

Foreword

ONLY A *HISPANIC* THEOLOGIAN COULD HAVE UNCOVERED PREVIOUSLY unknown aspects of Søren Kierkegaard. I recall speaking with Eliseo on the subject more than ten years ago, when I was teaching a semester at Loyola University and at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Since then, I have looked forward to the conclusion of his doctoral dissertation in order to find out about the interesting research on the economic problem in the anguished *Zeitgeist*¹ of Copenhagen, during the Golden Age of the Danish Empire. Kierkegaard was the vexing gadfly of this happy Denmark—in the eyes of the dominant classes of the bourgeoisie, of the state, of the Lutheran Church, and the conservative intelligentsia. The Kierkegaardian critique against the monarchic state, the traditional church, and its intellectual accomplices was well known whereas his critique of capitalism and the bourgeois class is less well known. Herein lies the uniqueness of this excellent work, which opens a new path in Hispanic liberation theology (if the author allows me to recognize his original discourse as such).

As a matter of fact, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), the scholar of humble upbringing, of imperfect and sickly body (which would send him to his grave at the young age of forty-two) had a prophetic spirit and never measured the consequences of his criticism of the institutions that he would, like the prophets of Israel, pronounce against—“the most honorable” personages embodying the structures of domination of his native land in its Golden Age.

His doctorate in Copenhagen, and above all his stay in Germany during the period immediately following Hegel’s death, allowed him, thanks to Schelling, to use a “positive” and “material” dialectical theological narrative of unexpectedly fertile soil. His methodology disconcerted those who felt under attack by that “vexing gadfly,” like the

1. “Spirit of the age.”

Athenian Socrates,² apparently skeptical of all assertions. Kierkegaard, deep down, departed from a critical, creative source well rooted in an innovative reinterpretation of the Christian sacred writings. This was a true foretaste of the liberation theology of the twentieth century, and more so thanks to Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez's groundbreaking exposition in this work.

In fact, the great critic (at that time still conservative) has inspired many philosophers of the twentieth century, from Martin Heidegger to Carl Schmitt. The Kierkegaard of 1846 (barely thirty-three years old) was impelled by European social events of the decade in a Europe that was already suffering the crisis of growing metropolitan capitalism—with colonies, as Kierkegaard was well aware due to his father's and other relatives' experience. As Marx wrote his famous *Manifesto* in 1848, Kierkegaard initiated a transitional period in his life that would last until 1952; from that year until his death (only three years later), we encounter Kierkegaard's most definitive thinking. In all this Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez corrects Kierkegaard's most distinguished biographer Walter Lowrie. These biographical periods will be covered in chapters 2 and 3 of this innovative work.

Kierkegaard's *Two Ages: the Age of Revolution and the Present Age* (1846) is the most political of his books. Kierkegaard feels committed to a republican and democratic society. But in *Christian Discourses* (1848) he delves fully into the criticism of money, which, like Marx, he identifies as the mammon of the New Testament. Money is exclusionary: "What I have, another cannot have," quotes the author of our book time and time again. A rich person results in many poor ones. Kierkegaard takes charge of the prophetic criticism of economic riches, without "romantizing poverty."

The criticism of fetishist money runs alongside the criticism of political fetishist power, in the name of a "Christian state"—which Marx criticized at the time with almost the same terms.³ Kierkegaard

2. Kierkegaard at the time did not distinguish between Socrates's Indo-European death (the Athenian "gadfly"), and the death of Joshua of Nazareth from the Semitic tradition. While one rejoiced with the return of the gods for the "immortality" of the soul, the other would suffer to the point of sweating blood when facing death, although he affirmed the "resurrection" from death. Two totally different anthropologies (see Dussel, *El dualismo en la antropología de la Cristiandad*). The concept of "Christianity" in this research was explicitly Kierkegaardian—as in all my works.

3. See my *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx*.

also targeted the Lutheran Church, represented by Mynster and identified with the state in “Christendom” as well as *The Philistine Bourgeois*, referring to the capitalists who exploited the farmers and the slaves in the colonies. Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez takes great care to clearly differentiate “Christendom” from “Christianity” throughout the text. This Kierkegaardian distinction was adopted by the Latin American liberation theology proposed since 1963 by the great Uruguayan theologian Juan Luis Segundo. Professors such as H. L. Martensen or artists such as J. L. Heiberg were not spared his criticism either. The paradigmatic example was a poor, humiliated Christ, and not a *Pantokrator* that identified with the triumphant and metropolitan, illustrated and bourgeois, healthy and beautiful state Christendom.

All this is retrieved from works such as *Works of Love*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Training in Christianity*, *For Self Examination*, *Judge for Yourself* or the *Instant*, and many others on which Pérez-Álvarez skillfully comments, forever extracting the themes referring to his research: the economic elements of his critical reflection.

Even the colonial matter is touched tangentially by our theologian, although one cannot say it was central in his critical discourse. The same applies to themes such as feminism or racism, distant from his progressive concerns.

Against what I myself had believed, and that which Pérez-Álvarez quotes explicitly, Kierkegaard deals with the “material” theme par excellence: if “matter” implies the *content* of human actions in regard to reproduction and the development of human life, such as eating, drinking, clothing oneself, or being hospitable to the homeless; such as affirming the culture of the oppressed, their gender, their race, their age (whatever it may be). All these “determinants” (in the Hegelian sense that Kierkegaard understood) illustrate the “positivity” of concrete Christianity, which is also expressed in the new economic realities of poverty, pain, colonialism, slavery, and the like. Kierkegaard did not forget these aspects, which are so relevant for a *Hispanic* theology, in solidarity with its people, where many are despised for being undocumented, many are economically exploited with low salaries, many are excluded from educational systems, etc. These essential “material” aspects are fundamental criteria of the Final Judgment expressed in Matthew 25, and thirty centuries before in the *Book of the Dead*, chapter 25, of the Egyptian Menfis by the great pyramids that Joshua of Nazareth already

must have admired, in his exile in these territories. A *Hispanic* theology, I repeat, has the sensitivity of discovering, given that it is analogically in the position of the Danish theologian facing the poor in the Golden Age of the Danish Empire.

Therefore, the post-Hegelian similarity between Kierkegaard and Marx is not surprising. Both criticize the “Christian state” as non-Christian Christendom—the sublime Sunday Christianity (or Saturday of the Jews for Marx), forgetting the “god” of the whole week that is an idol, a fetish. Kierkegaard (and it could just as well be Marx) writes: “If one . . . prays, but prays in a false spirit . . . in truth to God though he worships an idol.”⁴ It is like Bartolomé de la Casas, who understood (reading Ben Sira 34:24) in Cuba in 1514 that it means “to kill the son in the presence of the father,” to offer to God the goods robbed from the poor (the Indians). Idolatry covers modernity and colonialism. Bartolomé, Marx, and Kierkegaard belong to the same prophetic tradition.

Thus Kierkegaard was able to oppose the false “patriotism” of the great and powerful of his time and of his nation, as the prophet Nathan reminded David (the powerful) of his trampled duties. The perennial dialectic of the king and the prophet was highlighted innumerable times by professor Paul Ricoeur, the exiled evangelical French philosopher in Chicago, another contemporary Kierkegaard, my professor in La Sorbonne in the 1960s.

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4. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 179–80.