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THE THUNDERSTORM: KIERKEGAARD'S ECCLESIOLOGY

Bruce H. Kirmmse

The spectacular "attack upon Christendom" with which Kierkegaard concluded his career (and his life) was not an aberration. It was the culmination of an anticlerical—and, indeed, antiecclesial—tendency that had developed over a considerable period. This development can be followed quite clearly in Kierkegaard's journals and papers, where we can observe Kierkegaard's stance as it evolved through his often polemical engagement with the leading ecclesiastical figures of his time, and in particular with Bishop J. P. Mynster, Primate of the Danish Church. Of even greater importance, we can observe Kierkegaard's increasing appreciation of the significance of the modernizing Revolution of 1848, particularly the ecclesiastical and political consequences of that revolution. But Kierkegaard's critique also worked its way *backward* in time from 1848, and in the end it is doubtful whether he viewed any form of earthly congregation as compatible with what he believed to be "the Christianity of the New Testament."

"Geniuses are like thunderstorms: they go against the wind, terrify people, and cleanse the air.

The established order has invented a number of lightning rods for, or against, geniuses. They are effective. So much the worse for the established order. Because if they work once, twice, three times—the next thunderstorm will be all the more frightful."¹

Introduction

When Gandhi was asked what he thought of Western civilization, his famous reply was "It would be a very good idea." Søren Kierkegaard, on the other hand, did not think that Christian civilization was a good idea. He was fundamentally opposed to the use of Christianity as a social *religio*, as the ligaments or connective tissue of society. As is well known, he believed that "State Churches and People's Churches [*Folkekirker*] and Christian countries are nonsense," and he flatly rejected the possibility of "states, nations, peoples, kingdoms, which are Christian."² But that was not all. In the last years of his life Kierkegaard carried on a vocal polemic against the Danish People's Church, against "the established order" [*det Bestaaende*], with a vehemence which many found frightening and offensive. The Church was merely "theater" but less honest and straightforward: "On the the placards for the theater it always says 'No refunds'."³



"In the entire clergy there . . . is quite literally not one single honest pastor."⁴ Kierkegaard encouraged the common man "to refrain from participating in public worship,"⁵ and even on his deathbed he refused to accept the Eucharist from a pastor, because "pastors are civil servants of the Crown."⁶ And there is of course a great deal more of this sort of thing. In a letter dated October 6, 1855, shortly after Kierkegaard had been admitted to the hospital with what turned out to be his final illness, the poet and writer Carsten Hauch wrote to his friend B. S. Ingemann, also a major Golden Age writer:

[Søren Kierkegaard is] an acute but ice-cold spirit, whose words are as sharp as icicles, [who] loudly proclaims that he is as good as the only person who knows what true Christianity is. . . . [He is a] false prophet [who] displays great talents but whose heart is so empty that he says quite openly that it is a matter of indifference to him whether the world is Christian or not [Kierkegaard has] *the desire to overturn everything which has been established for centuries and to plunge everything back into a chaos from which only some undefined new thing will develop*...⁷

Kierkegaard had his reasons, both principled and (perhaps) personal, for his opposition to the People's Church. The expression "People's Church" certainly has its roots in Herder's nationalist romanticism and in Schleiermacher's view of the Church, but as a Danish term it has a decidedly Grundtvigian ring to it. It is thus quite fitting that the term "People's Church" first appeared as a Danish word ("Folkekirke") in an article published in 1841 by the Grundtvigian *Peter Christian Kierkegaard*!⁸ It should also be emphasized that P. C. Kierkegaard's younger brother Søren rejected the People's Church not only because it represented the continuation of Christianity's status as the state religion, as a part of "the established order," but also and especially because the term "People's Church" itself was so much in keeping with the spirit of the times, so democratic, that it could in fact prolong the life of the State Church and render it less vulnerable in the new age of popular sovereignty. Furthermore, in Søren Kierkegaard's opinion the term "People's Church" implied that the people own the Church and, with it, God!⁹ In any event, it is clear that even if the term "People's Church" at first had a Grundtvigian or an 1848-ish ring to it, in the wake of the revolutionary events of 1848-49, State Church conservatives such as Bishop Mynster quickly made the name their own. In a sermon from 1852 entitled "Our Evangelical People's Church," Mynster wrote:

We are happy . . . that we in this country dare call this church our People's Church. There are other countries in which the different religious confessions are all at large, possessing thousands upon thousands of adherents, so that no one can say which is the general religion of the people. But with us—thank God!—we can still tell which it is. People have also invented another name, "State Church," and the Church's enemies have tried to make use of it to serve their purposes, namely to imply that it was the worldly authorities who

used compulsion to maintain among the people a confession to which they would otherwise be indifferent, or which they would abandon. Therefore let us hold fast to the beautiful, living term "People's Church"; it signifies that this is the Church to which the people cling, the Church whose confession is rooted in the people, the Church which is one of the strong bonds which holds the people together, and which connects the generations that follow with those that have gone before. Praise and thank God that we still have such a People's Church that holds together the vast preponderance of the people, so that those who deviate from it can quickly be added up. There are indeed people living among us who confess another faith . . . but everyone feels that they are in many respects guests and foreigners and that in essential ways they are not a part of our people.¹⁰

As we have already seen, Kierkegaard was convinced that as far as constituting "the established order" was concerned, there was no real difference between a State Church and a People's Church. And H. L. Martensen, who was to be Bishop Mynster's successor, agreed on this point, writing: "[In 1848 it was] certainly of great significance that Church and State should continue to be united, and that there should continue to be a State Church, even if it was called a People's Church."¹¹

But perhaps it was not *only* the concept of a People's Church or a State Church which Søren Kierkegaard opposed. In the last part of his life it looked as if Kierkegaard opposed not only the Danish State or People's Church, but also the very concepts of Church and congregation as such. This was how Martensen viewed the situation, and he went to the counter-attack as early as his *Christian Dogmatics* of 1849:

Only in a *Kingdom* of God, only in a kingdom of individuals who have the spirit of God within them, who relate to one another in a reciprocity of productivity and receptivity, of communication and reception, can religion develop its wealth. History abounds with testimony to religion's society-forming power. . . . Where religion becomes merely a private matter, *only* the business of the individual, it is a sign of a state of disintegration.¹²

And in his only piece written in response to Kierkegaard's attack on the church, Martensen wrote in defense of Bishop Mynster's posthumous reputation, asserting that "[Kierkegaard's] Christianity [is no] form of social faith whatsoever, but a private religion pure and simple, a Christianity in which the Christian Church and the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church has been left out."¹³ Even many years later, Martensen was clearly convinced that Kierkegaard had been hostile to the Church as such. In his diaries, the politician A. F. Krieger wrote that on December 29, 1869 he had visited Martensen, who had read aloud "a section of his *Ethics* for me . . . in which he discusses S. Kierkegaard in particular (an episode, not an epoch), 'the individual.' Naturally, he emphatically put forth the view that Kierkegaard was fundamentally oblivious to both State and Church, no society, no congregation."¹⁴

Was Martensen right? What was Kierkegaard's view of the Church? In what follows I will give an account both of Kierkegaard's ecclesiology as it developed through the years and of Kierkegaard's developing view of his own role in relation to that ecclesiology.

I. Kierkegaard's Earliest View of the Church.

In his earliest considerations of the Church's relation to Christianity, Kierkegaard presupposes a form of separation of Church and State. "Christianity's standpoint compared to the ordinary human standpoint is like that of the Church compared to the State; it does not deny the state unless the state wants to interfere with it."¹⁵ Thus the State and the Church constitute two spheres which ought to be kept separate from one another. But even as a 23-year-old university student, Kierkegaard believed that the Church did not have any role of great importance to play in the modern world. The human race develops through various epochs, and right now we are in the epoch of individualism:

When the dialectical (romantic) period—a period I could very appropriately call the period of individuality—has been lived through world-historically, social life must again return to play its role *par excellence*, and ideas such as State (e.g., as with the Greeks—the Church in its older, Catholic sense) must necessarily return in a richer and fuller manner. . . .¹⁶

A few years later Kierkegaard wrote the following: "The Christian life as a whole is a complete life and as such has its 1) immediacy, i.e., faith . . . 2) mediacy, i.e., the Church . . . 3) identity . . ."¹⁷ Thus in Kierkegaard's early, Hegelian thought, the Church is "mediacy" and as such is the negation of faith as "immediacy"; but Kierkegaard counted on a third moment, a higher synthesis, "identity." Throughout Kierkegaard's entire life the question was how and when this "identity" could be attained. Thus, even as a university student, Kierkegaard had the notion that the prevailing situation was a product of the times, and that after the age of individualism the Church would be able to return.¹⁸

While he was at the pastoral seminary in 1840 and 1841 Kierkegaard described the Church's situation as follows: "**The congregation's relation to Christ in the image of the bride's relation to the bridegroom.** All of life is of course the time of engagement, the grave is the bridal chamber, heaven."¹⁹ In this case, the Church has been postponed to the hereafter—a harbinger of Kierkegaard's later notion that the Church has no actual existence in earthly life.

II. The mid-1840's.

Five or six years later Kierkegaard still had not come to clarity in his view of the Church, but he wrote rather sarcastically, that it can "never be to the advantage of the State or the Church to discuss their fundamental principles too often."²⁰ But despite the fact that by the mid-1840's Kierkegaard

had not attained clarity in his ecclesiology, his view of Bishop Mynster came into increasingly sharp focus. Mynster's Christianity is "heresy" because he has "deified the established order, and in his zeal for morality he has finally come to confuse it with bourgeois philistinism."²¹ Mynster himself realizes that very few people are really Christians, "but then all this talk of a State Church, a Christian country, and a Christian people is an illusion. . . . If Mynster were in the apostolic sense to be a teacher for the few Christians he himself speaks of, it would be a pretty modest living...."²² Genuine Christianity "explodes" a person, Kierkegaard writes, but now Christianity has become merely "refinement":

In many ways, Mynster himself is the inventor of this confusion of Christianity and cultivation. . . . He has solved a very difficult problem. If one wants to begin the debate in such a fashion that the concept of the "State Church" itself is placed under discussion, then Mynster is in a difficult position. If one concedes the concept of the State Church, Mynster is the master. . . . There is an ambiguity in his existence which one cannot avoid because the "State Church" is an ambiguity.²³

Thus, as early as 1847 the attack on the Church begins to take shape, and it is inseparable from Mynster. Ambiguity is key here: because the State Church is ambiguous Mynster's life is also ambiguous.

The following year things became even more pointed:

Mynster [has] no compass. What is great in him is a personal virtuosity à la Goethe. Therefore he has a certain dignity of bearing, but his life does not really express anything.

This is why he has always taken such great delight in "these quiet hours in holy places" . . . because he dispenses religion as an ingredient in life and not as the Absolute.... And yet it has become pretty close to paganism and theater....

For paganism theater was divine worship. In Christianity the churches have generally become theater.²⁴

Here we see prefigured the rhetoric equating the Church with the theater, as it will appear in Kierkegaard's later attack on the Church. Mynster has confused Christianity with cultivation and the Church with the theatre, and "Mynster's fundamental heresy" has made Christ, the apostles, and "all those who are Christian in the stricter sense" into "fantasts."²⁵ If Mynster is right about the established order, then Søren Kierkegaard is a man without seriousness, a fantast, i.e., mad. (Here it is useful to remember that Søren Kierkegaard's older brother Peter Christian, in speech before the Roskilde Ecclesiastical Convention held in the summer of 1849, assigned the label "ecstasy" to Søren's views, while reserving the term "sober-mindedness" for H. L. Martensen.²⁶ Søren interpreted "ecstasy" as "madness"—a word which would become a battle cry during his later attack on the Church.) Mynster was unusually eloquent (and the author of *Remarks on the Art of Preaching*, 1810), but alas,

the whole notion of a pastor in the sense of an orator is *eo ipso* the abolition of Christianity. . . . No, the fact is that a pastor must not be an orator, or the person who preaches Christianity must not be an orator.... [People] sit in a cozy church, surrounded by pomp and splendor (yes, just like a theater), and in walks a man, an artist.... [But] St. Paul, when he was in chains—how many people saw the greatness in him? No, most people, by far the majority, saw a fanatic....²⁷

In a little note from 1849 entitled "**Situation**," Kierkegaard both took stock of the situation and also expressed the following threat: "Attack on the entire elegant Church, and on the elegant congregation. Christ was not an elegant man, who, in an elegant church and before an elegant congregation, preached about the fact that the truth suffers. He was *really* spat upon."²⁸ And Kierkegaard had already come up with the watchword of the attack on the Church: "Close the shops": "Really, if the Sunday closing laws are to be enforced, the pastors also ought to be forbidden to preach on Sundays. Why should one tradesman be favored over others?"²⁹

III. 1848-49: *Revolution and National Religion.*

In 1848 the national question took center stage, and the State Church was rechristened as the People's Church. This further disquieted Kierkegaard. He could well understand that a country would like to have a national religion as its common property, thus

When at a particular time individuals or their representatives agree on adopting such and such a constitution for the State, they are within their rights. On the other hand, when at a given time individuals agree on introducing the worship of God—for example, adoring and worshipping the Round Tower—yes, one cannot object to the fact that this is in fact that country's worship. But it is certainly not the Christian Church.³⁰

Here we have the basis of Kierkegaard's post-1848 radicalism: It is impermissible to confuse a national religion with Christianity; therefore the very concept of the "People's Church" is anathema to Kierkegaard. And Bishop Mynster is complicit in what has happened: "How strange! Once, the objection to Christianity was . . . that it was unpatriotic, subversive, revolutionary. And now Christianity has become patriotism and the State Church. . . . Once Christianity was an offense unto the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks and now it is—cultivation. For Bishop Mynster the hallmark of true Christianity is cultivation."³¹ Thus the year 1848 was the proximate cause of the attack on the Church: "Then I saw with fear what was meant by a Christian state, and I saw it especially in '48. . . . So I mean to make a start here in Denmark, to peg the price of being Christian in such a manner that the entire concept—State Church, civil servants, clerical livings—is exploded."³²

In 1849, the year of Denmark's constitution, Kierkegaard's thoughts on "the established order" center upon the concept's literal meaning: "The

Establishment [*"Det Bestaaende,"* which literally means that which is standing, that which exists or is established and continues to remain in force]³³ is an absolutely un-Christian concept."³⁴

"The Church" must really represent "becoming," while "the State" represents "the Established." This is why it is so dangerous if the State and Church grow together and become identified. . . . We are perhaps better served by vigorously supporting a less than desirable Established Order instead of reforming it prematurely. With the Church just the opposite principle holds, because its idea is becoming. "Becoming" is more spiritual than being "Established."³⁵

Thus, according to Kierkegaard, he is not the person who is abolishing the Church. Rather, it is the Church which abolishes itself in its "becoming." This is much more than a relatively limited attack upon the concept of the State Church or People's Church. It is the Church itself, "the concept of congregation," of which he is critical. As he put it in *Practice in Christianity*, which he wrote in 1848, "A concept such as 'congregation,' . . . when applied to this life, is an impatient anticipation of eternity."³⁶ A year later he formulated his position even more succinctly: In this life the only Church is the Church militant, and "in the Church militant [there are] only individuals [and] thus the congregation is not recognized."³⁷ To put it another way, the self-abolishing Church must let its children go free: "Solomon's judgment can be applied to the Church. It became apparent that the *true* mother was one who would rather give up her child than have half of it. Thus also with the Church, the true mother: it would rather let go of the individual than have half of him."³⁸

IV. *Armed Truce: Practice in Christianity (1850-52).*

We have now come as far as 1850 and the time around the publication of *Practice in Christianity*, which was the most important harbinger of Kierkegaard's attack on the Church. But even though his criticism of the Church had developed quite a bit, and even though the book contains some very harsh words, *Practice* is nonetheless remarkably moderate. The "Editor's Foreword"³⁹ emphasizes that the critique contained in the book is being held in abeyance in the expectation that the Church will make the required "admission" that its Christianity does not live up to the demands of the ideal, to "the Christianity of the New Testament." In his journals Kierkegaard expresses it as follows:

The Established Order - My Position

Christianly understood, in the highest sense there is no Established Church, only a militant Church.

That is the first point.

The second point is that there is, however, in fact such an Established Church. It should not at all be overturned, no, but the higher ideal must hover over it as an awakening possibility. . . .⁴⁰

Thus, according to Kierkegaard, despite its radicalism, *Practice in Christianity* is to be viewed as a moderate work whose purpose is to preserve the Established Church. "A religious Establishment exists. So I publish a book [*Practice in Christianity*] which wants to strengthen it and in fact point the way in which the Establishment can be led forward. . . . In order to govern once more, admissions will have to be made. . . . Only in this manner can the Establishment be guided forward."⁴¹

But the next year (1851), in a series of journal entries entitled "**The Establishment - and Me**" the tone is sharpened: "I can only collide with the Establishment if Mynster makes a blunder. . . . [I]f he finally hardens himself in the view that his entire dubious way of preaching Christianity, which has made Christianity into theatrical delight—if he insists that this is wisdom and Christianity, then it is *he* who will change my efforts into something else."⁴² "That I am attacking the Establishment is as far as possible from being the case. I am defending it precisely against the party of movement, against the age's wicked desire for reform. . . . [I] believe, for example, that Mynster, who is also defending the Establishment, is not doing so properly. . . . But I am almost never understood."⁴³ "So my suggestion was: Let us do everything possible to place Christianity out of the range of fire. . . . [B]ut the whole of Mynster's wisdom consists in preserving an illusion. . . . [I]n two years the Establishment will thank me for this book."⁴⁴ So Kierkegaard waited for those thanks—and for the required "admissions." In the meantime he said "absolutely not one single word" about "changes in the external order of things" and instead observed "the silence of the dead."⁴⁵ He was not blind to the necessity of fundamental changes, including the separation of Church and State, but he himself was not prepared to demand this:

Scarcely anyone here is as familiar as I am with all the objections which, from a Christian point of view, can be made against a State Church, a People's Church, a Christian Establishment, etc. Thus, in the strict Christian sense the requirement is separation; that is the ideal requirement in its maximum.

But I say, that to undertake this separation is so very much a qualitatively religious undertaking that only a qualitatively distinguished religious character could carry it out—strictly speaking an Apostle, at the least a witness to the truth, is required. . . .

This is the manner in which I protect the established order.

But in order to do it, I require in turn what I also require of myself—admissions.⁴⁶

And a little later the same year (1851):

[In] any case, if State and Church are to be separated, then it is such a decidedly religious act that it must be done by a man of character (almost an apostle, at the least a witness to the truth). It must not happen with the help of lower forms (nonsense, balloting).⁴⁷ To this extent I intend to defend the established order, to postpone the matter until the man [of character] comes, and especially to take polemical aim at all muddleheaded reformations.⁴⁸

This was Kierkegaard's position as late as 1851, when he objected to efforts by Grundtvig's ally Rudelbach to enlist him in the campaign for separation of Church and State.

Before much longer Kierkegaard would come to realize that he himself was the "man of character" who could call for the separation of Church and State. But even as late as 1852 Kierkegaard had still not yet come to a clear understanding of things. This little vacillating journal entry is typical: "Since the year '48 Bishop Mynster has been entirely inexplicable to me [*changed from*: has been more difficult for me to understand, *changed from*: has been entirely inexplicable to me]."49 During the early months of 1853 Kierkegaard continued to wait and see, and while waiting he brooded about the idea that the victory of popular government would push the Church further in the direction of becoming a national religion: "In a number of ways, the heresies of 'Christendom' are rooted in the the doctrine of 'the Church.' By means of this doctrine people have desired to abolish or repress the truly Christian notion that Christianity is related to the individual; they have thus brought forward lower notions of religion, corresponding to paganism and Judaism: 'national religion and national God'."50 "[T]he more learnedly it was taught that there is no salvation outside the Church, the more the Church became analogous to the Jewish people or even to the pagans, and God a sort of national God."51 Thus, Kierkegaard implies, salvation *is* in fact found outside the Church—and perhaps not within it, since the Church represents "national religion" and "Judaism," not Christianity. But at this point Kierkegaard is not yet ready to take the revolutionary steps he regards as necessary.

V. The Change of Government in April 1853: From Defense to "Opposition."

In April 1853 something very important happened to change Kierkegaard's stance. The post-1848 liberal government fell, and the arch-conservative government of A. S. Ørsted was returned to power. Despite what some have said about Kierkegaard being unpolitical, in this connection he demonstrated that he was an experienced and very sensitive observer of politics. As soon as A. S. Ørsted's government had come back and (as Bishop Mynster had already done) had shown that it was very comfortable with the "new" Danish People's Church, Kierkegaard became convinced that he could not continue to play the patient and moderate waiting game. The government—even this so-called conservative government—had concluded an alliance with the People's Church—*Mynster's* People's Church! Kierkegaard knew that he could no longer reasonably pretend to hope that the established order would come up with anything resembling the "admissions" he felt were necessary. In a journal entry dated May 27, 1853, a bit more than a month after the return of the Ørsted government, Kierkegaard described

My life's work viewed as a whole, as I now more or less understand it, or as I possibly will come to understand it.

... Now the reaction is beginning to win. The government is surely getting a bit of courage again. Perhaps we will even have a tyrant-

ny. The opposition appears to be of the opinion that the salad days are over, and is retreating. So it will probably end with *me* becoming the opposition. . . .

Now that the reaction has won, opposition becomes the dangerous thing.⁵²

Toward the end of 1853 Kierkegaard gave another account of his decision to change sides and become "the opposition":

My Task.

Before '48 one could indeed almost view the opposition as the more powerful side. . . . So my choice was easily made: to attack the opposition and defend the established order.

'48 and the years that followed made it clear that Bishop Mynster is without character. . . .

But when the government is . . . also courting the numerical principle and is strengthening itself with the numerical, then I really cannot continue to defend it against the numerical—it is impossible. . . .⁵³

But even though Kierkegaard had decided by mid-1853 that the time of waiting and the time of "admissions" was over, he did nothing publicly, but wrote a great many polemical writings, including drafts of much of the material which would later appear in *The Moment*. Then Mynster died at the end of January 1854, and in April of that year, after a fierce struggle, the Ørsted government managed to force through the appointment of H. L. Martensen as Mynster's successor. Kierkegaard was furious, wrote more material for the attack on the Church, but remained silent. He was prepared for the attack but, fearing that legal action against him by the Ørsted government would distract attention from his principal objective, awaited the government's fall. Once again Kierkegaard proved to be an astute political observer, and he opened his attack on the Church in the columns of the National Liberal newspaper *Fædrelandet* on December 18, 1854, the very day the new National Liberal government took office in the wake of a long-drawn-out crisis that had resulted in the fall of the Ørsted government.

VI. *The Attack on the Church.*

The published writings constituting Kierkegaard's attack on the Church are well-known and easily accessible, so there is no reason to go through them here. But a number of the journal entries in his unpublished writings shed light on Kierkegaard's views, illuminating both his conception of the role of the Church as well as his changing understanding of his own role.

The question of the Church can be divided in two. First of all there is the question of the permissibility of a State Church, of Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity in the 4th century and the subsequent adoption of Christianity as the state religion. Kierkegaard had long been an opponent of a State Church, despite the fact that he only made his views public relatively late. He clarified his position in an 1854 journal entry:

State Church.

This is the root of the whole secret! . . .

The State is equally wrong in [two] ways. From a Christian point of view both ways are *lèse majesté*.

If there is a man who feels the need and the desire to hear the message about the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, then the State may not interpose itself and say: "Fine! It costs 10 rixdollars and we will arrange it."

Nor the opposite way. If there is a man who has no desire to hear the message about the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, then the State may not say, "Yes, in this matter you are free, you shall not be forced to hear it, but whether you wish to hear it or not, you will bloody Hell pay us all 10 rixdollars, because we have taken it upon ourselves to arrange all this Christianity." Things must not be like this. It must not be, as it is now, that if the man won't pay, the police can be called to collect the 10 rixdollars. On the contrary, if someone comes and demands 10 rixdollars of a man, he must be able to call the police and demand to be protected from this as from every sort of attack, from this as from every other sort of fraud. . . .

*In this case the greatest degree of seriousness and strictness (the judgment of Eternity) is recognizable by the greatest degree of freedom. In this life you may do completely as you wish with respect to this matter.*⁵⁴

A bit later in 1854, in a piece entitled "**The Law of Distance From God**," Kierkegaard notes that, "Christendom [is] surely . . . more or less at the maximum remove from God."⁵⁵ Matters could not get worse. And later still, in a piece entitled "**State Church - People's Church**": "Every effort that tends toward the establishment of a Christian State, a Christian people, is *eo ipso* un-Christian, anti-Christian...."⁵⁶ Every type of Established Church, State Church, People's Church, etc. is not merely unfortunate, it is *anti-Christian* and must be combatted with every means available.

In one of his final journal entries in 1855, Kierkegaard makes it absolutely clear that he was totally convinced that the separation or "divorce" of Church and State was both historically unavoidable—and *from a Christian point of view necessary*—and that the clergy would come to regret that they had not listened to him in time:

If the clergy unreservedly and in self-denial had been willing to consult the New Testament, they would have seen that the New Testament unconditionally requires the separation of Church and State and that it had therefore been the duty of the clergy to suggest it themselves. . . . [They would] have seen that from every sort of quarter the development of the world is pushing toward this point, the separation of Church and State, and that above all here in Denmark everything is undermined.

And if the clergy had been willing to understand this, they would have seen that in my hands the matter was in the best of hands, in hands that were as well-intentioned as possible toward the clergy.

They have rejected this. I have continually had to force the matter

to a higher and higher level and have had to put up with playing the role of a sort of madman—as compared with the wise clergy.

The clergy will come to regret this dearly. The decision is forcing its way through. It must come through. But then the clergy will have to deal with a completely different group of people.

The more promptly the clergy had been willing to opt for the decision, to opt for the divorce, the less they would have been unmasked in their untruth. The more active or passive resistance they make, the more they will be revealed in their untruth and the more wretched their situation will be when the matter is settled.⁵⁷

Thus, an error was made in the 4th century and we must atone for it now, before the democratic forms of the new age of popular sovereignty grant Christendom a new lease on life. But Kierkegaard did not simply go back to the 4th century and reject Constantine and the idea of a State Church. When one reads Kierkegaard's late journals it becomes undeniably clear that Kierkegaard rejected "the notion of the congregation" as such. He had hinted as much earlier, but in a journal entry from 1854 it can be seen how radical Kierkegaard's thinking has become. The problem began not with the 1849 Constitution, nor with Mynster, nor the Reformation, the Middle Ages, or even in the 4th century, but much earlier, with the foundation of the Church by Peter and the other apostles and the baptism of the 3000 on the first Pentecost:

An Alarming Note.

Those 3000 who were added to the congregation en masse on Pentecost—isn't there fraud here, right at the very beginning? Ought not the apostles have been uneasy about whether it was really right to have people become Christians by the thousands, all at once? . . . [Didn't the Apostles forget] that if the genuine imitation [of Christ] is to be Christianity, then these enormous conquests of 3000 at once just won't do? . . .

With Christ, Christianity is the individual, here the single individual. With the Apostles it immediately becomes the congregation. [*added here in the margin:* And yet it is a question as to whether the principle of having to hate oneself—which is of course the principle of Christianity—of whether that principle is not so unsocial that it cannot constitute a congregation. In any case, from this point of view one gets the proper view of what sort of nonsense State Churches and People's Churches and Christian countries are.] But here Christianity has been transposed into another conceptual sphere. And it is this concept [i.e., the concept of the congregation] that has become the ruination of Christianity. It is to this concept [i.e., the concept of congregation] that we owe the confusion about states, nations, peoples, empires, which are Christian.⁵⁸

Here we have Kierkegaard's final view of the Church: 1) true Christianity is too unsocial for any concept of congregation; and 2) the concept of congregation has been "the ruination of Christianity."⁵⁹

VII. Kierkegaard's Final Self-Understanding.

The only thing remaining is to look at Kierkegaard's final self-understanding in this connection. While we have seen his radical thinking gain in intensity from the mid-1840's, we have also noted that as late as 1850 he could write that the Church "should not at all be overturned" but that a "higher ideal must hover over it as an awakening possibility." As late as 1851 he could write that only a "man of character, almost an apostle, at the least a witness to the truth" could work for the separation of Church and State. Now, in 1855, he gives an unreserved retrospective view of his own development:

For many different reasons, and prompted by many different factors, I had the idea of defending the Established Church.

[Divine] Governance [*Styrelsen*] has surely had the idea that I was precisely the person who was to be used to overturn the Establishment. But in order to prevent such an undertaking from being the impatient, perhaps arrogant, daring of a young man, I first had to come to understand my task as just the opposite—and now, in what, inwardly understood, has been great torment, I had to be developed to take on the task when the moment came.⁶⁰

And Kierkegaard scarcely had any doubt that he was precisely the person who was destined to do this. There is no longer any talk of waiting for someone else, for an Apostle, a witness to the truth, a "man of character" in order to "overturn the Establishment." Kierkegaard believed that he had been chosen by God for this task. Of course, it could be objected that in his rejection of "the concept of congregation" Kierkegaard was doing far more than "overturning the Establishment" and was in fact rejecting significant portions of the New Testament. It is unclear how Kierkegaard might have replied to such an objection, but we may be permitted to speculate that he might have shrugged it off with the apparently straightforward rejoinder—contained in the final article of the final issue of *The Moment*, which lay ready for publication as Kierkegaard himself lay dying in the hospital in the autumn of 1855—"I am not a Christian."⁶¹ But once again difficulties immediately arise about how to interpret this seemingly unambiguous statement.⁶² Is Kierkegaard's position what it appears to be? Or is Kierkegaard deliberately being "deceptive," as he says one must be when communicating the most important things?⁶³ It is impossible for us to divine Kierkegaard's own views. A master practitioner of maieutics, Kierkegaard slips away from us and refers us back to ourselves. But Kierkegaard was not only a maieuticist, he was also a sort of meteorologist, an expert on lightning rods—and was himself a thunderstorm! He relished this role and might have warned us by referring to the Negro spiritual that James Baldwin used in the title of one of his essay collections: "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, there's fire next time."

NOTES

1. Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, and E. Torsting, eds., 2nd augmented ed. by Niels Thulstrup, index by N. J. Cappelørn, 16 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal: 1968-78) [hereafter "Pap.,"] X¹ A 590 n.d. (1849). The present essay is a revised version of my essay "Tordeneviret: Søren Kierkegaards ekklesiologi," published in Hans Raun Iversen, ed., *Vinduer til Guds Rige* (Frederiksberg, Denmark: Anis Forlag, 1995); this revised version appears here with the permission of Anis Forlag. I am grateful to Connecticut College for support from the R. Francis Johnson Fund for Faculty Development.

2. *Pap.* XI¹ A 189 n.d. (1854).

3. Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaards samlede Værker*, A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg, and H. O. Lange, eds., 1st ed., 14 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1901-1906) [hereafter "SV,"] vol. XIV, p. 235 (*The Moment*, no. 6).

4. *SV* XIV 269 (*The Moment*, no. 7).

5. *SV* XIV 85 ("This must be said: so let it be said, then").

6. See Kierkegaard's conversations with his friend Emil Boesen, in *Søren Kierkegaards efterlædte Papirer. 1854-55*, H. Gottsched, ed. (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1881), p. 597. An English translation of these conversations is included in Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 126.

7. Manuscript Department, Royal Library (Copenhagen), Ny kongelige Samling 3751, 4^e, II, fasc. 2, nr. 206 (my emphasis).

8. Peter Christian Kierkegaard, "Jesu Christi Kirke i Folke-Kirkerne," *Nordisk Tidsskrift for christelig Theologi* (1841-42), reprinted in *Peter Christian Kierkegaards Samlede Skrifter*, Poul Egede Glahn and Lavrids Nyegård, eds., vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Schønberg, 1902), pp. 1-110.

9. I have discussed this point elsewhere, including "'At voxte fra dette Barnlige': Kierkegaard mod kristenheden," *Berlingske Tidende*, October 4, 1994.

As we will see, even before the June 1849 Constitution and its studied ambiguity on the status of the People's Church—"the evangelical Lutheran Church is the Danish People's Church and is supported as such by the State," which can be read descriptively or prescriptively, as one wishes—Kierkegaard was already convinced that the entire clerical establishment was "an ambiguity." See also note 23.

10. J. P. Mynster, *Prædikener holdte i Aarene 1846 til 1852. Sommer-Halvaaret*. 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1854), pp. 17-18. Kierkegaard was present when Mynster delivered this sermon, and was annoyed by "the manner in which he now, almost democratically, tries to ingratiate himself with 'the People's Church,' him, the be-all and end-all of the State Church . . ." [*Pap.* X^e B 212 p. 335 n.d. (1852)].

11. H. L. Martensen, *Af mit Levnet*, vol. II (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1883), p. 132.

12. H. L. Martensen, *Den christelige Dogmatik* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1849), p. 10.

13. H. L. Martensen, *Berlingske Tidende*, December 28, 1854.

14. Entry for December 29, 1869 in *Andreas Frederik Kriegers Dagbøger, 1848-1880*, Elise Koppel, Aage Friis, and P. Munch, eds., vol. IV (Copenhagen and Kristiania: Gyldendal, 1921), p. 318.

15. *Pap.* II A 450 (June 5, 1839).

16. *Pap.* I A 307 (December 11, 1836).

17. *Pap.* III A 216 n.d. (1840).

18. But not before that time! Cf. Kierkegaard's later assertion in his review

of *Two Ages* (1846): "It is . . . as far as possible from being the case that the idea of sociality, of the congregation, can be the salvation of the age. In our time, the principle of association . . . is not affirmative, but negative—an escape, a diversion, a sensory illusion Only when the individual has won an ethical posture in himself despite the whole world, only then can there be talk of truly uniting in groups" [SV VIII 99].

19. *Pap.* III C 15 n.d. (1840-41).
20. *Pap.* VII² B 235 pp. 35 and 40 n.d. (1846-47), from the Book on Adler.
21. *Pap.* VII¹ A 221 p. 145 (January 20, 1847).
22. *Pap.* VIII¹ A 388 n.d. (1847).
23. *Pap.* VIII¹ A 415 p. 181 n.d. (1847).
24. *Pap.* IX A 39 n.d. (1848). See also *Pap.* IX A 154 n.d. (1848, after July 16).
25. *Pap.* IX A 60 n.d. (1848).
26. Peter Christian Kierkegaard's address was printed in *Dansk Kirketidende*, no. 219, bd. 5 (no. 11) (December 16, 1849), cols. 171-79, and is reprinted in Poul Egede Glahn and Lavrids Nyegård, eds., *op. cit.*, vol. IV, pp. 99-120.
27. *Pap.* IX A 240 n.d. (1848).
28. *Pap.* X¹ A 136 n.d. (1849).
29. *Pap.* VIII¹ A 489 n.d. (1847). It is worth noting that as early as 1847 some of Kierkegaard's rhetoric has become as harsh as it would be in 1855; cf. some of these same remarks in the drafts of *The Sickness Unto Death* from 1848, *Pap.* VIII² B 171,15.
30. *Pap.* IX A 264 n.d. (1848).
31. *Pap.* X⁴ A 126 n.d. (1851).
32. *Pap.* X¹ A 541 p. 345 n.d. (1849).
33. Here it should be noted that Kierkegaard was into more interesting etymological territory than perhaps even he himself was aware. Our very word "state," in the sense of a political unit, is itself a relative latecomer. It is a late Renaissance borrowing from the Latin "stare," "to stand" or, more loosely, "to be there, to exist," and took its modern form from the Italian "lo stàto," first used by Machiavelli as an abstract, value-free generalization connoting the whole of the political order, as "that which stands" or "that which is established."
34. *Pap.* X¹ A 407 n.d. (1849).
35. *Pap.* X¹ A 552 n.d. (1849).
36. SV XII 204 (*Practice in Christianity*).
37. *Pap.* X² A 366 n.d. (1849).
38. *Pap.* X³ A 54 n.d. (1850); emphasis in original.
39. SV XII xi, 71, and 139 (*Practice in Christianity*).
40. *Pap.* X³ A 415 n.d. (1850).
41. *Pap.* X³ A 598 and 599 n.d. (1850).
42. *Pap.* X⁴ A 228 n.d. (1851).
43. *Pap.* X⁴ A 358 n.d. (1851).
44. *Pap.* X⁴ A 365 n.d. (1851).
45. *Pap.* X⁵ B 144 p. 346 n.d. (1852).
46. *Pap.* X⁴ A 296 n.d. (1851).
47. "Nonsense" and "balloting" are Kierkegaard's codewords for Grundtvigianism.
48. *Pap.* X⁶ B 261 p. 435 (1851).
49. *Pap.* X⁶ B 211 p. 332 n.d. (1852).
50. *Pap.* X⁵ A 97 n.d. (1853).
51. *Pap.* X⁵ A 102 n.d. (1853).
52. *Pap.* X⁵ A 125 (May 27, 1853); emphasis in original.
53. *Pap.* X⁵ A 147 (November 2, 1853).

54. *Pap. XI¹ A 63* n.d. (1854); my emphasis.

55. *Pap. XI² A 51* pp. 59 and 60 n.d. (1854).

56. *Pap. XI² A 373* n.d. (1854-55).

57. *Pap. XI² A 414* (June 17, 1855).

58. *Pap. XI¹ A 189* n.d. (1854).

59. In order that the picture not be distorted, it ought to be noted here that according to Kierkegaard it was not merely the Church which made use of Christendom as a means with which to control the human race, but also the State which made use of Christendom to assure itself of obedient subjects. As is clear from the following journal entry, Kierkegaard was an expert critic of ideology. The Frankfurt School has nothing on him:

Church-State and State-Church: The Two Forms of Forgery.

. . . The really great attempt in this area was that of the Pope. His idea is to govern people with the help of the Eternal, because it is him—Peter of the Keys or Peter of the Lies [*Nøgle-Peter eller Løgne-Peter*] who speaks for the Eternal. Brilliant!

The other attempt in this area is that of the State. . . . The State [of course] cannot be absolved from having had a bit of the notion that it is always a good idea to have the Eternal up one's sleeve in order to govern people more effectively, so that the civic and the Christian come to overlap. Thus what the State would call a good citizen becomes synonymous with being a good Christian, entirely certain of the blessings of eternity, and what the State would call an unruly subject becomes synonymous with being a bad Christian, who will go to Hell. . . . [*Pap. XI² A 410* (May 23, 1855)].

60. *Pap. XI³ B 110* n.d (1855).

61. *SV XIV 350f.* (*The Moment*, no. 10).

62. See my essay "'I am not a Christian' — A 'Sublime Lie'? or 'Without Authority,' Playing Desdemona to Christendom's Othello" in a forthcoming volume of essays (title under discussion) on Kierkegaard edited by Poul Houe, Gordon Marino, and Sven Rossel; to be published by Rodopi Press, Vienna, expected publication in 1999.

63. See, for example, Kierkegaard's discussion of this in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* [*SV* vol. VII, pp. 221f.].