

Henrik Lindberg HANSEN

Dualism as the Productive Basis of Christianity

The choices we have to make as humans are almost never 'black and white'. There is always an angle or a point of view for the open-minded, which can change focus radically to the opposite. What is wondrous about the world is also what makes life uncertain. The multitude of choices and points of view derives ultimately from the eternity of creation. We can never be sure that we have taken each and every angle into account, and thus we can never be sure that we in fact hold the truth. Any claim to a truth must in this point of view be 'black and white' thinking.

COGNITION AND BLACK-AND-WHITE THINKING

The world is an immense and wondrous place. And we perceive it as such because we cannot encompass it in its magnitude. As we try to perceive it, it constantly slips out of the grasp of our cognition. If we zoom out, we can continue so far that not even our imagination can keep the pace; neither can we count the times we can imagine dividing something material. Both in the whole and in the tiny part of the world our imagination, our ability of cognition is bordered only by the concept of eternity. And what defines eternity is that we cannot understand it, we cannot grasp it – it is the term used for anything that eludes our cognition.

This is what makes the world a wondrous place. Living in the unpredictable – and more than that; living out the unpredictable. Being a Christian constitutes the foundation of living, as the love of God in which we continually are created gives meaning to each and every act of human. But it does not provide us with ready answers that would deprive us of the responsibility of living. We are responsible for what we think, say and do – and even more so as Christians, as we are responsible in accordance with the love in which we are continually created and nurtured. Thus being a Christian does not strip the world of its mysterious magnitude.

DISCERNING IN ORDER TO CHOOSE

Christians or not, we have to make choices. Even though we know that we make our choices on uncertain grounds, we have to make decisions to live. We have to decide whether to walk this way or the other. We have to decide what to eat (which is a big question considering the structures of the economy of the world). We have to decide what education we want – if we can afford one at all. We have to decide whether or not to have children. And each time we make a decision, we define our view on the world – and we define our view on ourselves in the world. As we cannot grasp the world as a whole, we have to categorize and simplify the world

to an understanding, which can be the basis for our choices.

In life we embark on the impossible task of deciphering the world into something we can grasp, but in doing so we always simplify, because it is the only way we can get close to an understanding we can use as the base of our actions. We cannot understand everything, so we have to simplify the world to a degree that we can understand. When we see a person, we categorize him or her according to continents, countries, cities; we categorize in education, income, work, fitness, etc.

It is a big world and none of us can grasp it in its whole. We have to make up categories to separate groups from groups. This is the only way even to get closer to an understanding of our surroundings as a whole. This is not a problem; it is a necessity. The problem arises when this tool of understanding stands in the way of perceiving people and situations as they are. This tool of categorizing the world in order to understand it should know its limits. When we move into a problem or get to know a person, these are usually more detailed than any pre-made categories. If we do not set aside the categories to understand the problem or meet the person, then the 'black and white' thinking starts.

DUALISMS OF CHRISTIANITY

The Bible in numerous places refers to God as good. If anything, this is essential to Christianity, because it is so essential to a human's understanding of oneself. God defines what good is, and this legitimizes our lives – it legitimizes life itself. We were made in the image of God; this is very important in the Christian self-understanding. We *are* good. We *are* accepted as the creations derived from the Creator. But as much as God is good, there is something, which is evil. There is something we can do, with which we turn our backs to the good God. God created human and God saw that it was good, but then something happened, human failed and evil entered the world.

In my view on Christianity there is no doubt as to whether or not it is dualistic. There would be no meaning in the word *good* if it was not for something being evil, as there would be no meaning in the word *God* if God was not good. This means of course that it is not God Who is dualistic in God's being; it is the way we live out God in the world which constitutes a dualism.

We were created as *Imago Dei*, in the image of God. As humans we are invested with the power of God from creation. This automatically establishes the God-given purpose of life. The purpose of human is to live out this God-like power. This *is* good. To purposely avoid doing so constitutes evil. What then is the power of God and how can this not be 'black and white' thinking?



THE DYNAMIC LIBERATING LOVE OF GOD

The Bible can be used as a well-established, well-defined moral code. We can sit down as we encounter the dilemmas of the world and read in the Bible to find similar situations and apply these to our lives today. This would in my opinion constitute 'black and white' thinking as it does not embrace the dynamics of the organic concept of the love of God.

The laws and moral codes of the New Testament are not based on themselves. They are not stagnant principles, which can be applied to our lives without consideration. This is obvious when we turn our attention to Mark 2:27, where the disciples were accused of breaking the Sabbath: 'The Sabbath was made for human and not human for the Sabbath'. The prohibitions do not live apart from human – they do not live a life on their own. The moral code varies – the world is a changing place, and the moral code must change with it.

The good in Christianity is not once and for all determined; it will change from time to time and from situation to situation, and so it does because it has its roots in something we cannot grasp, as little as we can grasp life. It has its roots in the love of God. The love of God determines our actions not once and for all but in each and every situation.

LIVING MORALS AND THE LOVE OF GOD

Paul reasons in 1 Corinthians 8:13 for a prohibition by saying: 'Therefore, if food makes my sister or brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my sister or brother stumble'. Paul argues that we can do as we like, as long as it does not harm our fellow Christians – or any one else, I dare add.

The moral code in the New Testament is not static, because it is a code built on a living thing. It is the power of creation. It is life breaking through. It is the Love of God. There is no 'black and white' in the preaching of Christ. He did not condemn the whore. He lives his life among thieves and beggars. And so he does because his preaching is in his actions, and his bidding is (John 13:34b): 'that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another'.

These are the God-like powers of human given in the creation. The power, the life, the love of God. This we can live out. And we will realize that in living out the love we live out God. It is explicit in Matthew 25:34–46: 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' In living out love, we live out God. 1 John 4, 8: 'One who does not love does not know God, for God is love.'

DUALISTIC PRODUCTIVITY

This love, the life, the power of God can be misused by humans. And through that dualism emerges. Paul underlines the dualism in Romans 7:15b: 'For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do'. Paul knows what is good, as we all do. We also know, what is wrong, because we know what is good. We do not know it once and

for all, but we feel it in each and every situation.

The love lived out is the purpose of our God-given lives. Love misused is a tragedy to God as it is a rejection of God. When we redirect our love away from the creation of God and direct it solely towards our self or towards our smaller community – towards our part of the world, then we reject God, as we corrupt God's love.

When laws stand in the ways of inter-human prosperity, then these laws do not reflect the love of God, and the love of God will highlight them as an abomination to God. When pre-made definitions of the person in front of us cloud our view of this person as a creation of the loving God, then the love of God will open our eyes to this person if we are open to this love.

UNDERSTANDING IS BEING HUMBLE

There is something in Christianity, which is good, and something which is evil. But that does not make Christian thinking 'black and white', even though 'black and white' thinking is dualistic. Christianity as a dualism between good and evil – between what we are created for, and what we are not created for seeks out the inequities by separating the two. And it shatters any 'black and white' thinking by drawing each person up close in the love of God.

We avoid 'black and white' thinking by being humble in the meeting with the immense and wondrous creation. In our cognition each and every one of us try to grasp the world, and we do so in many ways, and thus we do not have the right to lay claim to any ultimate truth. Our approach to the truth is much more practical. What we can do is walking through life with the love of God as our guideline – and enjoy the breathtaking marvels of a creation created in the love of God.

Henrik Lindberg HANSEN was born in 1974 in Denmark. He lives in Copenhagen, where he is working for the ecumenical youth of Denmark, after finishing his theological studies. He attends mass at the Danish Lutheran Church. His email address is LindbergHansen@hotmail.com.

