picture of the authorship', there may be a meeting point along the reasoning track, but if A. Henriksen accuses Soren Kierkegaard as having never achieved a real unity within his life and works, I would wish, he defines what he means by 'unity'. If Soren Kierkegaard as an individual is accused as having no unity in his life, well, it is understandable, but for his works, I disagree. It is being scholarly unversed for Henriksen to accuse Soren Kierkegaard's writings as having little real value. When from, *Training in Christianity* of Soren Kierkegaard, we have sieved out a therapeutic value which is exceedingly of real value. A value which the sinful woman benefited from and which till date anyone else can benefit from, how then could Henriken say such a writing has no value. P. Mesnard accused Soren Kierkegaard as appearing as a fragmented personality, seeking for unity and oneness all his life. He accused Kierkegaard also of refusing to make public, his God-relationship. Well, from the personality of Soren Kierkegaard, it was fragmented as it once was, but never all through, because he found that unity and oneness in the Christian God, which he explained unreservedly in his religious sphere of existence. For saying that Soren Kierkegaard could not make public his God relationship, well, I wonder how public he

could have wished Soren Kierkegaard show his God-relationship better than his attack on Bishop Martensen, of the Lutheran Established Church of Demark, calling for Christians to search for God personally, individually, subjectively and not objectively or on dogma.

6 Conclusion

Kierkegaard called a Clarion call for 'Religiousness B' - a personal encounter with God, rather than 'Religiousness A' - a belief that being baptized and a member of Christian church solely, qualifies one to be a Christian. According to Soren Kierkegaard, Christianity differs from Christendom. An authentic Christian does not live by hypocrisy. Therefore, in these areas, I disagree with these scholars. However, I agree with scholars like T.H Croxall and D. Patrick in accepting that Soren Kierkegaard explained himself either wholly or partly, and thus find a unity in his works. Again, I pitch my tent with Herman Diem for in his work, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence*, he points out what he calls, the question of the real Kierkegaard. Here he explains that, Kierkegaard's work is not only a reflection of his education by providence, but more importantly, the actual means of that education. This ends up in a power he calls, Governance or Providence.

However, understanding Soren Kierkegaard in its fullest and hence interpreting him is a herculean task. To this view, Anyaeh P. Ogbonna agrees with Soren Aabye Kierkegaard.

References

- Canon S.(ed) (1961). *The Spirit*, cited in *Psychology and Life*, Leslie D. Weatherhead, London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Kaufmann W.(1975). *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, New York: New American library.
- Kierkegaard S. (1967); *Training in Christianity*, trans, Walter Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard S.(1972). *Training in Christianity*, trans., Walter Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard S.(1960). *The Diary of Kierkegaard*; trans, Gerda M. Anderson(ed),Peter P. Rohde, New York: Philosophical Library.
- Oraison M.(1947). *Illusion and Anxiety*, trans., Bernard Murchland, C. S. C, New York: The Macmillan Company.