

Speech at the opening of the conference “*Kierkegaard Reconsidered in a Global World*”

By Prorector Thomas Bjørnholm

Dear Colleagues, students and guests. Welcome to the University of Copenhagen. Let me start with a quotation: “If quantum mechanics hasn't profoundly shocked you, you haven't understood it yet.”

This was not said by Kierkegaard – which is probably unnecessary to state here – but by the Danish physicist and Nobel Prize winner Niels Bohr.

I am a physicist myself and my personal knowledge about the writings of Kierkegaard is limited – but like quantum mechanics and physics, I guess his writings open up a new world for the beginner and continue to attract the experienced student.

I am also convinced that beginning to understand Kierkegaard's insights into the human existence must be as thrilling - and perhaps also shocking – just as the implications of the insights of quantum mechanics.

For the University of Copenhagen 2013 is indeed a special year as we are celebrating not one but two special anniversaries: The 200th anniversary of the birth of Søren Kierkegaard and the 100th anniversary of Niels Bohr's atomic model.

Both Kierkegaard and Bohr have had profound and lasting influence on their respective domains. And their contributions have been debated way beyond the borders of their tiny home country.

This conference certainly bears witness to the fact that the interest in Kierkegaard is not only a local phenomenon but indeed an international one.

And a quick glance at the conference programme will reveal that we have speakers from many European countries from across the Atlantic and from Asia.

This signifies that Kierkegaard also speaks to the academic audience outside the protestant culture he came from. The University of Copenhagen is proud to have received the 55 volumes of Søren Kierkegaard's collected writings with commentaries from the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre Foundation.

And we find it very important that parts of this colossal work is being translated to more than 10 languages. The volumes will also be invaluable for the recipients of the 3 Ph.D. grants we have set up on the occasion of the anniversary.

To a Kierkegaard layman like me, it is fascinating to acknowledge that the deep insight into human existence by reflection and thought by this fragile man is still a living part of academic debate so many years after his time.

Kierkegaard touches us with something which is universal to all and at the same time intimate in essence.

Therefore, studying both the life and the works of Kierkegaard must be a privilege and be a fascinating and a demanding endeavor. It is encouraging and interesting that the present Kierkegaard research is conducted across disciplines such as psychology, literature, philosophy and theology.

I believe that while specialized academic skills are vital, we must certainly not forget that no one works isolated and that we can strengthen our own insights by the perspectives from other disciplines.

This is certainly a perspective which flourishes in the case of science – and something that was also encouraged by Niels Bohr whom I quoted for a start.

Crossing borders within disciplines and crossing borders between countries and continents lead the thought to the theme of the conference: *Kierkegaard Reconsidered in a Global World*.

The many sessions in the conference program reveal that Kierkegaard and the themes that he wrote and thought about are global phenomena - Phenomena that are being studied globally.

An international research environment is enriching for all disciplines and fields of research. Therefore the future of Kierkegaard research looks bright.

At the same time I guess that the globalized world where more and more people are presented with more and more opportunities and responsibilities makes Kierkegaard more relevant than ever. I want to thank Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre for the great effort in relation to this conference. - One of the key events in the celebration of the anniversary.

I would also want to thank all who have come from afar to be in Copenhagen on the birthday of Kierkegaard. As it is widely known, Kierkegaard was an eager walker – often strolling around in the streets of Copenhagen.

We are lucky that the old centre of Copenhagen - considering time has passed - looks a lot like the place where Kierkegaard set his foot prints – fortunately the smell of the city has improved drastically, I am told.

There for I encourage you – especially those of you who are here for the first time - to go for a walk in the old part of city if the schedule allows it. But beware of the new invention since the Kierkegaard era: the fast running bicycles which Copenhageners can't live without.

If you go for a walk please do look up at the bust of Niels Bohr outside this building - and if the weather is good sit on a bench in the garden of the Royal Library near the Kierkegaard statue. I wish you all a pleasant stay in Copenhagen and a fruitful conference.

Thank you.