

ABOUT KIERKEGAARD'S STATEMENTS THAT "TRUTH IS SUBJECTIVITY" BUT ALSO THAT "SUBJECTIVITY IS UNTRUTH"

SZABADOS ÁDÁM

According to Kierkegaard, all speculative philosophies (both empirical and idealistic) are wrong in that they have an abstract idea of the subjective self, which in reality does not exist. To prove that *thinking* correlates with *being* in either way (empirically or idealistically) is just a duplicating of thinking, which is a tautology. The fact is that the existing self is not a changeless entity that could be examined in abstraction. The relationship of the self to reality is therefore never objective but always subjective: it is determined by the self's attitude to the truth.

If we want to know the truth objectively, the subjective self is really a hindrance. Truth should be outside the subject to be objective. This means, however, that the subject is not just unimportant (which in itself is also nonsensical), but even a problem, an obstacle to be overcome. To reach a truly objective knowledge the only logical solution would be suicide. But true thinking can only start from the affirmation of the existence of the existing human beings. All speculative philosophies, therefore, are wrong.

Truth should be subjective. Truth is subjectivity, for truth is actuality. Truth has to do with existing not speculation or possibility. *Esse* is more important than *posse*. The objection of the speculative thinker here is that if truth is subjectivity, than truth can be craziness, as well. Who secures us from the Don Quixote type of subjective knights of truth if truth is subjectivity? Kierkegaard's answer is that a belief in the objectivity of truth does not save us from craziness, either. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* he tells us the example of a lunatic who keeps shouting on the streets that the earth is round. Does his belief in an objective truth make him less crazy? No. And the lack of inwardness in the speculative approach is probably an even worse craziness than that of Don Quixote.

In objective thinking we emphasize *what* we say, in subjective thinking we emphasize *how* we say it. Objectivity is interested in definitions, subjectivity is interested in inwardness. Real truth always has to do with inward passion. When the eternal truth is inwardly grasped, and the subjective self is passionately involved in the process, it is truth, even if the eternal truth is not fully or rightly comprehended. When an idolater prays to his god with the right kind of passion, he is more in the truth than a so-called Christian whose heart is far from the God of his orthodoxy.

Truth is at its highest when it has to do with the infinite becoming finite in the person of Jesus Christ. It is a paradox, unsearchable and incomprehensible to the objective thinker. This incomprehensibility infinitely increases the importance of the subjective self's attitude to the paradox. The nature of truth in this situation is seen in its naked characteristics: it is an inward attitude to the presence of the eternal in the temporary. The wrong attitude — that is *untruth* — is both an objective, speculative approach to the paradox, and a subjective rejection (that is, stumbling) of the paradox (Jesus Christ). Objective thinking can be a mirror of a subjective rejection of the paradox. Truth is our subjective relationship to the absurd, the paradox. Stumbling moves us toward objectivity, therefore it is not truth.

Truth is – in an ultimate sense – faith. According to Kierkegaard, faith can be a definition of truth. Truth is a passionate inwardness, an acceptance of the uncertainty of objectivity with regard to the paradox. Faith is not faith where the objective is certain. But with infinite truth there is no objective certainty. Truth is a crucifixion of objective certainty. Truth, therefore is faith.

Untruth too, therefore, is always subjective. Untruth is stumbling. Truth or untruth ought not to be defined in an objective sense. Truth or untruth is not a right or wrong mental conception in connection with a set of creeds or a religious or philosophical system. Truth or untruth is determined by our inward attitude to what we perceive about the infinite. Truth has to do with the heart. Truth is therefore essentially faith. Not a *statement* of faith, but faith itself. As the Puritans corrected some of the wrong tendencies within orthodox Protestantism in the seventeenth century: there is a difference between a historical faith and a saving faith. Historical faith has to do with certain facts of history or religion, saving faith, on the other hand, has to do with a personal trust in the person of Jesus Christ. An affirmation of an orthodox creed without this personal trust in Jesus would still be untruth, the ultimate untruth. Untruth is essentially subjectivity. Subjectivity is untruth. Not because truth is objective, but because there is sin in all subjective self. A heart that opposes – or is cold toward – the Savior (even a passionless belief in objective facts) is still untruth, the ultimate one.

One implication of Kierkegaard's emphasis on the subjectivity of truth and untruth could be a challenge for us, Evangelicals, in our attitude to evangelism. When we invite people to "accept Jesus Christ as their Savior", we often do not ask them to believe in *the person of Jesus*, but to believe that Jesus *has died for their sins*. We ask them to believe in a fact rather than in a person. In many cases, therefore – if we accept Kierkegaard's categories – we invite people to untruth. We ask them to believe a statement of faith ("Jesus Christ died for your sins") and then assure them that they are saved. However, this might be the biggest untruth ever. Without a change of heart a correct belief in the atonement (even together with a belief that it happened for *me*) is still untruth. One of the greatest American evangelists of the twentieth century often justified his evangelistic methods by assuring everybody that on his meetings there were no emotions, people calmly and rationally accepted Jesus when they went forward. I wonder if Kierkegaard would not have seen this as a sign of untruth in many so called "converts". Truth is always passionate. Truth is – and always ought to be – passionate subjectivity.

Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity is also a challenge for the pastoral ministry. When we want our people to grow in truth, what do we mean by that? Do we emphasize the cognitive elements, the *what* of the process, or do we emphasize the heart and the *how* of the process? If subjectivity is the truth and an objective approach can be the sign of a subjectivity which is untruth, how much more important it is to focus on the heart! It does not follow, that the mind is not important, but that the function of the mind is to show us the paradox clearly and without an explanation so that faith can find its place and the heart might love the paradox with full subjectivity, inwardness and passion.