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A Summary of Readings: Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

Roger Schoeniger

Ouachita Baptist University

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A SUMMARY OF READINGS

SOREN KIERKEGAARD (1813-1855)

Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for
Religion Special Studies
H 490

Roger Schoeniger
Spring 1970
Ouachita Baptist University
Arkadelphia, Arkansas

H 230

SOREN KIERKEGAARD (1813-1855)

Every individual is a unique product of all those factors which touch his life. Soren Kierkegaard must be understood in the light of those factors within his life. His father, Michael Pedersen, played a major role in his son's life. He was obsessed with guilt because of past sins and sought to make atonement for these sins by disciplining his son in the Christian way of life. Somehow, the father's guilt was transferred to Soren, and Soren spent the rest of his life in search for forgiveness.

Kierkegaard turned almost into an ascetic. He was engaged to Regina Olsen, but broke his engagement because of a "dread" which he felt. The dread was a fear of the uncertainty of life. He turned to philosophy. The philosophical rage of his day was the philosophy of Hegel. This also left him cold and empty. Hegel was too abstract in his thinking and he viewed man as little more than a "pawn", to be moved about in the process of history.

Soren saw man as much more than this. His manner of life offended those who sought to order the lives of man. The group and its will had little effect upon Kierkegaard's life. He emphasized the individual and downgraded the group. The individual and the development of that individual was the most important thing in life.

This individuality and its development led to the question, how can it be done? This is where the background of Kierkegaard's personality played its most important role. From his strict and guilt-laden (inherited from his father) life and the imposing of a harsh view of Christianity, Kierkegaard's thought was formed. Man's means of development came from his freedom, but this freedom also entailed responsibility. Going back to his Christian heritage, he saw that man's proper use of his freedom could bring about his individuality.

Kierkegaard translated this into terms of living. The proper use of a man's freedom is issued in choices which he makes. These choices, in turn, produce an experience which molds his individuality. He saw these choices in three classes, classes determined by the motivation involved. These three classes or levels of choices are: (1) the aesthetic; (2) ethical; and (3) religious.

The aesthetic level is best exemplified in a child. The child lives a life almost exclusively on the aesthetic level. For the child, all choices are made in terms of pleasure and pain, and the experience from these choices is ephemeral, having no continuity or meaning. It is merely a connection of isolated, non-related moments. The ethical level is the level of conscious choice, while religious choices are those choices one makes in a commitment to oneself. To live at the religious level means to make any sacrifice or even

participate in antisocial action that may be required in being true to oneself. These levels are interwoven, and one leads to the other.

It is Kierkegaard's belief that man, going from one level of experience to another, would ultimately choose suffering and pain. He would have a constant awareness of the difference between temporal existence and ultimate truth. Only when man experiences the suffering of firm commitment to the religious level of experience can he be considered to be a religious person and hence on his way to being that individual he desires to be.

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