

Pure heart – Basis of Peace

Roman Králik



Purity of the heart: it is an image which compares the heart to the sea. But why exactly to the sea? That is because the heart has cleanness in its depth and cleanness in its cleanness.”

S. Kierkegaard

Negatives and superficiality – Loss of values

Every one of us faces a large amount of negative news everyday. Television, radio and the internet bombard us with accidents and catastrophes, revealing that humanity nowadays has lost its peace and joy. Negativity has flooded the world and the human mind.

Where to find peace? Where is the oasis where humans can find peace? In 1847, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) published *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and part of this paper is influenced by the sermon of Jesus on the mount and by Matthew 5:8: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Why is Kierkegaard concerned with purity? Because he knew that the human heart is “dim, not deep but superficial.” Thus Kierkegaard wages war against superficiality. Superficiality denies everything deep and thus everything valuable. In order for humans to attain peace, they must not be superficial.

Kierkegaard stresses principles that warn against the loss of human values as a consequence of the loss of internal peace and a sincere relationship with God. Again and again he questions us: What are the human values of today? Where is humankind heading? But he goes even deeper. In his books, he leads a discussion with the reader; he brings his visions and confronts the reader with her or his conscience. Kierkegaard centres his attention on human motives, on each individual’s character and relation to God.

Humans have become non-transparent, cunning, and long for rewards, advantages and to own and possess. These values are remote from Jesus’ beatitudes. Principles such as poverty, quietness, mercy and peace are not considered to be values anymore. This change of values has brought its fruit to humankind – suffering, distrust and fear. The trust among people has disappeared and ethics is at the periphery of interest. We do not have to talk about faith in God; trust is missing in relationships and friendships. As a consequence – the number of suicides has risen, prisons and orphanages are crowded and people live in fear of what the future holds.

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Relationship between God and humans

Kierkegaard is aware of God's demands and requirements for humans. God asks individuals to remember their "first love" – the time of decision involving burning desire for God, when one gives up things, desires and everything preventing a relationship with God. A human must give up everything preventing her or him from spiritual progress. Kierkegaard asks humans to desire and want the only thing.

Kierkegaard sees the difference between God and humans. A human has many desires, which are actually the beginning of spiritual death. Unlike humans, God knows everything and is eternal. A human without God means nothing and lives in untruth – she or he is always negligible. Humans live in untruth, and have hatred, anger, and fear for tomorrow inside. Humans trust the world and have faith in themselves. In his works, therefore, Kierkegaard often warns through the Holy Wit: "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded".

Humans are ill and have two types of diseases: on one hand their disease is a fight, a revolt of self-will and on the other hand it is cowardice, slavery and hypocrisy. Only when reaching the second group of diseases does the doctor discover that the cure used for the first group of diseases was wrong. Thus, the disease has spread and the human has refused the good. As a protection against the disease, God gives two guides: one leads forward towards the good, the other one calls back to the good from the bad. God does not award deeds with admiration but with calls for truth.

Desire for wrong rewards

A human's desire for God must be persistent in overcoming obstacles, exams which are present in a human's life. A human must want the only thing in suffering – God – and must be careful with rewards of this world, which become easily the aim of life. Awards are a kind of trap and must not



be taken into account. Kierkegaard's financial status and social background of priests were thorns in his side. To want the good as a reward in fact means that the human is of disunity and does not want just one thing! The human must decide at the crossroads: to want either reward, the world's recognition, or the only thing, God, and also the disadvantages and hatred from others that is connected with it. To want is a condition and rewards are always temptations. A reward is a symbol of disunity.

A humble person before God, who wants the good sincerely, is strong in God's strength and is strengthened by full faith in God. The world and Church would look different if such people worked for the Church. People very often forget God's reward and prefer early rewards. An early reward is unreal and not permanent or eternal. Humans want to prosper and profit out of the good.

A human, however, does not want to be rewarded only, but to be true as well. The desire to own the truth is weak and vain and is connected with a wish to win in this world. The person must have a proof of being the strongest. Throughout the world's history, humans have wanted to be clever, first, and equal to God, if not to overcome him. The peak of vanity is the human who begs for attention, not by offering beauty, skills or honesty but ambiguity and taint. A human must give up disunity and want the good in truth. This will penetrate into the soul and display hidden thoughts. Humans have stopped seeking for it, seeking only for themselves and relying only on their own reason (Proverbs 3,5). Everyone wants to win, to have victory run through them. The human finds her or himself to be the chosen one and a savior – even if he or she is bifurcated.

If humans want to approach God and become saints, they must live in peace and create peace; they must have a pure heart. This is a presupposition of a spiritual growth and change. This desire must not come out of fear against the good or punishment. A human must not have a fearful heart and must not be afraid of the desire to have a pure heart

Why is Kierkegaard concerned with purity? Because he knew that the human heart is "dim, not deep but superficial."



NEMET GÁBOR





because
t h e
heavens are
closed to a fearful
human. A human with
a pure heart is not afraid of a punishment
because she or he feels it as an act of love,
the good. A bifurcated spirit is afraid of
earthly punishment and does not understand
punishment in eternity. This is a difference in
perception of the good, not fear but love. Love
is shown by trust in the middle of the dangers
of this world.

The good requires peace and patience. The
human is able to want the good as a reward, as
a security from punishment and desperation.
To a certain level, the human wants to follow
goodness. It is enough for one to attend church
on Sunday and on Christian holidays. A person
is brave just in decisions about small things.
But then, in eternity, the individual will have
to answer the question: to what extent was she
or he punctual and persistent in following?

Humans live in troubles and a busy
world. They have forgotten to enjoy small
things. Busyness is a problem. One has no time
to think and understand oneself. One lives in
noise and does not know and see oneself in
depth. One does not have time to stop and face
the mirror, to find out, in which spiritual state

one is present. Our era has everything but time.
Humans are running but they have stopped
living and thinking about personal disunity.
Individuals make excuses to carry this burden
and seek for agreements all around to apologise
for behavior. There is a kind of cleverness in
every human though – a dangerous power to
see one’s own faults and failures. The human
finds excuses and objections to get rid of guilt.
A human who wants the good, needs wisdom
and bravery to fight excuses.²

A human of disunity has lost peace and this
is visible in actions which harm. This human
forgets that the only and true proof of conviction
and faith in life is deeds. Faith is proved by
deeds, deeds of love and mercy towards your
vicinage and fellowmen. It is not enough to
declare the faith; it is necessary to confirm it by
deeds. Such faith then becomes real. A human
without deeds is unstable and lives in a fake
idea of “Christianity”. Kierkegaard is critical of
Luther because Luther underestimated Jacob’s
epistle, which calls a human to deeds.

If one really decides to follow the good, one
must do everything. One must not be afraid
of suffering and contempt from others. The
good requires forgiveness, generosity, giving-
up position and the second mile. It requires
personal bravery to survive the pressure of
society. If one wants to do everything, than one
must choose to remain in the good regardless
of the circumstances. A human who wants the
only thing saves time for the good and does not
deal with many unnecessary things which do
not build character. Humans face the challenge
by suffering and learn what makes sense in life
and what is the highest in a spiritual point of
view. A human decides, by suffering, to refuse
recovery or to follow the good.

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Challenge

The human faces the challenge of living as an individual. One must leave the crowded mass of people and extricate from it. One must think about one's life before God. Unless one leaves the crowd, one is only a fraction in a mundane mess and runs away from God's voice as Adam in Paradise. Each person stands alone before God regardless of position or status. What does, however, a human do? A human wants to put conscience to sleep and move towards the crowd, which has forgotten its personal responsibility to want the only thing a long time ago.

Kierkegaard does not doubt that he is loved by God. God, who is infinity, but loves him and comes down to him. Kierkegaard's aim was for people to realise the seriousness of the situation. He pointed at human choice and the reality that our hearts must be purified from selfishness and handed to the hands of the higher entity. If even the smallest cloud comes in between the heart and the good, then, at that moment, the heart is not as clear as a mirror and does not reflect the heavens anymore.

Kierkegaard realised that the Christianity of his times had declined and become formal. It stopped being the life-and-death fight, no longer seriously understood in terms of the New Testament. It was a children's toy instead. The faith was always very deep, a strong but blissful feeling. Faith is the way, the journey which turns the problems and unrest in the world in a different

direction. The world's misunderstanding brings condemnation on one hand, and joy on the other, because faith overcomes the world – and brings peace from God. The journey of a Christian is similar to a ship on the sea: there are different obstacles, but the important thing is the direction – the lighthouse is Jesus Christ.

Kierkegaard requires the human to follow Christ. This journey should be the same, without compromise, as Jesus' journey: to walk alone in the role of a small servant and to not long for the rewards of this world. One should not expect advantages and help as a result of this decision; it is not a question of tradition or of different speculations. When a human freely decides, the help comes, under the condition of relying on God and not on people and their skills. In heaven, each human will answer the question of what treasures she or he gathered in the heaven, not how much property and contacts she or he built back on earth.

Everyone answers the question: how many times has one had denied oneself and bore suffering and insults? Jesus Christ is an example of this battle; he gave up everything, glory and recognition, and was killed on the cross in the middle of thieves. According to Kierkegaard, a choice always means "either-or". Kierkegaard is the philosopher of choice: to gain everything – or lose everything. There is only one way to victory: follow God and gain eternity. To follow does not mean that the human stops carrying the burden of Christ.



Kierkegaard often concentrates on and admires Christ, who sacrificed himself and did not want anything but to save all. He calls humans not to get rid of burdens but to learn how to carry them and remember the call of Holy Wit: carry the burdens of the others. There is a clear command; do not be Pharisees who preach about what the others shall do but forget about themselves. A Christian should be recognized by silence and mildness. They should forgive others and stand as examples. This forgiveness is not a careless forgetting but a conscious forgetting in active forgiveness.

What is the point of theological quarters on Søren Kierkegaard today? He is perceived as a less important theologian than the one who wanted to point out the real level of Christianity and bring its improvement. Kierkegaard pointed at the poverty of theology which had changed the life of Church into a grey theory. Kierkegaard's attack was connected with his awareness that the Church had succumbed to culture and society instead of having complete dependence on God. Due to Karl Barth's preface of the Letter to Romans,³ Kierkegaard became the subject of interest in Germany in the 1920s. This happens even today, in an era when recognising value is a problem.

What is the result? There is a story about a professor of theology who announced that he had never met any Christian apart from one, and that one was killed because of his ideas at the end of World War II. What has happened? An example has been lost, a pattern and a prior love to God. Secularization comes and values based on the Bible are lost as well.

Kierkegaard, therefore,

focused on the absurdity of seeking the truth in Church. Why is he so radical? Because a Church which is concentrated mainly on the interests of this world cannot be an authority. The Church has a mission, which, if not being fulfilled, does not make sense. According to Kierkegaard, the understanding of the Church as a "community of saints" is not very much stressed. The individual is important – the Christian, who serves the only God and not only serves selflessly, but also loves with all mind, heart and strength. Kierkegaard, by saying this, stresses the deeds of love which are expressions of faith. These deeds and all human life are the measurement of faith according to Kierkegaard. The true love of a human is displayed in obedience "because God can be praised only by obedience".⁴ When a human proves obedience to God, then she or he gains God and everything connected to God. This obedience is influenced by the interpretation of the life of Jesus Christ and his life was a symbol of suffering. He proved his obedience through suffering until death on the cross, giving up everything. Kierkegaard's stress of the difference between the human and God is popular, particularly this idea: "God is in the heaven and you Man on earth".

Humbleness and suffering – these are two important signs of a human's faith, "because as the gold is cleaned with fire, the soul is cleared by suffering". Such faith is not simple but a fight. A human then receives peace, creates peace and is no longer afraid of the future.

This article was translated by Elena Buraková.

Suggested Readings

Barth Karl. *Der Römerbrief*, 2 Aufl. München:

Chr. Kaiser, 1922.

Králík, Roman. *Zápas Sorena Kierkegaard*. Nitra: FF UKF 2006 (The Fight of Søren Kierkegaard).

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Evangelium utpení*. Brno: CDK 2006 (Gospel of Sufferings).

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Čistota srdce*, Praha: Kalich 1989 (Purity of Heart).



(Endnotes)

1 Kierkegaard, Søren. *Čistota srdce*, Praha: Kalich 1989, p. 154.

2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed his personal bravery by sacrificing for the truth. "Mainly Bonhoeffer's death and sacrifice would be the real preachment according to Kierkegaard". Králík, R. *Zápas Sorena Kierkegaard*; Nitra: FF UKF 2006, s. 55.

3 Barth Karl. *Der Römerbrief*, 2 Aufl. München: Chr. Kaiser, 1922, p. XIII.

4 Kierkegaard, S.: *Evangelium utpení*. Brno: CDK 2006, p. 131.