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What Does It Mean to Be a Christian? The Views of Joseph Smith and Søren Kierkegaard

David L. Paulsen

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and the American prophet Joseph Smith (1805–1844) both radically critiqued nineteenth-century Christian culture. Though Søren often directed critiques specifically toward the State Church of Denmark,¹ his ultimate target was Christianity as a whole, or simply “Christendom.”² Joseph’s critique singled out no specific church; he also focused on Christianity as a whole. While Søren advanced his critique with a copy of “the New Testament in his hand,” he emphatically insisted he was “without authority.”³ In contrast, Joseph claimed his critique was based on divinely invested authority and on revelation, which, he said, came to him both directly and in the form of ancient texts he translated with divine aid.

Søren and Joseph both called for drastic change in contemporary Christianity. Although it is clear that Kierkegaard sought to initiate reform in the lives of individual Christians, the goals he hoped to achieve on a churchwide level remain ambiguous. Nonetheless, his desired starting point was clear: an official Church acknowledgment that Christianity as taught and practiced in Denmark was not the Christianity of the New Testament.⁴ Mere reform was not enough for Joseph, who asserted the only solution was a literal restoration of New Testament Christianity, claiming God had called him to perform such a function.⁵ Indeed, Joseph viewed the Church that God restored through him as the kingdom of God, “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30).

Notwithstanding important differences, I find Søren’s and Joseph’s critiques of nineteenth-century Christendom mutually reinforcing and illuminating. To begin to clarify the content of their critiques and the extent of their congruence is the modest task of this paper. Assessment of

their views is largely deferred; however, self-examination in light of them may commence at once. I begin by providing some historical context for these men and their critiques.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD (1813–1855)

Søren Kierkegaard is widely recognized today as a towering figure in the philosophy of religion. But this has not always been so. His major books, published in printings of five hundred, sometimes did not sell out the first



Søren Kierkegaard

editions, and his greatest philosophical work, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, sold only seventy copies during his lifetime.⁶ However, Søren foresaw that others would be slow to recognize the significance of his work. In 1850, he wrote, “Circumstances are still far from being confused enough for people to make proper use of me. . . . But they must come to see that things will nonetheless end with circumstances becoming so desperate that they will have to make use of desperate people like me.”⁷

Kierkegaard invites us to ponder what he called “the essential questions”—those closest to our centers as feeling, thinking, acting individuals: What does it mean to exist? What does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to be an individual? What does it mean to die? For Søren, all of these questions coalesced in what he considered the most important inquiry of all: What does it mean to be a Christian?⁸ The probing of this last question is the central thread that runs through and ties together his entire authorship.⁹ All told, he dealt with this question, directly or indirectly, in twenty-one extraordinary books and in over eight thousand pages of journals and papers.¹⁰ Søren’s underlying aim in his voluminous production was not primarily theoretical. Instead, his purpose was to provoke Christian self-examination with a view to repentance or, as he otherwise put it, to introduce Christianity into Christendom.

In the last year of his life, Søren began a scathing assault on established Christian culture, climaxing with his famous (or infamous) *Attack upon Christendom*. The time for gentleness was past; what was needed

was a sledgehammer.¹¹ When an anonymous critic accused Kierkegaard of constantly “ringing the fire alarm,” he corrected the accuser by saying he had not sounded the alarm but started the fire in an effort to “smoke out illusions” of Christianity.¹²

Søren commenced his attack with a series of twenty-one articles published in a Copenhagen newspaper, *The Fatherland*, from December 1854 to May 1855 and he capped it off with a series of tracts called *The Moment*, which he published from May until October 2, when he fell to the ground paralyzed with an illness that was never clearly diagnosed. Kierkegaard himself considered his sickness to be psychic—the toll incurred by his efforts to root out the corruption embedded in Danish Christianity.¹³ He was taken to Frederik’s Hospital, where he died on November 11, reportedly lucid to the end.

Among the regular visitors Søren welcomed during his last illness was Pastor Emil Boesen, a close friend since his youth. One day Boesen asked Kierkegaard if he relied on Christ’s grace. Søren answered, “Naturally, what else?”¹⁴ Another day Boesen asked, “Won’t you take the Holy Communion?” Søren responded, “Yes, but not from a pastor, from a layman.” Boesen replied that that would be difficult. Then, Søren said, he would die without it: “I have made my choice. . . . The pastors are civil servants of the Crown; civil servants of the Crown have nothing to do with Christianity.”¹⁵

JOSEPH SMITH (1805–1844)

Joseph’s canonized account of his First Vision provides a useful background for understanding his critique of Christendom, as well as a core framework for comparing his perspective with Søren’s. In 1820, fourteen-year-old Joseph was living in upstate New York where there was, according to his account, “an unusual excitement on the subject of religion” (JS–H 1:5). This religious fervor created a significant stir and division among the people. Joseph was profoundly affected by the ensuing commotion: “During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness. . . . So great were



Joseph Smith. Courtesy Church History Library.

the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong” (JS-H 1:8).

While struggling with this question, Joseph came across the following passage while reading the Epistle of James: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). Following James’s counsel, Joseph went to the woods near his home to pray for direction. In response to his supplication, God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him. He wrote:

I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!* . . . I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right . . . and which I should join. . . . I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.” (JS-H 1:17–19)

In explaining why “they were all wrong,” the Lord made six sweeping indictments of nineteenth-century Christianity. These indictments summarize much of what I herein refer to as Joseph’s¹⁶ critique of Christendom. Considered one by one, they will serve as a roadmap for our comparison of Joseph’s and Søren’s views.

I. “THEY WERE ALL WRONG”

Joseph

In an 1832 journal entry referring to his First Vision, Joseph asserted “there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament.”¹⁷ Along the same lines, in explaining his First Vision to early followers, Joseph was known to relate how he “was told there was no Christian church on the face of the earth according to the ancient pattern, as recorded in the New Testament.”¹⁸

Søren

In his *Attack upon Christendom*, Søren repeatedly asserted that New Testament Christianity was no longer to be found. Consider the following representative texts.

March 22, 1855: “First and foremost, and on the greatest possible scale, an end must be put to the whole official . . . falsehood which . . . conjures up and maintains the illusion that what is preached is Christianity, the Christianity of the New Testament. Here is a case where no quarter must be given.”¹⁹

March 26, 1855: “The religious situation in our country is: Christianity (that is, the Christianity of the New Testament—and everything else is not Christianity, least of all by calling itself such), Christianity does not exist—as almost anyone must be able to see as well as I.”²⁰

And on March 28, 1855: “O Luther, thou hadst 95 theses—terrible! And yet, in a deeper sense, the more theses, the less terrible. This case is far more terrible: there is only one thesis. The Christianity of the New Testament simply does not exist. Here there is nothing to reform.”²¹

During the last few months of his life, Kierkegaard broke a lifelong habit and ceased attending church, advising others to do the same. In May 1855, he wrote: “Whosoever thou art, whatever thy life may be, my friend—by ceasing to take part (if in fact thou dost) in the public function of divine worship as it now is, thou hast one guilt the less and a great one, that thou dost not take part in treating God as a fool, and in calling that the Christianity of the New Testament which is not the Christianity of the New Testament.”²²

II. “THEIR CREEDS WERE AN ABOMINATION IN HIS SIGHT”

Joseph

Joseph did not claim that the denominational creeds contained no truth, but only that whatever truth they contained was mixed with falsehoods: “I cannot believe in any of the creeds of the different denominations, because they all have some things in them I cannot subscribe to, though all of them have some truth.”²³ Among the doctrines Joseph said had been corrupted by these creeds were those pertaining to the nature of God and the trinity²⁴ as well as those dealing with the purpose, proper mode, and authority to perform the ordinances of baptism²⁵ and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.²⁶ Perhaps most fundamentally,

Joseph held that some creeds erred in teaching that the heavens were closed and God had ceased to communicate with man on earth.²⁷

Apart from creedal doctrinal error, Joseph found fault with the creeds because of (1) their restrictive nature, (2) their causing division and contention among Christians, (3) their privileging orthodoxy (right doctrine) above orthopraxy (Christian practice), and (4) their substituting human constructions for revelation.

Joseph was particularly opposed to the dogmatic and restrictive nature of the creeds. “I want to come up into the presence of God,” he explained, “and learn all things; but the creeds set up stakes, and say, ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further;’ which I cannot subscribe to.”²⁸ On another occasion, he stated:

The most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was, that the latter were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time.²⁹

Further: “Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be kicked out of their church. I want the liberty of believing as I please, it feels so good not to be trammelled.”³⁰

Second, the conflicting creeds defined boundaries between sects that created confusion, contention, and division.³¹ Referring to the diverse and contradictory nature of the various creeds, Joseph reasoned: “Is God the author of all this? If not of all of it, which does He recognize? Surely, such a heterogeneous mass of confusion never can enter into the kingdom of heaven.”³²

Third, Joseph worried that preoccupation with right doctrine (orthodoxy) sometimes led to a disregard for necessary Christian practice (orthopraxy). Though he in no way minimized the importance of doctrine, he stressed the priority of orthopraxy over orthodoxy. For Joseph, it was unacceptable to merely profess belief in God, even if one’s beliefs were correct. He explained, “Any man may believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and be happy in that belief, and yet not obey his commandments, and at last be cut down for disobedience to the Lord’s righteous requirements.”³³ To receive salvation, according to Joseph, “We must not only do some things, but everything which God has commanded.”³⁴

Finally, Joseph knew that human constructions based on human wisdom were suspect; the only reliable source of correct doctrine was God. Therefore, when declaring doctrine, Joseph credited heaven as the source. For example, before discussing the “organization of Spirits in the eternal

world,” he said, “I am going to take up this subject by virtue of the knowledge of God in me, which I have received from heaven.”³⁵ Indeed, Joseph claimed, “Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.”³⁶

Søren

Søren, too, saw problems in postrevelatory, human theological constructions. From his perspective, New Testament Christianity was pure and undefiled—something against which modern Christianity should constantly check itself. Consequently, he bemoaned any changes to Christianity that stripped it of its original boldness: “Christianity was an imposing figure when it stepped vigorously forth into the world and spoke its opinion, but from the moment it tried to set bounds through the pope or wanted to throw the Bible, or later still the creed, at the people’s head, it became like an old man who thinks that he has lived long enough in the world and wants to retire.”³⁷ New Testament Christianity, Søren explained, was so imposing because it was a paradox for all.³⁸ There were no professors of religion or professional clergy to explain away the ultimate paradox of Christianity, that “the eternal, essential truth . . . has come into existence in time.”³⁹ Established churches sought to mitigate the paradoxical nature of Christianity and offer the masses a cheapened understanding of it.

Like Joseph, Søren feared orthodoxy would surmount orthopraxy. He warned against allowing the particulars of one’s creed to supersede the quality of one’s faith. “If a man is to be a Christian,” Kierkegaard maintained, “it is doubtless requisite for him to believe something *definite*; but it is just as certainly requisite for him to be *quite definite* that ‘he’ believes. In the same degree that thou dost direct attention exclusively to the definite things a man must believe, in that same degree dost thou get away from faith.”⁴⁰

Along the same lines, Kierkegaard declared that the attempt to encapsulate Christianity in a creed was an “ultimate misunderstanding.”⁴¹ He viewed Christianity not as a doctrine, but rather as an “existence-communication,” something to be lived, not just contemplated.⁴² “Surely a philosophical theory that is to be comprehended and speculatively understood is one thing,” said Søren, “and a doctrine that is to be actualized in existence is something else.”⁴³ Creeds were an “ultimate misunderstanding” because they categorized Christianity as the former rather than the latter.

Most fundamentally, then, Christians were to live Christianity, not just theorize about it.⁴⁴ Like Joseph, Søren stressed the priority of Christian praxis over theory. His apparent de-emphasis of doctrine was dialectically

designed to provoke us to self-examination and repentance and, thus, to bring back into equilibrium a pendulum that had swung too far—at least in nineteenth-century Denmark—toward speculative theologizing.

III. “THOSE PROFESSORS WERE ALL CORRUPT”

Joseph

Whatever Joseph may have thought about the framers of the classic Christian creeds, it is clear he often complained about the priests and pastors of the local churches themselves. He said, “The sectarian priests are blind, and they lead the blind, and they will all fall into the ditch together. They build with hay, wood, and stubble, on the old revelations, without the true priesthood or spirit of revelation.”⁴⁵

Even as a teenage boy anxious to tell of his vision of the Father and the Son, Joseph encountered bitter dissonance from denominational leaders whom he referred to as “professors of religion”: “I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion. . . . Men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects—all united to persecute me” (JS-H 1:22).

An 1832 journal entry provides more insight as to whom he believed the Lord was designating as “corrupt.” Joseph recorded, “Thus applying myself to them [the scriptures] and my intimate acquaintance with those of different denominations led me to marvel exceedingly for I discovered that they did not [adorn] their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository this was a grief to my Soul.”⁴⁶

Many of Joseph’s views were drawn directly from revelations that came to and through him; others he gleaned from ancient texts he claimed to have translated by the power of God. One such text was the Book of Mormon, a record of the Lord’s dealings with his prophets on the ancient American continent. These prophets foresaw nineteenth-century professors of Christendom displaying corruption of many guises, including intellectual arrogance, materialistic self-seeking, insensitivity to or even disdain for the poor, and classism. Consider the words of Jacob: “O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men. When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore

their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish” (2 Ne. 9:28).

Nephi also prophetically foretold many modes of corruption, specifically lamenting the “gold,” “silver,” “silks,” “scarlets,” “fine-twined linen,” and “precious clothing” that are the “desires of [the] great and abominable [that is, apostate] church” (1 Ne. 13:4–8). He also relates the failings of the Christian professors specifically to their pride, intellectual arrogance, and classism (2 Ne. 26:20–21, 29).

To avoid these types of corruption, the church described in the Book of Mormon at times maintained a lay ministry, which Joseph reinstated and which remains today in the church he restored. Two different accounts in the Book of Mormon describe such a lay-leadership structure:

And the priests were not to depend upon the people for their support; but for their labor they were to receive the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God. (Mosiah 18:26)

And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength.

And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely. (Alma 1:26–27)

Søren

Regarding priestly corruption in Christendom, Kierkegaard’s critique seems to be in close correspondence with Joseph’s. As we have seen, Søren had no tolerance for pastors who were royal officials—employees of the state.⁴⁷ But he also felt that the very idea of a professional clergy presented an inherent and irresolvable conflict of interest. Because the pastor’s financial and social well-being is tied to the appointments of the state or the generosity of his congregation,⁴⁸ his loyalty to Christianity becomes compromised, as other factors inevitably deter him from preaching the demands of discipleship:

To be specific, [the pastor] has the reason that he wants to have a good standing with the people, who would perhaps get angry if he represented

Christianity more truthfully. He has the reason that it is his bread and butter, and he must take care to speak in such a way that the congregation is not niggardly with the offering. In short, he has the reason that he himself is stuck in the same worldliness as the congregation.⁴⁹

Being involved in such worldliness was not consistent with the message of Christianity. Ironically, as Søren pointed out: “A pastor is one who is respected and honored and esteemed in society for proclaiming that we should not seek after worldly honor, esteem, and wealth.”⁵⁰ He derided pastors as opportunists who coasted along the comfortable crest of Christianity’s popularity. Strikingly like Nephi, Søren even lamented the love and wearing of costly apparel:

Thanks be to you, ye silk and velvet priests, who in ever more numerous troops offered your services when it appeared that profit was on the side of Christianity; thanks be to you for your Christian zeal and fervor in behalf of these millions, of kingdoms and lands, of a whole world of Christians. . . . For if things were to remain as they were, if only a few poor, persecuted, hated men were Christians, where was the silk and velvet to come from?⁵¹

Even more appalling, the results of such opportunism adversely affected the poor and outcast, for in such a religious system, serving the poor did not offer the same benefits to priests as serving those with power and wealth:

But, true enough, to the priest the king is infinitely more important than the beggar. “A beggar, what help will he be to us? We might have to give him money.” . . . “But a king, a king! That is prodigiously important for Christianity.” . . . [For] when the whole nation has become Christian, . . . then come silk and velvet, and stars and ribbons, and all the most exquisite refinements, and the many thousands per year.⁵²

Kierkegaard noticed that those to whom Christianity should offer the most concern and care—the poor and the suffering—sadly were those who were most neglected:

If Christianity relates to anyone in particular, then it may especially be said to belong to the suffering, the poor, the sick, the leprous, the mentally ill, and so on, to sinners, criminals. Now see what they have done to them in Christendom, see how they have been removed from life so as not to disturb—earnest Christendom. Rarely do they have a pastor, and then he is a mediocre one. Christ did not separate them in this way; it was for them especially that he was a pastor.⁵³

Although Søren spoke out strongly against a professional, especially a state-sponsored, clergy, perhaps he reserved his sharpest criticism for those who were “professors” as a result of academic training and

appointment—especially professors of Christian theology. He felt that the message of Christianity was not so difficult as to require the learned writings of specially trained men in order for common people to know how to be Christian—the New Testament had made it clear enough. Actually, said Kierkegaard, the need and usefulness of professors came about because of “the fact that [the requirements of Christianity are] not to our liking—and therefore, therefore, therefore we must have commentaries and professors and commentaries. *It is to get rid of doing God’s will that we have invented learning . . . we shield ourselves by hiding behind tomes.*”⁵⁴ In a scorching declamation preserved in his *Journals and Papers*, he wrote:

There are passages in the N.T. whereby bishops, priests, deacons (no matter how little they approximately resemble the original sketch) can be justified, but find the passage in the N.T. which mentions professors of theology. Why does a person involuntarily laugh if to that passage which declares that God ordained some to be prophets, others to be apostles, others to be directors of the congregation, there is added: “some to be professors of theology?”⁵⁵

In comparing Joseph and Søren, we must not forget that their respective critiques of intellectual arrogance stemmed from quite different theological perspectives. Kierkegaard held that reason’s inability to grasp religious truth, and thus the arrogance of any theologian or professor of religion attempting so to do, was not simply due to our fallen nature, but rather to the nature of God himself. Because God is wholly transcendent and wholly “Other,” any of his manifestations in the temporal world will necessarily conceal his true nature. Furthermore, God’s revelation will be self-contradictory, as evidenced by his supreme self-manifestation as the crucified man Jesus. Thus, reason can *never* grasp religious truths, as it is unable to believe by virtue of the absurd.⁵⁶

Joseph, while occasionally emphasizing our inability to *fully* grasp religious truths through reason (see, for instance, Mosiah 4:9), held no such extreme view. Rather, he often cited the reasonableness of the doctrines he taught as evidence of their truth. For Joseph, reason was a necessary companion to revelation, only undesirable when separated therefrom. Thus, despite their different motives for doing so, both Joseph and Søren distrusted an all-powerful, rational capability, especially as it was employed by unauthorized, dispassionate professors of religion.

**IV. “THEY DRAW NEAR TO ME WITH THEIR LIPS,
BUT THEIR HEARTS ARE FAR FROM ME”**

Joseph

The contention and hostility that Joseph observed among competing Christian clergy was perhaps his first indication that, despite the lip service they gave to Christian love, their hearts were far indeed from the Lord. When Joseph was seeking to know which of the churches was true, he noted “the great love” and “the great zeal” among new converts and clergy in the midst of “th[e] extraordinary scene of religious feeling,” where all people enjoyed the opportunity to freely “join what sect they pleased.” Such feelings of mutual congeniality, however, were short-lived:

When the converts began to file off, some to one party and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions. (JS–H 1:6)

Joseph understood the dangers of flattery (which he called “a deadly poison”⁵⁷) and ostentatious verbosity by those who made an external show of their religiousness. “Outward appearance is not always a criterion by which to judge our fellow man,” Joseph counseled. “But the lips betray the haughty and overbearing imaginations of the heart; by his words *and* his deeds let him be judged.”⁵⁸ Thus, Joseph tried to avoid fanfare in his own preaching: “I do not calculate or intend to please your ear with superfluity of words or oratory, or with much learning; but I calculate to edify you with the simple truths from heaven.”⁵⁹ He once remarked, “I love that man better who swears a stream as long as my arm, and administering to the poor & dividing his substance, than the long smoothed faced hypocrites.”⁶⁰ Righteousness, according to Joseph, was not dependent on a person’s ability to eloquently articulate beliefs. “To be righteous is to be just and merciful. If a man fails in kindness justice and mercy he will be dam[n]ed.”⁶¹

Søren

Søren also observed that speech and action are often separated by a chasm of hypocrisy. For him, there were some truths—indeed, the most meaningful ones—that could never be realized if hypocrisy were present. Objectively, truths may be articulated, but they cannot be appropriated

without fervent commitment to living them, hence the idea of Christianity being an “existence-communication.” Søren continually emphasized the roles of *passion* and *inwardness* as essential components in an individual’s path to becoming a Christian—two qualities completely incompatible with hypocrisy. Thus, a distanced, noninvolved objectivity becomes intrinsically at odds with the inner, subject-centered nature of true Christian discipleship. “Christianity explicitly wants to intensify passion to its highest, but passion is subjectivity, and objectively it does not exist at all.”⁶²

In this light, Søren asks us to ponder the following scenario and consider where more truth is to be found:

If someone who lives in the midst of Christianity enters, with knowledge of the true idea of God, the house of God, the house of the true God, and prays, but prays in untruth, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of infinity, although his eyes are resting upon the image of an idol—where, then, is there more truth? The one prays in truth to God although he is worshiping an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore in truth worshiping an idol.⁶³

Kierkegaard warns us of becoming Sunday-only Christians, who outwardly appear Christian yet inwardly remain empty, for “Sunday vistas into eternity are so much air.”⁶⁴ Instead, it is crucial that individuals’ dedication to living the Christian life saturates all parts of their existence. “It is in the living room that the battle must be fought, lest the skirmishes of religiousness become a changing-of-the-guard parade one day a week.”⁶⁵ On this point, the pastor has a responsibility to make Christianity’s requirements clear. Soft, lulling tugs are not enough: “If the pastor’s activity in the church is merely a once-a-week attempt to tow the congregation’s cargo ship a little closer to eternity, the whole thing comes to nothing, because a human life, unlike a cargo ship, cannot lie in the same place until the next Sunday.”⁶⁶

V. “THEY TEACH FOR DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN”

Joseph

In his preface to the Book of Commandments (now found in LDS scripture as section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants), the Lord discloses that people often substituted their own doctrinal constructions in place of his teachings: “For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant; . . . they seek not the Lord to establish

his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world” (D&C 1:15–16).

“All men,” Joseph taught, “are naturally disposed to walk in their own paths as they are pointed out by their own fingers and are not willing to consider and walk in the path which is pointed out by another, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, although he should be an unerring director, and the Lord his God sent him.”⁶⁷

One of the most prominent motifs woven throughout the Book of Mormon centers on the dangers of “priestcraft”: “for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world” (2 Ne. 26:29). The Book of Mormon teaches that in the last days many men would declare their own doctrine, fashioned and formed to fit the image of the world. Nephi warns of a time when many churches would be built up “and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor” (2 Ne. 26:20). As such churches neglect the poor and pander to the wealthy, the demands of Christian discipleship are subtly and quickly mediated and softened to allow both church and world to prosper side by side:

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Ne. 28:8–9; see also 2 Ne 28:12–13)

Joseph never aimed for popularity with the doctrines he taught. He, much like Søren, strongly emphasized that Christian discipleship requires the imitation of Christ, rather than complacently following the pleasing doctrines of men. He said that Christ’s command to “do the work, which ye see me do” contains “the grand key-words for the society to act upon.”⁶⁸ Indeed, in the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Lord instructs on this point very succinctly: “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Ne. 27:27).

Joseph, like Søren, recognized that the Christian sects of his day went astray in their teaching of the doctrine of grace (to be described below). While emphasizing the need to work out our own salvation, he also taught that people are powerless without Christ’s grace and humbly acknowledged his own personal dependence on it. “I only add, that I do not, nor never have, pretended to be any other than a man ‘subject to passion,’

and liable, without the assisting grace of the Savior, to deviate from that perfect path in which all men are commanded to walk.”⁶⁹ Thus, Joseph, while determined to emulate the Savior, reverberated the Book of Mormon admonition that even “after all we can do,” it is still only through Christ and his grace that we may inherit salvation (2 Ne. 25:23). Joseph once told his followers, “I don’t want you to think that I am very righteous, for I am not,” illustrating that even those called as prophets need repentance and grace.⁷⁰ Joseph’s emphasis on works never lessened the importance of human dependence on the grace of Christ. A passage from the Book of Mormon illustrates this:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved.

Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine. (2 Ne. 10:24–25)

Throughout his life, Joseph labored diligently to demonstrate that although he was a man like all others, the revelations that came through him were from the Lord and not merely his own musings.

Søren

Similar to Joseph, Søren heavily criticized the clergy of his day for teaching a watered-down, nondemanding form of Christianity that did a deep disservice to Christ and the message of the New Testament:

Everyone must be measured by the Pattern, the ideal. We must get rid of all the bosh about this being said only to the Apostles, and this only to the disciples, and this only to the first Christians, &c. Christ no more desires now than He did then to have admirers (not to say twaddlers), He wants only disciples. The “disciple” is the standard: imitation and Christ as the Pattern must be introduced.⁷¹

In Kierkegaard’s eyes, official Protestantism, with its state support and royal pastors, taught a diluted version of Christianity, focused solely on grace, without simultaneously stressing the demands of discipleship.⁷² The result, he asserted, was a false and crafty humility that served as an excuse for not attempting to imitate Christ, by claiming greater modesty in simply adoring him (or to have unmerited advantage through him). But too often “I cannot” is used to conceal what is really “I will not.”⁷³ Human beings, according to Søren, were capable of much more: “The symbolical

books of the Church recognize that there are various degrees of blessedness in the hereafter⁷⁴—why don't the preachers say anything about that? It is just possible that one or another of their hearers might wish to aspire to a higher degree."⁷⁵

As Søren saw it, Christendom's emphasis on grace without first teaching the demands of Christian discipleship led to the conclusion that God had made salvation possible not for the man who works and struggles at perfection and then works and struggles even more, but for the man who revels in sin and indulgent pleasure throughout his life:

The doctrine of "grace" is moved a whole stage too high. Christianity has demanded the genuine renunciation of the worldly, has demanded the voluntary, and then, on top of this, one is to acknowledge that he is nothing, that all is grace. Christendom removes the former entirely—and then lets grace move up; it grafts "grace," if you will, directly onto the secular mind.⁷⁶

But, as Søren pointed out:

There is always a secular mentality that no doubt wants to have the name of being Christian but wants to become Christian as cheaply as possible. This secular mentality became aware of Luther. It listened; for safety's sake it listened once again lest it should have heard wrongly; thereupon it said, "Excellent! This is something for us. Luther says: It depends on faith alone. . . . So we take his words, his doctrine—and we are free from all works—long live Luther!"⁷⁷

Unfortunately, according to Kierkegaard, Christian ministers had become adept at "applying Christianity *tranquillizingly*."⁷⁸ They gave congregations what congregations thought they wanted, and the result was a religion with "the quality of refined hypocrisy."⁷⁹

Søren, like Joseph, was deeply aware of his (and of every human being's) need for grace. Referring to this necessity, he wrote, "No man is saved, without grace—not even an Apostle."⁸⁰ But this need becomes glaringly evident in the face of our recognition of the demands of Christian discipleship and our failure, despite earnest endeavor, to meet those demands. Thus, for Kierkegaard, grace and works interrelate dialectically: "First one must realize that the model is a crushing demand [by imitating the model]. But thereupon the model, Christ, transforms itself into grace and mercy, and tries to take hold of you in order to bear you up. But so it is that through the Model you have died to the model."⁸¹ As Walter Lowrie observes, Kierkegaard feared that (in Protestantism) "grace was so much talked about because it was regarded as a dispensation to sin, or at least as an excuse to give up striving. Grace can be abused like the sacraments, 'by which men relieve themselves of the duty of loving God.'"

Lowrie continues, quoting Kierkegaard: “Severity first—i.e. the severity of ideality—and then gentleness. I myself have as much need as anybody of being spoken to gently, my soul is as much disposed to speak gently—but in a time of confused thinking the first must be put first, lest gentleness be an occasion for slothful indulgence.”⁸²

In a passage very much paralleling 2 Nephi 25:23 (“by grace . . . we are saved, after all we can do”), Søren wrote, “Christianity’s requirement is: Thy life shall as strenuously as possible give expression to works—and then one thing more is required: that thou humble thyself and admit, ‘But none the less I am saved by grace.’”⁸³ Thus, in his understanding of the dialectic between grace and works, Søren emphasized a “both/and” instead of an “either/or.”

VI. THEY HAVE “A FORM OF GODLINESS, BUT THEY DENY THE POWER THEREOF”

Joseph

Throughout the course of Joseph’s restoration efforts, his views often conflicted with the traditions and forms of Christendom, which had become deeply woven into the society and culture around him. Joseph felt that he was faced with the difficult task of fostering the Saints away from the “form of godliness” with which they were familiar toward newly restored teachings and blessings. He lamented, “It is very difficult for us to communicate to the churches all that God has revealed to us, in consequence of tradition.”⁸⁴ Joseph further felt deep frustration as he tried “to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God,” only to see them “fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions.”⁸⁵ In speaking against the form of Christianity in his day, Joseph’s words, like Søren’s, became at times very sharp.

Joseph taught that however godly the form of the churches of his day, they lacked those key ingredients that made a church a true and living religion. As he surveyed “Christendom at the present day,” he asked,

Where are they, with all their boasted religion, piety and sacredness while at the same time they are crying out against prophets, apostles, angels, revelations, prophesying and visions, &c. Why, they are just ripening for the damnation of hell. They will be damned, for they reject the most glorious principle of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and treat with disdain and trample under foot the key that unlocks the heavens and puts in our possession the glories of the celestial world. Yes, I say, such will be damned, with all their professed godliness.⁸⁶

Joseph understood the condition of nineteenth-century Christendom to be the consequence of a centuries-long apostasy. This apostasy had left Christendom with only a shell of its original self—and to this shell Christendom clung, embellishing and beautifying it, but nevertheless missing the essential core of Christianity. “Faith has been wanting,” said Joseph, “not only among the heathen, but in professed Christendom also, so that tongues, healings, prophecy, and prophets and apostles, and all the gifts and blessings have been wanting.”⁸⁷

The Book of Mormon adds a voice in describing modern Christendom as lacking the power of God. Two prophets in particular, Nephi and Moroni, described visions in which they saw our day and wrote concerning its calamities. Chief among these is the decrepit state of organized religion that claims a godly form yet rejects God’s involvement in the lives of men. Wrote Nephi:

For it shall come to pass in that day that the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when the one shall say unto the other: Behold, I, I am the Lord’s; and the others shall say: I, I am the Lord’s; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord—

And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance.

And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Harken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men. (2 Ne. 28:3–5)

Moroni wrote to us directly, saying, “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Morm. 8:35). He, like Nephi, described the corruptions and follies of modern-day Christendom, condemning specifically those who would sell forgiveness for sin, build up churches to get gain, wear fine apparel, and love their money and their apparel and the adorning of their churches more than they would love the poor and the needy or the sick and the afflicted (see Morm. 8:28, 32–33, 36–37).

Indeed, given such stern critiques, it is hardly surprising that Joseph saw his movement as decidedly different and separate from any then extant in Christendom. He wanted it understood that in his role as prophet he was not following after the manner of the world in any of the things he had established or taught. In a written exchange with James Arlington Bennet, Joseph made this abundantly clear.⁸⁸ In the first letter, Bennet gave Joseph mixed praise, calling him “a philosophical divine” whose influence is best left “to the mass.” Bennet, whose mind was of a “mathematical and

philosophical . . . cast,” felt he could be a friend to Joseph but “without being governed by the smallest religious influence.” Bennet was quick to recognize the Prophet’s accumulating accomplishments as the leader of a rapidly growing society, noting to Joseph that the “boldness of your plans and measures, together with their unparalleled success so far, are calculated to throw a charm over your whole being, and to point you out as the most extraordinary man of the present age.”⁸⁹

In his response, Joseph clearly stated that any success he may have had was to be attributed to the influence of God’s guiding hand. He welcomed Bennet’s praise only if he offered it with a proper understanding of the source of Joseph’s accomplishments. On the other hand, Bennet’s praise was meaningless and misguided if he were suggesting that Joseph’s success merely followed a worldly pattern.

The meaning of “philosophical divine” may be taken in various ways. If, as the learned world apply the term, you infer that I have achieved a victory, and been strengthened by a scientific religion, as practiced by the popular sects of the age, through the aid of colleges, seminaries, Bible societies, missionary boards, financial organizations, and gospel money schemes, then you are wrong. Such a combination of men and means shows a form of godliness without the power. . . . But if the inference is that by more love, more light, more virtue, and more truth from the Lord, I have succeeded as a man of God, then you reason truly.⁹⁰

Joseph wanted it understood that the authority of God was the driving force that fueled his actions—from translating the Book of Mormon to gathering the Saints. He did not want to be seen as a great political leader or as a worldly-wise religious thinker or even as an influential reformer. As he continued his response, Joseph boldly qualified the terms of praise that Bennet had written:

The boldness of my plans and measures can readily be tested by the touchstone of all schemes, systems, projects, and adventures—*truth*; for truth is a matter of fact; and the fact is, that by the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics, the knowledge of which was lost to the world, in which wonderful event I stood alone. an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation.⁹¹

Søren

One of the things Søren considered most dangerous about the State Church of Denmark was that its outward “form of godliness” gave common people every reason to be at ease concerning their eternal welfare. Most dangerously, nineteenth-century Denmark had, in his opinion, become naïvely comfortable in its role as a supposed Christian nation.

For Kierkegaard, blanket-labeling any group (let alone one as large as an entire nation) as secure in its Christianity removed the pursuit of discipleship away from the impassioned core of the individual. In fact, in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he stated that “the only unforgivable high treason against Christianity is the single individual’s taking his relation to it for granted.”⁹² He declared that a most damaging “presupposition” had been cemented into nineteenth-century Denmark: “Christianity as given.”⁹³

Søren presented a humorous, hypothetical conversation between a husband who openly wondered whether he was really a Christian and his surprised wife. Looking astonished, the wife exclaimed:

Hubby, darling, where did you ever pick up such a notion? How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish, aren’t you? Doesn’t the geography book say that the predominant religion in Denmark is Lutheran-Christian? . . . Don’t you tend to your work in the office as a good civil servant; aren’t you a good subject in a Christian nation, in a Lutheran-Christian state? So of course you are a Christian.⁹⁴

For too many Danes, lamented Søren, the undeniable fact of the *existence* of the State Church was evidence enough of Denmark’s claim to true Christianity—and by default, of the Christianity of all of its citizens. But this position assumed too much. As he explained, “After it has been said about the Church that it exists and that one can learn from it what the essentially Christian is, it is in turn asserted that this Church, the present Church, is the apostolic Church, that it is the same Church that has persisted for eighteen centuries.”⁹⁵ The fallacy here, Kierkegaard noted, lay in assuming that the Church’s present existence proved not only that it had always existed, but that it had existed in precisely the same form and manner throughout its entire eighteen-hundred-year existence. To the contrary, “here a demonstration [that is, proof] is needed” since “every qualification of pastness requires demonstration.”⁹⁶

But what were the common people supposed to believe? The church certainly possessed the impressive Christian trappings and inspiring sacred edifices that seemed to offer every indication of its legitimacy. But this, said Søren, only made the church that much more dangerous.

We have what one might call a complete inventory of churches, bells, organs, benches, alms-boxes, foot-warmers, tables, hearses, etc. But when Christianity does not exist, the existence of this inventory, so far from being, Christianly considered, an advantage, is far rather a peril, because it is so infinitely likely to give rise to a false impression and the false inference that when we have such a complete Christian inventory we must of course have Christianity, too.⁹⁷

And certainly, the “complete inventory” of Danish Christianity wasn’t limited to the Church’s material possessions:

We have, if you will, a complete crew of bishops, deans, and priests; learned men, eminently learned, talented, gifted, humanly well-meaning; they all declaim—doing it well, very well, eminently well, or tolerably well, or badly—but not one of them is in the character of the Christianity of the New Testament.⁹⁸

So deeply engrained in tradition and society was this “form of godliness” that Søren could not blame the common people for failing to see the true situation.⁹⁹ After all, what motivation did they have for questioning the State Church? Its brand of Christianity, however inconsistent with that depicted in the New Testament, promised heavenly security and comfort while never becoming too intrusive in one’s everyday life:

When one sees what it is to be a Christian in Denmark, how could it occur to anyone that this is what Jesus Christ talks about: cross and agony and suffering, crucifying the flesh, suffering for the doctrine, being salt, being sacrificed, etc.? No, in Protestantism, especially in Denmark, Christianity marches to a different melody, to the tune of “Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along”—Christianity is enjoyment of life, tranquillized, as neither the Jew nor the pagan was, by the assurance that the thing about eternity is settled, settled precisely in order that we might find pleasure in enjoying this life, as well as any pagan or Jew.¹⁰⁰

Yet, tragically, the common man was being robbed blind, said Søren, for the State Church had become expert in selling at an exceedingly low price a product it did not even possess—a scam of eternal proportions.¹⁰¹

Indeed, according to Kierkegaard, the church and priests of his day, however appealing their “form of godliness,” “denied the power thereof” in confusing state-sponsored royal appointments with the authority only God himself can provide. So, Søren openly questioned, “Can one be a teacher of Christianity by royal authorization? Can Christianity (the Christianity of the New Testament) be preached by teachers royally authorized? Can the sacraments be administered by them? or does not this imply a self-contradiction?”¹⁰²

In the next and concluding section, therefore, I take a closer look at divine authority, first examining Søren’s views on the issue. I divide this examination into three subsections: Søren on Adler, Søren on Protestantism, and Søren on Himself, Genius, and Apostleship. After setting out Søren’s views, I compare them with Joseph’s claim to having received revelation directly from God and authority from heavenly messengers sent by God.

DIVINE AUTHORITY**Søren on Adler**

During the later years of his life, Søren gave much thought to the issue of divine authority. As part of his growing attack upon Danish Christendom, he added the lack of any Church officials who possessed *divine* authority (as opposed to merely *royal* authority, which the State could provide) to convey the true message of New Testament Christianity. Surprisingly, Adolph Peter Adler (1812–1869), a member of the Danish clergy, provided Søren the stimulus to formulate and articulate his ideas on this topic.

Adler was born in Copenhagen in 1812 (a year earlier than Kierkegaard), and he, like Søren, received the degree of Magister Artium. A learned theologian and pastor of two rural parishes, he caught Kierkegaard's attention when he claimed to have seen a "vision of light" wherein Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him to burn his previous writings and instead write the words that Christ would inspire. In 1843, he published this account, and the words that Christ dictated, in a book entitled *Several Sermons*.¹⁰³ Søren's initial reaction upon hearing of this event is very significant:

Therefore when I, without as yet having seen his sermons and the preface to them, heard that Magister Adler had come forward and had appealed to a revelation, I cannot deny that I was astounded; I thought: either this is the man we need, the chosen one, who in divine originality has the new spring to refresh the lifeless soil of Christendom, or it is an offended person, but a crafty knave, who, in order to demolish everything, also an apostle's dignity, in order to collapse everything, brings a Christendom like the present one to the strenuous decision of having to go through its dogmatics in the situation of contemporaneity.¹⁰⁴

Soon thereafter, Adler came to visit Kierkegaard and told him that he regarded Søren "as a sort of John the Baptist" to himself (Adler) who, by virtue of his revelation, was something like a messiah. Adler read Søren a large portion of his work, half in a normal voice and half in a strange whistling voice. When Søren said that "he could discover no new revelation in Adler's work," Adler responded, "When I shall come to you again and read the whole work in this voice (the whistling voice) you will see that it will open to you."¹⁰⁵ Kierkegaard became disillusioned with Adler's claims and decisively passed him off as at worst a fraud and at least as a very confused soul. Adler was ultimately removed from his position as pastor and admitted that "revelation was perhaps too strong an expression."¹⁰⁶

The Danish Church was very careful in its handling of the Adler affair, for here was one of its clergy who professed heavenly manifestations and modern-day revelation. Officially, Adler was not removed from office because of heretically claiming revelation, but rather because those revelations were deemed inconsistent and his writings equally incoherent.¹⁰⁷ As Søren saw it, the actions of the Danish Church were calculated to skirt the real issue.

No Christian, and thus no Christian ecclesiastical superior either, can be willing to allow the syllogism: a man has claimed to have had a revelation in which the Savior has communicated this and that to him—ergo, the man is mentally deranged. If the state Church ever allows this conclusion, it has destroyed itself.¹⁰⁸

It is important to emphasize that, unlike most of his contemporaries, Kierkegaard was not immediately repulsed by Adler's claim to heavenly revelations. The intriguing possibilities raised by his story weighed heavily on Kierkegaard's mind. Adler served as a sort of muse, launching Kierkegaard into writing a series of articles addressing the issue of direct revelation from God, and the related issues of authority and apostleship.

Using Adler as his foil, Søren carefully examined the characteristics and qualifications of a true apostle—a divinely authorized minister of the Christian message. Unlike a poet, whom we approach purely on aesthetic grounds, an apostle must be approached within what Kierkegaard called the “sphere of the paradoxical-religious.” Thus, the apostle cannot be judged on the beauty or harmony of his writings (as the poet) but only by the stamp of his divine authority. “When the sphere of the paradoxical-religious is now abolished,” wrote Søren, “or is explained back into the esthetic, an apostle becomes neither more nor less than a genius, and then good night to Christianity.”¹⁰⁹

In *The Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard ascribed five key characteristics to an apostle, or to one who wears a true mantle of divine authority.

- The apostle has something paradoxically new to bring, the newness of which, just because it is essentially paradoxical and not an anticipation pertaining to the development of the human race, continually remains, just as an apostle remains for all eternity an apostle, and no immanence of eternity places him essentially on the same line with all human beings, since essentially he is paradoxically different.¹¹⁰
- An apostle is not born; an apostle is a man who is called and appointed by God and sent by him on a mission.¹¹¹
- It is not by evaluating the content of the doctrine aesthetically

or philosophically that I will or can arrive at the conclusion: ergo the one who has delivered this doctrine is called by a revelation, ergo he is an apostle. The relationship is just the reverse: the one called by a revelation, to whom a doctrine is entrusted, argues on the basis that it is a revelation, on the basis that he has authority.¹¹²

- I am fully convinced that the apostle Paul . . . would by no means have resented it if someone in an earnest discussion had asked him whether he actually had had a revelation; and I know that with the brevity of earnestness Paul would have cut it short and answered: Yes. But if Paul . . . had launched into a long prolix speech somewhat like this [as Adler had done]: “Yes, well now, I myself have indeed said it, but revelation is perhaps too strong an expression, but it was something, there was something of genius. . . .”—well, then it would have been a different matter.¹¹³
- An apostle has no other evidence than his own statement, and at most his willingness to suffer everything joyfully for the sake of that statement. His speech in this regard will be brief: “I am called by God; do with me now what you will; flog me, persecute me, but my last words will be my first: I am called by God, and I make you eternally responsible for what you do to me.”¹¹⁴

Kierkegaard illustrates his understanding of divine authority nicely in the following scenario wherein he compares and contrasts Christ’s teaching with a common theologian’s:

When Christ says, “There is an eternal life,” and when theological graduate Petersen says, “There is an eternal life,” both are saying the same thing; there is in the first statement no more deduction, development, profundity, richness of thought than in the second; evaluated esthetically, both statements are equally good. And yet there certainly is an eternal qualitative difference! As God-man, Christ possesses the specific quality of authority; no eternity can mediate this or place Christ on the same level with the essentially human likeness. Christ, therefore, taught with authority.¹¹⁵

Søren on Protestantism

A strong and surprising piece of evidence that Søren was unsatisfied with the traditional Protestant accounts of authority is the increasing admiration he showed toward the Catholic Church in his journal

entries toward the end of his life. In his last two years, Kierkegaard favorably contrasted Catholicism to contemporary Protestantism at least five times.¹¹⁶ Lowrie gives several explanations as to why Catholicism was so particularly attractive to Søren. First, by rejecting the saints, Protestants had “leveled [men] down,” which is to say that in Kierkegaard’s view, “Protestantism has become nothing but mediocrity from end to end.”¹¹⁷ Second, Catholicism placed a great deal of emphasis on Christian living, or works.¹¹⁷ Finally, Søren believed that “there can be no popular authority in the Church of God, but only God’s authority—therefore no democratic rule, no constitutional government in the sense of political liberalism. This is primitive *and* Catholic doctrine.”¹¹⁸ In other words, what attracted Kierkegaard to Catholicism was its more developed sense of authority.

However, for Søren, authority was given by God only to divinely chosen individuals through whom he would work in bringing new revelations to man. These individuals would follow the pattern of New Testament witnesses to the truth, typified by Paul. Sadly, Søren found no such contemporary witnesses (as the Adler affair made painfully apparent), nor did he consider himself such an authorized witness, yet he fully entertained the possibility that such an individual could come forth in his day and age. His attack against the Danish Church was harsh indeed, but only because its failings, when placed next to its possibilities and ideal role, were so readily and agonizingly apparent to Kierkegaard, who decried the apathy of the general populace and ecclesiastical leaders of his day. In this role, he most associated himself with Socrates. In the words of Jørgen Bukdahl:

Kierkegaard recalled Socrates’ situation and his battle against the Sophists as well as his own situation, in which he did battle against the Sophists of his era, the pastors. Socrates did not claim that he was knowledgeable, but insisted that he was ignorant, just as Kierkegaard did not call himself a Christian. But this was exactly why people could not dismiss them, because they knew that, in Socrates’ case, everyone else was just as ignorant as Socrates, and in Kierkegaard’s case, everyone else was just as little a Christian as Kierkegaard.¹¹⁹

Søren on Himself, Genius, and Apostolic Authority

Just as Søren believed that Adler failed to measure up to the requirements of apostleship, so did he describe his own position as one “without authority.” In his biography of Kierkegaard, Lowrie makes the following observation: “[Kierkegaard] felt that a prophetic figure was needed, a man who ‘could appeal to a direct relationship to God.’ This he never claimed to have, and therefore to the very end he described himself as ‘without authority.’”¹²⁰

That Kierkegaard never claimed authority cannot be overlooked, especially when comparing his position to that of Joseph Smith; Søren viewed himself as a thoughtful, insightful, “poetic-dialectical genius”—a penitent and brilliant bystander calling out the Danish Church’s fallacious claims to divine authority.¹²¹ In his essay “Of the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle,” Søren belabored the distinction between the two on three points: relation to time, origin of power, and teleology.

Søren explained that part of the genius-apostle distinction is the ability of each to be assimilated into history; in other words, their contributions are seen as commonplace when viewed from the perspective of centuries. He claimed that although a genius may, for a time, bear the burden of novelty, it is the burden of immanence, not of transcendence, and will therefore be assimilated and outdated by the progress of mankind.¹²² The apostle, on the other hand, cannot be assimilated; the paradoxical nature of his doctrine will forever remain novel and pertinent because of its transcendent, revelatory birth.¹²³

The genesis of power is different between the two as well. Genius gains notoriety on a purely aesthetic level, “according [t]o the measure of its content, and its specific weight.”¹²⁴ An apostle is acknowledged purely because of his divine call. Said Søren, “I have not got to listen to St. Paul because he is clever, or even brilliantly clever; I am to bow before St. Paul because he has divine authority.”¹²⁵

Therefore, the apostle’s power does not stem from the intellect, which must be personally developed and weighed by peers, but instead from divine sources. This leads to Søren’s claim that because intellect is dependent on one’s capacity for thinking, “genius *is born*. . . . An Apostle is not born; an Apostle is a man called and appointed by God, receiving a mission from him. . . . [His authority is] something which one cannot acquire even by understanding the doctrine perfectly.”¹²⁶ John S. Tanner explains that due to this genetic difference of power, Kierkegaard argues our perception of each must be different: “A royal command exercises a claim upon us that is categorically distinct from its poetic eloquence or philosophical profundity,” thus creating a distinction in how we are to respond to both.¹²⁷ Underlining this chasm, Kierkegaard stated:

To ask whether a king is a genius—with the intention, if such were the case, of obeying him, is in reality *lèse-majesté*; for the question conceals a doubt as to whether one intends to submit to authority. To be prepared to obey a government department if it can be clever is really to make a fool of it. To honour one’s father because he is intelligent is impiety.¹²⁸

In his final distinction between a genius and an apostle, Søren emphasized a difference in teleology. The teleology of genius is self-reflexive, focused on self-development and self-achievement. “Genius lives in itself; and, humorously, might live withdrawn and self-satisfied, without for that reason taking its gifts in vain, so long as it develops itself earnestly and industriously, following its own genius, regardless of whether others profit by it or not.”¹²⁹ An apostle, on the other hand, cannot exist in solitude, for by definition the existence of an apostle requires the presence of congregations to whom the apostle may preach and minister. Søren called this position a type of absolute teleology, wherein

the doctrine communicated to [an apostle] is not a task which he is given to ponder over, it is not given him for his own sake, he is, on the contrary, on a mission and has to proclaim the doctrine and use authority. Just as a man, sent into the town with a letter, has nothing to do with its contents, but has only to deliver it . . . : so, too, an Apostle has really only to be faithful in his service, and to carry out his task.¹³⁰

Kierkegaard viewed himself as one who had, through experience and study, developed an awareness of the theological ails of Denmark. His work was one of an immanent intellect conveying an immanent message; it was one of genius. Søren never viewed himself as an apostle because he knew he was never called by God to be one.

Joseph on Himself and Authority

Unlike Søren Kierkegaard, Joseph Smith presented himself from the beginning as one having authority. Notwithstanding this important difference in self-perception, Søren’s and Joseph’s views on authority are surprisingly similar. In fact, if the above constitute Søren’s requirements for apostleship, then Joseph would have been the first in his time to fulfill each.

As if responding directly to Søren’s requirements from *Book on Adler*, Joseph readily announced he was called of God, through revelation, to restore to the world things lost since New Testament times and he invited all to discover for themselves the veracity of his work (see D&C 1:17–30). From the outset, Joseph understood that the newness (at least by nineteenth-century standards) of the doctrine as well as the unique and paradoxical nature of his claims to revelation made it difficult for other sects to truly understand either him or his experiences. Explaining this nature to early members of the Church, Joseph said, “It is very difficult for us to communicate . . . all that God has revealed to us, in consequence of tradition.”¹³¹ When, following his First Vision in 1820, Joseph encountered opposition from the priests of his day, he did not back down but simply reaffirmed his

personal knowledge that the events he reported actually occurred. This caused him to be subject to “the most bitter persecution and reviling,” which eventually led to his martyrdom (JS–H 1:23).

Joseph’s unwavering claim of divine investiture of authority remained consistent throughout his life and set him apart from all the other religious figures of his day, something Søren would certainly acknowledge. Joseph recounted that when praying on the nature of baptism in May 1829, he and Oliver Cowdery were visited by the resurrected John the Baptist. Laying his hands upon their heads, the Baptist said, “Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of the Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins” (D&C 13:1). After receiving the authority from God to baptize, Joseph and Oliver were commanded to baptize one another.¹³² Joseph also recounted that Peter, James, and John later appeared and conferred upon them the Melchizedek Priesthood. This higher priesthood contains the keys to administer the gospel and to execute its higher ordinances, such as bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost (see D&C 84:18–19).

Having received the Aaronic and the Melchizedek priesthoods from those having the authority to confer it, Joseph and Oliver were now able to build Christ’s church according to “the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church” (Articles of Faith 1:6). Regarding the importance of this priesthood, Joseph later declared, “All the ordinances, systems, and administrations on the earth are of no use to the children of men, unless they are ordained and authorized of God; for nothing will save a man but a legal administrator; for none others will be acknowledged either by God or angels.”¹³³

As for Søren’s distinction between a genius and an apostle, Joseph made it clear he was neither philosopher nor genius. Referring to the time when he received his first revelation, he described himself as “an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor” (JS–H 1:23). Even though Joseph admitted to being “unacquainted with men and things” (JS–H 1:8), he boldly claimed, “I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God . . . ? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it” (JS–H 1:25). Furthermore, Joseph admitted, “I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught.”¹³⁴ This statement gives the sense that he viewed himself much like the messenger Søren referred to when he explained the absolute teleology of an apostle.

His position that a worldwide, centuries-long apostasy from New Testament Christianity had occurred obviously put Joseph at odds with the Christendom of his day. Indeed, he knew that his claim was radical enough to demand a complete break from any other form of established Christianity, Protestant or otherwise. Joseph explained his position in this way: “Here is a principle of logic that most men have no more sense than to adopt. I will illustrate it by an old apple tree. Here jumps off a branch and says, I am the true tree, and you are corrupt. If the whole tree is corrupt, are not its branches corrupt?”¹³⁵

Joseph never shied away from his revelations—the crux of one of Søren’s requirements for apostleship; instead, he repeatedly emphasized their importance in the work God had called him to do. “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” said Joseph, “was founded upon direct revelation, as the true Church of God has ever been, according to the Scriptures (Amos iii:7, and Acts i:2); and through the will and blessings of God, I have been an instrument in His hands, thus far, to move forward the cause of Zion.”¹³⁶

CONCLUSION

While it is likely that Søren knew something of the Mormons,¹³⁷ he apparently knew very little and gave them little attention. Joseph, like most people living outside of Denmark during the first half of the nineteenth century, apparently knew nothing of Søren Kierkegaard. Yet the two reached strikingly similar conclusions concerning the apostate condition of Christianity in their day. Both stressed first the demands of discipleship culminating in the imitation of Christ; and, given our failures to meet those demands, both emphasized our need for grace. Søren was open to the possibility of a modern-day apostle, but he strongly insisted that only one invested with authority originating in direct revelation from God could properly claim such an office. He acknowledged that he lacked such authority. Joseph claimed direct revelation from God and divine authority received directly from angelic messengers sent by God. Despite these differences, their harmonious visions of what it means to be a Christian unite to induce self-assessment of where we, individually, stand in relation to the standard.

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1. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark (the Church of Denmark or the People's Church of Denmark; Danish: Den Danske Folkekirke) is a state church and the largest Christian church in Denmark. It is officially supported by the government. In this paper, I often refer to it as the "State Church" or the "Danish Church."

2. Søren used "Christendom" as a derogatory title for the apostate condition of Christianity. He explained that, as he used the term, "'Christendom' is . . . the betrayal of Christianity; a 'Christian world' is . . . apostasy from Christianity." Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Attack upon "Christendom," 1854-55*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 33. Christianity and Christendom were to Søren diametrical opposites; he claimed that "to be a Christian in Christendom in plain and simple conformity is just as impossible as doing gymnastics in a straitjacket." Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 4 vols. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1967), 1:166 (#409).

3. Walter Lowrie, "Introduction by the Translator," in Kierkegaard, *Attack upon "Christendom,"* xv.

4. Bruce Kirmmse argues that Kierkegaard initially sought only an honest acknowledgement from the Church because any more specific demands would have been inconsistent with Kierkegaard's self-acknowledged lack of authority. See Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 459-60. Inconsistent or not, Kierkegaard eventually did call for the disestablishment of the State Church of Denmark. See Kierkegaard, *Attack upon "Christendom,"* 97. Because the Church would not concede the degradation of its purported Christianity, Søren felt that he must awaken individuals to the illusion of the Church and ultimately prompt the state to disestablish the Church. See Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, 467.

5. Joseph eventually claimed not only a restoration of New Testament Christianity but a restitution and a "welding together" of all previous dispensations (D&C 128:18).

6. Howard V. Hong, Kierkegaard lectures, Brigham Young University, n.d., notes in author's possession.

7. Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter* (Copenhagen: Gad, 2007) 24:139, translation by Bruce H. Kirmmse, in an email message to the author, October 30, 2008.

8. Hong, Kierkegaard lectures.

9. So Søren informed his readers in his posthumously published book, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, in Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*,

trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 21–124.

10. Hong, Kierkegaard lectures.

11. See Howard A. Johnson, “Kierkegaard and the Church,” in Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* xxvi, where he writes: “Kierkegaard did not abandon the pen for the sword, but we might say that, towards the last, he laid aside the rapier in favor of a less subtle instrument, the sledgehammer.”

12. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 41.

13. Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper, 1962), 2:583.

14. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2:586.

15. Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 788–89.

16. However, as B. H. Roberts pointed out, for one who believes Joseph’s account, the indictments could properly be understood as constituting the Lord’s critique: “There is peculiar force in the circumstance that the announcement which Joseph Smith makes with reference to this subject is not formulated by him nor by any other man, but is given to him of God. God has been the judge of the status of modern Christendom, Joseph Smith but his messenger, to herald that judgment to the world.” B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 1:62.

17. Joseph Smith, “History [1832],” in Dean Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 1:5.

18. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:141, March 19, 1871. The discourse was reported by Julia Young.

19. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 28.

20. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 29.

21. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 32. It appears that statements such as these at the end of Søren’s life supersede earlier statements that the Church and its doctrine were acceptable and that all that was needed was the reformation of us all.

22. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2:569. Howard Johnson reports, “One Danish biographer gives us the picture (how well authenticated I know not) of Kierkegaard on a Sunday morning, at the hour of High Mass . . . deliberately taking up a position at a sidewalk café opposite a church, and there conspicuously reading a newspaper so that all the pious en route to service might see.” Johnson, “Kierkegaard and the Church,” xix–xx.

23. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:57 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

24. “There is much said about God and the Godhead. . . . The teachers of the day say that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and they are all in one body and one God.” Joseph F. Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 311. “As the Father hath power in Himself, so hath the Son power in Himself, to lay down His life and take it again, so He has a body of His own. . . . [E]ach one will be in His own body; and yet the sectarian world believe the body of the Son is identical with the Father’s.” Smith, *Teachings*, 312. “That which is without body, parts and passions is nothing.

There is no other God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones.” Smith, *Teachings*, 181. “Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God! I say that is a strange God anyhow—three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization. ‘Father, I pray not for the world, but I pray for them which thou hast given me.’ ‘Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.’ All are to be crammed into one God, according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster.” *History of the Church*, 6:476.

25. “As it is well known that various opinions govern a large portion of the sectarian world as to this important ordinance of [baptism in] the gospel, it may not be amiss to introduce the commissions and commands of Jesus Himself on the subject.” Smith, *Teachings*, 262.

26. Smith, *Teachings*, 188.

27. “Many of the sects cry out, ‘Oh, I have the testimony of Jesus; I have the spirit of God; but away with Joe Smith; he says he is a prophet; but there are to be no prophets or revelators in the last days.’” Joseph replies, “Stop, sir! The Revelator says that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; so by your own mouth you are condemned.” Smith, *Teachings*, 312.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, written in 1646 and one of the classic texts on the closedness of the canon, states the following: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” Orthodox Presbyterian Church, “Westminster Confession of Faith,” <http://www.opc.org/confessions.html>.

Also, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* explains: “While the Church recognizes that God has spoken to His servants in every age, and still continues thus to favour chosen souls, she is careful to distinguish these revelations from the Revelation which has been committed to her charge. . . . *That Revelation was given in its entirety to Our Lord and His Apostles.* After the death of the last of the twelve it could receive no increment. It was, as the Church calls it, a deposit—‘the faith once delivered to the saints’ (Jude, 2)—*for which the Church was to ‘contend’ but to which she could add nothing.* Thus, whenever there has been question of defining a doctrine, whether at Nicaea, at Trent, or at the Vatican, the sole point of debate has been as to whether the doctrine is found in Scripture or in Apostolic tradition. The gift of Divine assistance (see I), sometimes confounded with Revelation by the less instructed of anti-Catholic writers, merely preserves the supreme pontiff from error in defining the faith; it does not enable him to add jot or tittle to it.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Revelation” (by George Joyce), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13001a.htm>.

28. *History of the Church*, 6:57.

29. *History of the Church*, 5:215.

30. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, Religious Studies Monograph Series, no. 6 (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 183–84.

31. *History of the Church*, 6:74–75.
32. Smith, *Teachings*, 203–4.
33. Smith, *Teachings*, 311.
34. *History of the Church*, 6:223.
35. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 205.
36. *History of the Church*, 6:50.
37. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. and ed. Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 21, 1835 (#31).
38. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 220. In this work, Kierkegaard used a pseudonym, Johannes Climacus. For clarity, however, in referencing this work we will use the author's real name and not the pseudonym.
39. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 213.
40. "He Was Believed On in the World," in Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses and The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, trans. Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 248; emphasis in original.
41. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 379–80.
42. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 380 n.
43. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 379 n.
44. See also Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 2:335–36 (#1880–81).
45. Smith, *Teachings*, 311.
46. Joseph Smith, "History [1832]," in Jesse, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:5. Joseph's strikethroughs and insertions in his journal render this sentence somewhat garbled: ". . . for I discovered that <they did not adorn> instead of adorning their profession by a holy walk . . ." To clarify the meaning, "of" has been deleted from the quotation, which is likely what Joseph intended.
47. Under the title "That from the Christian Point of View the Life of 'the Pastor' Is an Irregularity," Søren wrote:

"I suggest this not merely because his whole life cannot be said to resemble the imitation . . . of Christ.

"No, I allude especially to the fact that he is a government official. What nonsense, then, to proclaim a kingdom not of this world which wants to be of this world at any price.

"And the fact that he is a governmental official is so fundamentally confusing, interferes so profoundly.

"The common man, the people, always consider anything that is governmental (stamped by the state) as being better; it is better to be a royal hat maker than to be a pure and simple hat maker, etc., etc.: at every point social life is stamped by the state.

"And now comes 'the pastor.' The fact that he is authorized by the crown gives him status in the eyes of the people; they believe that to be the maximum—the higher the rank, the more status, the more badges—how utterly nonsensical this kind of Christian proclamation is. The pastor stands and walks and lives and enjoys status by virtue of the very thing Christianity is diametrically opposed to."

Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 3:461 (#3186).

48. In an undisguised affront called “That the Priests Are Cannibals, and in the Most Disgusting Fashion,” Søren judged the priests worse than cannibals because he said the priests actually feed on their friends in a calculative and persistent manner. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, 476.

49. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 3:450 (#3165).

50. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 3:435 (#3139).

51. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 35.

52. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 36.

53. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 1:159 (#386).

54. Quoted in Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2:539; emphasis added.

55. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 3:638 (#3568).

56. See Craig Hinkson, “Luther and Kierkegaard: Theologians of the Cross,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3, no. 1 (2001): 27–45.

57. *History of the Church*, 3:295.

58. *History of the Church*, 3:295; emphasis added.

59. See *History of the Church*, 6:303.

60. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 204.

61. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 206.

62. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 131.

63. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 201.

64. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 465.

65. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 465.

66. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 465.

67. *History of the Church*, 1:408. Similarly, the Book of Moses tells of a time when men disregarded the counsel of God and “the wickedness of men had become great” for “every man was lifted up in the imagination of the thoughts of his heart” (Moses 8:22).

68. *History of the Church*, 5:20.

69. *History of the Church*, 1:10 n.

70. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 204.

71. Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves! and Three Discourses, 1851*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 207.

72. Michael Plekon observes that much different from Luther’s time, when “good works” were exploited at the cost of grace, the Christianity of Kierkegaard’s day had traded works almost entirely for grace. Plekon calls this movement “an avalanche.” Michael Plekon, “Before the Storm: Kierkegaard’s Theological Preparation for the Attack on the Church,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (2004): 48, 53–54.

73. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 2:74–75 (#1272).

74. The symbolical books to which Søren referred would be *The Book of Concord; or the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, an authoritative collection of governing creeds and confessions by early Lutherans, including Martin Luther. This particular allusion is probably to “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” which says, “We also confess what we have often testified, that, although justification and eternal life pertain to faith, nevertheless good works merit other bodily and spiritual rewards, . . . and degrees of rewards, according to 1 Cor. 3:8: Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. [For the blessed will have reward, one higher than the other. This difference merit

makes, according as it pleases God; and it is merit, because they do these good works whom God has adopted as children and heirs. For thus they have merit which is their own and peculiar as one child with respect to another.]” Philip Melancthon, *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kes-singer, 2004), 83–84.

75. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2:534.

76. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 1:353–54 (#763). He also remarked:

“Now there will again be an uproar claiming that I proclaim only the law, urge imitation too strongly, and the like (although in the preface to the new book, *Training in Christianity*, I presented grace). And they will say: We cannot stop with this; we must go further—to grace, where there is peace and tranquility.

“You babble nonsense. For the average man Christianity has shriveled to sheer meaninglessness, a burlesque edition of the doctrine of grace, that if one is a Christian he lets things go their way and counts on God’s grace.

“But because everything which is essentially Christian has shrivelled to meaninglessness this way, they are unable to recognize it again when its pathos-filled aspects are delineated. They have the whole thing in an infinitely empty abstract summary—and thus think they have gone further, beyond the successive unfolding of the pathos-filled aspects.

“Nothing can be taken in vain as easily as grace; and as soon as imitation is completely omitted, grace is taken in vain. But that is the kind of preaching men like.” *Journals and Papers*, 2:334–35 (#1878).

77. Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination; Judge for Yourself!* trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 16 (p. 41 in the Lowrie translation). We should not let Kierkegaard’s comments here lead us to believe he universally rejected Luther’s thought. Indeed, some aspects of Luther’s thought—the inability of reason to understand God, the necessity of personal suffering, the perpetual becoming involved in Christianity, and God’s essentially hidden nature, for example—share much with Kierkegaard’s position. For more on the relationship between these two, see Hinkson, “Luther and Kierkegaard,” 27–45. With these thoughts in mind, perhaps we should read Kierkegaard here as attacking not Luther himself but a certain possible (but not preferable) reading of Luther’s works.

78. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 262.

79. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 201.

80. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2:576.

81. Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer*, X2 A 170 (1849), quoted in Louis Dupre, *Kierkegaard as Theologian* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 179; quoted in Vernard Eller, *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 389.

82. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2:576. For additional references on Kierkegaard’s conception of grace, see Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 2:166–67 (#1475), 2:169 (#1477), 2:169–70 (#1480), 2:172–73 (#1483), 2:174–75 (#1487), 2:180–81 (#1496), 2:317 (#1842), 2:327–28 (#1867).

83. Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves! and Three Discourses*, 42; quoted in Eller, 168.

84. *History of the Church*, 2:52.

85. *History of the Church*, 6:185.

86. *History of the Church*, 5:389.
87. *History of the Church*, 5:218.
88. For the text of both letters, see *History of the Church*, 6:71–78.
89. *History of the Church*, 6:72.
90. *History of the Church*, 6:73–74.
91. *History of the Church*, 6:74–75.
92. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 16.
93. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 50.
94. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 50.
95. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 39.
96. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 39–40.
97. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 30.
98. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 29.
99. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 59–60.
100. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 34–35.
101. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 51.
102. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* 46.
103. Walter Lowrie, “Preface,” in Søren Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation (The Book on Adler, or A Cycle of Ethico-Religious Essays)*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), ix.
104. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 45.
105. Lowrie, “Preface,” in Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation*, x–xi.
106. Lowrie, “Preface,” in Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation*, ix.
107. See Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation*, 69–92.
108. Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 78.
109. Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 173.
110. Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 175.
111. Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 176.
112. Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 177.
113. Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 26.
114. Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 186.
115. Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 182–83.
116. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Last Years: Journals 1853–1855*, trans. and ed. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 56, 135, 169, 249, 264.
117. Lowrie, “Introduction by Translator,” in Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom,”* xvi–xvii.
118. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2:524.
119. Jørgen Bukdahl, *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 126.
120. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2:473.
121. Micheal Plekon argues quite blindly that Kierkegaard invoked the authority of “the One who is Infinite Love . . . [through] the cross and the resurrection.” Michael Plekon, “Søren Kierkegaard at the End: Authority in the Attack on the Church,” in *Anthropology and Authority*, ed. Paul Houe, Gordon D. Marino, and Sven Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 106. It should be clear that Søren stated, “I have emphasized as decisively as possible . . . that I am without

authority.” Alastair McKinnon, “Authority in Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals: The Main Changes,” in *Anthropology and Authority*, 157.

122. See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age and Of the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle*, ed. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 92.

123. See Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, 92–93.

124. Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, 93.

125. Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, 93.

126. Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, 91–92, 96.

127. John S. Tanner, “Of Men and Mantles: Kierkegaard on the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle,” *BYU Studies* 40, no. 2 (2001): 155.

128. Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, 100.

129. Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, 107.

130. Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, 105–6.

131. Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 568.

132. See Joseph Smith—History 1:70–73; *Our Heritage: A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996), 13; *Teaching of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 85, 89.

133. Smith, *Teachings*, 274.

134. *History of the Church*, 6:366.

135. *History of the Church*, 6:478.

136. *History of the Church*, 6:9.

137. Apparently, the only reference Kierkegaard ever made to Mormons is found in a short journal entry about what he understood to be the Mormon notion of God’s omnipresence:

“In a piece by Prof. Jacobi (about the Irvingites, 1854) I see that the Mormons assume that God is not everywhere present but moves with great speed from one star to another. Splendid! Generally progress means, compared with a more childlike age, that more spiritual conceptions are achieved, as if a more childlike age had fancied that God moves with great speed from one place to another—and now the modern age understands that God is everywhere present. But here the movement is in reverse! It is very characteristic, and presumably I am not wrong in assuming this to be the influence of trains and the invention of the telegraph. In all probability there is in store for theology a completely new development, in which all these modern inventions will be employed to decide the conception of God.” Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 2:145–46 (#1443). In 1855, Søren’s brother, Peter Kierkegaard, published a tract about Mormons entitled “Om og mod Mormonismen” (About and Against Mormonism). Although this was published the year of Søren’s death, Søren may have learned more about Mormons from his brother. See “The Reverend Dr. Peter Christian Kierkegaard’s ‘About and Against Mormonism,’” *BYU Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007) 100–156.