
THE RELEVANCE OF KIERKEGAARD FOR POLITICAL THOUGHT VIOLENCE AND THE DIVINE COMMAND

Bojan Žalec *

*University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology, Institute of Philosophy and Social Ethics,
Poljanska c. 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia*

(Received 13 January 2017, revised 6 February 2017)

Abstract

The paper has two main parts. In the first the author delineates the Kierkegaardian theory of violence developed by the American theologian Charles K. Bellinger. This theory is an example of transcendental i.e. non-secular humanities. It uses Kierkegaard's theological concepts of creation, anxiety and sin to understand human violence. Its central matrix is the relationship 'God's call – human's response to it'. It makes possible interpretations of violence of key importance that secular theories can't offer. Since the significance of the illuminating interpretations of violence for political theory is evident it follows that Kierkegaard is of highest importance for in-depth political theory. In the second part the author argues for two theses. Firstly, he demonstrates that Kierkegaard's divine command ethics is compatible with liberal democracy. Secondly, not only that it is compatible, it is of vital importance for cultivation of liberal democracy. The main reason is that it is a foundation of genuine human subjectivity, autonomy, and morality that don't originate in self-love and are not motivated by serving to one's own interests. In a nutshell, the analysis based on Kierkegaard's thought suggests that fostering genuine religiousness and ethics in Kierkegaard's sense of the term is of vital significance for both understanding and combating (political) violence, and for the development and maintenance of liberal democracy.

Keywords: violence, ethics, divine command, politics, Kierkegaard

1. Theological anthropology and the psychology of violence

The theory of violence is very relevant for political thought. This needs no special explanation. We can thus claim that Kierkegaard's work is of exceptional significance for political thought as it is the basis of one of the most insightful and satisfying contemporary theories of violence. This theory was developed by Charles K. Bellinger [1]. With his theory, this American theologian did not discover anything truly new, but merely connected into a consistent whole the findings Kierkegaard had already arrived at. Bellinger coordinated and related these findings with those by other representatives of theological humanities, of

*E-mail: bojan.zalec@teof.uni-lj.si, Phone: +386 31 00 1300, Fax : + 386 1 434 58 54

which the most important in terms of the theory of violence are Eric Voegelin and René Girard. However, the fundamental classic of theological humanities is Kierkegaard.

The term theological humanities refers to an approach that applies theological concepts in explaining phenomena that the secularly limited humanities also deal with. It is based on the belief that such a transcendent approach can be more fruitful than the secular one. Its main components are theological anthropology, psychology and ethics. We can concretely illustrate this approach by presenting Bellinger's Kierkegaardian theory of violence. Let us name this theory or interpretation KB theory.

Kierkegaard's work is variegated. It consists of diary entries, works written under pseudonyms and works written under his real name. Kierkegaard, and some of his pseudonymous authors, believed that God exists and that humans can gain a knowledge of God and themselves by reading the stories in the Bible [1, p. 36]. Among them was also Vigilius Haufniensis, the 'author' of *The Concept of Anxiety*, and it is precisely with this work that we can begin our account of the KB theory of (political) violence. However, before we present the findings relevant to our paper, we will give a brief account of KB's view on creation since it is exceptionally important for the right understanding of the KB theory of violence.

Bellinger claims that Kierkegaard rejected the view of creation being an event that happened at a certain point in time after which God stopped creating. On the contrary, God is constantly creating; in the case of humans at least, this is the right interpretation of the Biblical doctrine. The common sense of the Judeo-Christian tradition itself already leads us to this view. Furthermore, in support of Kierkegaard's view, which he himself agrees with, Bellinger lists certain renowned theologians as being of the same opinion. The first and most famous on this list is Luther. Bellinger writes that the Genesis teaches us not that God *was* the Creator, but that God *is* the Creator [1, p. 30]. God never withdraws his sustaining hand from his handiwork. According to Luther, if he did that, all would disappear into nothingness [1, p. 29].

Bellinger claims that various works in Kierkegaard's oeuvre show that creation is "an ongoing event" [1, p. 30]. Even more, this view is the basis of Kierkegaard's understanding of human existence. Bellinger points out that Christ is the Word through whom all that is has come into existence or has started existing. Based on this alone, all interpretations of God as a watchmaker are unacceptable from the Christian point of view [1, p. 31]. We can also point out Kierkegaard's diaries in which he, in reference to the Bible, clearly foregrounds not only the ability of human beings to hear the word of God, but also the significance of them hearing or listening to it. Kierkegaard is a Biblical theologian who urges his readers to find the true meaning of their existence in their relationship with God the Creator. He is primarily a passionate reader of the Bible trying to enable the divine word to resonate through his writing, to reach his readers where they are and bring them to a greater spiritual maturity. For Kierkegaard, theological anthropology is the most important point in which

the doctrine of continuing creation comes into play. The 'subjectively' existing human being is personally involved in the event of creation. Creation is happening in their soul, or at least has the potential to happen in their soul. In the last analysis, theological anthropology must take the form of self-knowledge. One cannot understand the human condition in the abstract without understanding one's own condition [1, p. 32]. We can thus see that Kierkegaard's thought has both a theoretical and an upbuilding or homiletical element. He analyses human existence through his theoretical reflection, but his writing also addresses the reader in a challenging way. Kierkegaard does not merely describe God's work of creation, but also encourages readers to open their minds and hearts to this work [1, p. 33].

Even if we look at Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, we come across the topic of continuing creation. Among them is *Philosophical Fragments*, the first work by the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus. The topic here is rebirth and a new person [2]. Human beings fell into untruth through their own fault – sin [1, p. 34]. The teacher is God, who has entered into time to remind human beings they are living in untruth through their own fault. The teacher thus enables the resumption or continuation of the process of creation interrupted by sin. This is why the next necessary step in explaining Kierkegaard's understanding of creation is to look at what Kierkegaard understands under sin. We will start by looking at *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), 'authored' by Haufniensis. He is very interested in the question of the basic motivation for human behaviour or action. In his opinion, this motivation is anxiety, which is a uniquely human emotion that animals, which do know fear, do not experience. Anxiety is qualitatively different to fear. Anxiety does not arise due to external threats to an individual's existence, but is conditioned from within [1, p. 35]. Anxiety does not appear in animals because they are not spiritual beings. What does this mean? Haufniensis suggests that animals have a rigid, determined, set psychology that controls their responses to the environment [1, p. 36]. The world presents various threats and the animals do their best to avoid them. Human psychology is not set and so humans are free since they are aware of the possibilities open to them. We can shape our future by choosing our actions. And it is precisely in this ability that anxiety originates. Freedom that includes the awareness of future options constitutes an element of human nature that animals lack. This element is spirit.

Haufniensis proceeds from the belief that God exists and that human beings can gain a knowledge of God and themselves by reading stories in the Bible. His approach is narrative theology. For Haufniensis, Adam and Eve represent the human race, which means they symbolise spiritual existence. Their example shows that people have an open future in a way that animals do not. The future is the source of anxiety because its indeterminacy leads into emotional ambivalence. Haufniensis defines anxiety as "*sympathetic antipathy and antipathetic sympathy*" [3]. Anxiety originates in the conflict between us simultaneously wanting and fearing the same thing. What we simultaneously want and fear is the spiritual development of our self. The fact that human

psychology is not set means that the human self is continually in the process of formation. People do not experience the event of creation as a completed act but as an on-going event. More precisely, it is not true that we simply exist, rather we are continually becoming, we are continually coming into existence [1, p. 37]. This is an awkward position in a sense because it can have negative consequences. The fact that we are constantly coming into existence means that there is the possibility of alienating ourselves from the process of creation, which is not the case for animals. Theologically put, we can fall into sin. Human sinfulness is a propensity to fall out of harmony with our Creator and with ourselves through our own fault.

Haufniensis's book begins with the discussion of the story about Adam and Eve falling into sin. Through the first sin, sin came into the world, wrote Haufniensis. Adam and Eve made a 'leap' into sin that allowed sinfulness to become a quality of human existence. Every human being born after them makes a similar leap. This leap involves the loss of innocence and its replacement by guilt. Every person makes this leap as an individual. This leap is traditionally known as the Fall. But how is this qualitative leap to be understood psychologically? The answer to this question is Haufniensis's basic concern. Haufniensis claims that innocence is ignorance. In this state, a human being is calm and peaceful, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, something other, different is nevertheless present. There is no conflict involved since, in the state of innocence, human beings do not strive or yearn for anything. However, this state generates anxiety. Innocence is not entirely tranquil. It is a state from which anxiety arises. Innocence is accompanied by anxiety. Anxiety is uneasiness resulting from an individual's awareness that they could be different than they are now [1, p. 38]. They could have an ability or a knowledge that they do not possess now. This possibility could become actuality. But what could be the consequences if this does not happen? One does not know this and is therefore anxious. On the one hand, the realisation of this possibility attracts them, while, on the other, the thought of it arouses discomfort. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve lived in innocence, which was characterised by ignorance. When God prohibited them from eating off the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they did not quite understand him since they did not know the difference between good and evil. Perhaps they had an inkling that if they ate from the tree, they would be capable of something they were not capable of at the time, but they did not know what kind of an ability that would be. Even when they were told that they would die if they ate from the tree, they did not understand because they did not know what 'to die' meant. Because they did not understand what God said, they had no definite notion but merely indefiniteness and the ambiguity of anxiety [3, p. 45]. Anxiety is captured freedom. This is why, according to Haufniensis, sin cannot be logically explained and there can be no science of sin because sin arises from freedom, which is an area that transcends science [1, p. 38]. Science attempts to logically grasp reality it objectively perceives. Sin is subjective and is not logical. This is why knowledge appropriate to sin is a subjective, existential form of knowing. Haufniensis wrote that every person understands

how sin came into the world solely by themselves. If they understood it through another or 'learnt' it from another, they would *eo ipso* misunderstand it [3, p. 51].

Bellinger points out three findings that his reading of *The Concept of Anxiety* has led him to: 1. The most basic human emotion is not fear of external threats, but anxiety arising from spiritual freedom; 2. The freedom of human beings is an expression of their position as beings continually coming into being, continually being created; 3. Falling into sin means to alienate ourselves from our Creator and to derail the direction of the process of our becoming willed by God [1, p. 39].

Let us now take a closer look at Kierkegaard's conception of sin and despair. The key work for this topic is *The Sickness unto Death* by Anti-Climacus. He claims that, from the psychological point of view, sin is intensified despair [4]. Despair is the basic existential alienation from God that makes living a fully human life impossible [1, p. 43]. In order to be able to explain despair and its forms, Anti-Climacus must first explain the nature of the self. He suggests that the self has three dimensions: 1. The self is a synthesis of opposing elements, such as infinitude and finitude, freedom and necessity. 2. The self is a self-relation: it has the ability to be conscious of itself. 3. The self is related to the power that established it, God. Taken together, these three dimensions establish the way in which the self is spirit [1, p. 44]. Where does despair come from? According to Anti-Climacus, it comes from the fact that God, who created man as a relation, a synthesis, that is, a relation that relates itself to itself, "releases it from his hand" [4, p. 16]. People are unique among creatures in that they are released from God's hand. In case of other beings, there is therefore nothing that could block God's intention for them to become what they 'are', for their essence to be realised. But this intention can be blocked when it comes to human beings because they can actively block it themselves. This is the basic argument of *The Sickness unto Death* as a whole [1, p. 45]. The lowest form of despair is the lack of awareness about what God wants us to become, what image he intended for us. The next stage is conscious despair, which can be despair in one's weakness to become what God had intended or despair in one's defiance to become what God wants one to become [1, p. 46]. Demonic despair is the most intense form of this despair. In being demonic one wants to be imperfection or, in other words, does not want to become God's image. One decides for one's imperfection as a witness against God, a witness that God is a second-rate author. In a similar sense, Vogelien speaks about the epiphany of the ego that conceals the epiphany of God [5]. Anti-Climacus gives the following definition of sin: "Sin is: before God, or with the conception of God, in despair not to will to be oneself, or in despair to will to be oneself. Thus sin is intensified weakness or intensified defiance: sin is the intensification of despair." [4] Kierkegaard's starting point is that every sin, before it is a sin against others, is first and last a sin against God [1, p. 50]. Kierkegaard [4, p. 80] emphasises that a sinner does have the conception of God, but nevertheless does not will as God wills and is thus disobedient. What actually "makes human guilt into sin is that

the guilty one has the consciousness of existing before God” (ibid.). Sin is the most fundamental form of avoiding obedience to God. It is the unreadiness to “hear and understand” the voice of God communicating his will for an individual [4, p. 82]. Sin is defying God.

The opposite of sin is therefore faith. In his interpretation of Kierkegaard, Bellinger introduced the concept of “ego protection” [1, p. 42], which in his opinion serves well to summarise the basic insights articulated in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*. As mentioned, humans do not have a set psychology and are constantly coming into being, they are constantly becoming. Such a position leads to anxiety, which is a state from which sin arises. In the ‘leap into sin’, human beings turn away from God in order to control the process of creation themselves and reduce anxiety. Ego becomes like a sort of a shell in which an individual hides to avoid the possible further development of the self. In this state, the self tries to protect itself from the future, from the possibility that it could ‘die to itself’ and be reborn in a different, more mature person. ‘Demonic’ is the expression that denotes human existence when the attempt to avoid the breakdown of the ego has reached the level of panic [1, p. 53]. Or, as Kierkegaard says, to be demonic means “to pray to be free from being saved” [6]. According to KB, human life has three main dimensions: the vertical axis (God and nature), the horizontal axis (social existence) and the temporal trajectory of an individual self [7-9]. On each of these axes, there can come to disruptions whose consequences are various forms of pathology. Disruption on the vertical axis is defying God; on the selfhood axis, it is defying the call for spiritual growth; and on the horizontal axis, it is one’s immersion in a crowd, in Kierkegaard’s sense of the term, which is a corrupt form of human sociality and enables violence of immense proportions. The essence of the KB theory of violence is that God calls on every human being to spiritually develop, become God’s image, that is, the image God intended for them. This means that one loses one’s ‘identity’ and becomes something new. However, most people resist this in a more or less violent way. Such people do not want to hear God’s call. When this silencing endeavour obtains extreme proportions, which can assume a very violent form, KB talks about demoniness. Demoniness is an unnatural state, that is, a form of madness which can become actual insanity.

Opposing one’s own spiritual growth and endeavouring to silence God’s call can assume very different forms, which can be more or less violent. Sloodweg names such an orientation and behaviour, which is especially characteristic of modernity, crusades (against the knights of faith) [10]. To mention only a few in the way of illustration: excessive and for the preservation of liberal democracy harmful demand for excluding religious discourse from public life or acting in this direction; excessive demands for excluding religious education from public education or related behaviour; scientism, which can gain outright demonic proportions (eugenics, experiments on people etc.). Bellinger himself used KB theory to interpret Nazism and Stalinism. A Nazi is a demonic person who is a pathological aesthete controlled by anxiety about good. A

Stalinist is a pathological pharisaic ethicist filled with the anxiety about evil [1, p. 113-133; 11; 12]

I believe that the above delineation of KB theory suffices for us to conclude that KB theory is of exceptional significance for the understanding of violence and (*eo ipso*) the political field and that it enables interesting, weighty and illuminating interpretations that the secular theories of violence do not offer. We can therefore move on to the second part of our task, the presentation of Kierkegaard's divine command theory and the assessment of its 'usefulness' and significance.

2. Divine command ethics and its compatibility with liberal democracy

Kierkegaard believed that we must be absolutely humble before God and give him priority before all else. God must be our absolute priority [13]. This is the only way we can protect ourselves from self-love. Self-love is the most important thing we must overcome in life [13, 14]. I think it is quite reasonable to say that one of the main purposes of Kierkegaard's writing is to show human beings how they can protect themselves from self-love and overcome it. Because Kierkegaard's ethics is primarily an ethics of love [15], we can formulate the above statements as the demand for the primacy of the love of God. The significance of the primacy of the love of God can be illuminated from the aspect of idolatry. The primacy of the love of God is significant because any attitude that favours anything over God is idolatry. In order to understand this better, we must recall our findings about the central significance of creation in Kierkegaard's thought. Human beings without faith, which according to Kierkegaard is equivalent to the priority of the love of God, thereby avoid God's creation of them and thus become or try to become or be their own 'creator'. This amounts to the idolatry of oneself since one tries to assume God's function. It is needless to add that, according to the Christian doctrine, such self-idolatry is self-love, regardless of what one does.

If God must be our absolute priority, then we must absolutely respect his commands. Even more, only if something is a duty can it liberate us and make us autonomous. This is why, according to Kierkegaard, faith and love are duties or, more precisely, fundamental duties since they were commanded by God. According to Kierkegaard, all our main and fundamental commands are God's commands, which is why his ethics is the divine command ethics. This ascertainment presents us with the task of answering the question of whether Kierkegaard's divine command ethics is compatible with liberal democracy, whose essential component is pluralism. In what follows, we will argue that it is, drawing on the arguments of C. Stephen Evans, complemented by a few additional reasons.

In the last chapter of his *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love* [15, p. 318ff], Evans argues that the religiously grounded ethics of divine command (hereinafter EDC) is not sectarian and is compatible with liberal, pluralistic democracy. His starting point is that the Kierkegaardian type of EDC excludes all violence

towards people who think differently. This proceeds from its fundamental principle encapsulated in the phrase “love thy neighbour” [15, p. 319]. Furthermore, referring to KB theory, Evans claims that Kierkegaard’s theory is not only incompatible with violence, but even provides an excellent explanation of the origin of violence, which implicitly contains the prescription for healing human beings and society of violence and for its prevention [15, p. 320]. The second reason is that there can be a common moral ground for believers and non-believers [15, p. 321]. Thus, the principle of ‘loving one’s neighbour’ can also be understood by an atheist. At this point, Evans distinguishes between general and special revelation [15, p. 156ff]. General revelation is also given to non-believers. A non-believer can thus recognise something as a moral obligation without being aware that it is actually a divine command, just as one can recognise water and drink it without knowing that the water’s chemical structure is H₂O. So EDC does not contain the implausible claim that a person must be religious to recognise certain moral values or principles and try to build their life on them. Even more, religiously grounded ethics and anthropology have an explanation for this: God the Creator placed love in every human being. This implies that every human being has worth and that, in principle, every human being has the capability of acknowledging the truth that every human being has worth. We should add that even though moral revelation is communicated to certain people as a special revelation (through Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius...), this does not mean that it cannot be, at least partly, recognised by way of general revelation, a general moral sense or conscience, and that it cannot be advocated by appealing to general revelation. This is how Kierkegaard himself proceeded. Although he thought that the morality of neighbour-love was derived from the New Testament, he claimed that the soundness of this ethics could be defended on the basis of criteria recognised even by the opponents of religion since such an ethics allows human beings to flourish by preserving the constancy of love, enhancing human freedom, and protecting human life [15, p. 322]. However, if this is so, the following question arises: Why do we even need religiously grounded moral theory if people can recognise their moral obligations without believing in God or accepting the authority of a special revelation? Why do we need the divine command theory? We have already indicated the answer: this theory explains how our morality is related to us achieving our deepest and greatest happiness, but thereby does not reduce our morality to our own interest. What prevents this reduction to one’s own interest is precisely the principle that the ground of right actions is the unconditional fulfilment of a divine command. That morality has primarily nothing to do with one’s own interest is one of the strongest intuitions about natural morality.

Yet many nevertheless think that the above explanation cannot be applied to liberal democracy, which is bound to the separation of church and state. Many think that in a liberal democracy religion has to be a private matter. This is a big question of course and would demand much more space than this article offers, which is why we will list only a few of the most important reasons for

disagreeing with the extreme exclusivist opinion on this issue. It was Martin Breul [16] who clearly pointed out these reasons when he listed five of them in support of the thesis that religious beliefs can play a legitimate role in the public discourse of a pluralistic and democratic society. Even more, Breul claims that these roles are necessary for such a society. No role has the function of justification. Breul agrees with the extreme exclusivists that religious beliefs cannot perform the function of justification. He lists the following reasons or roles: 1. Religious beliefs can play the role of motivational reasons; 2. The second reason why religious beliefs need to be publically expressed concerns the reservation of some people regarding the possibility of translating the content of religious beliefs into non-religious, secular language. Breul proceeds from the conception that the public is a critical and discursive procedure for the coordination and organisation of common action and life. If this is so, then religious beliefs should not be a priori excluded from the public or limited to the private sphere, for there would thus be no possibility or opportunity to check the accessibility of their content and translate the parts that are interesting for a social discussion into a generally acceptable language. If we want to be at a post-secular level, we thus have to reject the 'liberal' demand for the privacy of religion and allow the presence of religious arguments in public, but their advocates have to be aware of the epistemic limitation of these arguments [16]. 3. The third reason for the presence of accessible religious reasons in public discourse is the consideration of minorities [16]. For many minorities, the only way for them to explain their misgivings or reservations is to express themselves in religious language or with the help of religiously coloured or grounded objections. Religious justifications can serve as (initial) substitutes for generally acceptable justifications into which they can be translated or which can later be given, communicated. According to Breul, the reason for this is not any sort of a patronising protection of cultural diversity, but the desire to expand the field of democratic public discussion as much as possible, both in view of content and the possible participants (including the minorities from the margin). Strahovnik points out the same [17]. 4. Religious arguments can serve as additional justification in addition to the arguments based on generally acceptable reasons. Thus, various dictatorial orientations or blatant injustices can be criticised from religious points of view. In such a case, religious arguments are not of decisive significance, but they can add weight to a certain viewpoint. The exclusion of religious argumentation from public discussion can generate a public space occupied by various extremists who unreservedly appear in public discussions with false religious arguments that serve their interests. Thus, the influence of the religious far right and evangelical fundamentalists has substantially increased in the US in recent years [14]. 5. In environments of stable disagreement that require extensive compromises, a reference to religious notions might be needed [16]. Take the example of abortion advocates and their religious opponents. Since we cannot expect them to reach a consensus on this question, the only solution of this stalemate is to reach some kind of a compromise which both parties would be able to live with and which would enable their conciliation. But

if we want to reach such a compromise, we first need to learn what constitutes the value criteria and conceptions of concrete potential partners in the desired compromise so they can be taken into account in the process of reaching the compromise. This can be achieved only if the religious side can explain its views in a public discussion and if its views are taken into account in public discourse.

Evans formulates the objection against (extreme) exclusivism on the basis of differentiating between two conceptions of liberal democracy [15, p. 325]: 1. A society committed to a free and open debate, in which everyone can participate, including religiously committed individuals. 2. On the second view, religious convictions may not be debated because they belong to the private sphere. According to Evans, only the first society is a truly liberal democracy, while the second, under the guise of neutrality, establishes a naturalistic framework of discussion, which can hardly be called religious neutrality. The fact that many believers defend the justification and the need of religious discourse in public debates by no means implies that a truly religious Christian wants a sort of a theocratic society. Quite the opposite. Kierkegaard's case is very telling in this respect. Kierkegaard opposed the system in place in Denmark at the time, in which the church was a tool of the state. His main reason was objection to the idea that the ideals of genuine Christianity can be identified with the norms of any actual, concrete human society. As Evans points out, the genius of EDC lies precisely in the transcendence it gives to our moral obligations [15, p. 326]. EDC can never be identical with *vox populi* or *Sittlichkeit* in Hegel's sense. The authentic ethical individual must always receive the established norms 'with fear and trembling'. When Christians identify their faith with *Sittlichkeit*, they have betrayed their faith and are involved in a rebellion against God [15, p. 327]. In this respect, Kierkegaard terms the attitude of a true Christian as "witness to the truth", while Evans names it "counterculture". Kierkegaard believed that such a witness to the truth would certainly meet with persecution, but they must not seek persecution, let alone martyrdom [18]. This comes through most clearly in his understanding of a Christian's attitude as being a witness to the truth for a wider community, without the hope that the wider community will understand them [15, p. 328].

For Kierkegaard, any Christian triumphalism is anathema and the Constantinian fusion of Church and State a fall whose consequences we still feel today [1, p. 98ff]. According to Kierkegaard, a harsh critic of Christendom, we must not identify any social changes, social order and, even less, temporal order with the Kingdom of God. It is precisely the transformers of society that have to be aware of this the most. On the other hand, Kierkegaard's views and findings delineated above can also be useful for others, not only Christians, for people with very different views on the relation between religious communities and politics. According to Kierkegaard, the one who wants to serve God and love their neighbour must be aware that no human being is God. Ultimately, our doings are not our own but God's. This can be nicely illustrated with the case of reconciliation between two people [15, p. 330ff]. Kierkegaard deals with this issue in *Works of Love* [13, p. 331-344]. He points out the danger of self-

righteousness and superiority that can spoil the noblest of endeavours. The danger in reconciliation is not only that the one who loves feels superior, but that the repenting perpetrator feels ashamed and humiliated [13, p. 338]. The only solution here is for a third party to “step in” between them, that is, a humble relation to God [13, p. 339]. The ‘victorious person’, in terms of reconciliation, must be aware that the perpetrator’s repentance and plea for forgiveness are not their doing but God’s and that good is transcendental. They thereby admit their frailty, and yet are not humbled before the penitent but before God or Good. The penitent is also not humbled before the ‘victor’ but before God. Since both persons in this relationship are humbled, there is nothing humiliating for either one of them [13, p. 340]. Thus, this common humility makes true reconciliation possible. The one who truly loves must clearly express and keep repeating that the conversion of the penitent is not their but God’s due. This is the way the ones who truly love conduct themselves, notes Kierkegaard [13, p. 341]. This is for Kierkegaard the essence of fear and trembling: living in the awareness that we exist before a higher power and are responsible to it. This is precisely why this higher power must be a truly transcendent one, such that nothing human or temporal may rightly be identified with It. It is only a God who is truly transcendent that can humanize and equalize relationships in this way [15, p. 331].

Evans concludes that persons who believe in such a God and are committed to serving him can make a vital contribution to a pluralistic liberal democracy. Such persons do not consider earthly matters to be the end goal of human life, but Evans [15, p. 332] points out C.S. Lewis’s view that it is precisely those who had thought most about the other world that understood the present world best and did the most for it [19]. This is why we can defend Kierkegaard’s divine command theory as the one whose broader familiarity and acceptance would have very beneficial effects in a pluralistic democratic society.

3. Religious roots of autonomy and subjectivity and thus also liberal democracy

If we have heretofore emphasised primarily the compatibility of Kierkegaardian faith and ethics with liberal democracy, we would now like to shed light on their, from the practical point of view, vital necessity for the functioning of liberal democracy. The central claim supporting this viewpoint is that Kierkegaardian faith and ethics are a source of subjectivity and autonomy, which are the heart of liberal democracy, without which the latter soon withers away. What do we mean by this? Firstly, it is worth mentioning that an individual’s awe of divine commands together with their awareness that faith cannot be reduced to any *Sittlichkeit* gives an individual the strength to oppose the established norms and views, which means that it strengthens their autonomy and subjectivity. Such individuals and such opposition are crucial for social and democratic development. Without them, democracy can be abstract at best, but never actual. Such an abstract democracy ossifies, stops developing, while its

members fall deeper and deeper into a more or less concealed bare belongingness, which can easily develop into fundamentalism, quietist individualism or anarchism. Subjectivity and autonomy at the heart of liberal democracy thus originate in religion. True Christianity implies subjectivity and even enforces or demands it [10]. Even the most ‘terrible’ and ‘absurd’ divine command, for example, the command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, does not undermine our autonomy, but, on the contrary, strengthens our determination, and it does so with fear and trembling that resists every reduction of responsibility to anything not based on the priority of the love of God [10, p. 244-245]. It is true that in order to observe the commands, we must lose some of our worldly wits [10, p. 243; 20], but this is the necessary price for our subjectivity and autonomy. However, as Evans notes, it is not necessary for this loss to be radical, that is, on condition that we know something about our God. This remark is important when we consider the question of how we know that a certain command is divine. One criterion can be its accordance with our knowledge about our God. Nowadays, we can thus justifiably doubt that the command to kill our only son would really be a divine command [15, p. 307].

The absence of subjectivity and autonomy has fateful consequences for society as it leads to the disappearing of genuine cohesion and therefore disintegration. In their absence, a possible opposition to anarchism or individualism is only an empty belongingness, which is the opposite of genuine belongingness. Such an empty belongingness is more or less fundamentalist and originates in the same problem as empty individualism: the withdrawal of a spiritually developed self with all its consequences (lack of identity, lack of autonomy, absence of subjectivity, reservation and self-love) [21]. This is why the answer to the urgent problems of the contemporary world, from individualism to fundamentalism, is not a return to a sort of gregarious morality, but the development of spiritually developed and awoken individuals, single individuals in Kierkegaard’s sense of the term [22]. There are several obstacles to achieving this goal. Firstly, the predominant culture of (self-)idolatry. Some see in it a concealed cowardice. Sloodweg, for example, thus says that people today lack courage for a deep and genuine inner self [10, p. 248]. In addition, faith draws from a source that the contemporary dominant immanentistic thought rejects. However, our analysis suggests that the sources of truly free decisions and thereby liberal democracy are of a transcendent nature.

References

- [1] C.K. Bellinger, *The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001.
- [2] S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985, 21.
- [3] S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sinn*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980, 42.

- [4] S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983, 77.
- [5] E. Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1989, 67-68.
- [6] S. Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, Vol. 2, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1970, 1277-1278.
- [7] C.K. Bellinger, *The Trinitarian Self: The Key to the Puzzle of Violence*, Pickwick Publications, Oregon, 2008, 1ff.
- [8] R. Králik, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **13(1)** (2017) 25-34.
- [9] K. Valčová, M. Pavlíková and M. Roubalová, Komunikácie, **18(3)** (2016) 98-104.
- [10] T.J.M. Slootweg, *Love and Violence: Dialectical Reflection on the Phenomenology of the Crusade*, in *Religion, Politics and Law: Philosophical Reflections on the Sources of Normative Order in Society*, B.C. Labuschagne & R.W. Sonnenschmidt (eds.), Brill, Leiden & Boston, 2009, 223-256.
- [11] C.K. Bellinger, *The Joker is Satan, and So Are We: And Other Essays on Violence and Christian Faith*, Churchyard Books, Fort Worth, 2010, 9-23.
- [12] B. Žalec, Filozofia, **69(5)** (2014) 443-450.
- [13] S. Kierkegaard, *Works of Lowe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995, 149, 448.
- [14] M. Sandel, *Justice – What's the Right Thing to Do?*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 2010, 208-269.
- [15] C.S. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands & Moral Obligations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.
- [16] M. Breul, Theologie und Philosophie, **90(4)** (2015) 499ff.
- [17] V. Strahovnik, Bogoslovni vestnik, **74(2)** (2014) 245.
- [18] S. Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997, 51-89.
- [19] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996, 119.
- [20] P. Kondrla and R. Králik, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **12(4)** (2016) 155-164.
- [21] M. Pavlíková, Xlinguae, **10(1)** (2017) 65-66.
- [22] R. Králik and S. J. Tinley, Komunikácie, **19(1)** (2017) 28.