



Abraham and Mary—Models of Faith in the Day to Day

Patrick Claffey

The Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic and religious author, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a complex and often troubled man. While from a modest social background, his father, Michael Pedersen, through his impressive entrepreneurial skills amassed the fortune that would eventually allow his son to pursue his studies and go on to life of scholarship and what he described as 'authorship' without having to worry unduly about more worldly matters. The family came from the Lutheran pietist tradition, and so, as Clare Carlisle explains in her excellent biography, aspired 'to a holy life that follows the example of Christ [seeking] to imitate Jesus deep, inward faith in God, and his pure-hearted obedience, humility and poverty.'

There is little doubt that Søren was a deeply religious man but also one who reflected deeply on what his faith really meant in the reality of everyday life. The focus of Kierkegaard's thought was 'what it means to exist', and more specifically to live fully as a Christian in the world. He was, however, contemptuous of the official Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was the National Church, sometimes called Church of Denmark, the established and state-supported church. Kierkegaard dismissed it and its representatives, notably his former mentors, Bishop Jacob Peter Mynster (1775 – 1854) and Hans Lassen Martenson (1808-1884), as representing Christendom rather than true Christianity. He accused them of peddling a watered-down form of the faith, designed more to comfort their bourgeois congregations than to give witness to the Gospel.

In his seminal work *Fear and Trembling*, which he published in 1843 under the pseudonym *Johannes de silentio (John of Silence)*, Kierkegaard focuses on the Old Testament figure of Abraham, 'our father in faith', as the model for Christian faith today. While Kierkegaard tells us that he was 'appalled' by the moral scandal of Abraham's submission to God, Carlisle tells us that, like Luther, he uses 'the story [...] to expose the limitations of human reason and criticise the hubris of contemporary philosophy.' (39) Here he echoes St Paul who questioned what he saw as the pretension of the Greek philosophers (1 Corinthians 1:23).



What Kierkegaard sets out to do is to reimagine Abraham for a new generation. How, he asked his readers, could God possibly have made Abraham the father of a nation (Genesis 15) and then ask him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22)? And why did Abraham accept? The only answer could be faith but this, he wrote, was impossible to understand in rational terms 'and [...] showed that reason should surrendered. "While Abraham arouses my admiration,' he writes, 'he appals me as well.'

However, God cannot be confined or understood in terms of purely human ethics, he argues. Carlisle suggests that 'Kierkegaard wants to shake his readers awake, to say *Look, listen* this is what the God-relationship involves, *this* is what faith requires—it might disrupt your whole existence, overturn your sense of right and wrong, make you a criminal in the eyes of the world—and *now* do you claim to have faith?'

It is a radical vision indeed and designed to banish apathy. In writing it, he is addressing individuals in the reality of their own faith lives, challenging their comfort zone and their smugness and letting them know that faith has a cost and it can indeed be very high. In effect he is challenging his own time and that mediocre form of Christianity that has taken hold. It is time he believes for a comfortable institu-

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tional Christendom, based on a rational ethics of human origin, to come to an end and to give way to something new and much more radical.

Clare Carlisle, *Philosopher of the Heart: The Restless Life of Søren Kierkegaard*, London, Allen Lane, 2006



God Is Love

This is all I have known for certain, that God is love. Even if I have been mistaken about this or that point, God is nevertheless love. If I have made a mistake it will be plain enough; so I repent – and God is love. He is love – not he was love, nor he will be love, oh no, even that future is too slow for me – he is love.

Oh, how wonderful! Sometimes, perhaps, my repentance does not come at once, and so there is a future. But God keeps no person waiting, for he is love. Like spring water which keeps the same temperature summer and winter – so is God's love. His love is a spring that never runs dry.

- Søren Kierkegaard

How does one understand

How does one understand that this man, with his individual and datable history, is at one and the same time God? What greatness, sovereignty, and profundity must he not have revealed and lived in order to be called God? What does "God" mean now? What sort of human being is he, that we can make such an assertion about him? What does the unity of the two – God and man – concretely signify in a historical being, one of our brothers, Jesus of Nazareth?

This is one of the central facts of our faith that sets Christianity apart from other religions. Once Christianity affirms that a man is at the same time God, it stands alone in the world. We are obliged to say it: This is a scandal to...all the religions and pious peoples of yesterday and today who venerate and adore a transcendent God: one that is totally other, who cannot be objectified, a God beyond this world, infinite, eternal, incomprehensible, and above everything that human beings can be and know.

-Leonardo Boff, *Brazilian theologian b. 1938*

The poverty of Christ

There are many who are enkindled with dreamy devotion, and when they hear of the poverty of Christ, they are almost angry with the citizens of Bethlehem. They denounce their blindness and ingratitude, and think, if they had been there, they would have shown the Lord and his mother a more kindly service and would not have permitted them to be treated so miserably. But they do not look by their side to see how many of their fellow humans need their help, and which they ignore in their misery. Who is there upon earth that has no poor, miserable, sick, erring ones around him? Why does he not exercise his love to those? Why does he not do to them as Christ has done to him?

-Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Good Hours

by Robert Frost

I had for my winter evening walk –
No one at all with whom to talk,
But I had the cottages in a row
Up to their shining eyes in snow.
And I thought I had the folk within:
I had the sound of a violin;
I had a glimpse through curtain laces
Of youthful forms and youthful faces.
I had such company outward bound.
I went till there were no cottages found.
I turned and repented, but coming back
I saw no window but that was black.

Over the snow my creaking feet
Disturbed the slumbering village street
Like profanation, by your leave,
At ten o'clock of a winter eve.

Masses Times

Feast of the Epiphany:

Thursday 6 January 10 am Mass

Sundays: Vigil, 6pm (Saturday), 9.30am, 11am, 5pm

Croatian Community Mass 6.30pm

French-speaking community mass 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month at 12.30

Daily masses 10am only for the moment

-Rosary daily after 10am mass

Baptisms:

1st and 3rd Sundays of each month, request forms available from parish office

Marriages

regarding use of St Mary's Church and Pre-Nuptial Enquiries please contact the Parish Office

Parish Office open Monday—Friday, 10.30-14.00

IN MEMORIAM

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Sunday 15 January

Patrick O'Mahoney, Ahhi9versary