

**Theopoetics:**

**Kierkegaard and the Vocation of the Christian Creative Artist**

Luke Tarassenko

Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

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## Abstract

In this doctoral dissertation I examine the development of Kierkegaard's sense of vocation as a Christian creative artist by research into his journals and published works, as well as investigating how this was influenced by his scriptural hermeneutic. I then attempt to sketch some starting points for a theology of Christian creative artwork contextualised within modern theological aesthetics by drawing upon this examination. I argue that Kierkegaard began writing without documented reflection on his intentions and communicative methodology, but was nonetheless a religious author from the start of his career, as his text *The Point of View for my Work as an Author* later claimed. I trace how he began with a more "indirect" approach in his writing and gradually developed a theory of "indirect communication", though there were more "direct" elements present in his work from the beginning (the "first authorship"), yet as he continued in his authorial career he became ever more "direct" in his mode of communication (the "second authorship"), until it eventually became exclusively more "direct" religious writing (the "attack on Christendom"). I conclude that the most concise and complete formulation of Kierkegaard's mature conception of his task as a Christian artist becomes "to communicate Christianity in Christendom" in a more direct mode—to explain straightforwardly what authentic Christianity is in an age of cultural, purely nominal religion. I allow that this task is in some ways unique to his own historical situation but contend nonetheless that a consideration of it is profitable for contemporary theology because of the many different ways that he attempted to carry it out. In Kierkegaardian terms, and following on from resources in Kierkegaard and his use of scripture, I argue constructively from all of this that more "direct" communication is the more valuable form of communication to the Christian creative artist for theological reasons, but that more "indirect" communication can still be useful, in the task of communicating creatively through art.

## Longer Abstract

In this Modern Theology DPhil dissertation I examine the development of the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary philosopher-theologian Søren Kierkegaard's sense of vocation as a Christian creative artist by research into his journals and published works, as well as investigating how this was influenced by his scriptural hermeneutic. I then attempt to sketch some starting points for a theology of Christian creative artwork contextualised within modern theological aesthetics by drawing upon this examination. I argue that Kierkegaard began writing without documented reflection on his intentions and communicative methodology, but was nonetheless a religious author from the start of his career, as his text *The Point of View for my Work as an Author* later claimed. I trace how he began with a more "indirect" approach in his writing and gradually developed a theory of "indirect communication", though there were more "direct" elements present in his work from the beginning (the "first authorship"), yet as he continued in his authorial career he became ever more "direct" in his mode of communication (the "second authorship"), until it eventually became exclusively more "direct" religious writing (the "attack on Christendom"). I contend that the most concise and complete formulation of Kierkegaard's mature conception of his task as a Christian artist becomes "to communicate Christianity in Christendom" in a more direct mode—to explain straightforwardly what authentic Christianity is in an age of cultural, purely nominal religion. I allow that this task is in some ways unique to his own historical situation but conclude nonetheless that a consideration of it is profitable for contemporary theology because of the many different ways that he attempted to carry it out. In Kierkegaardian terms, and following on from resources in Kierkegaard and his use of scripture, I argue constructively from all of this that more "direct" communication is the more valuable form of communication to the Christian creative artist for theological reasons, but that more "indirect" communication can still be useful, in the task of communicating creatively through art.

Much work has already been done on the development of Kierkegaard's artistic methodology, including by Henning Fenger, Roger Poole, Sylvia Walsh, George Pattison, Joel Rasmussen and Joakim Garff. However, fierce debate still goes

on in this area, particularly with respect to the issue of whether Kierkegaard's authorship was and is truly "religious" from its beginning, with Fenger, Poole and Garff arguing against and Walsh, Pattison and Rasmussen arguing in favour of this. Furthermore, no-one has yet undertaken a study of the development of Kierkegaard's artistic methodology that does all of the following: gives special attention to his *Christian* communicative purposes in carrying out his artwork, from a theological perspective; pays close heed to the entirety of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers* and compares what they have to say about his own artistic vocation with its practice in the full variety of his published works; examines the way in which his scriptural hermeneutic and key scriptural texts influenced this vocational concept and practice; and uses Kierkegaard's theory of Christian communication through art as a starting point for sources of insight about this subject for contemporary theology as opposed to exclusively for Kierkegaard studies. For these reasons, my dissertation is innovative and makes an original contribution to knowledge by adding to current debates over the religiousness of Kierkegaard's authorship, examining texts that have been neglected with regard to this question, interrogating it with attention to his scriptural hermeneutic, and utilising the discussion for constructive theological ends.

In order to make my argument, I present the findings of my research into Kierkegaard's journals and published works and the significant secondary literature about the topic in scholarly prose. I order the information chronologically because I am tracing the development of Kierkegaard's artistic vocation over time, from his debut as a literary author up until the moments of his final publications. In my Introduction I thus announce the primary subject of the dissertation: the development of Kierkegaard's sense of vocation as a Christian artist over time. I explain how this will be investigated by examination of the evidence from his journals and his published works, and by comparing the two, without "psychologising" about Kierkegaard's intentions or venturing out "behind" the evidence of the texts, so to remain "in front" of the text, in the language of Paul Ricoeur. I signpost the fact that in particular by looking in detail at the *Journals*, upbuilding discourses and late writings I will be making an original contribution to knowledge by paying heed to some often neglected materials in relation to this

question. I explain how this will also yield conclusions concerning the related and highly contested issue of whether Kierkegaard was a “religious author” from the start of his career as *The Point of View* later claims, indicating that I will agree that (with qualifications) he was so, *contra* Fenger, Poole, and Garff, and in agreement with Walsh, Pattison, and Rasmussen. I explain further that I will be paying especial attention to the theme of the relative merits of more “indirect” versus more “direct” communication for the purposes of the Christian artist along the way, and later to the influence of scripture on Kierkegaard’s communicative methodology, in order at the end of the thesis to make some preliminary suggestions for a theology of Christian creative artwork in Kierkegaardian language. I hint that in the end I will conclude that more “direct” communication is more valuable to the Christian artist, but that more “indirect” communication can still be useful.

The first Part of my thesis is devoted to an exploration of Kierkegaard’s own artistic vocation. My first chapter is called “Indirection: 1835-45”, a triple-entendre referencing Kierkegaard’s term “indirect communication”, the apparent lack of a clear direction exhibited by his earliest writings and the magician’s sense of *misdirection*. In this chapter I examine the development of Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation from the very beginning of his career as a writer with *Either/Or* until the first self-enforced hiatus in his work that comes with *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. I show how at the commencement of Kierkegaard’s literary output there is no documented reflection on his communicative methodology or of a religious vocation in writing, but how nonetheless the material he produced clearly identifies him as a religious author. To do this, I analyse how *Either/Or* can be read as an outworking of Kierkegaard’s vocation, how it is pseudonymous, indirect and much concerned with his relationship with Regine Olsen, and yet how it is undeniably a religious work, particularly from its themes and from the closing “Ultimatum”, in agreement with *The Point of View*. I also inspect the first published *Two Upbuilding Discourses* to reinforce the claim that Kierkegaard was a religious author from the beginning, which they support both by their own content and because of their correspondence with the Ultimatum in *Either/Or*. I then briefly summarise Kierkegaard’s literary output between *Two Upbuilding Discourses* and

*Postscript* and examine how in the *Journals* over this period the idea of “indirect communication” first appears and slowly takes shape, along with the gradual documentation of an embryonic sense of religious artistic vocation. I show how both are projected back onto the already written pseudonymous works. Lastly, I turn to *Postscript* and in particular what it has to say about communication and vocation, suggesting that it can be read as a piece of “indirect kakangelism” in the service of Christianity. Throughout the first chapter, I demonstrate how in this “first authorship” the emphasis is on a more indirect approach to creative artwork, and how over the course of this period Kierkegaard came to reflect more and more on his vocation and methodology, leading him to develop the concept of “indirect communication” working in service of the religious.

In my second chapter, “Direct-Indirection: 1846-48”, a pun on Kierkegaard’s own use of the term “direct-indirect” and the sense of “redirected wandering” or “repositioned aimlessness”, I examine the development of Kierkegaard’s religious vocation from the recommencement of his writing after *Postscript* up until the composition of *The Point of View*. I divide my chronology in this way because there is a disproportionate amount of reflection on his artistic vocation that is recorded during this time, including in his unpublished lecture notes on communication. To begin with, I scrutinise how during the events involving the newspaper-journal *The Corsair* Kierkegaard began to reflect more explicitly on his vocation and decided to resume writing. I look at *Two Ages* as an outworking of Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation after he decides to continue writing again, focusing on what it has to say about communicators of religious truth in the present age and suggesting parallels between this portrayal and Kierkegaard’s writings about his own task. Next I trace Kierkegaard’s further reflections on his artistic task in his journals from 1847 as he continues to write, highlighting how at this time he continues to cite a mixture of “worldly” and “spiritual” factors as motivating his artwork but how the religious motivations become more prominent. I also undertake a close reading of the unpublished lectures on communication in the *Journals*, observing how even in these systematic lectures there is a profound, uneasy tension between direct and indirect communication that is not resolved by them and how they end by speaking of Christian communication as “direct-indirect”. Following this, I treat

*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* as an example of a direct-indirect approach, privileging them because of their detailed discussion of vocation, which I assess as having to do in the text with living responsibly “before God”. This leads in turn to a treatment of the *Journals* from 1848, where there is still a tension between indirect and direct communication but Kierkegaard starts to move further towards favouring an even more direct form of communication. Finally, I carry out a study of *The Point of View*, arguing that it displays a now familiar tension between indirect and direct communication but nonetheless still makes hints in favour of a more direct approach. I argue that this text is broadly consistent with what comes before it, that is to say it is accurate in its claim that Kierkegaard was a religious author from the start but that there is no documented evidence which suggests that he had a developed plan for the authorship when he embarked upon it. I additionally raise the question of whether *The Point of View* is consistent with what comes after it, underlining the fact that there is still a great deal of writing to come even after it has been penned. I argue that in this period of the “second authorship”, as typified by the lecture notes, there is an uneasy tension between indirect and direct communication typified by the term “direct-indirect”: the idea of indirect communication has now taken full shape and is favoured in regards to religious communication, and yet the authorship is becoming at this time more direct.

In my third chapter, “Direction: 1849-55”, playing on Kierkegaard’s phrase “direct communication” and the sense of “direction” (though this can also carry the magician’s sense) as “route” or “path”, I examine Kierkegaard’s writings from *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* up until the end of his life. To start with, I show how in the *Journals* of 1849 he calls himself a “poet of the religious” and comes to see his task as being to describe poetically the requirements of Christianity, although I also quote passages in which he wrestles with the prospect of becoming “more than a poet” at this time and show that there is still a tension here. I look at *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* and the manner in which it is derogatory about “the poet” and poetry but how it is simultaneously written in a highly poetic style. I argue from this that Kierkegaard is at this stage only disparaging towards a certain kind of poetic practice, namely that which remains

in the realm of possibility and never ventures forth into actuality. I then assess *Armed Neutrality* to make clear the way in which it typifies this tension between indirect and direct communication, poetry and upbuilding, irony and witness, which is reaching its climactic tenor at this point. Afterwards I perform a close reading of *Practice in Christianity*, paying special attention to what it strikingly has to say about the impossibility of direct communication of the religious and its critique of religious art. I conclude that the critique is profound but not invalidating of all Christian art on Kierkegaardian grounds, even “more direct” art, because it comes in an artistic text, it deals with the special case of the God-man and though it expresses extremely important caveats it does not explicitly rule out the possibility of communicating effectively through Christian art. I also discuss how the text serves as an outworking of Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation at this time, itself being more direct in style but also published under a pseudonym, yet again exemplifying the tension. In the proceeding section I look at how in his *Journals* Kierkegaard now comes right up against the “border” between more indirect poetry and more direct witness, agonising over whether he should become a martyr for the truth. Finally, I outline the narrative of Kierkegaard’s terminal “attack on Christendom” and look at the writings and *Journals* of this time to show how he ends his career by exclusively privileging more direct communication over more indirect communication in his writing. I show how the term “poet” falls out of favour with him at the end of his life, replaced by the humorous title “policeman”, but nonetheless how even the final writings of Kierkegaard’s life are poetic in character and how he never completely forsook his literary mode of expression. I thus argue that during this period there is an ever-increasing progression towards the favouring of a more direct form of communication in Kierkegaard’s writings until in the end in the production of *The Moment and Late Writings* he comes to privilege more direct communication exclusively.

Having thus spent the first Part of my thesis working through Kierkegaard’s output chronologically, in Chapter Four, “Biblical Bridges: Scriptural Resources in Kierkegaard and Beyond”, I go on to connect my enquiry to more general issues to do with the vocation of the Christian creative artist in modern theology by examining the scriptural resources and hermeneutic that contributed to

Kierkegaard's sense of his own vocation. I do this by identifying them as portrayed and at work in two more texts, *For Self-Examination* and *Works of Love*. Via an exegesis of these, I show how Kierkegaard espoused a high view of Christian scripture, demanding that it be responded to with strong existential commitment by its readers, though how he was also sensitive to the problems of interpretation, with regards to which he prioritises the criterion of "love". From here I go on to consider specific scriptural tropes from the Old Testament and New Testament that may be seen as influencing Kierkegaard's artistic vocation, in particular focusing on the example of the New Testament figure of Christ who both preaches more "direct" sermons and tells more "indirect" parables. I also suggest some other scriptural tropes that Kierkegaard does not explicitly mention that might contribute to a Christian theory of creative artistic vocation in order to lead into my concluding discussion.

In my final chapter, "Theopoetics: Kierkegaard and the Vocation of the Christian Creative Artist", I attempt to gesture towards a preliminary theology of the vocation of the Christian artist of my own, articulated in Kierkegaardian terms: I explain why Kierkegaard's work is so useful for thinking through this problem and what he can contribute to a modern theological aesthetics, discuss the relative merits of more indirect versus more direct communication for the Christian creative artist, and advance my own tentative conclusion about the matter. Because of the complexity of Kierkegaard's thinking on the subject, I nuance my discussion by suggesting that rather than the pure types of "indirect communication" and "direct communication", it is more useful to think in terms of a communicative spectrum in regards to both the genre and content of communication, ranging from "more indirect-indirect" to "more direct-indirect". While observing that there is much to be done here in terms of future research, I provisionally conclude that more direct-indirect communication is the more valuable form to the Christian artist, but that more indirect-indirect communication can still be useful too.

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## **Dedication**

*For Joanna\**

## Epigraph

Do not say that Christian art is impossible. Say rather that it is difficult, doubly difficult—difficulty squared, because it is difficult to be an artist and very difficult to be a Christian, and because the whole difficulty is not merely the sum but the product of these two difficulties multiplied by one another, for it is a question of reconciling two absolutes. Say that the difficulty becomes excruciating when the whole life of the age is far removed from Christ, for the artist is greatly dependent upon the spirit of the time. But has courage ever been lacking on the earth?

Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for the works of Kierkegaard. Full references are given in the bibliography.

CA	<i>The Concept of Anxiety</i>
CD	<i>Christian Discourses</i>
CI	<i>On The Concept of Irony</i>
CLA	<i>The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress</i>
COR	<i>The Corsair Affair</i>
CUP	<i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i>
EO	<i>Either/Or</i>
EPW	<i>Early Polemical Writings</i>
EUD	<i>Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses</i>
FT	<i>Fear and Trembling</i>
FSE	<i>For Self-Examination</i>
JFY	<i>Judge For Yourself!</i>
JP	<i>Journals and Papers</i>
KJN	<i>Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks</i>
Pap	<i>Søren Kierkegaards Papirer</i> [papers]
PC	<i>Practice in Christianity</i>
PF	<i>Philosophical Fragments</i>
POV	<i>The Point of View</i>
RT	<i>Repetition</i>
SKS	<i>Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter</i> [writings]
SLW	<i>Stages on Life's Way</i>
SUD	<i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>
TA	<i>Two Ages</i>
TMLW	<i>The Moment and Late Writings</i>
UDVS	<i>Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits</i>
WA	<i>Without Authority</i>
WL	<i>Works of Love</i>

## Introduction

If I were to give a fuller account of my life's inner understanding...this would grow into a whole folio which only very few would have the ability and seriousness to understand. But I do not have time to record anything like that.<sup>1</sup>

The Danish writer Søren Kierkegaard (1812-1855) wrote these words in 1846, a year which he would later refer to as standing at the centre of his authorship.<sup>2</sup> He says here that a comprehensive survey of his self-understanding would occupy a “whole folio” only accessible to an initiate minority—an ominous caveat for anyone who might wish to try to understand the way that Kierkegaard understood himself. This project is in one sense an attempt, however, naïve as it may be, to put together such a folio: In this dissertation I will be examining the development of Kierkegaard's concept of his vocation as a Christian creative artist and attempting to sketch some starting points for a “theopoetics” of Christian creative artwork by drawing upon this examination. Kierkegaard did eventually come to pen his *own* folio concerning his life's inner understanding, at least with regard to his work as a creative artist, and furthermore he wrote a great deal of reflections on his own vocation, task and method both before and after the above statement was made, so there is a vast amount of material to draw upon for such a project. This is probably why he warns that it will not be a straightforward affair.

### ***Kierkegaard: A Kind of Christian Artist-Philosopher-Poet-Theologian***

Since I am submitting this dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology, it would seem reasonable to assume that Kierkegaard is a

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<sup>1</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 126 / JP 5, 5913* (1846). The translations from Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers* given are usually from the Hong and Hong edition, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> *POV, 31*.

theologian, or at least a philosopher. But he is not always so easily classified in either of these ways and it is traditional to start a work on Kierkegaard by debating about how he should be labelled. In Kierkegaard studies to date, there has been a constant, ongoing argument about whether he is really a “philosopher”, a “poet”, or a “theologian”. As a result there are always books appearing with titles which try to claim his for one or another of these categories with each commentator attempting to argue that their classification is the best.<sup>3</sup> In some ways they are *all* right because he was all of these things and all wrong because he was not any one of them more than any of the others: his work is philosophical, literary and theological each. However, it must be conceded that what Kierkegaard called *himself* most often was a “poet”, a kind of creative artist, as some of his commentators have rightly pointed out.<sup>4</sup> But what even these commentators all too often fail to heed is the fact that he was a *Christian* poet, a *Christian* creative artist:<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard’s eventually stated aim in writing all of the books that he has become so famous for in certain parts of the enlightened European-American West was to awaken his readers to an understanding of what *Christianity* truly is, to

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<sup>3</sup> On the “philosopher” side, see for e.g. Louis Pojman, *Kierkegaard as Philosopher* (Swindon: Waterleaf, 1978), Alistair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2009) and George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005) (although note that Pattison does not straightforwardly claim that Kierkegaard is a philosopher). On the “poet” side, see for e.g. Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) and Eric Ziolkowski, *The Literary Kierkegaard* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2011). And on the “theologian” side, see for e.g. David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), Arnold Come, *Kierkegaard as Theologian: Recovering My Self* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997); Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1964) and David Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> See Mackey, *A Kind of Poet*; Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard’s Existential Aesthetics* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1995); Ziolkowski, *The Literary Kierkegaard*.

<sup>5</sup> This term is more in line with British Kierkegaard scholar Hugh Pyper’s assessment: “When I am asked what description best sums up Kierkegaard—philosopher, theologian, a kind of poet, novelist, preacher—these days I have an answer: he is an evangelist, in its root meaning as bearer of good news.” –Hugh Pyper, *The Joy of Kierkegaard: essays on Kierkegaard as a biblical reader* (London: Equinox, 2011), 1. Robert Roberts also calls Kierkegaard a “Christian missionary, albeit one of unusual stripe” in *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* ed. Paul Copan and Chad Meister (London: Routledge, 2007), 162.

communicate *Christianly*. As I will discuss in the following pages, he may not have had this aim fully developed in his mind when he began writing, he may not have been very successful at achieving this aim, and he may have been deluded about the degree to which some of his writings work in service of this aim, but that is the mature conception of his own artistic vocation at which he arrived.

This is the thesis of this thesis. But what is so interesting about Kierkegaard is that he set about trying to achieve this aim in such a variety of different ways. For this reason, an investigation into the way that Kierkegaard conceived of and carried out his vocation as a “Christian creative artist” is not *just* interesting as another inroad into the established academic genre of Kierkegaard studies, as another bubo-like footnote on the flabby buttocks of intellectual history delineated by doctoral students. It is also interesting because it can serve as a coordinating theological study of the relative merits of different approaches to Christian communication through creative art. Broadly speaking, Kierkegaard tried out two different kinds of communication in his attempt to achieve the aim of artistically communicating Christianity: what he called “indirect communication” (Danish: *indirecte Meddelelse*) and “direct communication” (Danish: *ligefrem Meddelelse*), though these terms will need a lot more clarification, and virtually everything in between. Which kind of communication is more useful to the contemporary Christian artist, from a theological perspective? After tracing the evolution of Kierkegaard’s artistic methodology in detail, this study will attempt to give an answer to this question, and thereby to sketch some starting points for a “theopoetics” of Christian creative artwork, with continual reference to Kierkegaard.

## **Definitions**

It would be sensible at the outset to say exactly what I mean by “theopoetics”, along with “vocation” and “creative artist”: The term “theopoetics” appears to have been coined in the 1960s and 70s by the American theologians Stanley Hopper, David Miller, and Amos Wilder, particularly through the latter’s 1976 text *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* where he uses it in the singular form.<sup>6</sup> For Wilder, making a plea for a “theopoetic” meant doing more justice to “the role of the symbolic and the pre-rational in the way that we deal with experience.”<sup>7</sup> Since then, the word has been picked up and developed as a technical term for an emerging sub-discipline in theology that encompasses elements of process thought, narrative analysis and postmodernism, a discipline being pioneered by writers such as John Caputo, Catherine Keller and Roland Faber, among others.<sup>8</sup> These days theopoetics even has its own website, <http://theopoetics.net>, its own journal and its own annual conference. And the process theologians who contribute to this movement often appropriate Kierkegaard for their purposes. For example, in the recent book *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophising Mutifariousness* by Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal one finds a chapter on “Kierkegaardian theopoeisis” by Sam Laurent.<sup>9</sup> This chapter “provides a theopoetics of the divine-human relation by describing Kierkegaard’s

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<sup>6</sup> See Stanley Hopper, Melvin Keiser and Tony Stoneburner, eds., *The Way of Transfiguration: Religious Imagination as Theopoeisis* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992); David Miller, *Hells and Holy Ghosts: Towards a Theopoetic of Christian Belief* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); and Amos Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Wilder, *Theopoetic*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> See John Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal, eds., *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophising Mutifariousness*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003). See also Gabriel Vahanian, *Theopoetics of the Word: A New Beginning of Word and World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), for yet another appropriation of the word, in this case by a radical ‘death-of-God’ theologian.

<sup>9</sup> Sam Laurent, ‘Kierkegaardian Theopoeisis’ in *Theopoetic Folds* ed. Faber and Fackenthal.

anthropological view in which the spirit is included in human subjectivity” and “cites selfhood as an ongoing process inclusive of multiplicity and theopoeisis.”<sup>10</sup> In this breed of theopoetics, then, Kierkegaard is portrayed as a postmodern precursor who offers insight into the unfolding processes of God and self.

I say all of this to clarify that this is emphatically *not* the kind of theopoetics that I am interested in here, partly because I do not share the beliefs of some of these thinkers that God and the world have been interdependent from all time and that there is a God who does not know the future. Rather, for the purposes of this thesis, “theopoetics” primarily means “human poetic making as a means of communicating theological ideas” or “theological artwork” and only *secondarily* has to do with God’s own poetic making. So while it may be the case, as Sylvia Walsh argues in her important book *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard’s Existential Aesthetics*, that aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought might be used as the starting points for “a theopoetics in which creation, like the poetic productions of the poet, may be understood in aesthetic terms as a work of art by God”,<sup>11</sup> this is not my central interest here. Instead, I will be focusing on the concept of artistic making as a means of communicating (specifically Christian) theological ideas and the best way that this can be done, a subject which I believe Kierkegaard is extremely helpful for thinking about. In other words I will here eventually be attempting a *theology of Christian artwork*.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 235.

It is important to note that the word “vocation” in my title (Danish: *Kald*, literally “calling”), which has a rich and complex history,<sup>12</sup> is being taken in the sense of “a calling from God which shapes one’s working life”, the sense in which it will be shown Kierkegaard understood it as well. It is important to note as well that the word “artist” (Danish: *Kunstner*) is being taken as a broad term which encompasses that of “poet” (Danish: *Digter*; the word which Kierkegaard was more prone to using to refer to himself) and stands as I have explained for “a maker of creative works of art”, which Kierkegaard indubitably was.<sup>13</sup> So I am here using “artwork” in a very broad sense, as including the visual, literary, audial arts, etc. But even when one narrows the term to that of “poet”, as both Kierkegaard and I will do at times, one sees that for the Danish writer the word became intimately bound up with his sense of religious vocation. As Walsh states, “Underlying the poetic features of Kierkegaard’s writings is a poetic passion founded upon an understanding of the poetic as a mode for depicting and relating ourselves to ethical and religious ideals. It is primarily in this sense that Kierkegaard should be regarded as a poet.”<sup>14</sup> There is much ground then for examining Kierkegaard’s self-understanding as a creative artist or poet alongside his sense of religious vocation since, as Alistair Hannay says, “for Kierkegaard, the limitations of art are to be

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<sup>12</sup> The *Oxford Compact English Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1996) defines vocation as “1. A strong feeling of fitness for a particular career (in religious contexts regarded as a divine call). 2. A person’s employment, esp. regarded as requiring dedication.” The second sense marks a distinctively modern shift, since the word is originally derived from the Latin *vocatio*, in turn coming from the Greek *klesis*, both meaning calling.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 5, where she argues that Kierkegaard’s authorship is a work of art, which it is widely considered to be. Cf. Billeskov Janesn, “The Literary Art of Kierkegaard” in *A Kierkegaard Critique* ed. Howard Johnson, Niels Thulstrup and Billeskov Janesen (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962). Interestingly, Edna and Howard Hong’s collection of Kierkegaard’s *Journals*, which organises the material by theme, has a section for “Art, Artistry, the Artistic”, but no sections for “Poet”, “Poetry” or “the Poetic”. Granted, this is probably because of the overabundance of material to do with poetry in Kierkegaard, but the division is nonetheless interesting. See *JP* 6, 604, note 2151, for the Danish connection between “art” and “making”.

<sup>14</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 1.

appreciated from a standpoint quite other than that of rational thought and philosophy”<sup>15</sup> and that other standpoint must in the end be seen as that of a theological, specifically Christian, theory of artwork. Hence my title.

### ***Methodology and Context***

With all of these definitions in mind, in this thesis I will be investigating the following: The development of Kierkegaard’s sense of artistic vocation as recorded in his private writings and evidenced by his published works; whether he was really a “religious author” from the start of his career as his text *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* later claimed; the evolution of his theory and practice of “indirect” and “direct” communication; his scriptural hermeneutic as it can be gleaned from some key works that discuss this subject and as it can be seen as influencing his sense of vocation; and how a study of all of these things can contribute to the expression of a theology of Christian creative artwork in Kierkegaardian language.

In order to make my argument, I will present the findings of my research into Kierkegaard’s private and published works as well as the significant secondary literature about the topic in scholarly prose. I order the information chronologically because I am tracing the development of Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation over time, from his debut as an author up until the moments of his final publications. As such I will be drawing in part from Kierkegaard’s extensive *Journals and Papers* and the “direct” writings concerning his work as an artist. The direct writings on the nature and purpose of his whole authorship “have been

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<sup>15</sup> Alistair Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge, 1982), 74.

greatly understudied in comparison to his earlier pseudonymous literature”<sup>16</sup> so this inclusion will lend an atmosphere of novelty and originality to my thesis. However, a number of methodological problems abound with regard to the *Journals* and the more direct writings on the authorship. To begin with, there is the fact that Kierkegaard was astonishingly prolific and the latest critical edition of his journals alone runs to eleven large volumes, so it has been necessary to be highly selective with my quotations. Further, there is the problem of the *style* of Kierkegaard’s journals. Rather than straightforwardly recording the business of his daily affairs and communicating his ideas about himself, Kierkegaard more often than not preferred to fill his personal journals with aphoristic, usually cryptic, meditations and reflections on a variety of philosophical-theological themes.

As a consequence, Joakim Garff laments in Derridean language, “He has left behind nothing but fragments and scattered traces, and indeed it seems as if, from the very first moment he put pen to paper, he adopted free, fictionalised production as his preferred mode.”<sup>17</sup> While I will end up disagreeing with the extent to which Garff thinks that Kierkegaard “fictionalised” his own autobiography, it is certainly the case that the nature of his journal writing makes historical investigation of him difficult. It will be important for me to avoid committing a kind of “intentional fallacy” by using the *Journals* straightforwardly to project an uncritical image of Kierkegaard, assuming that they provide unambiguous insight into his “real” historical person.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, I will at the

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<sup>16</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 224.

<sup>17</sup> Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography* trans. Bruce Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 97.

<sup>18</sup> For a stern warning against committing the “intentional fallacy” in Kierkegaard scholarship, see Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 165. The intentional fallacy has been written on influentially by Monroe Beardsley and

same time here be adopting a “sympathetic” hermeneutic in my readings, treating the *Journals* as a text in their own right and as at least indicative of Kierkegaard’s *recorded ideas* about his artistic vocation, without seeking to psychologise and hypothesise too much about what is “behind”, “above” or “below” the text. I will as such be remaining in the world “in front of the text”, in the language of the phenomenological hermeneutic of Paul Ricoeur.<sup>19</sup>

In tandem with this, rather than making use of the *Journals* text alone, I will be comparing my findings from the *Journals* with the different literary works which Kierkegaard published during his lifetime under his own name and under pseudonyms. Again, I will avoid the infamous problem of pseudonymous attribution by looking for points of correspondence and contrast between the two different sets of *texts*, rather than simply using the published works to arrive at Kierkegaard’s “position” on a given matter. Because there is not room to examine the whole of Kierkegaard’s journals *and* all of his published works in a single doctoral thesis though, my investigation will by necessity again be restricted to a particular selection when it comes to the latter. Of these, I will focus on works that either stand at important thresholds in the development of Kierkegaard’s documented understanding of his vocation—usually at those points when he begins, ceases or resumes his writing—and those that themselves contain a significant amount of reflection on his concept of artistic vocation. As such, in order to make my argument I will be performing close readings of the following texts: Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Papers*; his autobiographical, posthumously published

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William Wimsatt in an essay in *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 81f.

<sup>19</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, ‘The Hermeneutic Function of Distanciation’ in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* trans. John Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 140-143; and ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation’ in *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 70, No. 1/2 (Jan. - Apr., 1977), 1-37.

*The Point of View for My Work as an Author*; and the published works *Either/Or*, *Two Upbuilding Discourses, Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Two Ages*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, *Practice in Christianity* and *The Moment and Late Writings*. In Chapter Four I will also look at *For Self-Examination* and *Works of Love* in order to elucidate Kierkegaard's scriptural hermeneutic so as to lead into my conclusion. Apart from *Either/Or* and *Postscript* (and to a lesser extent *Practice in Christianity*), these works have received comparatively less attention in Kierkegaard scholarship.

The key interlocutors for this project will be the biographers of Kierkegaard, since they are the most concerned with discussing the development of his vocation, along with a number of other important scholars. Much work has already been done on the evolution of Kierkegaard's artistic methodology, including by Henning Fenger, Louis Mackey, Alistair Hannay, Roger Poole, Sylvia Walsh, George Pattison, Joel Rasmussen and Joakim Garff. However, fierce debate still goes on in this area, particularly with respect to the issue of whether Kierkegaard's authorship was truly "religious" from its beginning, with for example Fenger, Hannay and Garff arguing against and Walsh, Pattison and Rasmussen arguing in favour of this idea. Furthermore, no-one has yet undertaken a study of the development of Kierkegaard's artistic methodology that does all of the following: gives special attention to his *Christian* communicative purposes in carrying out his artwork, from a theological perspective; pays close heed to the entirety of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers* and compares what they have to say about his own artistic vocation with its practice in the full variety of the genres of his published works; examines the way in which his scriptural hermeneutic and key scriptural texts influenced this vocational concept and practice; and uses

Kierkegaard's theory of Christian communication through art as a starting point for sources of insight about this subject for contemporary theology as opposed to exclusively for Kierkegaard studies. For these reasons, my dissertation is innovative and makes an original contribution to knowledge by adding to current debates over the religiousness of Kierkegaard's authorship, examining texts that have been neglected with regard to this question, interrogating it with proper attention to his scriptural hermeneutic, and utilising the discussion for constructive theological ends.

### ***Outline***

My thesis will thus progress as follows. The first Part is devoted to an exploration of Kierkegaard's own artistic vocation. My first chapter is called "Indirection: 1835-45", a triple-entendre referencing Kierkegaard's term "indirect communication", the apparent *lack* of a clear direction exhibited by his earliest writings and the magician's sense of *misdirection*. In this chapter I examine the development of Kierkegaard's artistic vocation from the very beginning of his career as a writer with *Either/Or* until the first self-enforced hiatus in his work that comes with *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. I show how at the commencement of Kierkegaard's literary output there is no documented reflection on his communicative methodology or of a religious vocation in writing, but how nonetheless the material he produced clearly identifies him as a religious author. To do this, I analyse how *Either/Or* can be read as an outworking of Kierkegaard's vocation, how it is pseudonymous, indirect and much concerned with his relationship with Regine Olsen, and yet how it is undeniably a religious work, particularly from its themes and from the closing "Ultimatum", in agreement with

*The Point of View*. I also inspect the first published *Two Upbuilding Discourses* to reinforce the claim that Kierkegaard was a religious author from the beginning, which they support both by their own content and because of their correspondence with the Ultimatum in *Either/Or*. I then briefly summarise Kierkegaard's literary output between *Two Upbuilding Discourses* and *Postscript* and examine how in the *Journals* over this period the idea of "indirect communication" first appears and slowly takes shape, along with the gradual documentation of an embryonic sense of religious artistic vocation. I show how both are projected back onto the already written pseudonymous works. Lastly, I turn to *Postscript* and in particular what it has to say about communication and vocation, suggesting that it can be read as a piece of "indirect kakangelism" in the service of Christianity. Throughout the first chapter, I demonstrate how in this "first authorship" the emphasis is on a more indirect approach to creative artwork, and how over the course of this period Kierkegaard came to reflect more and more on his vocation and methodology, leading him to develop the concept of "indirect communication" working in service of the religious.

In my second chapter, "Direct-Indirection: 1846-48", a pun on Kierkegaard's own use of the term "direct-indirect" and the sense of "redirected wandering" or "repositioned aimlessness", I examine the development of Kierkegaard's religious vocation from the recommencement of his writing after *Postscript* up until the composition of *The Point of View*. I divide my chronology in this way because there is a disproportionate amount of reflection on his artistic vocation that is recorded during this time, including in his unpublished lecture notes on communication. To begin with, I scrutinise how during the events involving the newspaper-journal

*The Corsair* Kierkegaard began to reflect more explicitly on his vocation and decided to resume writing. I look at *Two Ages* as an outworking of Kierkegaard's artistic vocation after he decides to continue writing again, focusing on what it has to say about communicators of religious truth in the present age and suggesting parallels between this portrayal and Kierkegaard's writings about his own task. Next I trace Kierkegaard's further reflections on his artistic task in his journals from 1847 as he continues to write, highlighting how at this time he continues to cite a mixture of "worldly" and "spiritual" factors as motivating his artwork but how the religious motivations become more prominent. I also undertake a close reading of the unpublished lectures on communication in the *Journals*, observing how even in these systematic lectures there is a profound, uneasy tension between direct and indirect communication that is not resolved by them and how they end by speaking of Christian communication as "direct-indirect". Following this, I treat *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* as an example of a direct-indirect approach, privileging them because of their detailed discussion of vocation, which I assess as having to do with living responsibly "before God" in the text. This leads in turn to a treatment of the *Journals* from 1848, where there is still a tension between indirect and direct communication but Kierkegaard starts to move further towards favouring an even more direct form of communication. Finally, I carry out a study of *The Point of View*, arguing that it displays a now familiar tension between indirect and direct communication but nonetheless still makes hints in favour of a more direct approach. I argue that this text is broadly consistent with what comes before it, that is to say it is accurate in its claim that Kierkegaard was a religious author from the start but that there is no documented evidence which suggests that he had a developed plan for the authorship when he embarked upon

it. I additionally raise the question of whether *The Point of View* is consistent with what comes *after* it, underlining the fact that there is still a great deal of writing to come even after it has been penned. I argue that in this period of the “second authorship”, as typified by the lecture notes, there is an uneasy tension between indirect and direct communication typified by the term “direct-indirect”: the idea of indirect communication has now taken full shape and is favoured in regards to religious communication, and yet the authorship is becoming at this time more direct.

In my third chapter, “Direction: 1849-55”, playing on Kierkegaard’s phrase “direct communication” and the sense of “direction” as “route” or “path”, I examine Kierkegaard’s writings from *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* up until the end of his life. To start with, I show how in the *Journals* of 1849 he calls himself a “poet of the religious” and comes to see his task as being to describe poetically the requirements of Christianity, although I also quote passages in which he wrestles with the prospect of becoming “more than a poet” at this time and show that there is still a tension here. I look at *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* and the manner in which it is derogatory about “the poet” and poetry but also how it is simultaneously written in a highly poetic style. I argue from this that Kierkegaard is at this stage only disparaging towards a certain *kind* of poetic practice, namely that which remains in the realm of possibility and never ventures forth into actuality. I then assess *Armed Neutrality* to make clear the way in which it typifies this tension between indirect and direct communication, poetry and upbuilding, irony and witness, which is reaching its climactic tenor at this point. After this I perform a close reading of *Practice in Christianity*, paying special attention to what

it strikingly has to say about the *impossibility* of direct communication of the religious and its critique of religious art. I conclude that the critique is profound but not invalidating of all Christian art on Kierkegaardian grounds, even “more direct” art, because it comes in an artistic text, it deals with the special case of the God-man and though it expresses extremely important caveats it does not explicitly rule out the possibility of communicating effectively through Christian art. I also discuss how the text serves as an outworking of Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation at this time, itself being more *direct* in style but also published under a pseudonym, yet again exemplifying the tension. In the proceeding section I look at how in his *Journals* Kierkegaard now comes right up against the “border” between more indirect poetry and more direct witness, agonising over whether he should become a martyr for the truth. Finally, I outline the narrative of Kierkegaard’s terminal “attack on Christendom” and look at the writings and *Journals* of this time to show how he ends his career by *exclusively* privileging more direct communication over more indirect communication in his writing. I show how the term “poet” falls out of favour with him at the end of his life, replaced by the humorous title “policeman”, but nonetheless how even the final writings of Kierkegaard’s life are poetic in character and how he never forsook his literary mode of expression. I thus argue that during this period there is an ever-increasing progression towards the favouring of a more direct form of communication in Kierkegaard’s writings until in the end in the production of *The Moment and Late Writings* he comes to privilege more direct communication exclusively.

Having thus spent the first Part of my thesis working through Kierkegaard’s output chronologically, in Chapter Four, “Biblical Bridges: Scriptural Resources in

Kierkegaard and Beyond”, I go on to connect my enquiry to more general issues to do with the vocation of the Christian creative artist in modern theology by examining the scriptural resources and hermeneutic that contributed to Kierkegaard’s sense of his own vocation. I do this by identifying them as portrayed and at work in two more texts, *For Self-Examination* and *Works of Love*. Via an exegesis of these, I show how Kierkegaard espoused a high view of Christian scripture, demanding that it be responded to with strong existential commitment by its readers, though how he was also sensitive to the problems of interpretation, with regards to which he prioritises the criterion of “love”. From here I go on to consider specific scriptural tropes from the Old Testament and New Testament that may be seen as influencing Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation, in particular focusing on the example of the New Testament figure of Christ who both preaches more “direct” sermons and tells more “indirect” parables. I also suggest some other scriptural tropes that Kierkegaard does not explicitly mention that might contribute to a Christian theory of creative artistic vocation in order to lead into my concluding discussion.

In my final chapter, “Theopoetics: Kierkegaard and the Vocation of the Christian Creative Artist”, I attempt to gesture towards a preliminary theology of the vocation of the Christian artist of my own, articulated in Kierkegaardian terms: I explain why Kierkegaard’s work is so useful for thinking through this problem and what he can contribute to a modern theological aesthetics, discuss the relative merits of more indirect versus more direct communication for the Christian creative artist, and advance my own tentative conclusion about the matter. Because of the complexity of Kierkegaard’s thinking on the subject, I nuance my discussion by suggesting that rather than the pure types of “indirect communication” and “direct communication”, it is more useful to think in terms of a communicative spectrum in regards to both the genre and content of

communication, ranging from “more indirect-indirect” to “more direct-indirect”. While observing that there is much to be done here in terms of future research, I provisionally conclude that more direct-indirect communication is the more valuable form to the Christian artist, but that more indirect-indirect communication can still be useful too.

## **Part One**

### **Kierkegaard's Artistic Vocation**

## Chapter One: Indirection

1835-1846

### BEGINNING

#### *Journals, 1835-1843*

Kierkegaard began as an undergraduate student at the University of Copenhagen in 1830. His *Journals and Papers*, which constitute one of the key texts for the purposes of this investigative project, begin at this point. However, the first lengthy entries in the *Journals* date from a recreational excursion in 1835 to a coastal village called Gilleleje where he was sent on a retreat shortly after his mother passed away. It is among these early journal entries that one finds what is possibly the most famous of Kierkegaard quotations:

What I really need is to be clear about *what I am to do*, not what I must know, except in the way knowledge must precede all action. It is a question of understanding my destiny, of seeing what the Deity really wants *me* to do; the thing is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*. And what use would it be in this respect if I were to discover a so-called objective truth, or if I worked my way through the philosophers' systems and were able to call them all to account on request, point out inconsistencies in every single circle?...What use would it be to be able to propound the meaning of Christianity, to explain many separate facts, if it had *no* deeper meaning for *myself* and *my life*?<sup>1</sup>

It has often been observed that this passage anticipates and highlights for the first time some particularly Kierkegaardian themes: existential passion, the relative value of subjective as opposed to objective truth, the formation of the self, the priority of the individual before God, and so on. Nevertheless, what is also striking

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<sup>1</sup> *Pap I A 75 / JP 5, 5100* (1 August 1835).

about this passage and often overlooked by its existentialist appropriators is that it turns on the idea of *Christian vocation*. The young Kierkegaard is here wrestling with the problem of what he should occupy his life with, and is even so bold as to couch the question in terms of “destiny...what the Deity really wants” him to do. The question here is of how religion is to inform his practical ethic or life-task. From the beginning, then, we find Kierkegaard preoccupied with the concept of his vocation from a Christian perspective.

Exactly what became “the idea for which [he was] willing to live and die” is what I will here be investigating. One opinion, voiced early on in the biography of Joakim Garff, is that it “was in fact the production of dazzling literary work. But of course he did not know that yet, university student that he was.”<sup>2</sup> Whether this was *ultimately* the idea that Kierkegaard *died* for still remains to be seen but he certainly did come to *live* for this activity for a time. However, there was still quite an extended interval between his self-reflective holiday at Gilleleje and the beginning of his dazzling literary production. As Garff notes, Kierkegaard was still a student at this time, and in spite of the Gilleleje entry as a student his journal entries in general document depression, frivolity, and a straying away from the trajectory of a Christian adherent, let alone a Christian artist, in a period which biographers often call ‘Faustian’ because he was interested in studying the Faust mythos at the time, amongst other things.<sup>3</sup>

But this Faustian period did not last forever. Apparently, in 1838, after eight desultory years at University, Kierkegaard underwent some kind of conversion or reconversion experience. Another famous journal entry of May 19<sup>th</sup> of that year

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<sup>2</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 59.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, 74-80.

testifies to the transformative experience of an “indescribable joy”<sup>4</sup> and after this point Kierkegaard appears to be much more reconciled to Christianity in the *Journals*. This was, however, the same year that his elderly father passed away. A set of entries on gold-bordered loose leaves, which were probably written later, refer to this time as being akin to a “Great Earthquake”.<sup>5</sup> When interviewed about this in older life, his one surviving brother, Peter Christian, claimed that this phrase referred to the sheer amount of death that Kierkegaard had encountered in his young life and in particular the culminating shock of his father’s death.<sup>6</sup> There are also suggestions that it could have referred to a revelation about his father blaspheming against God as a young man, or his sexual indiscretion in conceiving the eldest Kierkegaard child out of wedlock, or Søren’s surprise at living longer than his father, who may have believed he was destined to outlive all his children due to either of these former events.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after this, Kierkegaard’s first venture into published writing, besides a few journalistic excursions, appears in the form of the aptly titled *From the Papers of One Still Living* (likely referring to the also recent death of his University mentor, P.M. Møller), subtitled *Published against his will by S. Kierkegaard*.<sup>8</sup> However, far from writing out of a developed sense of artistic vocation or a new sense of calling stemming from the death of his father and his reconciliation to Christianity, the motive for publishing this text appears to have had more to do with impressing the literary community with which it is in dialogue.<sup>9</sup> Further, the book is not a primary

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<sup>4</sup> *Pap II A 228 / JP 5, 5324* (1838); cf. Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 170.

<sup>5</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 131.

<sup>6</sup> Five of Kierkegaard’s six siblings, and his mother, had all died by this time. Cf. *ibid.*, 135.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-7.

<sup>8</sup> This and the articles are collected in *EPW*.

<sup>9</sup> See Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 138-146.

literary work but rather a review, albeit with a good deal of Kierkegaard's own thoughts interwoven into it, of Hans Christian Andersen's then recently published novel *Only A Fiddler*. And indeed, while the text itself does much in criticism of Andersen to stress the importance of having a "life-view", especially in connection with the production of creative literature,<sup>10</sup> there is not much clue in the *Journals* that Kierkegaard had yet come to form completely his own solid "life-view" by this stage in any way that would inform the creative output that was to come, other than by becoming more reconciled to Christianity.

Nevertheless, it is in this late student period that many commentators locate the genesis of Kierkegaard's idea of becoming a full-time writer, obviously backed up by the fact of the publication of *From the Papers of One Still Living*. Walsh refers to him as "a student of aesthetics and a budding author during his university years...much concerned with the nature and requirements of poetic creativity".<sup>11</sup> Garff argues that even by 1837, although "Kierkegaard's development had not yet become 'public'," it was "clear that the twenty-four-year-old university student was thinking about his writing in relation to a public forum", using evidence from a journal entry in which he appears to resolve to start writing more frequently and more impressionistically towards this particular end.<sup>12</sup> But it is Hannay who makes the boldest claims about the incubation of Kierkegaard's sense of his own task at this point in his life. Hannay suggests that already by this time Kierkegaard could have been beginning to conceive of his task as "defending his father's religion" against the Hegelian pantheism supported by some of his

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<sup>10</sup> See *EPW*, 76-77, 83.

<sup>11</sup> Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>12</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 98, referencing *Pap II A 118 / JP 5, 5241* (13 July 1837).

university teachers.<sup>13</sup> Such a “defence would have to be carried out in the terms of the ‘opposite camp’, his complex allegiance to which Kierkegaard would therefore have to maintain, as a kind of philosopher in their midst who tries to show them, or anyone else for that matter, where the limits of philosophy lie.” Hannay goes on to ask

What task would be better suited to his talents and his indecisiveness about what he should do with his life?...Kierkegaard’s intellectual brilliance could [be] employed in the cause of [his father’s] faith, while the skills of an imaginative writer, which because it was creative rather than destructive was the gift he most prized in himself, could be employed to ensure that the intellect was being used only ironically in order to show that really, in the case of faith, it should not be used at all. There was also a kind of built-in insurance in this. If Kierkegaard failed as a writer he might still impress the right people with his dialectic, and if that failed to impress, the efforts of the imaginative writer still might. If both failed, it would still have been in a good cause, of an idea one could really be said to live and perhaps necessarily die for.

This hypothesis is appealing and if it is correct then it means that the method of what he would go on to call “indirect communication” or “deceiving people into the truth” was already taking shape in Kierkegaard’s mind when he was a student and was therefore pre-meditated by the time he came to employ it. But what actual evidence is there for this in his journals? The answer is: not a great deal. While, as Garff makes use of above, there is certainly some evidence that he was self-consciously reflecting on his own writing style and exploring how successful he might be as a published author by offering to the public *From the Papers of One Still Living*, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that Kierkegaard had formed a clear idea of writing in service of his father’s faith or delimiting the boundaries of human reason from within at this stage. Certainly that is what

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<sup>13</sup> Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 100.

Kierkegaard went on to try to do. Indeed, Hannay could be right; the seeds of his self-understanding of his own vocation may have been being sown at this time. But if one is to remain strictly with the evidence “in front of the text”,<sup>14</sup> there is no explicit record in his journals that Kierkegaard had a clearly formed conception of his vocation as a Christian artist during his early student years.

In 1840, ten years after first beginning at University, Kierkegaard at last sat his final exams in Theology and proposed to a young lady called Regine Olsen whom he had met three years earlier. He began writing his dissertation for the *Magister* degree and even enrolled in the Royal Pastoral Seminary, a clear vocational move (and one again not heralded in the journals at all). These biographical facts seem straightforward and promising enough. However, a dramatic change soon took place. And this change must in the end be seen as having to do with his vocation as a Christian artist, so it is wise to pay careful heed to this transitional point in his life. Indeed, if we are to trust Emil Boesen, whom he said was his only close friend, Kierkegaard first gained an understanding of what he wanted to do and what he could do only when writing his dissertation and engaged.<sup>15</sup> At some point he appears to have reached the conclusion that these two activities, ‘writing’ and ‘being engaged’, were not compatible. Here Hannay ventures another speculative comment, but this time there is much more ground for it. He argues that, around the time of writing his dissertation, Kierkegaard was hoping to fulfil

long-entertained hopes to be a writer, not just a philosopher  
in the more traditional and pedestrian sense—nor just a

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<sup>14</sup> For this methodological debt to Paul Ricoeur see my Introduction.

<sup>15</sup> As Boesen says in a letter from 1868, quoted in Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 126, from Bruce Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 218.

writer in the general literary sense, for the role he might have as a writer would also be religious...in doing so he would be acting as custodian of an idea that was worth living and dying for. It was not a future it would be easy to fit Regine into.<sup>16</sup>

Hannay's tone is ominous here for good reason. In July 1840, Kierkegaard wrote that "when the individual, having given up all efforts to find himself in life outside himself...turns now after this shipwreck towards the highest, then after this emptiness the absolute rises not only in its fullness before him but also in the responsibility he feels is his".<sup>17</sup>

If Kierkegaard is referring even obliquely to himself in this entry, then the "responsibility" that he felt was his turned out to have drastic repercussions. In 1841, Kierkegaard broke off his engagement to Regine, defended his dissertation successfully, and went to Berlin, where he began writing furiously. The product of this writing immediately following the break with Regine, the pseudonymous *Either/Or* edited by "Victor Eremita", is a creative work of art and deals with profound religious and Christian themes, in a way that was unprecedented by anything he had produced before. So the nascence of both Kierkegaard's vocation as a Christian artist and his decision to split from Regine are contiguous. Why were they contiguous, and how well-formed was Kierkegaard's concept of his vocation at this stage? The exact reason for his split from Regine has been the subject of vast speculation, and the *Journals* do not offer us a single, direct, clear answer. Probably it is safest to say with Hannay that the historical Kierkegaard felt inhibited by his own experience of recurrent melancholia and did not believe that he could be a

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<sup>16</sup> Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 137.

<sup>17</sup> *Pap.* III A 26 / *JP* 1, 1026 (1840). Note that around this time he also says that he has found the "Archimedean point" he said he was searching for in the Gilleleje entry, which he identifies as "divine fatherly love, the one unshakeable thing in life, the true Archimedean point" –*Pap.* III A 73 / *JP* 5, 5468 (1840).

good husband because of it,<sup>18</sup> though various commentators have notoriously substituted the word ‘melancholia’ with a whole host of other terms over the years.<sup>19</sup>

But none of these could explain the whole of the matter because of the coincidence of the breaking of the engagement with this massive literary production. It can securely be said without psychologising beyond the biographical facts that part of the reason that Kierkegaard broke with Regine was in order to write *Either/Or*: Instead of getting married, he went to Berlin and wrote a book. But one searches in vain for a well-thought-through vision of his artistic vocation in his personal writings even at the time of the composition of *Either/Or*. If he had one, he did not commit it to paper. There is simply nothing to quote. Rather, the book seems from the personal writings to have simply “poured out” of him with Regine as the main source of inspiration.<sup>20</sup> This conclusion would agree with the Kierkegaard of the *Journals* in the year the book was eventually published, who in 1843 wrote of *Either/Or* that “if anyone should come to know the real motive [for writing it]...Good Lord! One would think that such a deep book must have a very deep reason...and yet it has to do entirely with my private life...and the purpose... indeed, if one should come to know that, I should be declared stark mad...I considered it a good deed”<sup>21</sup> So although no religious reasons are cited for the

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<sup>18</sup> Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 154

<sup>19</sup> See Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 111. Suggestions have included everything from guilt over youthful sins, clinical depression, or a sense of a call to celibacy, to a curved spine, some other physical deformity, or epilepsy, to name but a few of the *less* colourful ideas.

<sup>20</sup> To repeat, there are no journal entries at this time giving religious reasons for writing *Either/Or*. For journal entries to do with Regine, however, see e.g. *Pap III A 159 / JP 5*, 5515; *Pap III A 163 / JP 5*, 5518; *Pap III A 176 / JP 5*, 5532 (all from 1841) and the letters at *JP 7*, 54; 7, 62 and 7, 68, which also mention *Either/Or*.

<sup>21</sup> *Pap IV A 70 / JP 5*, 5626 (1843). The “good deed” being deceiving Regine into thinking he was not worthy of marriage in order to safeguard her emotions—cf. Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 238; Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 317.

writing of the text at the time of its composition and publication, the one that *is* offered has to do with his personal life and Regine. In Thompson's words, "When he left Regine...what he had really chosen was his vocation as an artist—the un-remitting, day-to-day labour of producing" and it is the leaving of Regine that is identified by Kierkegaard as motivating the work more than anything else.<sup>22</sup> Thus, at this point, "the spur for the exercise seems clearly to have been an interest in resolving a tragic collision in his own life"<sup>23</sup> rather than fulfilling some grand vision he had of the role of the Christian creative artist.

In the early years of Kierkegaard's writing career, then, there is no documented evidence of a developed sense of Christian artistic vocation. Though there is evidence (given above) that he was thinking about his vocation from a Christian perspective, there is no written reflection on religious goals or methods in specific connection with his literary output. When a motive *is* named for writing his first major literary work, it has to do with Regine, not with communicating Christian truths in an aesthetic mode. All of this might seem at first glance to contradict what is said later in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, that Kierkegaard was a religious author from the time of the composition of *Either/Or*. However, Kierkegaard does not say in that text that he had a fully developed plan for his writings when he started out, as I will examine later.<sup>24</sup> All he says in *The Point of View* is that his authorship was religious in character from its

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<sup>22</sup> Josiah Thompson, *Kierkegaard* (London: Gollancz, 1974), 137.

<sup>23</sup> Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 196.

<sup>24</sup> Though later in the *Journals* Kierkegaard does say that *Either/Or* had a "plan from the first word to the last" and that there is a continuity between it and the later authorship –*Pap IV A 214 / JP 5*, 5627 (1843). Cf. *Pap IV A 216 / JP 5*, 5629; 1843; *VII 1 A 118 / JP 5*, 5905; 1846; *X 6 B 4:3 / JP 6*, 6770 (1851). Apparently as part of the whole including the pseudonymous works, *Either/Or* lacked one component, according to Kierkegaard: a non-epistolary narrative section or imagined construct in an experiential mode –*Pap XI 3 B 54 / JP 6*, 6944 (1854). This was later to appear in *Stages on Life's Way*.

commencement with this text. This is, on most definitions of the word “religious”, in actual fact the case. But to argue such a case I will need to examine *Either/Or* itself.

### ***EITHER/OR***

I will now interrogate how *Either/Or* serves as an outworking of Kierkegaard’s vocation at this early point in his authorship (and *earliest* point in his pseudonymous authorship): how it is much concerned with Regine but also how it is a religious work. There has not been a great deal of research into the kind of vocational approach that is evinced by *Either/Or*, so this is relatively unexplored territory.<sup>25</sup> As announced, it will be my contention here that if *Either/Or* is held up against the text of the *Journals*, the correspondence in regard to the content concerning Regine is strong, but that nonetheless it is also a religious work. Yet making this observation does not overturn the fact that one can see no proof from the *Journals* at this time that in penning such a religious work Kierkegaard was adhering to some kind of considered plan for how he was to function as a Christian artist that he had set down anywhere in writing. I can agree with Lowrie that on balance it appears that “over and above all...conscious planning, the aesthetic works were a spontaneous outpouring, a product of genius.”<sup>26</sup> This must be most true of *Either/Or*, the earliest of the pseudonymous works, where there is the least evidence that Kierkegaard had done any conscious planning by the time he wrote it.

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<sup>25</sup> This is stated by David R. Law in Law, ‘The Place, Role and Function of the “Ultimatum” of *Either/Or*, Part Two, in Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship’ in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or* ed. Robert Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995) Part II, 235.

<sup>26</sup> Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 246.

Of course, my conclusion will to a large extent depend on the definition I am using of the term “religious” (Danish: *religiøs*). The problem is that the meaning of this word is notoriously vague which is probably why this issue has caused so much controversy. At face value, the word is simply the adjectival form of the noun “religion”, and so means “related to, having to do with religion”, but that is not much help. “Religion” itself comes from the Latin *religio*, the origins of which are obscure, and which probably meant something like respect for the divine, or “obligation, the bond between man and the gods”, possibly deriving from a word for repeated reading or binding.<sup>27</sup> In modern Danish and English it has come to mean something like “belief in and reverence for God or some supernatural power” and so “religious” is the corresponding adjectival form for this: “related to, having to do with belief in and reverence for God or some supernatural power.” This therefore is the working definition of the term “religious” that I am using in my investigation and it will be important to stick close to it: as a written work, does *Either/Or* relate to, have to do with belief in and reverence for God or some supernatural power?

### **Regime-Related Religious-Readings**

It does not take a great deal of hermeneutical or expository work to reinforce the idea that the content of *Either/Or* corresponds strongly to the preoccupation with Regime displayed in the journals of the time. It could be said that Regime can be found on every page. Eduard Geismar even argued in the 1920s that the original purpose of the work is to place Regime before the question of who

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<sup>27</sup> See “religion” in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

the real Kierkegaard is.<sup>28</sup> This is venturing too far “behind” the text than a responsible reading will allow, although it does agree with several comments made later in the *Journals*. However, the ease and plausibility of such a psycho-biographical reading is a testament to how tempting it is to connect much of the material in *Either/Or* directly with Regine. The title of the work alone is enticing: Coming to the work for the first time after reading the autobiographical *Journals* from 1840-43, a reader could be forgiven for thinking that “Either” and “Or” referred to the process of making the life-altering decision either to marry or (in the event) not to marry that they record. Indeed, one of the “diapsalmata” very early on in the work, itself headed “Either/Or”, directly supports this reading: “Either marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way.”<sup>29</sup>

A brief reminder of the basic structure and composition of *Either/Or* may be useful at this point, and this will also support the Regine-related-reading at every stage: *Either/Or* is divided into two parts, which are themselves presented in a fictional Preface by the pseudonym Victor Eremita as consisting of two different sets of papers that he has found in a secret compartment of an old writing-desk. Eremita calls the first set the papers of “A”, and the second the papers of “B”, letters to “A”, and the two sets fit neatly in most minds with the “Either” and “Or” of the title. Part one, by “A”, contains a highly heterogeneous collection of everything from pithy aphorisms, to literary criticism, to philosophical essays, to an epistolary novella. Part two, by “B”, consists of three letters, apparently written to the author of part one. And what do these aphorisms, critiques, essays, novella, and letters concern themselves with? In A’s case, an “aesthetic” view of life, according to

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Law, ‘Place’, 236.

<sup>29</sup> *EO I*, 38.

Eremita,<sup>30</sup> but one depicted with reference to the great womaniser Don Giovanni, various jilted women from world literature, and a piece called “the Seducer’s Diary” about the systematic seduction and betrayal of a young woman. In B’s case, an “ethical” view of life, but one depicted with reference to a lengthy apology for “the aesthetic validity of marriage”, an expansion of this into a further defence of how the ethical life incorporates the aesthetic within it, and finally an interpolated sermon from another fictional author that emphasises how, whatever one does, in some respect one is always in the wrong before God. As I said earlier, it is not difficult to envision some trace of Kierkegaard’s broken engagement to Regine on every page of the text by way of searching for correlating themes in the *Journals* that could connect specifically to her.

At the same time, to leave the matter here, concluding that *Either/Or* is simply a book about Kierkegaard’s broken engagement to Regine Olsen, would be to do an enormous injustice to the text and the richly complex literary-philosophical-theological ideas that it puts forward. The difficulty is that an interpretive analysis of those ideas, especially into terms of what kind of a view of its original authorial intention they ultimately contribute to, is famously hard. As the Seducer’s Diary itself observes, “A book has the remarkable characteristic that it can be interpreted as one pleases”<sup>31</sup> and *Either/Or* resists straightforward interpretation because of its many pseudonymous and structural layers. David Gouwens lists some of the manifold interpretative strategies that have been brought to *Either/Or*, including: new critical, biographical-genetic, philosophical-poetic (reader response), literary-historical, comparative literary, studies of

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<sup>30</sup> *EO* I, 13.

<sup>31</sup> *EO* I, 374; quoted by David Gouwens in ‘Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*, Part One: Patterns of Interpretation’ in *IKC: Either/Or* I, 5.

Kierkegaard's own understanding of his literary criticism, psychological, structural, computer-analytical,<sup>32</sup> neopositivist, and postmodern.<sup>33</sup> For the purposes of this study, the chief question I am interested in asking, in front of the text, is the literary question of whether it is a religious text or not, along with the related theological question of whether the work evinces a developed theory of religious artistic vocation.

### ***Either/Or I***

A close examination of the text itself will be important here to settle the issue. The pseudonymous editor Victor Eremita sets the tone for the work by choosing to talk about a distinction between the "outer" and "inner" and saying that A and B will go on to confirm his suspicion that "the outer is not the inner".<sup>34</sup> A, he tells us, exhibits a complete contradiction between inner and outer, whereas B has a more significant interior under an ordinary exterior. This seems to set up the whole text as having to do with the correspondence between external appearance and interior subjectivity and in the light of what Kierkegaard will go on to develop later in the authorship about religiousness being a kind of passionate interiority it is not difficult to view this as a religious theme. Crucially, Eremita then says "when the book is read, A and B are forgotten; only the points of view confront each other and expect no final decision in the particular personalities."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Niels Jørgen Cappelørn argues against Henning Fenger and in agreement with my position in this thesis that because the *Journals*, like *The Point of View*, indicate that the fuller religious understanding of the authorship was retrospective an understanding of *Either/Or* as religious does not necessarily depend on particular evidence of Kierkegaard's intentionality at the time it was published. Cf. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, 'The Retrospective Understanding of Kierkegaard's Total Production' in *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results* ed. Alistair McKinnon (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 8-38.

<sup>33</sup> Gouwens, 'Patterns', 6.

<sup>34</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 3, 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

This is potentially a highly revealing sentence for Kierkegaard's communicative methodology with regards to *Either/Or*. Although it comes from the mouth of the fictional editor, it could hypothetically explain the way that Kierkegaard saw the maieutic function of the book: as a literary juxtaposition of different existential points of view which offers no final argument or "decision" for either/or, but provokes the reader to make a decision between them for themselves. As I have shown, there is very little in the *Journals* up to this point that corresponds with this sentence, but it does resemble strongly material that will appear later on in the *Journals*, in a way that lends some substance to the reading of *Either/Or* as a piece of indirect communication in the service of the religious.

There is not a huge amount in the remainder of *Either/Or*'s first volume that is specially relevant to religion or to the question of Kierkegaard's religious task. As mentioned above, it contains aphorisms, essays, speeches, literary criticism, satire, and an epistolary novella. A study in the practice of the fashionable Romantic literary art of Kierkegaard's day and at the same time a critique of it, it is a fragmented, eclectic, ironic, artistic presentation of the aesthetic mode of life.<sup>36</sup> And Regine is so easy to read everywhere as to be nearly omnipresent. She is perhaps most manifestly present in some of the aphorisms already discussed, and in "Silhouettes", a speech on the subject of despair delivered to "the fellowship of the dead", which spends the majority of its time discussing a series of betrayed female lovers in famous literature, such as Goethe's Marie Beaumarchais—"Her story is brief: Clavigo became engaged to her, Clavigo left her."<sup>37</sup> "Clavigo" might as

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<sup>36</sup> See Rasmussen, *Irony and Witness*, Walsh, *Living Poetically*, and Pattison, *The Aesthetic and the Religious* for their informative chapters on the Romantic movement's influence on Kierkegaard, which comes particularly through Goethe and Schlegel.

<sup>37</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* I, 177.

well be replaced with “Kierkegaard”. But there is little material on the idea of task or vocation in the first volume.

The most interesting connection that can be made between it and my findings from the contemporaneous *Journals* comes in “The First Love”, a piece of criticism on a French play by the same name. Here we read that “Anyone who has ever had leanings towards productivity has certainly also noticed that it is a little accidental external circumstance that becomes the *occasion* for the actual producing.”<sup>38</sup> The piece goes on to discuss this further, joking about just how much productivity can stem from an apparently innocuous little external occasion. This description and discussion could very straightforwardly be applied as a hermeneutical lens with which to read the *Journals* of the time of *Either/Or*: The occasion? The broken engagement. The productivity? *Either/Or* itself. This could be a published acknowledgement by Kierkegaard, conscious or unconscious, that he did not have a grandiose religious plan mapped-out when he set out in writing *Either/Or* but that it was actually occasioned by an external circumstance which prompted the huge outburst of productivity from his pen. Again, one should be wary of making this into a definitive reading or of carrying the idea too far, but it is interesting nonetheless to see this discussion of inspiration and occasion appearing in “The First Love.”

From the above, then, it could be fair to say on the strength of *Either/Or*, Part One *alone* that it is *not* a religious work after all, in concession to Fenger and Garff. The most I have been able to glean so far is a religious *option* for interpretation from the Preface, based on readings of other Kierkegaardian texts,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 233.

rather than any strong religious content. And certainly Part One does not have anything specifically theological to contribute to a theory of authorial vocation.

### ***Either/Or II***

This brings me to the second volume of *Either/Or*, however. There is much more here that is religious and that specifically pertains to the question of religious vocation. To reiterate, the second volume takes the form of three letters by Judge William to the aesthete of volume one. The first letter is primarily about how there is an “aesthetic” element in marriage that is beautiful, how marriage and the ethical incorporate romance and the aesthetic within themselves in a “concentric” manner, and how marriage is the “true transfiguration” of romantic love, not its annihilation.<sup>39</sup> The second letter is about the “balance between the aesthetic and the ethical” in the development of the personality, focusing more on the ethical as the transfiguration of the aesthetic as opposed to marriage as the transfiguration of the romantic.<sup>40</sup> And the third letter contains an enclosed sermon by yet another character, a rural pastor, which will warrant special examination below. All of this is much more obviously religious in character than Part One. It is important to note that, at this point in Kierkegaard’s own development as an author, the terms “the ethical” and “the religious” are almost synonymous in the writing, and they are not really made distinct from one another except perhaps implicitly in the closing sermon.<sup>41</sup> So the ethical half of *Either/Or* is in fact emphatically religious. It is also saturated with scriptural allusions. Indeed William himself proclaims that he

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<sup>39</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or II*, 8, 29, 31.

<sup>40</sup> See *ibid.*, 253.

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, 18, 36.

seems to be “so conversant with the Bible that [he] could be qualified for the theological degree”.<sup>42</sup>

As well as its being much more explicitly religious, there is more material on offer in *Either/Or* Part Two that could provide clues that an early form of the method of indirect communication was being practiced at this point, an idea noticeably absent from the *Journals* at this time. For instance, the Old Testament story of the prophet Nathan indirectly rebuking King David is employed as a literary device quite early on by William and this scriptural model will become a paradigmatic example of indirect communication later for Kierkegaard.<sup>43</sup> More importantly, later in the first letter William says that the “point” of his ethical either/or is not what is chosen but the reality of choosing, and that “Up to that point, one person can help another; when he has reached that point, the significance the one person can have for the other becomes more subordinate.”<sup>44</sup> This is reminiscent of Eremita’s language of different points of view confronting one another, leaving the reader to choose between them for themselves, and strongly resembles phrasing that Kierkegaard will go on to use when he does come to form his theory of indirect communication.

Furthermore, *Either/Or* Part Two contains some beautiful passages that have to do with the aesthetic and artistic. Although these passages do not have so much to say about religious vocation or yet specifically tie this to the concept of Christian communication, they have much to say about aesthetics in general and its connection with ordinary existence. Where the Judge criticises the aesthete of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6. Cf. Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 176.

first part's artistic endeavours and forays as being fragmented, schizophrenic and lacking in unity, he consistently argues not for the abolition of artistry but rather for its incorporation into the ethical-religious life in a way that makes the artistry consistent, meaningful and even further-reaching. Indeed, in William's view life itself can become an artwork in cooperation with the divine artist:

Here I am at the summit of the aesthetic. And in truth, he who had humility and courage to let himself be aesthetically transformed, he who feels himself present as a character in a drama the deity is writing...he who in the most profound sense feels himself creating and created...he and he alone has brought into actual existence the highest in aesthetics.<sup>45</sup>

This is a wonderful connecting of the aesthetic and the existential in the service of the ethical-religious which also refers to God as a kind of creative artist, with whom the human artist can collaborate in the creation of his or her life. It is following on from this passage that he can say, of the ethical-religious married man who takes finite, temporal romantic love and makes it infinite by virtue of his moral commitment, that "he has not killed time but has rescued and preserved it in eternity. The married man who does this is truly living poetically."<sup>46</sup> The phrase "living poetically" first appeared in Kierkegaard's magister dissertation "On the Concept of Irony with continual reference to Socrates"<sup>47</sup> and now neatly encapsulates this concept of being an artist of life in collaboration with God. This is a highly fecund idea that I will return to later in my project.

Importantly, *Either/Or* volume two actually contains some *explicit* reflections on the subject of vocation or "task" (Danish: *Opgave*) as well. William tells us "I see each person according to his beauty...I see him as one who has a

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>47</sup> *CI*, 297. It is first used of the romantics, but here re-appropriated in an ethical-religious mode. See Walsh, *Living Poetically*, Chapter 2.

concrete task for his life...he has his teleology within himself, he actualises his task"<sup>48</sup> and soon after that "everywhere the point is to be rightly situated, not to waste time in wishing but to take hold of one's task."<sup>49</sup> He then goes on to put words in the mouth of an imaginary "ethicist" who exemplifies the position that he himself advocates, and this ethicist introduces the word "calling" as synonymous with "task", and says that it is every human being's "duty" to have a calling.<sup>50</sup> There is a universal calling which is issued to everybody, and there is an individual calling which is tied to a person's particular talent and *aesthetic existence*, "the aesthetic aspects of his whole personality". Thus a person's particular talent is their individual calling and a "calling" or task is the expression of the relation of an individual's work to their personality.<sup>51</sup>

Could this be the reflection on Kierkegaard's task and calling that was conspicuously absent from his *Journals* of the time? Maybe, but it is impossible to say. It could be that while Kierkegaard did not put down his thoughts about his plan for his literary activity or use of his particular talents early on in his personal journals, they came out in this published work that he was busy writing. I will not reach behind the text to make this speculative conclusion. But all the same, the "talent" passage in *Either/Or* Part Two provides some very stimulating meditations on the subject. The portrait of task and calling presented is one that is strongly tied to an individual's particular talent and personality. The ethical task is to set about fulfilling the universal call to disclose oneself, live consistently and become a true self by finding the individual work that correlates with one's particular personality

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<sup>48</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* II, 275.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 293, 297.

and aesthetic existence. In other words: Perform the task and fulfil the calling that matches your unique talents and personality. It is not at all difficult to make the leap to applying this idea to Kierkegaard himself and to imagine him following this principle in his own mind. Garff, Hannay and Thompson have already all ventured so far as to say that the young Kierkegaard must have decided to become a writer because it was what he was talented at. And it is not too much more of a leap to imagine him originally deciding to employ this talent in an ethical-religious mode because of his own religious beliefs, though I must stop short of saying that this is definitely what took place at this time.

### **The “Ultimatum”**

It is significant that I have been able to put the case for *Either/Or* being a religious text without yet referring at any length to the “Ultimatum” that makes up its final pages. The Ultimatum is the famous third and final letter that William has written to the aesthete, which contains a brief recommendation from him and then an enclosed sermon by a fictional rural Danish pastor entitled “The Upbuilding That Lies in the Thought That in Relation to God We Are Always in the Wrong”.<sup>52</sup> For Robert Perkins, as for many commentators, the Ultimatum is essential to understanding *Either/Or*.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Kierkegaard himself asserted that unless the sermon and its last sentence are understood as the climax of the book then its significance as part of the authorship and a human document will be missed.<sup>54</sup> And while the work can still be read as religious without examining it, the final letter reinforces the religious reading many times over.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>53</sup> Perkins, ‘Either/Or/Or: Giving the Parson His Due’ in *IKC: Either/Or* II, 208.

<sup>54</sup> *Pap IV A 42 / JP 4*, 4847 (1843); *CUP I*, 630; quoted in Perkins, ‘Either/Or/Or’, 208.

To begin with, we note with Perkins that the sermon is “an overtly religious literary form.”<sup>55</sup> Yet it is not only its form but its content that pushes *Either/Or* even further into the realm of the religious. This is because, as it is generally agreed, the Jutland pastor’s message represents a conceptual break from William’s ethical teaching in the previous two letters. Where for William, who tells us “I am not assuming a radical evil”<sup>56</sup> and “‘to choose’...is my watchword, the nerve in my life-view”,<sup>57</sup> it is always possible to actualise ethical potentialities simply by choosing them, the pastor has a sense of total depravity and of God as being so incomparably greater than the best man has to offer as to render human ethical striving “wrongful”. In spite of what William recommends regarding the sermon saying what he wants to say in even better terms, its content strongly subverts his ethical vision of a life that can be lived rightly by oneself.<sup>58</sup> The God of the sermon always stands infinitely higher than man’s best moral offerings, but this becomes for the pastor an upbuilding thought because it leads to a liberating focus on God’s greatness, an idea that is missing in William, which puts an end to doubt and inspires action.<sup>59</sup> Thus I can agree with Rasmussen when he says that “in fewer than fifteen pages, this sermon from the heath completely recontextualises the whole of William’s contribution to religious ethics, and reorients the reader toward a religious life view articulated by *neither A nor William*.”<sup>60</sup>

Commentators differ as to the exact extent that the sermon departs from the judge and that it enters more fully into the religious sphere, however.

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<sup>55</sup> Perkins, ‘Either/Or/Or’, 210.

<sup>56</sup> *EO* II, 175.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>59</sup> See for e.g. *ibid.*, 353.

<sup>60</sup> Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, 42-43; see also Perkins, ‘Either/Or/Or’, 222.

Kierkegaard would later write in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that the sermon does not fully succeed in entering into the religious sphere because it opens up the disjunction between the infinite and the finite but returns from this to a harmony, rather than leaving it paradoxically unresolved, and Law follows this conclusion.<sup>61</sup> Perkins actually argues against *Postscript* that *Either/Or* makes it definitively further than the ethical into the properly religious by pointing to Kierkegaard's later admission that he did not understand all the details of his developing views when he began *Either/Or* and the idea that the ethical in *Either/Or* includes the religious.<sup>62</sup> He argues that in the *Ultimatum* we actually find what would later come to be called "Religiousness A" and that because of this "Kierkegaard could have named his book *Either/Or/Or*." Nonetheless, both commentators agree that the sermon still demonstrates the religious sphere "breaking in" to the work in some way. And importantly, even Law holds that "the ideas in the 'Ultimatum' constitute part of Kierkegaard's maieutic program of bringing the reader into a position where religious existence can become a possibility."<sup>63</sup> Law is very careful, as I have been also, to caution that this does not mean that Kierkegaard had the whole structure of his authorship worked out from its beginning, but all the same he can argue from an examination of *Either/Or* that "the underlying idea was established at a relatively early date that Christianity is the highest form of existence and that Kierkegaard sees it as his task to lead the reader to the consciousness and choice of this sphere of existence."<sup>64</sup> Whatever the precise character of the religiousness of the "Ultimatum", it only adds to the religious

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<sup>61</sup> *CUP I*, 268; see also Law, "The "Ultimatum" of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, Part Two and the Two Upbuilding Discourses of 16 May 1843' in *IKC: Either/Or II*, 257.

<sup>62</sup> Perkins, 'Either/Or/Or', 208-9.

<sup>63</sup> Law, 'Ultimatum', 288.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

character of *Either/Or* and to the possible religious interpretations of the work, for example as if it is taken as a potential “third” religious option transcending both the aesthetic and the ethical, as suggested by Rasmussen and Perkins. To my mind it does not matter whether or not the sermon exhibits “Religiousness A” or “Religiousness B” since the point is that it is “religious,” that the text has a religious character.

Some, such as Hannay, dispute this and want to argue that *Either/Or* is not actually a religious text. Taking his cue from a place in the retro-perspectival *Point of View* which describes *Either/Or* as “prereligious”,<sup>65</sup> Hannay seeks to undermine a traditional “Socratic” reading that sees *Either/Or* as an indirect deceit that starts out in the aesthetic in order to lead the reader into the religious by the ending *Ultimatum*.<sup>66</sup> He argues that it requires “a considerable stretch of hermeneutic imagination to read *Either/Or* as a work designed to uncover the religious”<sup>67</sup> and believes that for the most part it only gets as far as ethical categories.<sup>68</sup> And yet, despite this, Hannay does concede that “Kierkegaard’s claim that he had a religious purpose from the start does not entail that the works written with that purpose disclose to the reader a unity of theme or content”. While “Kierkegaard’s own utterances even tend to undermine the claim to unity”,<sup>69</sup> this first point does seem to amount to an admission that it could have been the case that Kierkegaard was a religious author right from the beginning even if his earlier works do not exhibit the degree of religious conceptual unity that was later to evolve in the authorship.

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<sup>65</sup> Hannay, “The Judge in the Light of Kierkegaard’s Own *Either/Or*: Some Hermeneutical Crotchets’ in *IKC: Either/Or* II, 183.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-7.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 187, 197. Hannay does allow that the *Ultimatum* makes it into religious categories, but still holds that this does not mean that the whole work is designed to uncover the religious.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

Other commentators will take us further than this basic admission and want to argue that *Either/Or* is a religious work. Perkins, for example, observes in line with my comments above that, even prior to the “Ultimatum”, many religious subjects are discussed in the text, particularly in Part Two, and that no book is more referenced or alluded to in it than is the Bible.<sup>70</sup> These and similar observations lead him to the conclusion that opinions such as that of Hannay or Fenger and Garff, who argue the same, remain “arcane or subject to some idiosyncratic view of religion.”<sup>71</sup> Perhaps precisely what *is* meant by the term “religion” is actually of some importance here.<sup>72</sup> It could be that if one takes the term in the specialist sense that Kierkegaard will later develop in the pseudonymous authorship, that of “Religiousness A” and “Religiousness B”, as a particularly Climacan piece of vocabulary, then the book does not measure up to standard, and this could be what Hannay is driving at.<sup>73</sup> But if “religious” is taken more broadly, as the term is commonly understood, in the sense discussed above of “related to, having to do with belief in and reverence for God or some supernatural power,” then it is much easier to agree with Kierkegaard’s later claim that he was a religious author (in his practice if not in his recorded intent) from the start of his career.

Another commentator who lends innovative support to a religious reading of *Either/Or* is Charles Bellinger.<sup>74</sup> Bellinger proposes “an interpretive thought-

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<sup>70</sup> Perkins, ‘Either/Or/Or’, 210.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 230, footnote 33.

<sup>72</sup> Note that in *Pap X 4 A 663 / JP 6*, 6823 (1852) Kierkegaard says his own “Or” evolved to become more radically religious than Judge William’s ethico-religiousness.

<sup>73</sup> Although some commentators want to argue that parts of *Either/Or* do in fact meet the standards of Religiousness A, for which see below.

<sup>74</sup> Charles Bellinger, ‘Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son: Or, Three Rival Versions of Three Rival Versions’ in *IKC: Either/Or II*, 59-82.

experiment. What if Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* is a kind of parable?"<sup>75</sup> Contending throughout that "Kierkegaard's thought can only be interpreted accurately when it is seen in connection with the Bible", Bellinger has it that the book "has religious resonances which must be heard if it is to be understood accurately".<sup>76</sup> Then, following a definition of "parable" given in a book by Thomas Oden called *Parables of Kierkegaard*,<sup>77</sup> and using the fact that, like a parable, *Either/Or* exhibits no artificial final closure, Bellinger suggests that *Either/Or* can plausibly be read as a retelling of Jesus's parable of the prodigal son.<sup>78</sup> On this reading, "A" corresponds to the younger, prodigal son who squanders himself in wild living, "B" to the older brother, who implicitly attempts to earn favour through right and moral actions, and the pastor of the closing sermon to the Father of the parable, who offers a third, truly religious alternative. Thus Bellinger holds that "*Either/Or* communicates a message which is linked with the meaning of Jesus' life and teachings. When we hear what is being spoken in *Either/Or* we are hearing indirectly the voice of Christ."<sup>79</sup> Once again, this is too strong for a *definitive* critical interpretation, but, crucially, it remains a viable *option* for interpretation because of the religious content of the text, and an indirect religious artwork would have it no other way. Importantly, it must be noted that Bellinger does not think this connection was made consciously by Kierkegaard, though he does find two minor references to the parable in *Either/Or*.<sup>80</sup> But the connection does not need to have been conscious in order for Bellinger to have, as he puts it, countered "Fenger (and

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 59, 63

<sup>77</sup> "a parable is a brief story of spare characterisation and surprising reversal, with the underlying intent of moral or spiritual illumination" –Thomas Oden, *Parables of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), x, quoted in Bellinger, 'Parable', 59.

<sup>78</sup> Bellinger, 'Parable', 70.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>80</sup> *EO I*, 228 and 261; quoted in Bellinger, 'Parable', 74.

MacIntyre [and Hannay and Garff]) not obliquely but directly, by arguing that *Either/Or* is itself an inherently religious work.”<sup>81</sup> With this I can wholeheartedly agree.

### ***Either/Or*: Conclusion**

To sum up then, *Either/Or* is a religious text, on my reading, particularly on the strength of the second volume (and this does not negate its being an aesthetic text as well). Whether or not there is primary textual evidence of consciously planned “indirect communication” in this work does not rule out the possibility of it simply being a “religious” work, a possibility which my reading finds is actually the case. It is a religious work because it deals with religious themes and ideas using religious language and does so in a way that broadcasts itself as being religious. To contest this is to wrangle over the definition of the term “religious” in a way that distorts its meaning too far in my view. There *are* also some suggestions that a strategy of indirect communication is being consciously employed at this stage and that Kierkegaard was meditating on his vocational task while he was writing it, but these can only be suggestions—there is as of this stage not yet any kind of “meta-text” in the *Journals* or any other work that warrants a view of this tactic as conscious. Of course, arguably a consequence of indirect communication is that it is *never* possible to show that it has been adopted as a conscious strategy from the work alone. But the point is that Kierkegaard did go on to document this strategy later, that it is not documented sufficiently here, and yet that the work is religious all the same, in effect if not in demonstrable intent.

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<sup>81</sup> Bellinger, ‘Parable’, 59.

## ***TWO UPBUILDING DISCOURSES***

In his chapter on *Either/Or*, Law further contends that “for those who have picked up the hints in the pseudonymous work, a fuller and clearer expression of this religious existence is unfolded in *Two Upbuilding Discourses*.”<sup>82</sup> This text merits detailed discussion here. Published only three months after *Either/Or*, these two discourses also stand right at the start of the authorship proper and deserve to be checked against my findings from the *Journals* and the later claim that Kierkegaard began as a religious author too. In my estimation they do much to reinforce each of these. The *Two Upbuilding Discourses* are very different in genre and character from most of *Either/Or*. In contrast to the open-ended, pseudonymous, polyphonic, “indirect” aspects of the latter, the veronymous<sup>83</sup> *Discourses*—these two initial ones and the many that would follow—are usually taken as more “direct” writing.<sup>84</sup> Considered by many to be the “most neglected of all his works”,<sup>85</sup> the discourses are an important key to understanding Kierkegaard’s authorship, both at the moment of its nascence and in terms of how it developed over time. Indeed, Pattison even claims that they provide *the* interpretative key to understanding the authorship and the best vantage point from which to view all of the other works.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Law, ‘Ultimatum’, 288.

<sup>83</sup> The term “veronymous”, meaning published under Kierkegaard’s own true name, comes from Michael Strawser, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard: From Irony to Edification* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

<sup>84</sup> See *EUD*, xi. Although the first *Two Upbuilding Discourses* were published by themselves, I am working mainly from this English translation in which they are collected along with the other first sixteen discourses.

<sup>85</sup> Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* ed. Robert Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>86</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.

An initial point to be made here following on from *Either/Or*, again with Law, is that the “Ultimatum” and *Two Upbuilding Discourses* seem to “stand in a close relationship”.<sup>87</sup> Law points to the evidence that, in a draft of the *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, Kierkegaard calls them sermons and that he also does so in two journal entries written *after* he had revised the Preface.<sup>88</sup> This draft and these journal entries thus name the *Discourses* as having the same religious genre as the Ultimatum, which I found was the most religious part of *Either/Or*. There is a strong degree of similarity between the writing in each, as they both meditate on religious themes speaking mainly in the second person, as one would expect of a sermon. For Law, the similarities “reveal the fundamental coherence of Kierkegaard’s thought and that there is indeed a general plan underlying the whole of the Kierkegaardian corpus”.<sup>89</sup> This is too intentionalist a conclusion to draw but the religious affinity between the Ultimatum and the *Two Upbuilding Discourses* does go to some lengths to bolster both the religious reading of *Either/Or* and the case for seeing Kierkegaard as a religious author at the start of 1843. Fenger, as I will examine in detail below, protests that the gap of three months between the two works is too large to warrant such a case, but this judgment seems arbitrary and is justly countered by highlighting the affinity between them. *Two Upbuilding Discourses* is then a highly important text because, as the first book published after *Either/Or*, it continues in the same vein as its most religious and direct element, and moreover it initiates a dual sequence of pseudonymous and veronymous works that will proceed in one way or another until 1850.

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<sup>87</sup> Law, ‘Ultimatum’, 261.

<sup>88</sup> *EUD*, 430; see also Law, ‘Ultimatum’, 262-3.

<sup>89</sup> Law, ‘Ultimatum’, 287.

## Regine-Related Religious-Readings, Repeated

I now turn to the text itself. The difference in genre between the *Upbuilding Discourses* and *Either/Or* can be demonstrated almost from their prefaces and openings alone. After a dedication to his late father under his own name, Kierkegaard begins the Preface to the *Two Upbuilding Discourses* by saying, *contra* the draft and the *Journals*, that these are self-consciously *discourses* that are being presented, *not* sermons, because their author is “without authority” to preach or to teach as a priest.<sup>90</sup> We are also informed that they are being addressed to “*that* single individual” (Danish: *hiin Enkelte*) who reads well as being Regine.<sup>91</sup> The first discourse is called “The Expectancy of Faith”. With it we immediately know that we are on different ground from (most of) *Either/Or*, certainly from its opening, for it begins not with an aesthetic aphorism but with a “prayer”, expressing repentance and thanksgiving and acknowledging God’s constancy.<sup>92</sup> Kierkegaard then quotes from the Bible, Galatians 3:23f to be precise, taking up themes of “faith” and “grace” before addressing his “listeners” who are apparently “in church”.<sup>93</sup> A reader could be forgiven for questioning whether this is not in fact a sermon after all. The actual discourse then goes on to discuss faith as the highest possible good, the best thing that could be wished for someone on a new year’s day. Faith involves struggles, but it can never be stolen by any circumstance in life. The second discourse, “Every Good and Perfect Gift is From Above”, also opens with a prayer, asking God to open his hand, and a scripture quotation, this time from

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<sup>90</sup> *EUD*, 5, cf. also xiv.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, xx. We know as much from the *Journals*: The term initially referred to Regine but would later become a category that referred to individuals in general, and Kierkegaard came to see guidance as providentially involved in this transition. Cf. *Pap X 1 A 266 / JP 6*, 6388 (1849).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

James 1:17-22 which contain the words of the title.<sup>94</sup> These words have been repeated many times but people live as if they were not true,<sup>95</sup> and the theme of the second discourse is that all good has its home in heaven. It ends with a third prayer.<sup>96</sup>

As another reminder, what I discerned in the *Journals* from this time was at the most an implicit, but nowhere baldly stated, religious motive for writing and a much more explicit preoccupation with Regine in connection with the commencement of the authorship. For *Two Upbuilding Discourses* to be consistent with this we would expect to find a preoccupation with Regine within them as well. The work does not disappoint on this front. As well as the aforementioned dedication to “that single individual” which is evidently a nod to Regine, there are many places in the text that seem to fit well with being viewed as communication to Regine. As I said was the case for *Either/Or*, in some regards Regine can be seen as present on every page. Even if one rightly hesitates to draw strong Regine-related conclusions based merely on knowledge of the biographical facts of Kierkegaard’s life, it is very easy to find correspondences on the subject of Regine just by using the *Journals*-text as a hermeneutical lens held up against the *Discourses*. They very readily intertextually correspond to produce a narrative of Kierkegaard, whose name appears on both texts, sending a message to Regine to continue to have faith and to enjoy God’s gifts even though he has left her,<sup>97</sup> and this narrative is strengthened by the individualistic dedication. A section in the second discourse that talks about pleading with someone for something when they

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>97</sup> This is perhaps very nearly explicit and actually a good *prima facie* reading of, for example, passages at *ibid.*, 25.

“know what is really best for you” could conjure poignant images of Regine pleading with Kierkegaard not to break the engagement with her when he thought he knew what was best for her.<sup>98</sup>

Later testimony supports this reading too. Regine herself is reported as believing that the first volume’s dedication to “an Unnamed Person” was meant for her.<sup>99</sup> And Kierkegaard himself later stated outright in his 1849 *Journals* that he had meant *Two Upbuilding Discourses* for Regine and that in the first discourse’s text he had included a secret message to her.<sup>100</sup> In commenting on this, Andrew Burgess rightly warns against what Pattison has called the “Brandes–Heiberg–Lowrie” psycho-biographical school of simplistically explaining the authorship using Kierkegaard’s life,<sup>101</sup> but nevertheless observes that this early part of the authorship simply “begs to be footnoted to events in his life”.<sup>102</sup> Following Kierkegaard’s mention of a secret message in *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, he identifies it as the passage remarked upon at the end of the paragraph above which he too takes to refer to Regine’s struggle over the broken engagement.<sup>103</sup> He adds to this still further evidence, not from anecdotal external sources but again from the *Journals*, that the scriptural text from James used as the starting point for the first discourse was personally important to Kierkegaard and Regine, in order again to show that the work can function as a kind of message to Regine. As I have said, in agreement with Burgess, even if one exercises caution about drawing links between the text and the narrative of Kierkegaard’s life, by drawing links between

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>99</sup> Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, 51.

<sup>100</sup> *Pap X 5 A 149 / JP 6*, 6472 (1849). Cf. Andrew J. Burgess, ‘Kierkegaard’s Discourses on ‘Every Good and Perfect Gift’ as Love Letters to Regine’ in *IKC:EUD*, 16.

<sup>101</sup> Named after some scholars who are fond of committing intentional and psycho-biographical/genetic fallacies. Quoted in Burgess, ‘Love Letters’, 17.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> *EUD*, 37; see Burgess, ‘Love Letters’, 18-19.

it and the *Journals*-text alone, replete as they are with Regine-related writing, there is enough grounds to suggest a correspondence.

So the *Two Upbuilding Discourses* are, like *Either/Or*, very much preoccupied with Regine—but are they an example of religious, “direct communication” being employed at the outset of the authorship?<sup>104</sup> First it must be noted, as many commentators are keen to point out, that in a certain sense they are still indirect communication.<sup>105</sup> As Stephen Shakespeare says, “If nothing else, the prefaces to the discourses should make us pause before assigning these texts to the category of direct communication.”<sup>106</sup> Some have even raised the postmodern idea that above the discourses Kierkegaard used his own name as a pseudonym.<sup>107</sup> In the end, it may turn out that they are indirect communication because in a sense all communication is indirect, a point which I will discuss in depth later in this project. And yet, as I have shown, the *Discourses* are markedly different from *Either/Or*: they *are* signed with Kierkegaard’s own name and they do exhibit a vastly different genre and style from the larger part of *Either/Or* by being straightforward, sermonic meditations on biblical texts. To say that they are not religious and not at least a *more* direct form of communication would necessitate a complete redefinition of those words. Even Bishop Mynster, following Kierkegaard’s own bad habit, once reviewed some of the *Upbuilding Discourses* and called them

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<sup>104</sup> “Direct communication”, in contrast from indirect communication, is straightforward, explicit and overt. For an excellent study of “direct communication” and its relation to indirect communication see John Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 249-303. Elrod’s position on the movement in Kierkegaard’s authorship is close to that which I arrive at in this thesis and he also looks at the term “direct-indirect”.

<sup>105</sup> See e.g. Jolita Pons, *Stealing a Gift: Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms and the Bible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 44; Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 4; Michael Strawser, *Both/And*, Chapter 8.

<sup>106</sup> Stephen Shakespeare, ‘A Word of Explanation: Transfiguring Language in Kierkegaard’s ‘Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses’ in *IKC:EUD*, 92; see also Pattison, ‘The Art of Upbuilding’ in *IKC:EUD*, 88.

<sup>107</sup> Perkins, *IKC:EUD*, 3; see also for e.g. Joseph Westfall, *The Kierkegaardian Author* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 3; Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, 2.

“sermons” by accident, in defiance of their Preface.<sup>108</sup> Lastly, it should be noted that Kierkegaard himself would go on to write in the *Journals* “All my upbuilding discourses are in fact in the form of direct communication.”<sup>109</sup>

### ***Two Upbuilding Discourses as an Outworking of Artistic Vocation***

As a result it is pertinent to ask what kind of an artistic vocation or communicative strategy these first *Upbuilding Discourses* might betray as a complement to and in distinction from *Either/Or*.<sup>110</sup> As I have shown, they use a much more direct, overtly religious form of communication than that pseudonymous, more indirect work and the others like it that would follow. Thus they, and these initial two in particular, identify Kierkegaard as a religious author right from the start of his authorship, or at least from three months after the publication *Either/Or* (as mentioned, this detail will actually become important later in relation to Fenger). *Prima facie*, they aim to “build up”, to communicate in the language of faith and in a more direct, straightforward mode to those who are able to hear. Kierkegaard was adamant later on that they were supposed to complement *Either/Or* religiously as direct communication in parallel to its

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<sup>108</sup> See Pattison, ‘Upbuilding’, 77.

<sup>109</sup> *Pap IX A 222 / JP 6, 6234* (1848).

<sup>110</sup> Another question might be: What kind of religiousness do the *Discourses* present? Again in the secondary literature commentators battle with Johannes Climacus’s definitions of religiousness given in the *Postscript*. On these, the *Discourses* appear to come under “Religiousness A”, which is not full-blown Christian religiousness. If to be properly *Christian* a discourse must explicitly discuss Jesus as the absolutely paradoxical God-man who redeems humanity by his death (“Religiousness B”), then the *Two Upbuilding Discourses* and indeed the next sixteen which were to follow them (and which together make up the Hongs’ collection *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*) are not properly Christian, as Climacus actually says in the *Postscript*. –*CUP*, 256. Cf. Thomas C. Anderson, ‘Is the Religion of ‘Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses’ Religiousness A?’ in *IKC:EUD*, 73. However, Anderson argues that “in some places the discourses present a religion that is clearly different from Climacus’s description of Religiousness A...sometimes...it seems close to Christianity”. –Anderson, ‘Religion’, 74. For example, he notices that the *Discourses* go further than Religiousness A by sometimes calling God “father”. Here Anderson disagrees with Climacus in much the same way that Perkins refuses to agree with Climacus’s classification of the Ultimatum. Of course, to say all of this is to measure the religiousness of the signed *Discourses* against definitions of religiousness that are written under a pseudonym. The point still stands that the *Discourses* are broadly religious works that look very much like direct sermons about Christian themes on Christian texts.

indirect communication, and there is no reason to question this on the basis of the text itself.<sup>111</sup> Perkins agrees, arguing that the early writings up to and including the *Discourses* “should have made it clear to each and all Kierkegaard’s basic intention to become an upbuilding religious author”.<sup>112</sup> He then ventures “we have to infer Kierkegaard’s reasons for writing them, but the popularity of the worst modes of life presented in *Either/Or*, Part One, no doubt contributed mightily to his decision.”<sup>113</sup>

Once again, there is a danger of committing an intentional fallacy here but Perkins’ comment does show how uncontroversial it is to conclude that the *Discourses* are supposed to serve a religious, more directly communicative and enriching end, which *may* have been a counterbalance to the disproportionately favourable reception of the portrayal of the aesthetic mode of existence in *Either/Or*. Even Pattison, who is extremely cautious not to create a projected, fictional Kierkegaard out of the biographical material of his life, will say that “like other parts of his authorship, Kierkegaard’s upbuilding writings were, from the beginning, carefully considered elements in a larger communicative strategy (even if that strategy was not quite as calculated as Kierkegaard himself sometimes suggested)”.<sup>114</sup> In the case of the *Discourses*, it appears from them that the communicative strategy is straightforwardly, plainly to “speak” to the reader about spiritual truths of faith, anchored in scripture, in a way that teaches, instructs and encourages, or in other words “builds up”, as if they were listening to a sermon in church. Pattison notes that the combination of existential emphasis and literary

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<sup>111</sup> See e.g. *Pap X 2 A 196 / JP 6*, 6533 (1849). Cf. also *EUD*, xi.

<sup>112</sup> Perkins, *IKC:EUD*, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Here Perkins cites *POV*, 20.

<sup>114</sup> Pattison, ‘Upbuilding’, 77.

playfulness in the way that he does this means that Kierkegaard works to recall us to an “unrepresentable freedom within which the religious relation to God must be worked out”<sup>115</sup> so that “the aim is...to leave the reader alone with God”.<sup>116</sup> The stress in the *Discourses* is always on the personal God-relationship of the single individual and what their lived life of faith will actually look like, towards which the writing seeks to up-build them. In a sense this is the stress of Kierkegaard’s whole authorship, and Perkins actually claims that “Upbuilding, or edification, is the central theme of Kierkegaard’s authorship”.<sup>117</sup> The difference between the *Discourses* and *Either/Or*, as well as the later indirect works, is that in working to up-build they are much more overtly religious, direct and straightforward. They function from within a perspective of faith, presenting that faith overtly, rather than covertly.<sup>118</sup>

Before I move on from *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, there is one more aspect to them that deserves brief discussion here because I will return to similar themes later in this thesis. In an article on the *Discourses*, Stephen Shakespeare asserts that they “have to be regarded as *performative works*, rather than depositories of objective doctrinal information. In this sense, it is intriguing that they echo the pattern of Christ’s own lived mode of communication”.<sup>119</sup> By this I assume he means that the discourses have the genre and character of spoken address, referring as they do to their *hearers* and asking to be read aloud, rather than their (incorrectly) perceived lack of propositional doctrinal content. It is very

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 83. This is explored more in Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, Chapter 6.

<sup>116</sup> Pattison, ‘Upbuilding’, 88-9

<sup>117</sup> Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Faith is quite literally presented “overtly” in the *Two Upbuilding Discourses* since it is their subject.

<sup>119</sup> Shakespeare, ‘Explanation’, 93, footnote 4.

interesting that Shakespeare locates this direct, performative form as being patterned on the model of Christ. Christ is certainly recorded in the New Testament as communicating with people through spoken address, and as talking directly, plainly and straightforwardly about spiritual matters from a standpoint of faith in a way that aims to teach, instruct, encourage and build up. But, Christ also used what are arguably more indirect forms of communication, also performative but much less straightforward or direct, such as *parables*: open-ended stories that concealed just as much as they revealed so that people “might be ever hearing but never understanding”.<sup>120</sup> Shakespeare may be right in saying that in writing the *Upbuilding Discourses* Kierkegaard was following the example of Christ, but was he following that example just as much in writing the indirect, covert, open-ended narrative-based *Either/Or*? There is no evidence of a conscious modelling on Christ in the *Journals* up to this time, but it will appear later, and I will return to this theme of Christomorphic communication in the second major section of this thesis. Here I close my consideration of *Two Upbuilding Discourses*.

## **A FLOOD OF BOOKS**

### ***Journals, 1843-1845***

*Either/Or* and *Two Upbuilding Discourses* were both published by Kierkegaard in 1843 using his own funds. Two more trips to Berlin followed their production, one later in the same year and one in 1845, in connection with more interactions with Regine. Throughout this time, Kierkegaard was writing profusely and managed to

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<sup>120</sup> Mark 4:12, quoting Isaiah 6:9.

produce an astonishing catalogue of literary works in just two years, including no less than seven collections of these more overtly religious and direct, veronymous *Upbuilding Discourses*, as well as the more covertly religious, indirect and pseudonymous *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Prefaces* and *Stages on Life's Way*. At first, influences to do with Regine are still cited as the motivating forces behind the works and there is little in the *Journals* that talks of an expressly religious purpose in writing, despite the strong religious themes and tone of the books. However, as time went on, over this period Kierkegaard became more and more obviously religious in his stated intentions in writing these works and began to reflect more and more on his role as a Christian artist.

For example, in an undated entry from 1843, the year that *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* appeared, Kierkegaard writes

It is all very well to say that the ethical expression is to transmute one's talent into one's calling. But the issue here is far more difficult. To what extent is the individual obligated not to overlook the religious consideration in his choice? My own life is an example. If I had followed my inclination, chosen that for which I apparently have had a definite talent: becoming a police official, I would have been far happier than I came to be later, even though everything is better now. My acuteness would have been turned outward. The religious would have become a qualification of inwardness which would not have been pursued further, even though I would have turned back to it frequently. By going through the religious to my proper task, I turned my acuteness against myself. If this so-called actuality is supreme, I ought to have chosen otherwise. Here a new difficulty is apparent.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Pap IV A 160 / JP 4, 4946 (1843).*

Although the statement that he should have become a police officer is probably to be taken as an instance of Kierkegaardian irony (though, strangely, it anticipates findings in the third chapter of this thesis—the motif will recur) and although it is not completely clear what “otherwise” refers to in this entry, it *is* clear here that Kierkegaard was beginning to think more about his “calling” and the “religious” element to his “proper task” in a way that he now recorded in his journals. He meditates here on how it is not merely enough to pursue one’s talent as a vocation, as Judge William has said, but that religion must have an influence in the matter. In Hannay’s view, what was happening now was that in light of the success of *Either/Or*, of which the most successful components were notably *not* the ethical-religious treatises but the scandalous “aesthetic” sections, Kierkegaard was forced to reconsider his aims as an author from a religious standpoint.<sup>122</sup> Again, this is too strong a conclusion when not presented alongside evidence from the *Journals*, but the point remains that documented reflection on Kierkegaard’s religious task in being a writer has now begun to show itself in those pages.

Despite this, what emerges from the *Journals* of this period is still not a unified, distinct conception of his own religious vocation, but rather a series of varied reflections on the subject which give the impression of a gradual development of and a wrestling with the concept but nonetheless indicate that Kierkegaard was thinking about it more seriously. For example, in another 1843 entry he tells of how “My destiny seems to be to discourse on truth as far as I can discover it but in such a way as at the same time to demolish all possible authority on my own part... I speak the truth and thus place them in the contradiction from

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<sup>122</sup> Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 257. This is the same view as that of Perkins mentioned in relation to *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, above. Note that this theory supports the conjecture that religious aims were present at the time of writing *Either/Or* even though they were not recorded.

which they can be rescued only by appropriating the truth themselves.”<sup>123</sup> Then, in an entry from 1844 he asks himself “Have I, after all (however much I should like to have someone share my point of view), the right to use my art in order to win over a person, is it not still a mode of deception?”<sup>124</sup> These are, I believe, the first instances of Kierkegaard beginning explicitly to explore the idea of “indirect communication” in relation to his Christian vocation in his personal journals, although it is not baptised with this title yet.<sup>125</sup> They come surprisingly late, with many pseudonymous works already in print. Essentially the idea involves Kierkegaard using aesthetic works to help people indirectly to reflect on the truth by negating his own direct authority and thereby provoking them to appropriate meaning for themselves. The authority of the author is negated, so the reader is forced to make their own meaning, even more so than usual when approaching a text. In the 1844 entry he is already refining it. Speaking of the person being “won over”, Kierkegaard goes on to wonder if “When he sees me moved, inspired, etc., he accepts my view, consequently for a reason entirely different from mine, and an unsound reason.” One sees here an acute awareness of the problems and pitfalls of communication, of how ideas can be “lost in translation”, another sign that Kierkegaard was thinking more seriously about his role as a communicator at this time: What if his indirect deception works, but people come to the truth for the wrong reasons? The entry finishes “The majority presumably do not understand the discussion at all—if one has any art, he ought to use it; yes, anyone who does not use it in this way is an immoral person who does not recognise his duty, lacks earnestness, is self-centred etc. Answer: Bah!”

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<sup>123</sup> *Pap IV A 87 / JP 5*, 5646 (1843).

<sup>124</sup> *Pap V A 47 / JP 1*, 624 (1844).

<sup>125</sup> These entries are however a good way of defining what indirect communication is. Other definitions will be discussed as I progress through Kierkegaard’s writing.

Could it be that with this one dismissive “Bah!” Kierkegaard does away with any hopes of constructing a theory of Christian communication using his thought? It might be tempting to make this conclusion were it not for other journal entries from around the same time which talk of this idea of the indirect communication of the religious much more positively and suggest that this “Bah!” is humorous and not intended to stop short all discussion of how art is to be employed for the truth. In another undated entry from either 1844 or 1845, Kierkegaard says that “The religious speaker should be distinguished by his having existentially made sure of what the simplest of men also know...the most matchless discoveries, even the discovery of gunpowder, do not compensate as a substitute...” for what? Simply, “for a lack of self-knowledge and of maieutic skill in relation to others.”<sup>126</sup> The explicit identification of religious speech with the “maieutic”, or midwifery, here makes it clear that Kierkegaard is beginning to see it more and more as an indirect form of communication, where the speaker brings to birth the truth in others, and that his ideas on the subject are starting to crystallise. Indeed, they are even applied retroactively to *Either/Or* to explain how it is meant to function as a work of art. Its quality of indirectness is used conveniently to explain why no mention of this plan appeared earlier, for the aim was allegedly that

the reader would enter into a relation of self-activity with the book, as I had intended he should and had sought to bring this about by abstaining completely from saying anything about the plan of the work; in any case I was in no position to have any more definite view on this than any other reader, should there be one. The plan was a task for self-activity, and to impose my own understanding on the reader seemed to me an offensive and impertinent meddling.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Pap VI B 11 / JP 1*, 626 (1844-45).

<sup>127</sup> *Pap IV B 59 / JP 5*, 5710 (1844). Of course, there was no mention of this plan at the time of the writing or publication of *Either/Or*, as I have examined. This does not mean that there was not such

We have no way of knowing if Kierkegaard really intended this when he wrote *Either/Or*. But a theory of “indirect communication” is now starting to come through in his *Journals*. By 1845, the idea has taken a much fuller shape. Now we read that if a subjectivity wants to “communicate himself” to express the life of the eternal, this is something he “cannot possibly do directly” but “always indirectly”.<sup>128</sup> This is the first appearance of the words “indirect” (Danish: *indirecte*) and “communication” (Danish: *Meddelelse*) together in the *Journals*. Now that they have been conjoined, Kierkegaard is able to write about how he is pleased that his pseudonymous authors have overcome difficulties which he had “despaired” over: By using them he has been able to communicate the religious indirectly, which is preferable since “If this is communicated in a direct form, then the point is missed; then the reader is led into misunderstanding—he gets something more to know...he receives it as knowledge so he keeps right on sitting in the *status quo*.”<sup>129</sup> What is notable about this entry in relation to the present enquiry is that it has the tone of retro-perspective; it sounds as though Kierkegaard is looking back on the pseudonymous works he has thus far produced and reinterpreting them, reflecting that it is advantageous that they do not try to communicate elements of religious “knowledge” *directly*. On the contrary, I assume that he means that it is to their advantage that they aim to provoke an existential response in their readers *indirectly*. Consistent with what I have argued so far, this textual evidence paints an image of a Kierkegaard who did not have a conscious theory of “indirect communication”, or a clear understanding of his vocation as a

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a plan. It does mean that there is no textual evidence that such a plan existed at the time, even if there was one.

<sup>128</sup> *Pap VI B 38 / JP 1*, 632 (1845). In Kierkegaard, the pronoun is almost always male.

<sup>129</sup> *Pap VI B 40:45 / JP 1*, 633 (1845).

Christian artist, in his mind when he set out in writing the early pseudonymous works, but who, as he began to reflect on his method, gradually accumulated that theory and understanding little by little over time.<sup>130</sup>

The picture that emerges is of a writer who initially set out on his creative project largely compelled by tensions arising from a crisis in his personal life, but who at the same time chose to write about religious themes and in cooperation with some kind of religious sense of purpose, although to begin with he never wrote down how he might have conceived of that purpose or developed his idea of vocation explicitly. However, over the next few years, as the writing continues, the conception grows organically along with it, and specific reflections on his task as a Christian writer and role as a communicator of the religious start to appear in the *Journals*. This conclusion still allows that the reasons behind the writing were complex, even if a conception of religious vocation was beginning to distil.<sup>131</sup> Some, such as Thompson, want to select a single driving force as the motivator behind the production of this time. Thompson claims “to find in Kierkegaard’s art the evidence of his lifelong struggle to shape experience into image...there was nothing of the entertainment, the pleasant diversion, in Kierkegaard’s literary production. It was wrung from the very ‘abscess’ of his suffering as a man...”<sup>132</sup> While it may be true that the sublimation of an inner suffering contributed to Kierkegaard’s impulse to write, it is not necessary to promote this factor to being the sole contributor. Furthermore, it is dubious whether the “struggle to shape experience into image”

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<sup>130</sup> This may have been the unfolding of something already latent but earlier unexpressed, or it may have been the assembly of a view he did not previously hold: it is impossible to know either way.

<sup>131</sup> Alongside the reflections on his religious task, for example, in 1843 Kierkegaard was still able to speak of writing as a place where “dark thoughts and passions” could be therapeutically “exorcised”. See *Pap IV A 110 / JP 5*, 5666 (1843). Cf. Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 347.

<sup>132</sup> Thompson, *Kierkegaard*, 135; see *Pap IX A 217 / JP 6*, 6230 on the “abscess of melancholy” resulting in writing material, which actually comes later, from 1848.

should necessarily be equated with a drive to sublimate inner suffering. Hannay is more measured in his assessment, locating a variety of different impulses behind the astounding literary production of this time. For example, Hannay sees *The Concept of Anxiety* in particular as “an attempt to make a serious capital out of a lifelong apprenticeship in philosophy and theology, and among other things to demonstrate an academic ability”.<sup>133</sup> And he argues that by the time of *Stages on Life’s Way*, the last pseudonymous work of 1845, “if it was still uncertain in Kierkegaard’s mind where his authorship was heading, part of that uncertainty must have been due to the complexity of the motivations driving him to write”.<sup>134</sup> Even without reaching as far behind the text as Hannay, this is certainly what the evidence points to: a “complexity of motivations” contributing to the creative drive, but in addition to this a slowly forming picture of an indirect communicator of the religious seeking to bring to birth an appropriation of the truth in others. In the next year of Kierkegaard’s life, this picture would take on an even greater clarity in the writings as he reached one of the climaxes in his own self-understanding which happened to coincide with some more particularly distressing events in his personal life. Before I can examine these, however, I must turn to the culminating text of this intense period of productivity, which appeared in that same year.

### ***CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT***

That text was *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to ‘Philosophical Fragments’*.<sup>135</sup>

Written in 1845, but appearing on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1846, *Postscript* bore the

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<sup>133</sup> Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 227.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 258

<sup>135</sup> There is not enough space to discuss its precursor, *Philosophical Fragments*, here, suffice it to say that in this text the “poet” is presented as a negative type (as later in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* and *Works of Love*) who misunderstands “the god”. However, Climacus also discusses whether he is a critic or himself is “the poet” and jests

pseudonymous and veronymous attributions “by Johannes Climacus, edited by S. Kierkegaard” on its title page.<sup>136</sup> “*Concluding*” was foremost a reference to the (temporary) decision that this work would mark the end of Kierkegaard’s writing, “*Unscientific*” to its emphasis on subjectivity in contrast to the objective natural sciences and world-historical system builders, and “*Postscript to ‘Philosophical Fragments’*” to the fact that it develops ideas and jokes that are first put forward in that work, despite being five times its length.<sup>137</sup> A gargantuan 600-page treatise on the objective and subjective issues of the truth of Christianity, historical criticism, existential passion, and all of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous writing up until this point, *Postscript* is not always (or often) easy to read, but nearly a couple of centuries of reception have found it to be a gold-mine of philosophical insight and it has become part of the canon of great texts in continental philosophy. Here I will discuss what it has to offer on the subjects of artistry, indirect communication, direct communication and “task” and analyse how it can be read as an outworking of Kierkegaard’s Christian artistic vocation at this point in his career.

### **Indirect Communication as an Art**

At first glance *Postscript* might seem to be unfavourably disposed towards poetry, artistry and the aesthetic. Stressing as it does the importance of lived existence as opposed to mere speculation or fantasy, the “poet” is often set up in this text as an example of someone who preoccupies themselves with the latter, choosing to spend more time in the realm of imaginative possibilities than the

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about how he has “plagiarised” from the whole of humanity in order to compose his own “poem” or “proverb”. See *PF*, 34-36. *Fragments* also contains the fecund line, speaking indirectly of the incarnation of Christ, “Presumably it could occur to a human being to poetise himself in the likeness of the god or the god in the likeness of himself, but not to poetise that the god poetised himself in the likeness of a human being...” –*PF*, 36.

<sup>136</sup> *CUP* II, vii, 5.

<sup>137</sup> *CUP* II, vii, ix, xi respectively.

concrete world of existential actualisation of those possibilities. For example, “For the poet, actuality is merely an occasion that prompts him to abandon actuality in order to seek the ideality of possibility. Poetic pathos, therefore, is essentially fantasy.”<sup>138</sup> And similarly we hear that reality and poetry have little to do with one another: “Poetry makes one attempt after the other to look like actuality, which is altogether unpoetic.”<sup>139</sup> For this reason, Kierkegaard is often seen as espousing a negative, critical view of poetry and the artistic during this period and Walsh notes that much in the writings from 1845 onwards, including *Postscript*, seems to indicate him moving “away” from the poetic.<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, a careful and close reading of the *Postscript* reveals that Climacus is not as completely denigrating of poetry and artistry as he first may seem. True to form, it is not the practice of *any* kind of poetry of which he disapproves, rather it is the manner in which it is done, the “how” of the poetry. And, while he is sometimes disparaging of “the poet” and “poetry” (Danish: *Poesie*), he often speaks positively of “artists” and “artistry” (Danish: *Kunst*), particularly when he is dealing with the theme of communication.<sup>141</sup> In fact *Postscript* has a great deal to say on the subject of communication which is applicable to the subject of artistic communication. Both “indirect” and “direct” communication appear and are discussed in the main body of the text, sometimes for lengthy passages. A highly important passage for this study is found under the heading “*The subjective thinker is aware of the dialectic of communication.*”<sup>142</sup> Here Climacus discusses the

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<sup>138</sup> *CUP I*, 388.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>140</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 167, see also Chapter 6.

<sup>141</sup> This reinforces the choice of the word “artist” rather than “poet” in my title, for which see my Introduction.

<sup>142</sup> *CUP I*, 72-80.

way in which a subjective thinker, as opposed to an objective thinker, approaches the whole area of communication. One of the chief characteristics of subjectively-attuned, dialectical communication here is “Double-reflection”.<sup>143</sup> This is the reflection of inwardness that is a part of subjective communication, the phenomenon whereby the subjective thinker not only communicates his message, which is reflected in the act of communication, but reflects upon it himself as he communicates, in personal, private, existential inwardness. We then read that this difference between subjective and objective communication must manifest itself in the form of the communication, which for the former

must artistically possess just as much reflection as [the subjective communicator] himself, existing in his thinking, possesses. Artistically, please note, for the secret does not consist in his enunciating the double-reflection directly, since such an enunciation is a direct contradiction.<sup>144</sup>

Thus the subjective communicator must possess enough skill to hide his own double-reflection from the form of communication, to a degree that merits the term “artistic”. (In fact double-reflection is itself called an “art” by Climacus.)<sup>145</sup> This is indirect communication. The person who employs simple direct speech is apparently unaware of double-reflection, and so there can be huge misunderstandings when it is practiced. As Edward Mooney explains, “The life task of an ethicoreligious individual is to communicate an ethicoreligious identity...Such an expression cannot be directly communicated for the simple reason that direct communication leaves out the communicator’s subjectivity”.<sup>146</sup> But by contrast the subjective thinker sets both himself and his hearer “free” by his

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>146</sup> Edward F. Mooney, ‘Exemplars, Inwardness and Belief: Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication’ in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript* ed. Robert Perkins (Macon.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 146.

awareness and hiding of his own double-reflection, and “the secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free, and for that very reason he [the communicator] must not communicate himself directly; indeed, it is even irreligious to do so.”<sup>147</sup> By negative implication, indirectness is not only an art form, but the properly religious art form, when it comes to communication: The religious communicator must retain an awareness of their own double-reflection but also contrive artfully to conceal this in the communication.

It is particularly irreligious to communicate directly because the religious domain is the most subjective domain, Climacus elaborates.<sup>148</sup> And by now we have heard it stressed repeatedly that to communicate a conviction within this subjective realm is an art and it is an “artistic communication”.<sup>149</sup> Climacus now unpacks this in a key section which effectively associates artistry, inwardness and indirect communication with one another:

Actually to communicate such a conviction [in this case the conviction that truth is inwardness—and we note that this is precisely the conviction that Climacus/Kierkegaard is communicating through the indirect communication of *Postscript*] would require art and self-control...enough art to vary inexhaustibly, just as inwardness is inexhaustible, the doubly reflected form of the communication. The more art, the more inwardness—yes, if he had considerable art, it would even be quite possible for him to say that he was using it with the assurance of being able the next moment to ensure the inwardness of the communication, because he was infinitely concerned to preserve his own inwardness...<sup>150</sup>

The implication is that a subjective communicator must constantly stand guard against letting his own doubly reflected responses “slip” into his communication in

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<sup>147</sup> *CUP* I, 74.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

order to preserve its ability to provoke genuine subjective response and existential reflection in the receiver. So this means that the communicator has to vary constantly the manner in which he communicates—a real art. This is in essence a theory of indirect communication and this is the first time it appears in Kierkegaard’s published writings. Very interestingly, Climacus observes how the employment of this method will not leave the artist with a final reassurance of the quantity of people he has been able to help to genuine subjective reflection, since “the artistic way, despite his utmost efforts, would leave undecided whether or not he had helped anyone” at all.<sup>151</sup>

It is worth noting here that Climacus suggests that in employing this method of communication, the subjective thinker is being Godlike, just as God does not “decide” whether anyone will receive his message but preserves free human response in his communication of himself. For of God he says that “No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can.”<sup>152</sup> This is borne out in the way in which God is omnipresent in creation and yet nowhere directly observable, because the awareness of his presence is only made possible by a free, inward, subjective response to him. Similarly, God revealing himself in the form of an ordinary human being displays this quality of indirectness, leaving human beings freely able to respond with acceptance or offense, and this is called a “deception” as it is in the earlier work *Philosophical Fragments*, which is “continually also the possibility of the truth”.<sup>153</sup> As such, the artistic method of indirect communication is in *Postscript*, following on from ideas in the ‘script’ of *Fragments*, identified as being

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 246.

an imitation both of God's method of communicating generally and of God's self-communication specially as Christ via the incognito of the incarnation. In the same way that God does not reveal himself directly and does not force his respondents to react to him in a coercive way, neither does the indirect artist. In the same way that Christ both discloses and veils himself in a form which does not directly and straightforwardly display himself, so does the indirect artist. This will repay further consideration later in my project when I come to assess the relative merits of "indirect" and "direct" communication in relation to their pertinence to the New Testament example of Christ.

### **Climacus on Direct Communication**

During this exposition of indirect communication Climacus presents thoughts on "direct communication" as well. It is usually used as a contrasting example of the dispassionate and unreflective methods of objective thinking. Direct communication is trying to say something to someone else while naively and ignorantly both failing to acknowledge that the communication will have its own subjective resonances in the recipient and to remember to reflect subjectively on one's own communication. It is like simply telling somebody "There is a God that exists" without bearing in mind the possibility of their personal commitment to this idea or having any personal commitment to it oneself. This means that Climacus does not look favourably upon direct communication. Indeed, the direct communicator "is a fraud towards God...a fraud towards himself...toward another...that brings him into contradiction with his entire thought."<sup>154</sup> A fraud towards God because this is not the way that God or religious truths work, towards

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 75.

himself because he forgets that he is an existing person, towards another for the same reason, and in contradiction with his entire thought because he has completely forgotten to pay attention to the reality of what it means to be a subjective existent who thinks.

However, though Climacus speaks negatively of direct communication, he does later in the text deal at some length with the communicative genre of the “religious discourse.” Here it is of paramount importance that “The religious address can deal with everything, though it must continually bring everything into relation to the absolute category of religiousness”,<sup>155</sup> and also that “Essentially, the religious address has [the task] of *uplifting through suffering*.”<sup>156</sup> His explication of the religious address largely focuses on how it must differ from poetry in that it does not imaginatively reconstruct life but states plainly what is the case, relating its subject matter to the religious life which is characterised by passionate suffering; “for religiousness, poetry is a beautiful and amiable jest, whose consolation religiousness nevertheless rejects, because it is precisely in suffering that the religious breathes”.<sup>157</sup> It is not clear on these pages whether Climacus has now switched to talking about direct communication, and/or if he is referring to Kierkegaard’s *Upbuilding Discourses*, which do not sound so different from “uplifting” discourses. To be sure, he is not now talking about religious discourses in the same way that he discussed simplistic, unreflective direct communication before, because he says that “When the religious speaker forgets that his setting is inwardness and the individual’s relation to himself, he then has essentially the same task as the poet and should keep his mouth shut, because the poet can do it

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 436.

better.”<sup>158</sup> Nonetheless, a discourse which treats the religious as an absolute category and relates everything to it is a more direct form of communication than an indirect, pseudonymous work that works much more self-consciously to deceive and to conceal its author. Probably this is an example of how, as was discussed above in relation to *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, in Kierkegaard and Climacus’ thought the dialectic of communication means that *all* communication is to some extent indirect and so even the *more* direct communicator of the religious address must be aware of the importance of inward response.

### **Existence Artists**

In spite of this rich and dense discussion of communication, most of the *Postscript* is not concerned with communication but with *existence*, although we will see that ultimately the two do not turn out to be very different. What is relevant for this study with regards to “existence” is that, in considering the way a subjectively aware person should relate themselves to existence, Climacus ends up talking about becoming an “artist in existing”. The fact that the term “artist” is used here and not “poet” is again characteristic of this text. While the two have sometimes been synonymous in the authorship, and earlier in *The Concept of Irony* and *Either/Or* Kierkegaard has used the term “living poetically” to mean much the same thing, it seems that in *Postscript* he prefers to use the term “existence artist” rather than “existence poet” to talk about his favoured mode of existential poesis in distinction from the more Romantic, daydreaming, inactive “poet” he disparages. What is surprising is that, as Walsh notes, secondary commentators have paid very little attention to the characterisation of the subjective thinker as an existence

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 437.

artist in this text.<sup>159</sup> I therefore join Walsh in calling attention to this important theme, but here with specific focus on how it relates to Kierkegaard's own artistic vocation.

The first time the idea appears in the text is when Climacus observes that "In Greece a thinker was not a stunted existing person who produced works of art, but he himself was an existing work of art."<sup>160</sup> Before long he is developing this idea more extensively under another heading, "*The Subjective Thinker; His Task; His Form, That Is, His Style*"<sup>161</sup> beneath which is found a passage that is somewhat confusing but extremely significant:

the subjective thinker is not a poet even if he is also a poet, not an ethicist even if he is also an ethicist, but is also a dialectician and is himself essentially existing, whereas the poet's existence is inessential in relation to the poem, and likewise the ethicist's in relation to the teaching, and the dialectician's in relation to the thought. The subjective thinker is not a scientist-scholar; he is an artist. To exist is an art. The subjective thinker is aesthetic enough for this life to have aesthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, dialectical enough in thinking to master it.<sup>162</sup>

Though it contains the important definition "To exist is an art", equating a subjectively aware life with the creative work of an artist, this passage is confusing because it seems to suggest that a subjective thinker, who is an artist, can be simultaneously "a poet" and "not a poet". It seems as though at this point Kierkegaard is completely ambivalent towards the term "poet" and one might be forgiven for wishing that he would just make up his mind about the word once and

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<sup>159</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 196, footnote 3. Walsh points out for example how Louis Mackey in *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, C. Stephen Evans in *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript"*, and David Gouwens in *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the Imagination* all at most briefly mention the idea of the subjective thinker as existence artist, but do not go on to examine it at any length.

<sup>160</sup> *CUP I*, 303.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

for all. But what Climacus seems to be acknowledging here is a hierarchy within his subjective schema whereby existential artistry takes precedence over poetry and yet it is still possible to be an existential artist and at the same time to be a poet—someone who makes poetical productions. It is certainly possible that this is what Kierkegaard himself aspired to be. Yet, by acknowledging this hierarchy, the truly subjective poet who is sensitive to the dialectic of existence must always be aware that his or her poetry does not correspond to actuality and always seek to awaken others to reflective subjectivity. In this way, the existence artist can *use* poetry or *employ* poetry in the service of subjectivity and existential art. This seems to be what Climacus means when he says that “The subjective *thinker’s form*, the form of his communication, is his *style*...His form must first and last be related to existence, and in this regard he must have at his disposal the poetic, the ethical, the dialectical, the religious.”<sup>163</sup>

However, in sketching out this subtle distinction, Climacus warns the would-be poet to tread very carefully. In one place he says “With regard to the religious, the point is that [the person who was only poetically relating to actuality] has passed through the ethical. A religious poet, therefore, is in an awkward position.”<sup>164</sup> He explains that this awkwardness stems from the fact that only imaginatively relating oneself to the religious through poetry does not amount to subjective appropriation, which is what religion requires. The religious poet must be very cautious not just to poetise the religious but to actualise it in his or her own subjective existence. All of this leads to a highly nuanced, and in the end still somewhat ambivalent, view of poetry and the poetic. In Walsh’s words, “Climacus

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 388.

works out a positive concept of the poetic in an existential context even as he is critical of poetry in those forms that abstract from existence.”<sup>165</sup> At the most positive, however, Climacus allows later in the book that “Although a poetic production is in the medium of imagination, a poet-existence may at times provide a *confinuum* [border territory] to the religious, although qualitatively different from it.”<sup>166</sup> So poetising can come close to religiousness, to use a spatial metaphor, but it can never amount to full and proper religiousness, subjectivity and existential appropriation. The term reserved for these in the *Postscript* is, as shown, not poetry but “art”.<sup>167</sup> Ideally, for Climacus, there is an overlap or commonality in life between the art of existing and the art of communicating indirectly. Climacus’s ideal artist is someone who is aware of their own subjectivity, existentially appropriates the truth of Christianity in their life in a way that makes it like a work of art, and communicates this truth to others in an indirect, equally artistic manner. Perhaps this is Kierkegaard’s ideal artist too, and the artist that Kierkegaard aspired to be.

### **The Task in *Postscript***

This brings me to the vocational subject of “task” in *Postscript*, where the term appears frequently. Indeed, what has been examined above on the topic of indirect communication could easily be seen as a kind of commentary on Kierkegaard’s own communicative task. In *Postscript*, the word “task” is used to refer to what Climacus would have as the goal of the individual who wishes to

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<sup>165</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 220.

<sup>166</sup> *CUP I*, 443.

<sup>167</sup> In her treatment of *Postscript*, Walsh does not seem to make this distinction. But on my reading of Climacus, he prefers the term “existence artist” and its cognates to “existence poet”, of which I find no instance in the text. This is another interesting support of the choice of the term “Artist” in my title.

become genuinely subjective. This means that he often states “the task is...” and then casts his definition slightly differently depending on exactly what aspect of becoming subjective he is examining at that moment, be it a more general or technical aspect. So, to choose two examples, at the same time “to become subjective should be the highest task assigned to every human being”<sup>168</sup> and “the task is to practice one’s relation to one’s absolute *telos* so that one continually has it within while continuing in the relative objectives of existence.”<sup>169</sup> In other words, the task of every human being, according to the *Postscript*, is to become an authentic self, to maximise subjectivity. It is not yet clear how far this *telos*, for a Christian existent with a flair for literary art such as Kierkegaard himself, should incorporate within it a kind of purposeful communication. Ideas about communication are strongly visible in the *Postscript*, and visibly connected to the idea of becoming subjective, but ideas about “communication” and “task” have not yet become as clearly intertwined in the way that they will be later in the writings. However, they are closer than one might think. As I alluded to earlier, eventually Christianity itself is called an “existence-communication” by Climacus, late in the work but repeatedly.<sup>170</sup> A Christian existence indirectly communicates that it is subjective and that it is subjectively oriented in faith towards the absolute paradox of the God-man simply by virtue of being what it is. So more fully formed thoughts about the connection between the task of Christianity and artistic communication may not be too far off. They are hinted at when in the “Conclusion” to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Climacus says that even baptised persons may need to become Christians in a different sense, but for these people “it is not

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<sup>168</sup> *CUP* I, 163.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 560, 564, 570, 608.

information that is lacking, something else is lacking, and one human being cannot directly communicate this something else to another.”<sup>171</sup> One can, perhaps, *indirectly* communicate this something else to another, and maybe it is Kierkegaard’s task to do this as a Christian artist.

### **“A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature”**

Fascinatingly, and without a doubt convolutedly, there is in fact a long section in *Postscript* which I have not mentioned until now where Climacus applies his theory of indirect communication to the artwork of a certain prolific pseudonymous authorship that has come before him. In “A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature”, Kierkegaard, in the voice of Climacus, offers an interpretation of his entire artistic production so far, casting it in the light of indirect communication.<sup>172</sup> In a highly ironic and contrived manner, Climacus narrates how just as he was preparing to set about communicating the idea that truth is subjectivity in 1843, a book called *Either/Or* by Victor Eremita appeared.<sup>173</sup> He then proceeds to offer an interpretation of the communicative function of this work, followed by every work in the authorship so far up to the most recent *Stages on Life’s Way*. Claiming that he is only a reader of the other pseudonymous authors, Climacus says that he is “pleased that the pseudonymous authors, presumably aware of the relation of indirect communication to truth as inwardness, have themselves not said anything or misused a preface to take an official position in the production”, as if authors were the best interpreters of their own words or as if strong, *didactic* declarations of authorial intention, which the authors refrain from,

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 614.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 251-300.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 251.

could really be helpful to readers.<sup>174</sup> For example, in the first case of *Either/Or*, “That there is no conclusion and no final decision is an indirect expression for truth as inwardness” and Climacus sees the whole book as working as an indirect polemic against truth as speculative knowledge.<sup>175</sup>

*Either/Or's* decisive last sentence ended it on an upbuilding note, and Climacus narrates that he had wished to see this emphasised more definitely in the direction of the Christian-religious. And then, lo and behold! *Two Upbuilding Discourses* appeared from the pen of a one Magister Kierkegaard. “The upbuilding is a wider category” than the Christian, however, and the first eighteen *Upbuilding Discourses* “only use ethical categories of immanence” for Climacus, although he acknowledges that some did call them sermons.<sup>176</sup> In a footnote Climacus also discusses whether the *Upbuilding Discourses* are aesthetic. He states that they do incorporate an aesthetic element to a degree but allows that for an upbuilding discourse “it may be all right to include the poetic portrayal. But the decisive difference between the poet and the upbuilding speaker remains, namely...the aim of transposing everything into the upbuilding...to compel the stubborn person to disarm, to mitigate, to elucidate...”<sup>177</sup> In this fashion it is acknowledged that the *Upbuilding Discourses* also incorporate more indirect, poetic, “aesthetic” elements and that they are supposed to function in service of the religious also.<sup>178</sup> Now, after reviewing some of his theory of indirect communication again, telling the story of

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 252, 280.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 252. Cf. also “The absence of an author is a means of distancing.”

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 256, 257.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 257n.

<sup>178</sup> Climacus also affirms that the *Discourses*, like the pseudonymous texts, have both direct and indirect elements later when he says: “Just as the pseudonymous books, in addition to what they are directly, are indirectly a polemic against speculative thought, so also are the discourses, not by not being speculative, for they are indeed speculative, but by not being sermons.” –ibid., 272-3.

his coming up with it for the first time,<sup>179</sup> Climacus goes on to review the other pseudonymous books, all of which are interpreted as indirect communication of the idea that truth is inwardness in various ways, with an increasing differentiation between the ethical and the religious spheres as the authorship progresses. However, this sequence of publications only finally arrives at the *decisively* Christian-religious with the appearance of Climacus's own *Philosophical Fragments*, although that book does not name it as such. In this little pamphlet, Climacus tells us he attempted to place "Christianity indirectly into relation to what it means to exist, in bringing it through an indirect form into relation to a knowing reader", and that this was not done with direct communication since "Existing in what one understands cannot be directly communicated to an existing spirit, not even by God, still less by a human being."<sup>180</sup> Although Climacus does soon find himself wondering "whether this matter of indirect communication could not be directly communicated", he eventually sees this as an impatient inconsistency, because it is always better to minimise the importance of the communicator in seeking to cultivate inwardness.<sup>181</sup>

What is so interesting here is that Climacus interprets the authorship as serving indirectly to communicate to those who will hear it the maximally Christian-religious idea that truth is inward subjectivity: "That subjectivity,

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<sup>179</sup> This includes the following insights: that he thought he should present his ideas in an existing individuality and that this "should not be done didactically, since in my opinion the misfortune of our age was just that it had come to know too much and had forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is. Consequently, the form had to be indirect" (ibid., 259); that "inwardness...when applied to communication, is the inexhaustible renewal and fertility of expression. Inwardness cannot be communicated directly, because expressing it directly is externality..." (ibid., 260); and that "in our age such matters are not talked about, for example, whether it is legitimate, as we say, to win a person for the truth...if he [has] the art of persuasion...whether he has the right to use it to win adherents for the truth. Or should he, humble before God...rather use all [his] gifts to prevent the direct relationship..." (ibid., 260-1).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 277, 278.

inwardness, is truth was my thesis. I have tried to show how in my view the pseudonymous authors tend towards this thesis, which at its maximum is Christianity.”<sup>182</sup> Such a retro-perspectival interpretation of the potential religious function of the authorship thus far is absent from the *Journals* of the time, although the idea of indirect communication has been slowly forming there. It is absent from the time of the composition of the works also, including in the case of the earliest *Either/Or*. But it now appears in the centre of one of the pseudonymous works themselves, jokingly offered in the voice of one the pseudonyms. This evidence strongly suggests a reading of the authorship as beginning, at the same time as being religious, with no conscious documented reflection on the method of indirect communication working in the *service* of the religious, however indirect it may have been. However, as it continues through this, its first phase, such reflection does appear in the *Journals*, until at last it now breaks into the published text of *Postscript* in the voice of Climacus, who specifically applies it to what has been published before.

### ***Postscript as Indirect Kakangelism***

All that remains in my survey of the main body of *Postscript* is to interrogate the question of how the work *itself*, the most recent publication in this highly subjective indirect output, might function as a piece of indirect communication in service of the religious. Walsh points out how, following the “Glance” at a recent effort in Danish literature, on Climacus’s terms it is possible “to create external products of art that come close to reflecting actuality in an ethical-religious manner [i.e. indirectly] and that serve to direct us toward actuality rather than

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 278.

away from it in the realisation of poetic ideality in our own lives”, as in the case of the preceding authorship.<sup>183</sup> The question of whether *Postscript* itself does this is pertinent. To remind us, *Postscript* is partly pseudonymous, though it blurs the boundaries more than most other texts between pseudonymous and veronymous. So it is at least in some broad sense “indirect” and it can be read as working “indirectly” to awaken its readers to what Christianity really is. Arguably it even works to do this in a more “direct” manner as well: The pseudonymous character Climacus tells his readers repeatedly that he is not himself a Christian but is looking to describe what Christianity is from the outside. He tells us that he is looking to make difficulties everywhere and jolt readers out of their complacency as being part of nominal “Christendom” into the realisation that Christianity actually requires some kind of passionate subjective commitment on the part of the individual and not just being born in a certain place and time or paying lip service to a certain set of objective doctrines. Thus the *Postscript* sets itself up as having a religious, artistic task: to awaken readers in Christendom to the possibility of genuine Christianity. It is then in a sense a piece of “indirect evangelism” or “indirect kakangelism”—bad news, though the ultimate goal is positive.<sup>184</sup>

The text of the *Postscript* also presents *itself* as a piece of indirect communication in indirect, not authoritative or straightforward, service of the

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<sup>183</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 221.

<sup>184</sup> The *Journals* from this period, as noted, are relatively silent on the subject of purpose and task while *Postscript* is being written and before. As we have seen, Kierkegaard had begun to mention the idea of indirect communication in those pages, but the theory had not yet been fully developed, certainly not to the degree that it is in *Postscript*. Further, it had not yet been explicitly linked to the idea of Kierkegaard’s own religious task. He did start to reflect more on this connection soon after (see below), but this was only as, and once, *Postscript* was published. In other words, like the earlier authorship the *Postscript* is not recorded as planned indirect communication serving a religious purpose in the *Journals*, except for in reflection and reinterpretation that comes after it is written, and that is appended to it.

religious. So one could say that *diachronically* speaking it is not possible to cross-reference the purposive character of *Postscript* with contemporaneous statements from the *Journals*, but *synchronically* speaking it reads as a text with a strong, purposeful, religious character. It seems that, at this point, Kierkegaard was reflecting on the communicative function of his authorship, but those reflections appeared in his actual published authorship more than his private notebooks. One might therefore indulge the instinct of perusing *Postscript* for any more remaining potential references to Kierkegaard's own vocation. And there is one (more) which bears examination. In a passage early on in *Postscript*, Climacus writes

Let us imagine an individual who stands at the beginning of life. He now resolves, for example, to spend his whole life pursuing the truth and actualising the known truth. So in the moment of resolution he rejects everything, everything, including, of course, world-historical importance. But now, what if momentous importance comes to him little by little as the fruit of his labour? Well if it comes as the fruit of his labour—but it never does that. If it comes, then it is **guidance** who adds it to his ethical striving in itself, and consequently it is not the fruit of his labour. It is a *pro* that must be regarded as a temptation just as much as any *contra*. It is the most dangerous of all temptations, and many a glorious beginning in the hypertension of the infinite has grown slack in what for the fallen one became a soft, effeminate embrace.<sup>185</sup>

This passage is striking because it recalls the famous Gilleleje entry where Kierkegaard, at “the beginning of life”, determines to pursue truth that is true for him. It is also important because it contains a reference to “guidance” (Danish: *Styrelsen*),<sup>186</sup> which at the end of the *Postscript* is linked to the published writings in the “First and Last Explanation” (see below). The point of the passage is that it is a temptation for a labourer to think that momentous importance comes to his work by his own efforts, when it is rather the sovereign hand of divine guidance that engineers such importance. This idea very easily transposes onto a

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<sup>185</sup> *CUP* I, 138, bold emphasis mine.

<sup>186</sup> Sometimes translated ‘Guidance’, ‘governance’, ‘Governance’, ‘providence’ or ‘Providence’.

consideration of Kierkegaard's own experience. It cannot be proven, but Kierkegaard could very well have had in mind his own development when he was penning these words. Certainly he goes on to speak of his own work in these terms. If he did have it in mind, it is highly telling that such an idea appears in a pseudonymous work that he was writing for the public before it appears as a fully developed, consciously employed, premeditated theory in his private journals. Indeed, as I will examine elsewhere, the first reference to "guidance" in the *Journals* comes from March 1846—after the *Postscript* has been published.

It has now been shown that the *Postscript* has a large amount to offer towards a Kierkegaardian theory of indirect artistic communication. It is highly ironic that this theory is explicated in a pseudonymous work that is itself indirect and seeks to communicate subjective, existential, religious ideas. Indeed, Climacus narrates that, when he had first comprehended that people had forgotten what existential inwardness was, it "became clear to me that if I wanted to communicate anything about this, the main point must be that my presentation would be made in an *indirect* form."<sup>187</sup> Like a perceptive prophet foreseeing the movement of post-structuralism that would appear in Europe in the next century, we can envision Kierkegaard concealing himself behind this sentence, hiding behind his pseudonym, forbidding us to gaze into the depths of his own double-reflection and make solid conclusions about the extent to which he had consciously employed a theory of indirect communication by writing this text.<sup>188</sup> And yet, remaining in front of the text, there is a remarkable correspondence between Climacus's

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. "Kg anticipates some poststructuralist insights about the indeterminacy of language, but insists that responsibility for making sense lies with people, not texts or language itself." –Timothy Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 36.

narrative about his own work and Kierkegaard's use of the device of "Climacus" in the first place. The facts remain, in the best sense we can make of the term "facts", that Kierkegaard wrote this book, that it was published under the name of a pseudonym, edited and with a last word by Kierkegaard, and that it has a great deal to say about indirectly communicating through art in order to awaken subjectivity. So it is a piece of indirect artistic communication that works to communicate ideas about indirect artistic communication, a work that itself practices the theory it attempts to formulate.

### **'A First and Last Explanation'**

There is one last element in *Postscript* to note, that last word which comes at its end. When it was eventually published, to it was appended a short piece of direct communication in Kierkegaard's own voice titled "A First and Last Explanation". This appendix states his opinion of the relevance of his authorship at this time, and in the *Journals* he says that he had decided he owed it to the truth to publish it, "leaving the outcome to God's will and accepting everything from his hand as a good and perfect gift".<sup>189</sup> In the Explanation, Kierkegaard acknowledges that he is the author of all the pseudonymous works thus far and goes on to claim "My pseudonymity or polyonymity has not had an *accidental* basis in my *person*...but an *essential* basis in the production itself".<sup>190</sup> It had been essential apparently because the production "poetically required an indiscriminateness with regard to [human values and emotions] which is ideally limited only by psychological consistency, which no factually actual person dares to allow himself or can want to allow himself in the moral limitations of actuality". In other words,

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<sup>189</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 3 / JP 5*, 5872 (1846).

<sup>190</sup> *CUP I*, 625.

factually actual people cannot display the kind of indiscriminateness and consistency that he wanted to display in his work, so he had to invent what he calls “poetically actual subjectivities” in order to do that.<sup>191</sup> In essence, this is a published, veronymous proclamation of the method of indirect communication which he had been starting to reflect upon in his *Journals*, which had appeared in fuller form in Climacus’s voice in *Postscript* and which is now applied retroactively to all of the pseudonymous works explicitly by Kierkegaard. Proclaiming himself the indirectly communicating “author of the authors”,<sup>192</sup> Kierkegaard also distances himself from the pseudonyms, to the extent that he makes the infamous and highly divisive claim here that “in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me”,<sup>193</sup> stating his wish and prayer that people attribute quotations from the works to the pseudonymous authors.<sup>194</sup>

Having made this plea, a term observed above that will become crucial later on now appears for the first time in print in overt connection with the authorship: “guidance”. Guidance in this context is Kierkegaard’s term for the way in which divine cooperation has assisted him in his authorship by providentially steering it in its overall direction. It is almost a personal title for God himself. Kierkegaard thanks guidance “who in such multitudinous ways has encouraged my endeavour, has encouraged it over four and one-quarter years” (since it began with *Either/Or*) and for whom he says “I can truly testify that I staked my life to the utmost of my capacity” even if it does not look to the worldly observer that he has achieved very

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 625-6.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 627.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 626.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 627.

much of importance.<sup>195</sup> In reality, the pseudonymous authors *are* important, but this importance does not consist in their making any new proposal “but precisely in the opposite, in wanting to have no importance, in wanting, at a remove that is the distance of double-reflection, once again to read through solo, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human existence-relationships.”<sup>196</sup> The (re)interpretation of the method of the pseudonymous works, the identification of guidance as working through the authorship, and this affirmation of their purpose as being indirectly to awaken reflective inwardness—all of these ideas serve to illustrate the concept of his artistic vocation that Kierkegaard had arrived at by this stage. These will be themes that he returns to as he continues to meditate on guidance, and the “First and Last Explanation” will prove crucial later on with regard to critical interpretations of the whole, completed authorship. It may have been the first Explanation of its kind, but it certainly did not turn out to be the last.

### ***Concluding Unscientific Postscript: Conclusion?***

I conclude my investigation into *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* with the following summary: At first glance it may seem that *Postscript* is disparaging towards poetry and the artistic, but in fact it speaks of indirect communication as a kind of art, where the subjective communicator is aware of their own subjectivity in double reflection but conceals this in order to preserve a free response on the part of the receiver. Climacus also talks of God as an indirect communicator, both generally through the glory of creation and specially through the incognito of the incarnate, paradoxical God-man. In contrast to this form of indirect

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 628.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 629-30.

communication, direct communication is set up as an opposing type, which leaves out subjectivity on the part of both the communicator and the recipient, but there is some ambiguity in the text as to whether or not religious discourses can be direct in this way to a degree. Indirect communication conversely aims at maximising subjectivity and subjectivity-maximising existence is also spoken of by Climacus as a kind of art to be practiced by existence-artists. Indeed, it is the proper “task” of every human being to maximise subjectivity and there are hints that for certain people this can involve making indirect artworks in the service of the religious. One of those people is the author who is responsible for the recent pseudonymous “Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature”, along with Søren Kierkegaard, the author of eighteen *Upbuilding Discourses*, and Climacus joins this effort with his *Fragments* by working to communicate indirectly the thesis that truth is inwardness in a more decisively Christian-religious way. *Postscript* itself can be read as the climax of this development, and as a piece of indirect ev(/kak)angelism seeking to awaken people to the truth of Christianity. And Magister Kierkegaard himself appends his explanation to the text that this is precisely what it all is, and that he is the one who has written it. Here he concludes his authorship. Or does he?

## Chapter Two: Direct-Indirection

1846-1848

### THE CORSAIR AFFAIR

#### *Journals, 1846*

The *Journals* from 1843 to 1845 comprise only 150 pages or so. This is telling. If Kierkegaard was meditating elaborately on his methodology and vocation during this time, as the text of *Postscript* might suggest, he did not record it in his own personal notes. In spite of this, from 1846, the *Journals* begin to grow again.<sup>1</sup> If one peruses them for signs of methodological meditations, at first the findings might again be discouraging. Indeed, just as was the case with *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard says that he writes simply because he feels a compulsion to do so and because the works pour out of him spontaneously. In one entry he says that his pseudonymous writings come from a place somewhere between his melancholy and his “thorn in the flesh”, whatever that is.<sup>2</sup> A little later we find him saying “I require the magic of artistic production in order to forget all of life’s crude trivialities”.<sup>3</sup> These confessions reinforce the reading that envisages Kierkegaard as writing out of some kind of creative impulse linked to his emotions as a kind of therapeutic exercise at this time, as opposed to the living out of a religious idea of vocation.

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<sup>1</sup> See Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 411.

<sup>2</sup> *Pap VII A 27 / JP 5*, 5885 (1846).

<sup>3</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 168 / JP 4*, 4323 (1846); see also *Pap IV A 110 / JP 5*, 5666; *Pap VIII 1 A 27 / JP 5*, 5890; *Pap X 1 A 422 / JP 6*, 6416; *Pap X 2 A 92 / JP 6*, 6507; *Pap X 5 A 105 / JP 6*, 6840 (1846) for similar confessions.

Thompson, as usual psychologising somewhat, puts forward this view in the following way: "Without friends, family or confidants, Kierkegaard was emptying out his thoughts and feelings through his pseudonyms. His pen rushed across the page not because he enjoyed it but because he felt he *must* write, must drain the watershed of ideas and fancies that he had built up over the years."<sup>4</sup> There is clearly an element of this to be found in the text. At the same time, just as meditations on religious motives for writing *are* found in the works he was now producing, he may also have been considering them privately. Evidence of this has occurred sporadically up until this point in the form of a scattered series of cryptic journal entries to do with indirect communication and "destiny". Perhaps it would take a particular crisis or event to bring these cryptic reflections and meditations on his religious task to the fore of Kierkegaard's mind. Whether or not such a speculative theory is correct, the actual facts of what happened are that a particular crisis-event *did* take place in 1846 and that after this happened written reflections on his own religious task began to increase exponentially, along with the volume of the journal entries.

This event was Kierkegaard's famous run-in with the satirical newspaper-journal *The Corsair*.<sup>5</sup> Late in 1845, Kierkegaard had chanced upon an article by a man called P. L. Møller poking fun at him and Frater Taciturnus, a character that had been created as one of the contributors to *Stages on Life's Way*.<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard retaliated early in 1846 by publishing a satirical article of his own which exposed Møller's association with *The Corsair*, something which Møller did not want made

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<sup>4</sup> Thompson, *Kierkegaard*, 141.

<sup>5</sup> Documented in English translation in *COR*.

<sup>6</sup> See *COR*, xii.

public.<sup>7</sup> The result was that he was ridiculed and mocked, to a real extent persecuted, for the next few months by *The Corsair*, including via a series of cruel cartoons caricaturing aspects of both his personality and physicality.<sup>8</sup> The ensuing impact on Kierkegaard must have been monumental and the event became defining for his sense of vocation. Thompson argues that it was through the *Corsair* affair that Kierkegaard “came to see himself as precisely the kind of person the times required”.<sup>9</sup> Even the deconstructive, ironic Garff agrees that “In Kierkegaard’s consciousness, the episode with *The Corsair* marked a new beginning”<sup>10</sup> and adds that “much more markedly than before, it...now [became] true that ‘to be an author is a deed’”.<sup>11</sup> For it is in response to the persecution precipitated by the *Corsair* affair that Kierkegaard appears to have been provoked to set down a concept of his own vocation as a Christian artist in writing for the first time. After this event we start to find entries such as: “The literary and social and political situation requires an exceptional individual—the question is whether there is any one in the realm who is fitted for this task except me...”<sup>12</sup>

What this task could be will become clear in due course. For now what is important is that Kierkegaard, apparently prompted by the *Corsair* affair, was beginning to write more explicitly and urgently about his own task in his journals. An entry of 9<sup>th</sup> March 1846 headed “REPORT” is extremely important for my purposes. Here Kierkegaard writes:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *Kierkegaard*, 194.

<sup>10</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 411.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 412, quoting *Pap VII 1 A 99 / JP 5*, 5888 (1846).

<sup>12</sup> *Pap VII A 221 / JP 5*, 5961 (1846). Cf. the following on purpose and martyrdom: *Pap VI A 119 / JP 5*, 5842; *Pap VII 1 A 120 / JP 5*, 5907; *Pap VII 1 A 229 / JP 5*, 5966; *Pap VIII 1 A 43 / JP 2*, 2090.

As frequently happens to me, for all my deliberation, an increment emerges due not to me but to guidance. It seems always that I understand far better afterwards whatever I had given most thought to, both what it means ideally and that it's just what I should do...Two things in particular occupy me: (1) That I remain true to my existence-idea whatever the cost; (2) That for me it becomes in the religious sense as ennobling as possible.<sup>13</sup>

This entry is very important for the present investigation for a number of reasons. Firstly, it contains an admission, as has been and will continue to be a re-emergent theme, that Kierkegaard did not have a clear idea of his vocation when he commenced his work but that that understanding came later when he reflected back upon it led, as he now believes, by “guidance”.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, it shows that at this time Kierkegaard was occupied “in particular” with his sense of vocation, and he refers to this “existence-idea” as if it is now something that exists clearly in his mind, a step forwards from the youthful Gilleleje entry where he was still searching for it. Thirdly, it shows how this “existence-idea” is for Kierkegaard specifically connected to a “religious...ennobling”. While one still does not come across any journal entry that spells out exactly what this “existence-idea” concerning his religious vocation is in so many words, there is now visible written witness that there was such an existence-idea related to his vocation and that Kierkegaard was thinking about it.

But again, what actually was the idea? Part of its implications (at this stage) for Kierkegaard seems to have been that it resisted being disclosed, at least to the Danish public. For in the “REPORT” he goes on to say “I also could wish to make myself understood to one single person, to my reader. But I do not dare, for then I

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<sup>13</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 97, 98 / JP 5, 5886, 5887 (1846).*

<sup>14</sup> We saw this term first appear above in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

betray the idea.”<sup>15</sup> And later in the same entry he adds “note, my solitary secret is not my sorrow but precisely that I have the upper hand, that I turn what is hostile into something that serves my idea without it giving any hint of my doing so.” So an aspect of his guiding idea is allegedly that it can use non-disclosure and adverse circumstances, such as the persecution from the *Corsair*, to its advantage. Thus Kierkegaard believes that “No matter how significant or insignificant my writer’s existence, this much is certain: I am the only Danish writer who, because of my dialectical relation, is just so placed that it can suit the idea to have every possible lie, distortion gibberish and backbiting come out to confuse the reader...”<sup>16</sup> Again, authorial silence and the “idea” are connected. A final entry from March 1846, another part of which I have already quoted above, emphasises this relationship most fully:

...not only should an author’s production bear witness to the idea, the author’s own existence should correspond to the idea...Authors are supposed to do things for one another, criticise each other’s writing, talk about their immediate plans, etc...I have kept quite out of this, taking advantage of my pseudonymity. I have thereby done myself, in the finite sense, irreparable damage, offended people, forgone the support of all the small-talk tradition, and given my whole endeavour the appearance of chance and whim. Even if I were now to show how it all hangs together and what an immensely rigorous order lies behind it, no one would believe it—for it would be inconceivable that anyone with such a plan should be able to keep quiet about it. Oh, you fools! Only that one who *can* keep quiet has such a plan...<sup>17</sup>

Kierkegaard claims here that “an immensely rigorous order” hangs behind his authorship up until this point and says that only an author with such order can remain silent regarding it. However, presumably he does not have to keep this plan

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<sup>15</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 97, 98 / JP 5, 5886, 5887 (1846).*

<sup>16</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 99 / JP 5, 5888 (1846).*

<sup>17</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 104 / JP 5, 5891 (16 March 1846).*

quiet from *himself* as well, and mercifully there is actually some record made at this point of what this guiding idea behind his authorship actually *was*. Thankfully it can now be seen in the *Journals* of this time, often by completing some of the entries already quoted above. For example, *Pap VII 1 A 99* ends “it can suit the idea to have every possible lie, distortion, gibberish and backbiting come out to confuse the reader *and thereby help him to self-activity and prevent the direct relationship.*”<sup>18</sup> Kierkegaard’s “idea” apparently involves “helping” his readers to “self-activity” indirectly and covertly through the pseudonymous authorship, which is why it can be served by persecution and authorial silence, because these things minimise the importance of the author. He seems to have been putting this idea down on paper in more concrete terms even before the landmark “REPORT”, as when he says “Up to now I’ve been of service by helping the pseudonyms to become authors”,<sup>19</sup> states that “the task is not to come from the individual to the generation, but to attain to the individual from the individual through the generation”,<sup>20</sup> or muses on how the way that “several of Plato’s dialogues end with no conclusion has a far deeper reason than [he] had earlier thought. For this is a reproduction of Socrates’ maieutic skills, which activate the reader or listener himself, and therefore end not in any conclusion but with a sting.”<sup>21</sup>

This is the most complete conception of Kierkegaard’s vocation as a Christian artist that we have struck upon in the *Journals* so far. Prompted by the persecution from *The Corsair*, or so it looks, he had now deigned to commit it to paper in explicit form among his personal writings. Put plainly, by this point he

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<sup>18</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 99 / JP 5, 5888 (1846)*, italics mine.

<sup>19</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 9 / JP 5, 5877 (9 February 1846)*.

<sup>20</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 20 / JP 4, 4110 (1846)*.

<sup>21</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 74 / JP 4, 4266 (1846)*.

conceives of his vocation as a Christian artist as being to help his readers indirectly to reflect on their own existential situation and to point them in the direction of the Christian existence which they are capable of realising. He describes this as a “task” and a “purpose”, and though he acknowledges that his “thorn in the flesh”, breaking from Regine and making a penitential effort to “make up” for his past sins have all contributed to the writing, among other things, he believes that this is the true vocation to which God has called him in his creative artwork. He also says that he has come to understand this better and better as time has gone on. However, around the same time that these observations were being made, Kierkegaard seems to have been considering whether it would be wise if his authorship to come to an end. As mentioned above, he had originally planned to terminate the authorship with *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. So in February 1846 he writes: “My idea now is to qualify myself for the priesthood. For several months I have prayed to God to help me further, for it has long been clear to me that I ought not to continue as an author, which is something I want to be only totally or not at all.”<sup>22</sup> In March, once the *Postscript* had been published, he then writes “my activity as an author, God be praised, is now over. That has been granted me—and next to publishing *Either/Or* this is what I thank God for—to conclude it myself, to understand myself when to stop.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus with the “First and Last Explanation” that was appended to *Postscript* Kierkegaard ostensibly hoped to conclude his authorship and become a priest.<sup>24</sup> But, eventually, quite possibly because of the further reflections on his artistic task

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<sup>22</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 4 / JP 5*, 5873 (7 February 1846).

<sup>23</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 87, 98 / JP 2*, 1528, *JP 5*, 5887 (1846).

<sup>24</sup> See Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 412.

that were elicited during the *Corsair* affair, he changed his mind.<sup>25</sup> At some point the idea of ceasing to produce and becoming a pastor was postponed again, so that by November 1846 he can write a long entry lamenting that “For me to become a priest would present a great difficulty...I need the magic spell of productivity to help me forget all life’s mean pettiness.” If he will not become a priest, what will he do? He goes on:

I realise more and more that I am so constituted as precisely not to succeed in realising my ideals, while in another sense and humanly speaking I am outstripping them...It was indeed my ideal to simply become a husband and make that my whole life. And while I despair of attaining that goal, I become—lo and behold!—an author, and, who knows, maybe a first-rate one at that. My next ideal was to become a village priest and live in a quiet country setting, becoming an integral part of the small circle of people around me—and as I despair of attaining that, lo and behold! it is quite possible that I will again realise something which seems far greater.<sup>26</sup>

Apparently, *The Corsair* affair and all the contemporaneous reflections on his task eventually made Kierkegaard realise that, rather than becoming a priest, precisely what he should go on being was: a Christian author; a Christian creative artist.

### ***Two Ages***

I will now turn to Kierkegaard’s book *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review*. This text is important because it was the first to appear in print after the apparent conclusion to the authorship that was announced in the *Postscript* so it represents the first piece of literary output offered after Kierkegaard’s decision to carry on writing, this time under his own

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<sup>25</sup> The fact that the reception of *Postscript* was almost completely silent, or else poor, may have been an influence too. See *CUP* II, xv-xviii.

<sup>26</sup> *Pap* VII 1 A 169 / *JP* 5, 5947 (5 November 1846).

name again.<sup>27</sup> It was probably started earlier than the *Postscript* was published, in 1845, though it was finished in the early months of 1846 and so it is not controversial to suggest that it was influenced by the dealings with the *Corsair*.<sup>28</sup> The book is actually a book-length review of an anonymously published novella called *Two Ages* by a woman named Thomasine Gyllembourg, the mother of Kierkegaard's contemporary J. L. Heiberg, a Copenhagen theatre director, literary critic and writer.<sup>29</sup> Kierkegaard was an admirer of Mme Gyllembourg's work and he wrote *Two Ages* as a review of her latest offering and a commendation of her work as a whole, but also used it as a platform for publishing his thoughts about society, cultural epochs and group psychology. An occasion for reflection, as it were.

The original novella contrasts the mentality of two different generations, the passionate age of the French revolution and the later age of more removed rationalism, especially as each is reflected in family life, by following a series of interrelated protagonists across the two by means of a trans-generational love story. Kierkegaard tells us as much in the (here relatively uninteresting) first two parts of his review in which he offers an "aesthetic" interpretation of the novel, after saying in his Preface that he originally intended the piece for a literary journal but was prevented by its length.<sup>30</sup> In the Introduction he also tells us that the "life-view" of the author of *Two Ages* "lies on the boundary of the aesthetic and in the direction of the religious"; that where poetry stops, this author begins,

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<sup>27</sup> *TA*, x-xi; cf. also *Pap VII 1 A 9 / JP 5*, 5877 (February 1846).

<sup>28</sup> See *TA*, ix; M. Jamie Ferreira, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 116.

<sup>29</sup> For more on J. L. Heiberg and family, see Jon Stewart, *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> *TA*, 5. Although parts one and two are not so relevant here, they do contain some repetitions of Kierkegaard's idea that the purely poetic leads one away from actuality, and he says that he approves of aesthetic productions that avoid this, for which see Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 186-9.

because “poetry does not essentially reconcile with *actuality* but deals with ideality”;<sup>31</sup> and that having a life-view is extremely important for an author.<sup>32</sup> In Part Three, “Conclusions from a Consideration of the Two Ages”, he now returns to these more constructive themes and effectively uses his review of the novel as an opportunity to air his own ideas.<sup>33</sup>

These cluster around “the Age of Revolution” and “the Present Age” in turn. The Age of Revolution, we are told, is “is essentially passionate, and therefore it essentially has *form*” because passion always expresses itself in a form. Form and content go together, and therefore form essentially has “*culture*”—“the tension and resilience of the inner being are the measure of essential culture.”<sup>34</sup> The passionate man of the Age of Revolution is able to find an important “either/or” choice in every situation, and does not simply sit about reflecting on everything and becoming paralysed, but rather thrives on action.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, the Present Age is “essentially a sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence.”<sup>36</sup> The Present Age, the age of Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen and arguably of our own day, has no passion. It has no “primitivity”, meaning that no-one has experienced anything first-hand, but only via second-hand report and abstraction (in Kierkegaard’s day through the expanding print media and in ours perhaps via social media and news websites?). The symbol of the Present Age is paper money, which is not actually proper money but stands in for proper money that has real value.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, harking back to *From the Papers of One Still Living*. See also Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 186.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 60f.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

The problem is that an age that is devoid of passion is also devoid of inwardness, which go hand in hand for Kierkegaard, and so presumably it stunts the development of subjectivity as well.<sup>38</sup> Whereas *enthusiasm* is the positive unifying principle of the Age of Revolution, *envy* is the negative unifying principle in the Age of Reflection, because rather than doing anything, the reflectors of this age spend all their time making abstractions from reality and comparing themselves to everybody else (again, present-day social media comes to mind).<sup>39</sup> Envy stifles passion, because everyone is so afraid of reflection's judgment on them that they never actually *do* anything.<sup>40</sup> In order to further elaborate on this envious, passionless, reflective age, Kierkegaard coins a new specialist term, "levelling". Levelling is his name for the function within the Age of Reflection whereby everyone is brought down abstractly to the same level, reduced to being a secondary concept or a uniform number as opposed to a passionate, powerful person. Levelling is "a quiet, mathematical enterprise that avoids all agitation" and is "abstraction's victory over individuals".<sup>41</sup>

This makes levelling sound like a decidedly negative idea. And it is, except that Kierkegaard also says that this negative starting point can nevertheless serve as an occasion and opportunity for "levelled" individuals to be religiously educated in the process of vigorously examining levelling and introduced to the "inspired leap" that can free them from it.<sup>42</sup> To use an appropriate but anachronistic expression, levelling 'levels the playing field' so that abstractly all individuals begin from the same place. An awakening to the inadequacies of levelling can prompt a

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 82, 85.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 87-89.

dissatisfaction and searching that can lead an individual to a discovery of the religious sphere of life. After thus explaining how levelling can dialectically function as a negative catalyst for religiousness, Kierkegaard then returns to his polemic, now directing it against the spirit of levelling, which he identifies as the “public...a monstrous abstraction” idealised from actual people which develops phantasmally with the aid of the press.<sup>43</sup> In the Age of Reflection everything is done so that the sluggish public can have something to gossip about, and notably “the poet and the artist” are identified as being among the primitive workers who actually *do* something so that the public can talk about them.<sup>44</sup>

This mention of poetry and art signposts why *Two Ages* is useful for my purposes. While it is a text that mainly deals with Kierkegaard’s ideas about society and, to an extent, politics, working as Perkins says to debunk the myth that Kierkegaard’s thought is purely individualistic,<sup>45</sup> it does also have some applications to his theory of artistic communication.<sup>46</sup> This is because *Two Ages* finishes with a kind of manifesto for what Kierkegaard calls the “unrecognisable ones” who will work within society against the spirit of levelling. By this point he has already conceded that no particular individual will be able to halt the abstraction of levelling, but he does think that groups of individuals can work effectively against levelling in society in the service of the religious.<sup>47</sup> And his description of these individuals resembles very much himself, particularly himself engaged in creative artwork. These men of excellence, he tells us significantly, will

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>45</sup> Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), xiii.

<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, as Walsh laments and as was the case for *Postscript*, though many commentators have written on *Two Ages*, no-one other than Walsh seems to have examined what it has to offer on this subject. See Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 185 footnote 8.

<sup>47</sup> *TA*, 87.

be “without authority” because they understand that levelling works in society to put everyone on an even platform, with no claim to special authoritative status. This is a category he applied directly to himself.<sup>48</sup> Like “plainclothes policemen, they will be unrecognisable”, concealed secret agents.<sup>49</sup> These unrecognisable ones will have a “double task”, for they must both work and simultaneously conceal their working so that they subvert the appearance of their own authority, and we even hear that God has permitted levelling but wants to cooperate with each individual, presumably also in cooperation with these plainclothes policemen, to draw “the highest” out of them in the face of it.<sup>50</sup> Effectively, as Walsh puts it, Kierkegaard is granting “a social role for art in the criticism of modern culture.”<sup>51</sup>

There now comes a highly interesting passage right at the end of *Two Ages* where Kierkegaard states that

The unrecognisables recognise the servants of levelling but dare not use power or authority against them, for then there would be a regression, because it would be instantly obvious to a third party that the unrecognisable one was an authority, and then the third party would be hindered from attaining the highest. Only through a *suffering* act will the unrecognisable one dare contribute to levelling and by the same suffering act will pass judgement on the instrument.<sup>52</sup>

This passage is important because it links the work of the unrecognisable person seeking to cooperate with God to draw the religious out of people with “*suffering*”. The communicators of religiousness who renounce their own authority cannot coercively force their beliefs on others but must expect to undergo a certain amount of suffering as they vulnerably work within the atmosphere of levelling. They do not dare to attack levelling head-on or to defeat levelling outright but will

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<sup>48</sup> See for e.g. the above on *Two Upbuilding Discourses*.

<sup>49</sup> *TA*, 107 –the mention of “policemen” harks back to the earlier journal entry quoted above and anticipates the use of the same title later in *The Moment*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>51</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 188.

<sup>52</sup> *TA*, 109

defeat it in suffering, and Kierkegaard says clearly that they are thus saving and helping people “indirectly”.<sup>53</sup> What is striking about all of this is that not only does this description resemble Kierkegaard, an indirect religious communicator (and a direct one, also “without authority”) who has been persecuted by the press in a levelling society, but it also resembles Christ. Christ is, after all, as will be seen in *Practice in Christianity*, the indirect religious communicator *par excellence* and one who suffered incalculably for his covert work against the evils of levelling. Indeed, we hear right at the close of *Two Ages* that “Those who have not made the leap will interpret the suffering act of the unrecognisable one as his defeat, and those who have made the leap will have a vague idea that it was his victory.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, one might say, there is always a possibility of offense and to those who have not leapt religiously Christ the anti-leveller’s suffering looks like a complete failure, but to those who have faith it looks like a triumph. The same might be said of Kierkegaard’s own artistic communication. In fact, this is what Kierkegaard had begun to say about his own artistic communication in the *Journals*, as we saw above.

### ***Two Ages: Conclusion***

As an outworking of Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation, then, *Two Ages* is a somewhat curious piece. To a large extent it simply embodies his desire to continue writing and publishing, and not in fact to conclude any longer with the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. One gets the impression that he merely

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<sup>53</sup> The term is used at *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

continued with what immediately came to mind and what he was thinking about at the time, in this case a novel that he had recently read and which had impacted him. At the same time, there is a kind of literary unity here with his very first book-publication which was also a review used to air his own ideas, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, and more importantly explicit thoughts on artistic communication and task do appear here, as I have examined. The development of these thoughts that appeared in *Postscript* is returned to here, with particular attention being paid to the *suffering* of the Christian communicator and the subversive nature of the role he or she must play in the face of levelling society, but now they are appearing in a text published veronymously. So while in one sense *Two Ages* is a mere extension, a following-through of the momentum of writing, in another sense it is also a visible outworking of further thoughts about religious communication in a more “direct” mode. Finally, these thoughts turn out to apply very readily to Kierkegaard himself and, as we saw in the *Journals*, in 1846 he was now beginning to apply them to himself on paper, for all posterity to see.

## **ONE STILL STILL LIVING**

### ***Journals, 1847***

I will now focus closely on the next two years of Kierkegaard’s life because a disproportionately large amount of reflection on his vocation occurs during this time. 1847 is the first year that Kierkegaard started journaling *really* voluminously. Up until then he had been journaling frequently, to be sure, but now he began recording his own personal reflections even more frequently and at greater length than ever before and thirty-six numbered journals marked “NB” begin in 1847. It is

in these journals that Kierkegaard documents the firmer decision to carry on writing where before he said that he had thought he would end with the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.<sup>55</sup> He also documents his coming to see himself more and more as having a unique religious task, continuing on from the reflections that seem to have been initially elicited by the *Corsair* affair.

The continued authorship from 1847 onwards was also marked by a change of approach and in the next two years Kierkegaard published mainly more “direct” religious works under his own name, with more *Upbuilding Discourses*, *Works of Love* and *Christian Discourses* all appearing at this time. The only pseudonymous, “aesthetic” piece that he published in this period was a short article called *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* by “Inter et Inter” which Kierkegaard saw as “balancing” the direct religious works of these years.<sup>56</sup> Walsh argues that it is very important to look at the *Journals* and the direct works from this time onwards to understand Kierkegaard’s view of the poetic-religious and that they reveal that Kierkegaard saw his “task” as being that of “a religious, or Christian, poet”.<sup>57</sup> She notes that although Kierkegaard will sometimes use the term “poet” negatively in this period onwards,<sup>58</sup> in the end a balanced “survey of [the] journal references to himself reveals that he identifies with this role far more frequently in this period than in earlier years”,<sup>59</sup> concluding that “Kierkegaard understands his task as a

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<sup>55</sup> See Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 350.

<sup>56</sup> See *Pap IX A 227, 241 / JP 6, 6238* (1848).

<sup>57</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 224. This is in contrast with a non-religious Romantic poet such as Goethe or Schlegel; for more on this see below.

<sup>58</sup> See *ibid.*, 224, footnote 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 224, footnote 3; cf. also the Index to *Pap*, Vol. 14, under ‘*Digter*’, 303-310. There are 901 references from the later period, and only one prior to 1847.

poet in the later writings to be that of bringing...religious ideas once again into view for his time".<sup>60</sup>

Other commentators agree in locating an intensification of Kierkegaard's sense of religious vocation in this period and point to different reasons for why it should happen now. Lowrie believes, as was suggested might be the case above, that it was the persecution by the *Corsair* that first set in motion the processes that intensified this self-understanding. He argues that through it Kierkegaard "learned to think of himself as 'separated' in a religious sense, and to regard this 'difference' [being unlike other men] as an indication that he was called upon (though not directly commissioned by a divine call) to perform on behalf of Christianity what only an extraordinary individual could do".<sup>61</sup> For Lowrie, this is the reason why Kierkegaard again rejected the idea of becoming a country parson and instead devoted himself to explicitly religious writing almost exclusively from this point on—a sense that he was uniquely placed to perform some kind of extraordinary task for Christianity through his writing, though Lowrie will not call this a direct divine commission.<sup>62</sup> Hannay places slightly more of an emphasis on cognitive dissonance as being a factor in the increased development of this self-understanding, arguing that, when Kierkegaard did not die young at the age of 33, "he must have begun, if he hadn't started long ago, to wonder what the underlying meaning of his activity to date was."<sup>63</sup> He too notes how important the *Journals* from this point onwards are for understanding Kierkegaard's own concept of his vocation, for "the intense self-pre-occupation typical of the entries in [the "NB"]

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<sup>60</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically* 225.

<sup>61</sup> Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 362, 382.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>63</sup> Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 345. The expectation of death at the age of 33, the age that Christ died, is related to his superstition about his father outliving his children, mentioned above.

journals leads one to suppose that they played a large part in creating Kierkegaard's own image of what his life and work amounted to".<sup>64</sup> He also mentions the fact that by 1847, obsessed with the idea that his authorship should exhibit a conceptual unity, Kierkegaard had even begun to revise some of his earlier journals.<sup>65</sup>

Highly important and representative of this transitional point is a very long entry containing a meditation on his role as a writer and on the decision to keep writing instead of seeking an appointment in a rural parish. It opens with another admission that writing was something that Kierkegaard simply *did* and that it was a kind of cathartic, therapeutic exercise: "I feel well only when writing. Happy and at home in my thoughts, I then forget all that is disagreeable in life, and all life's suffering."<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, as is becoming more and more the case the further we travel through Kierkegaard's writings, this activity is not judged to be *merely* a form of therapy but is attached to an idea of religious vocation. For, he goes on, "So powerful an urge, so ample, so inexhaustible, and having been sustained day after day for five or six years, still flowing as copiously as ever, such an urge must also be, one would think, a calling from God." There follow a few sentences expressing the idea that for Kierkegaard it would be torture *not* to write and that surely God does not want him to torture himself, but even to these is appended the statement "And God I presume has no wish to remain without witness in external matters either." Then, after complaining about his financial situation and public persecution and dismissing the passing idea of becoming a priest as a kind of unsatisfactory voluntary martyrdom, he eventually concludes that "Being an

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>66</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 222 / JP 5, 5962 (1847)*.

author is, on the other hand, not voluntary; on the contrary, it is in line with everything in my personality and its deepest urge." Thus he is able to pray that God will help him not to doubt his vocation as an author, and resolves that, just as with his engagement, he "must again hold [his] course in the high seas, live under God's sway unconditionally." Of course, it would be more secure to become a priest, require less faith(!), and provide a more sheltered life. But, says Kierkegaard, "I believe it is my task to do without all this."<sup>67</sup> He ends this entry by making a direct link between the fact that Christianity is misunderstood and the fact that *he* is misunderstood.

This dichotomous blend of the citation of both worldly (writing as therapy) and spiritual (writing as a calling from God) factors as being an influence on Kierkegaard's writing is typical of the *Journals* from this time. A number of other, less summative but perhaps only a little less revealing, entries from this period highlight how at this stage Kierkegaard was able to acknowledge both personal motives or external circumstances *and* a sense of divine calling or religious vocation as being the driving forces behind his artistic output. He recognises that different factors have given rise to the conception of his task, but sees them as mutually enhancing—there is an element of simultaneity in their operation. As a consequence, sometimes he credits *The Corsair* with provoking the continued productivity, as when he says "God be praised that the rabble's barbaric attacks have landed on me...Now I am ready to go, and determined as never before."<sup>68</sup> Sometimes, it is melancholy that is named as the chief source of the authorship, at least initially, as when he says "It is this that I have partly emptied out in the

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<sup>67</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 222 / JP 5, 5962 (1847).*

<sup>68</sup> *Pap VII 1 A 229 / JP 5, 5966 (24 January 1847).*

pseudonyms...my melancholy has kept me outside myself while I discovered and poetically experienced a whole world of the imagination.”<sup>69</sup> Sometimes, Regine still appears as the key motivator of the authorship: “When I left her I chose death—that is precisely why I have been able to work so enormously.”<sup>70</sup> Sometimes, relatedly, it is penitence, since “what fortifies [him] more and more” is his (apparently) “original...first...deepest...unchanged view that I truly haven’t chosen this life because it would be brilliant but as a penitential comfort in all my wretchedness...[with] the thorn in the flesh.”<sup>71</sup> And sometimes, still, Kierkegaard explains that writing is, simply, what he does: “all I can do is work.”<sup>72</sup>

Concurrently, however, the connection of these compulsions and circumstances to a sense of Christian calling is made much clearer and the *spiritual* motives and influences are now given more of the centre stage. So, in contemporaneous entries, Kierkegaard is also able to write passages such as

what [the public] cannot in all eternity deny is my idea and my life, that mine was one of the most original thoughts in a long time and the most original in the Danish language, that Christianity needed a maieutician, and I understood how to be that while no one knew how to appreciate it. The category of proclaiming Christianity and confessing Christ isn’t appropriate in Christendom; here the maieutic is exactly right; it assumes that human beings possess the highest but wants to help them become aware of what they possess.<sup>73</sup>

His artwork, according to this entry, does not yet serve the eternal cause of maieutically reintroducing Christianity in “Christendom”, Kierkegaard’s term for purely nominal, cultural Christianity. Another example is the entry “The fact is,

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<sup>69</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 27 / JP 5, 5980 (1847).*

<sup>70</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 100 / JP 5, 5999 (1847).*

<sup>71</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 119 / JP 6, 6002 (1847).*

<sup>72</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 200 / JP 6, 6023 (1847).*

<sup>73</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 42 / JP 5, 5897 (1847).*

what our age needs is upbringing. Here's what happened to that end: God picked out one who also needed upbringing and brought him up *privatissime* so that he could teach others."<sup>74</sup> So even though *The Corsair*, his melancholy, Regine, penitence, and the simple impulse to create are all stated as contributing to Kierkegaard's drive to write, more and more Kierkegaard now identifies God as working through these factors in order to issue him with a specific, religious task to perform in writing: "When God has as though withdrawn from me a little, I have no one else's confidence to cling to, and then I hear the incessant charge that I do—just what I am doing, because for me God is all-important."<sup>75</sup> In one of many sarcastic entries about the attitude of the Danish public, he even does go so far as to call the use of his authorial talents, at last, "one's divine vocation".<sup>76</sup>

What was it precisely that Kierkegaard hoped to achieve by enacting this divine vocation as a Christian artist? The *Journals* material from 1847 I have quoted shows that at this point he thought of his work as being "maieutic", that he thought of himself as a kind of midwife or "maieutician". This makes firm an idea that had only been hinted at and experimented with earlier in the *Journals* and made clear only in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: that Kierkegaard's authorship until this point can serve to bring to birth an awareness of what true Christianity is in its readers. "Surely I must eventually awaken people..." he says, "to call them out or stir them up so that at least they stop wasting their lives without ever really reflecting on how loving God is."<sup>77</sup> Now, however, ever more detailed and thorough reflections on exactly the way in which this awakening might function begin to

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<sup>74</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 43 / JP 2, 2090 (1847).*

<sup>75</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 116 / JP 5, 6001 (14 May 1847).*

<sup>76</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 336 / JP 5, 5188 (1847).* The use of the royal "one" highlights just how important one's divine vocation is.

<sup>77</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 219 / JP 5, 6032 (2 August 1847).*

appear and with them Kierkegaard seems to begin slowly to refine his concept of his vocation as a Christian artist. An entry written on August 16<sup>th</sup> 1847 anticipates a fundamental change. Up until here Kierkegaard had occasionally been saying that one of the worldly contributors to his motivation to write was a feeling of penitence, as has been shown, but now he appears to learn that God does not just forgive but *forgets* his guilt, so that he must forget it also:

That I have profited others by my work and that God has approved it and has helped me in every way is perfectly certain...I know within myself before God that my labour as an author, my readiness to obey his signal, to sacrifice every earthly and worldly consideration, will mitigate for me the impression of the evil I personally have committed.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps in conjunction with this new awareness of God's grace, a new aspect to Kierkegaard's religious vocation now starts to appear in his journals. He begins to pen lines such as "My whole life is an epigram calculated to make people aware"<sup>79</sup> and note feelings such as his "surprise" at how "perfectly Providence has led [him] in order to develop for me that purpose" of being "offered up."<sup>80</sup> This new aspect is, simply put, the idea of existential witness, of his indirect maieutics evolving into a more direct, active kind of martyrdom. However, it only appears in a very embryonic form here. Before he would go on to say much more about witness and martyrdom, Kierkegaard would still need to attempt to clear up his thoughts about the particular requirements of indirect and direct religious communication in a systematic manner.

### **The Unpublished 'Lectures on Communication'**

A long undated journal entry, also from 1847, includes the following:

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<sup>78</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 250 / JP 5, 6043* (16 August 1847).

<sup>79</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 548 / JP 5, 6107* (1847).

<sup>80</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 138 / KJN NB 20:30* (1847).

if an author has his own distinctive conception of communication, if all his distinctiveness and the reality of his historical significance are perhaps focused precisely in this, well, then it will be a long-drawn-out affair—O, school of patience. Before there can be any mention of understanding something of what he has communicated, one must first understand him in his distinctive dialectic of communication and in this light understand everything which one understands. And this, his distinctive dialectic of communication, he cannot, however, communicate in the traditional dialectic of communication. The age, of course, will demand just this of him, which naturally is nonsensical. O, it is a long way home to being understood—O, school of patience. And the more a person understands himself in what he understands, the more readily he discovers that he is not understood—only people who themselves understand nothing at all can through delusion succeed in believing themselves understood by all.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps this should be taken as a kind of warning label that should be read by all prospective scholars of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard certainly had “his own distinctive concept of communication”, one that seems to have developed over time, and he warns us that, if his “historical significance” is “perhaps focused precisely in this”, as perhaps it is, then understanding him will be a “long drawn-out affair”, a “school of patience”. This especially could be taken as a warning not to embark on a project such as the present one which seeks to understand Kierkegaard’s concept of his Christian vocation and communication through art. Ironically enough, at the same time, the entry, which speaks of both how the distinctive communicator will struggle to communicate his method in the language of the age and how he will struggle to be understood the more he understands himself, is illuminating. If nothing else, it portrays a Kierkegaard who was sincerely grappling with his concept of communication at this time and wrestling with his

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<sup>81</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 466 / JP 1, 645 (1847).*

understanding of himself as an artistic communicator, along with the possibility of disclosing some theory of that self-understanding to the age.

More evidence in support of this portrayal comes in the form of a draft for a set of lecture notes on “The Dialectic of Ethical and Ethical-Religious Communication...A Little Sketch” that appears in the *Journals* at this time.<sup>82</sup> These notes exhibit Kierkegaard’s thinking about how to articulate his ideas to do with communication generally, and his own communication in particular, in a formal theory, but they also reveal a perhaps unsurprising amount of tension surrounding these. Unfortunately, the lectures are unfinished and they were never delivered or published in Kierkegaard’s lifetime, indicative of his documented ambivalence and ever-changing opinions to do with the issues. Nonetheless, the lectures are extremely valuable for the purposes of this enquiry and I will examine them in detail here.

Very early on in the lecture notes, which go through successive draft stages, Kierkegaard complains of

The confusion when that which ought to be communicated as scholarship and science is communicated as art...but also when that which should be communicated as art is communicated as science and scholarship, and this is the confusion of the modern age, that the ethical is communicated as scholarship and science.<sup>83</sup>

This is the main complaint of the lectures, which essentially argue that ethical and ethical-religious matters cannot be communicated in a scientific manner because

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<sup>82</sup> Kierkegaard writes, “As far as I can recall this is from 1847. In any case, it is not later than the March publication of *Christian Discourses*, which was the Spring of 1848.” –*Pap VIII 2 B 79 / JP 1*, 648 (1847). But Christopher Nelson argues that The Lectures on Communication, from the *Journals* evidence, cannot have all been done by 1847, and that it seems that they were being revised, revisited, added to as late as 1849 and even into 1850 and 51. –Christopher Nelson, ‘Kierkegaard’s Undelivered Lectures and his Author-Activity Writings’ in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Point of View* ed. Robert Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2010), 396.

<sup>83</sup> *Pap VIII 2 B 81 / JP 1*, 649 (1847).

they do not properly involve the communication of *information* but of *capability*, since “the ethical demands that every man shall realise it at every moment, but then he surely has to know it” already.<sup>84</sup> Thus if the communicator begins by trying to instil the ethical in an individual then the communication never becomes truly ethical and is belayed from the outset. However, says Kierkegaard, if one experimentally assumes that the object of the communication is something which we all have latent within ourselves, as is the case with ethical-religious capability (and Socratic communication), then the object, the concept communicator and the receiver all lose their significance, and “There remains only one communicator: God.”

Proceeding along these lines, Kierkegaard argues that there follows a new distinction to be made about communication: “The difference between communicating something as an art and communicating as a science.” The ethical cannot be communicated as a science, because it does not involve the dispensing of knowledge, instead “The ethical must be communicated as an art, simply because everyone knows it...The object of communication is consequently not a knowledge but a realisation.” There now come a series of headings which are of decisive importance. The first is the famous and enigmatic term “INDIRECT COMMUNICATION”, under which is written:

(The object, as was shown, is not a knowledge but an art, a realisation.)

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<sup>84</sup> Nelson points out that that “knowledge communication” and “capability communication” do *not* necessarily equate with “direct communication” and indirect “communication”, particularly in the case of the latter. “While any communication of capability is bound to be more or less indirect, the qualification ‘indirect’ speaks to the means adopted for the communication, whereas the qualification ‘capability’ speaks to that which is communicated ‘more or less’ indirectly” –Nelson, ‘Dialectic’, 405. Note that the term “capability communication” appears nowhere else in Kierkegaard’s corpus outside the Lectures on Communication.

The communicator always dares influence only indirectly, (1) because he must always express that he himself is not a master-teacher but an apprentice and that God, on the other hand, is his and every man's master-teacher, (2) because he must express that the receiver himself knows it, (3) because ethically the task is precisely this—that every man comes to stand alone in the God-relationship.

This is the first systematic exposition of the term “indirect communication” that is found in the *Journals*, written after the works which supposedly employ it have been published. It is linked to an “art” and said to consist in communicating in such a way that the receiver is enabled to stand in their own relationship to God. Next comes “DOUBLE-REFLECTION”, a closely related concept, about which Kierkegaard says “Since ethically there is no direct relationship, all communication must go through a double-reflection; the first is the reflection in which the communication is made, and the second is that in which it is recaptured.” And then comes “THE MAIEUTIC”, summed up thus: “All indirect communication is different from direct communication in that indirect communication first of all involves a deception—simply because an attempt to communicate the ethical directly would mean to deceive.”<sup>85</sup>

What one finds here is consistent with what Kierkegaard has developed in his journals and the lectures so far: Authentic ethical communication must by necessity be indirect, because the human communicator is not the ultimate communicator and because he or she communicates a capability as opposed to a knowledge. Indirect communication works to provoke its recipients to their own realisations and capable appropriations, without didactically imposing information upon them, though now “God” is much more involved in the process. This entails a

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<sup>85</sup> All *Pap* VIII 2 B 81 / *JP* 1, 650 (1847).

mechanism of “double-reflection” because the capability is reflected in both the communicator and the recipient. It is called “maieutic” because it involves a form of conceptual midwifery, but it can also be called a “deception” because initially the recipient is not aware of what is happening. This is how Kierkegaard now writes of the function of the whole of his indirect, pseudonymous authorship, as he says “My service in using pseudonyms consists in having discovered, Christianly, the maieutic method.” Were he to leave things here it would sound like *only* indirect communication is involved in the communication of Christianity and that the vocation of the Christian artist as Kierkegaard sees it is solely to be an indirect communicator. But there is in an odd tension in the lecture notes whereby Kierkegaard seems to want to say that although all Christian communication must be indirect, it must also involve *some* direct communication. (One remembers that while he was publishing the early pseudonymous works he was also publishing *more* direct—or less indirect—religious, “upbuilding” works alongside them and that at this time he is publishing these almost exclusively.) This leads him to make the fine distinction that “The difference between upbringing in the ethical and upbringing in the ethical-religious is simply this—that the ethical is the universally human itself, but religious (Christian) upbringing must first of all communicate a knowledge.”<sup>86</sup>

This seems to contradict what Kierkegaard has said so far in the lecture notes: that communication of the ethical does not communicate knowledge. Why must the ethical-religious communicate knowledge, all of a sudden? Because “Ethically man as such knows about the ethical, but...does not know about the religious in the Christian sense.” In this case there must first be a communication

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<sup>86</sup> *Pap VIII 2 B 85 / JP 1, 653 (1847).*

of “a little knowledge”, perhaps the information that Christ died so that we could be forgiven for our sins, but then things continue as for the ethical and “the instruction, the communication, must not be as of a knowledge, but upbringing, practising, art-instruction.” As a result, “The communication of religious capability is direct communication insofar as there is at first a communication of knowledge, but essentially indirect communication.” Here Kierkegaard appears to affirm *both* forms of communication simultaneously in a way that is not always clear and these statements represent a tension in his writing between more indirect and more direct communication, parallel to how elsewhere in the 1847 *Journals* an embryonic idea of more direct witness had begun to arise. Perhaps it has arisen because “a man is duty-bound to God to present the truth in its truest form. Fine. But it holds true for every man that in the same degree which he has the ability to render truer the form of truth—if he then does this—to that same degree he will win fewer men.” Perhaps Kierkegaard struggled with the alternative concepts of indirect and direct communication at this time because he could not see how direct communication alone could effectively win people to the truth when they were already deluded into thinking they *had* the truth in Christendom, so he believed he needed to maieutically “deceive” people into realisation of their own existential situation?

This is conjecture, at least at this stage. What is clear is that the tension between indirect and direct communication is very strong in the lecture sketches. On the one hand, Kierkegaard goes on to say famously in the notes “I regard it as my service that by bringing poetised personalities who say ‘I’ (my pseudonyms) into the centre of life’s actuality I have contributed, if possible, to familiarising the

contemporary age again to hearing an *I*, a personal *I* speak.”<sup>87</sup> Through the pseudonyms he believes that he can *indirectly* reawaken the age to personality because they hide his authorial authority. It is apparently because the world has been developing away from acknowledgement of personality that this has to be done poetically, because the poetic personality always has something which makes him or her more palatable for a world which is unaccustomed to hearing an ‘*I*’. On the other hand, he admits that he will not go beyond this himself in venturing *directly* to use his own ‘*I*’, but then continues, “I am convinced the time will come when an *I* stands up in the world, someone who says ‘*I*’ directly and speaks in the first person. Then, for the first time, he will also in the strictest sense rightly communicate ethical and ethical-religious truth.” So he does not think that indirect deception *alone* is the way to communicate ethical-religious truth. After all, if in communicating the truth it seems to a person that he “does not produce the desired effect, then it can very likely be his duty, at least by way of experiment, to choose another form, but maybe it is also only his impatience to demand quick results instead of having faith.” If writing indirect pseudonymous works such as *Either/Or* does not produce the desired effect, it can very likely be a man’s duty, at least by way of experiment, to choose another form, such as that of upbuilding discourses, but maybe it is also only his impatience to demand quick results instead of having faith.

The conclusion of the lectures, then, is that “Especially in the communication of ethical truth and particularly in the communication of ethical religious truth, the indirect method is the most rigorous form. Yet a more direct form which runs parallel to it can also be necessary in order to support that by

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<sup>87</sup> *Pap VIII 2 B 88 / JP 1, 656 (1847).*

which in another sense it is itself supported.”<sup>88</sup> The conclusion is therefore an uneasy dialectical tension between both indirect and direct communication, and Kierkegaard claims that he has understood this all along, “therefore along with the pseudonyms there always was direct communication in the guise of the upbuilding or edifying discourses, and the last few years I have used direct communication almost exclusively.” It is revealing that Kierkegaard never finished writing the lecture notes, and that they peter out in the following way, in which one can see the tension being played out at every point:

#### THE DIRECT METHOD and THE INDIRECT METHOD

*All communication of knowledge is direct communication.*

*All communication of capability is more or less indirect communication.*

First of all comes what I have called genuine art-communication; it is indirect or at least essentially indirect. Then ethical communication; this is unconditionally indirect. Then ethical-religious communication, namely, Christian; this is direct-indirect.

What is fascinating about this extract, the end of the lecture notes draft, is that in it Kierkegaard refers to ethical-religious or *Christian* communication as being “direct-indirect”. Nothing could exemplify more than this the tension between an indirect and a direct approach evident in Kierkegaard’s writings so far and in his *Journals* at this time. He here seems to be introducing a new category which is a synthesis of the two. As earlier we heard that indirect and direct communication can run in parallel in the service of the ethical-religious, and that ethical-religious communication must first introduce a “little” direct information and then must proceed in an indirect mode, now ethical-religious communication

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

is named as neither indirect nor direct but as direct-indirect communication. At this point I should note that up to now I have been very careful at certain places in this dissertation, when commenting about the genre and method of Kierkegaard's various works, to refer to them as either "*more* indirect" or "*more* direct". This is because, as is epitomised by the lecture notes on communication, Kierkegaard is not entirely rigorous and rigid in his use of these terms and he does not seem to be clear on their use himself. He does not use the terms "more indirect" and "more direct", but rather chooses to deal in more discrete categories, "indirect" and "direct". But Kierkegaard is a dialectician, and as we see in the lecture notes there is a certain fluidity to his thoughts about indirect and direct communication, to the extent that Christian communication is eventually named here as direct-indirect, both indirect and direct. This might merit speaking of a communicative *spectrum* of indirectness-directness, and perhaps even using more double-barrelled terms where the first word refers to the content of the communication and the second to the genre of the communication, such as "direct-direct", "direct-indirect", "indirect-direct" and "indirect-indirect" communication, in order to be more precise. I will come back to this idea in the final, more constructive chapter of my thesis.

### ***UPBUILDING DISCOURSES IN VARIOUS SPIRITS***

I now turn to *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, which was published in March 1847 and marks the proper start of what has come to be called the "second authorship".<sup>89</sup> These *Discourses* were just that—discourses, the next set in the series of upbuilding, explicitly religious writings that had begun with *Two*

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<sup>89</sup> *UDVS*, xi; cf. Perkins, *International Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* ed. Robert Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 1.

*Upbuilding Discourses* around the same time as *Either/Or*. As I have observed, from now on, this kind of more overtly religious, more direct writing would take precedence for Kierkegaard and he would devote his authorial energies almost exclusively to it.<sup>90</sup> But, as I have also been arguing, this does not represent a change in his aims so much as a development in the method by which those aims were sought to be brought about. In Perkins' words, "The novelty in the second authorship is not the change of Kierkegaard's authorial goals but the change in the tone *and*, if you will, the definitive shift to an explicit privileging of the Christian ethics of love."<sup>91</sup> Apart from the short piece titled *The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of An Actress*,<sup>92</sup> "the style of the second literature is not anything if not religious

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<sup>90</sup> In the *International Kierkegaard Commentary on Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, one of the few sources of secondary literature on the volume, Graeme Nicholson wants to argue that, from the *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* onwards, Kierkegaard is no longer using "simple direct communication". As he sees it, this text initiates a new, higher, form of direct communication. Nicholson calls the more developed, stronger form of direct communication that he believes appears from 1847 onwards "intense communication". But I find his argument highly unconvincing as he fails to sufficiently distinguish the *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* from the earlier *Upbuilding Discourses* and the term is found nowhere in Kierkegaard's writings. See Graeme Nicholson, 'The Intense Communication of Kierkegaard's Discourses' in *IKC:UDVS*.

<sup>91</sup> Perkins, *IKC:UDVS*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> There is not room to examine *Crisis* in detail here, but the following should be noted: The accompaniment of *Crisis* by the religious work *Christian Discourses* published simultaneously with it was supposed to mirror the near-simultaneous publication of *Either/Or* and *Two Upbuilding Discourses* at the start of the authorship. Cf. *CD*, xv. In the piece, a series of articles about the career of a Copenhagen stage actress, Kierkegaard concludes by looking at what he calls "the metamorphosis of potentiation" and "the metamorphosis of continuity". While the first metamorphosis is one of a returning to the *idea* of something that was present and latent at the beginning, and so one of "aesthetic" interest, the second metamorphosis is one of growing into new and more appropriate roles with time, and so is of "ethical" interest. See *CD*, 323. It is not difficult to read an analogy here between the development of the stage actress and Kierkegaard's own development over the course of his literary career. This is also suggested by Joseph Westfall: "in the story of the actress, [we can find] an analogy to the story of the anonymous author of the Kierkegaardian authors"—Joseph Westfall, *The Kierkegaardian Author*, 254. But which has been Kierkegaard's own metamorphosis, a metamorphosis of potentiation or of continuity? This is an interesting question, and commentators agree that there is a parallel here but no commentator that I have come across ventures to say whether Kierkegaard's own development is closer to the "potentiation" or "continuity" model. Hugh Pyper seems to imply that it is one of potentiation in 'The Stage and Stages in a Christian Authorship' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Christian Discourses: And, The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 310. However Walsh in *Living Poetically*, 185, seems to imply that Kierkegaard's own metamorphosis could be one of continuity. Kierkegaard himself would seem to argue, from the journal entries mentioned above, that he has not grown older and changed continually into new roles in a straightforward manner, rather his authorship has involved the increasing actualisation of a latent potential that was nonetheless present and evident from the start of his career, namely

and prophetically so.”<sup>93</sup> Where the “first authorship” had been more indirect, or at least had been around one-half more indirect, involving a development of the theory of indirect communication during its course, the second authorship is now as a whole much more direct in genre and mode. In 1847-48, as well as the aesthetic article, it consisted of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *Works of Love* and *Christian Discourses*, all published veronymously. I shall focus on *Upbuidling Discourses in Various Spirits* here because it is the first text to come into print after *Two Ages* and because it explicitly deals with the topic of vocation or calling.

The shift towards directness is immediately made clear from the outset of the new *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. As has now come to be expected, the book opens with a dedication to “THAT SINGLE INDIVIDUAL”,<sup>94</sup> placing it self-consciously in the series which began with this same dedication and which had continued to rededicate itself in this way. It is then split into three parts, Part One being a discourse “On the Occasion of a Confession”, Part Two “What We Learn from the Lillies of the Field and from the Birds of the Air” and Part Three “The Gospel of Sufferings, Christian Discourses.” For the purposes of this study, Part One is the most interesting and the section which I will be examining here. M. Jamie Ferreira points out that in many ways this opening Part picks up the ideas of *Two Ages*, which means that the distinction between “first” and “second” authorship is

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the religious element. This would identify Kierkegaard’s own metamorphosis as one of *potentiation*: The religious was present at the start of his career, as he will soon say again in *The Point of View*, but now there has been a greater actualisation of this potential so that it has become heightened. The publication of *Crisis*, he is insistent, itself demonstrates this point, being, as it is a much “littler” reduction of the aesthetic enormity of his initiating *Either/Or* and accompanied by *Christian Discourses*, a much more extensive development of the religious potential evinced by *Two Upbuilding Discourses*.

<sup>93</sup> Perkins, *IKC:UDVS*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> *UDVS*, 4.

not really that clear-cut and so has largely been made by scholars because of the shift in privileged method that these *Discourses* initiate.<sup>95</sup> This shift is symptomatic of the new identification of religious communication as “direct-indirect” that is sketched in the *Journals* lectures on communication of the time, but as I have shown these distinctions are by no means clear-cut either. There is still after all a case to be made for the relative “indirectness” of these discourses also, particularly from the way that they continue to subvert their own authority and seek to awaken their hearers to personal reflection.

In keeping with this, the Preface to Part One’s discourse “On the Occasion of a Confession” reasserts that its “speaker” is not an “authority”, as is customary for the upbuilding discourses.<sup>96</sup> Through the discourse the speaker “seeks that single individual to whom it gives itself wholly”, one he calls “*my reader*” who reads aloud, slowly, repeatedly, for “his” own sake. The use of the masculine possessive pronoun illustrates how the single individual has evolved from being Regine to becoming a universal ideal reader who strives to become a true individual. There now appears, still in the Preface, nothing less than an analogy to explain how Kierkegaard understands his artistic task as it is operating in this discourse: When a woman makes a sacred cloth for religious use, he tells us, she does not want people to notice her artistry, but rather the meaning of the cloth. “She could not work the sacred meaning into the cloth...The meaning is in the beholder and the beholder’s understanding when, faced with himself and his own self, he has in the infinite remoteness of separation infinitely forgotten the needlewoman and her

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<sup>95</sup> Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 122.

<sup>96</sup> *UDVS*, 5.

part”.<sup>97</sup> Although it is right for the needlewoman to do everything she can to make the work excellent, the artistry is there not to draw attention to itself, but only so that by its absence it would not disturbingly draw attention to itself.<sup>98</sup> There is a parallel here, perhaps, with Kierkegaard’s highly artistic literary corpus which seeks to gesture beyond itself towards the reader and towards God. At the very least the link is being made reflexively here as regards the upbuilding discourses, in any case.

As the discourse proper gets underway, it is made clear to the hearer that they are in overtly religious, more “direct” communicative territory: It starts with a prayer, which notes that we are nothing without God and references biblical terms such as “repentance” and “perseverance”.<sup>99</sup> Kierkegaard then refers to King Solomon from the Hebrew Bible, and quotes from the book of Ecclesiastes.<sup>100</sup> Quotations from the Psalms soon follow, not to mention from the New Testament book of James which serves as a kind of anchor for the discourse.<sup>101</sup> The atmosphere, as with the other upbuilding discourses that have come before, is confessional, scriptural and overtly religious. The central theme of this first of these variously-spirited discourses is that “PURITY OF HEART IS TO WILL ONE THING”,<sup>102</sup> a phrase under which it has sometimes been published in translation as a stand-alone piece. The basic sense of the phrase is that the most spiritually developed individuals (who have maximised their authentic subjectivity, we could say following Climacus) will have a singular clarity of devotion to God and of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 12, 24.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 24.

purpose in life. It is a kind of polemic against the “double-mindedness” which is in turn polemicized by the author of James. It is the “purpose” component of this working definition that is most relevant here, however, and one particular passage in the discourse is directly demonstrative of a theory of artistic vocation, indeed of vocation in general.<sup>103</sup>

In this passage, Kierkegaard takes the idea of willing one thing in purity of heart and applies it to the concept of vocation. Just before he does this, at the start of the passage he reminds us that even a religious discourse is not about the eloquence of the speaker or writer but about the response of the reader—a tenet which is more often associated with a more “indirect” approach to communication and so another reminder that “indirect” and “direct” cannot serve as un-nuanced and un-dialectical categories of communication for Kierkegaard.<sup>104</sup> Next he examines the speaker-listener relationship in the religious discourse with a metaphor from secular art, a particular favourite of his involving the theatre that we have seen has been in use since at least the time of *Either/Or* Part Two. It is now modified slightly to include the speaker of the discourse as the “prompter” on hand to give verbal cues to the hearers of the discourse, who in turn are theatre actors acting before God.<sup>105</sup> There follows a sentence which may be specially applicable to artistic religious vocation: “Let us never forget this,” Kierkegaard says, “let us not secularise the religious but eternally separate the religious and the secular precisely by earnestly thinking about them together.” The religious and the secular are then, for the Kierkegaard of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, two distinct, separable realms, but nonetheless two realms which must be

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 122-154.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 124-5.

attended to simultaneously, and not separated in such a way that there remains no interaction or confluence between the two.

With these ideas about communication, performing before God and the secular-religious interface fresh in the mind, he now turns to vocational questions.<sup>106</sup> These are presented precisely as a series of direct questions to the hearer of the discourse: The religious discourse will ask you, “What kind of life is yours, do you will one thing and what is that one thing?”<sup>107</sup> and “Are you living in such a way that you are conscious of being a single individual?”<sup>108</sup> For all are individuals before God, all will be judged individually, and “The awareness of being a single individual with eternal responsibility before God is the one thing needful.”<sup>109</sup> Yet the crucial question is the next one: “What is your occupation in life?” This may be great or small, but the discourse demands that whatever the vocation is it must be thought of together with the responsibility of eternity; every occupation can be valuable and purposeful from this perspective because what eternity values is the integrity of single individuals. Thus, two more direct questions to the hearer that follow on closely are “In the course of your occupation, what is your frame of mind, how do you perform your work?” and “Are you convinced that your occupation is your calling so that you do not reinterpret it according to the results and think that it is not still your calling if the results are

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<sup>106</sup> In his chapter in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary on Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, Christopher Nelson carries out an analysis of the concept of vocation in “An Occasional Discourse”, rightly identifying it as one of the most important place in his published work where Kierkegaard sets out his thoughts on it in a veronymous text. He traces the development of the concept of a religious vocation back through Martin Luther and St. Paul. Nelson also observes in passing that “the direction of the authorship is itself highly telling for the concept of vocation” – Nelson, ‘Kierkegaard’s Concept of Vocation in “An Occasional Discourse”’ in *IKC:UDVS*, 103.

<sup>107</sup> *UDVS*, 126.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

unfavourable and your efforts do not succeed?”<sup>110</sup> The answer to the first of these questions is clearly meant to be that your work should be done in a state of mind that is aware of your individual eternal responsibility before God. The answer to the second question is that ideally you do *not* allow the results or success of your work to affect whether or not you see it as your call, because having a vacillating motivation dependent on the changing fruits of one’s labours is an unstable foundation and a sign of weakness. Therefore Kierkegaard implores his hearers to stand fast in the occupation to which they believe they have been called no matter what the apparent visible results, deferring at every point to God who by his help is able to make good out of even the poorest human beginnings, so long as the worker remains faithful to him. Calling is as such not about results or success but about being responsible before God.

Another barrage of challenging questions bring the passage and the discourse to their conclusion: Are you single-minded or double-minded in your work? Are you “eternally concerned?” Do you “stick to your bid?” What means do you use to perform your work? Are the means just as important as the ends (because they should be)? What is your frame of mind towards others? Are you in harmony with everyone, by willing one thing? Do you do unto others as you would have them do unto you, by willing one thing?<sup>111</sup> Two things are significant about these remaining questions that round off the discourse. The first is that they are heavily inflected with scripture, a key source of influence on Kierkegaard’s thoughts to do with vocation here, not just in the recurring mention of “double-mindedness” from James but in the quotation from Jesus’ New Testament “Golden

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 139-144.

Rule” of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. The second is related to this and is that the discourse, while all along it has been repeatedly concerned with and addressed to “that single individual”, ends with an emphasis on the *other* when it comes to thinking about vocation. The resting place of the discourse is not purely within the self-enclosed sphere of the individual’s awareness and conscience but in the space between the individual and all the others that they encounter in their working life, on whom the outworking of their calling is going to have an effect. It is thus important for a Kierkegaardian theory of vocation that it is not simply concerned with individuals ascertaining their callings by themselves in private communion with God but also with monitoring the healthiness (but not the authenticity!) of that calling by seeing how it affects and influences others. A calling should work towards harmony with others, and carrying it out should be a way of loving others, of doing unto them as one would be done by. So a calling that is being worked out in the proper way should be other-focused and loving.

### ***Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits as an Outworking of Artistic Vocation***

Let us now apply this vocational manifesto to Kierkegaard himself and his career so far as a kind of thought-experiment to see whether he himself can be construed as measuring up to his own standards for religious vocation, for this will yield some potent insights into his understanding of his own artistic task. Of course, Kierkegaard does not state that he is talking about himself in this passage, but it is written under his own name so there is an even stronger case than is usual for looking for connections between this text and the autobiographical journal material. Indeed we remember from the *Journals* of this period that he has recently

recorded a decision to carry on writing after thinking that he would end with the *Postscript* and become a priest, a decision that came with the persecution from *The Corsair*. It is therefore not surprising at all that reflections on vocation now appear so visibly in the published works, just as they were now beginning to appear more and more plainly in the *Journals*.

“What kind of life was Kierkegaard’s, did he will one thing and what was that one thing?” asks the discourse. Kierkegaard’s was a largely solitary, literary life. Whether he willed one thing on a personal, spiritual level is not something that can be tested, but he did claim later that his whole literary work had been the outworking of one idea.<sup>112</sup> “Did he live in such a way that he was conscious of being a single individual with an awareness of his eternal responsibility before God?” This information is not accessible to us either. But the *Journals* are beginning by this time to document evidence that could serve as the best possible clues that he did, and there is a very great deal more to come there. From these, a strong case can be made that, in considering his eternal responsibility before God, Kierkegaard came to believe that the most important thing he could do and indeed must do was to communicate what true Christianity was in an age that had forgotten this. The way in which he lived, by spending his time writing, was certainly an attempt to undertake this task, both when it came to the more “indirect” and the more “direct” works, and in essence that is precisely what this thesis is concerned with.

“What was his occupation in life, then?” Plainly, he was a writer (and a self-funded one at that, a luxury many would-be writers cannot afford). “In the course of his occupation, what was his frame of mind, how did he perform his work?”

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<sup>112</sup> *Pap X 6 B 4:3 / JP 6, 6770 (1851)*.

Again, we cannot really know, although it is probably fair to say he performed it with passion, industriousness and by all accounts a singular clarity of devotion. “Was he convinced that his occupation was his calling so that he did not reinterpret it according to the results and thought that it was not still his calling if the results were unfavourable and his efforts did not succeed?” This is an extremely interesting question. From what has come before, there is a certain amount of evidence to suggest that Kierkegaard *did* reinterpret his calling to some degree in accordance with the results that it yielded. Not in terms of his general call to be a writer and a communicator of Christianity which did not alter (unless one sees his transient resolutions to become a priest as a response to frustration at the ineffectiveness of his writings, but that is pure conjecture and has no basis in any of the journal material) but rather in terms of the methods or means by which he carried out that call: At the place we have just reached in this survey of Kierkegaard’s work, we are at one of the turning points where to a large extent he modifies his whole approach, in this case moving from a more indirect (or parallel indirect/direct) general mode of writing to a more direct (or direct-indirect) general mode of writing. It could be suggested that, just as *Either/Or* may have been followed by *Two Upbuilding Discourses* when the public’s interest in the former was largely concentrated on “The Seducer’s Diary”, the post-1847 adjustment to a more direct approach may have been the product of a disillusionment with the indirect writings’ ineffectiveness at awakening readers to Christianity. Once more, this cannot be proved from the *Journals* but it is a thought-provoking possibility. It is an even more interesting question whether or not the direct writings *are* more or less effective for the propagation of the Christian

message than the indirect writings and one I will return to in the second Part of this thesis.

Suffice it to say here that, globally and historically speaking, it is not difficult to establish that Kierkegaard is best known for *Fear and Trembling*, *Either/Or* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Those have been his most popular and famous texts, and they are all pseudonymous, more indirect and belong to the “first authorship”. But are they more or less effective at awakening people to Christianity than the *Upbuilding Discourses*, *Works of Love* and *The Moment*? This is impossible to quantify. Some people share anecdotal evidence of such awakenings, or even cite them for themselves. On the other hand, the appropriation of the pseudonymous authorship by a movement like atheist French existentialism could be a negative indicator of its potential for awakening persons to Christianity, even if the reader is supposed to be able to respond to it in their own free way. One wonders what Kierkegaard would have made of his being admired by such acclaimed, but non-Christian, thinkers as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger.

We can skip over some of the remaining questions from “An Occasional Discourse” because they largely repeat themes that I have just been examining. However it will still be fruitful to focus on the last few to ask how Kierkegaard, the solitary writer, could have seen himself fulfilling a calling towards *others*: “What was his frame of mind towards others? Was he in harmony with everyone, by willing one thing? Did he do unto others as he would have had them do unto him, by willing one thing?” In other words, in carrying out his religious vocation as an artist, in what way was Kierkegaard *loving* others, as a truly Christian calling

should entail? Attempting to answer this question will help me to spell out a little more lucidly exactly *why* Kierkegaard might have come to the conclusion that his calling was to communicate Christianity by writing at all. To do so requires trying to put oneself in the mindset of a nineteenth-century Danish Lutheran Christian who has had a very religious upbringing and to a strong degree has returned to the beliefs of that upbringing in later (working) life. We have already seen from Judge William, who may or may not share some of his thoughts with Kierkegaard, that *calling* goes hand-in-hand with *talent* because a person will always be called to something to which they are personally and particularly suited.

For Kierkegaard then, the voracious reader and writer with a *Magister* degree, his calling was always in some way going to involve books—writing books. Now, if one is a conservative Danish Lutheran Christian, or indeed any kind of conservative or evangelical Christian, the best way to “love” someone and to do unto them as you would have them do unto you, aside from clothing them and meeting their basic needs if those are lacking, is to share the Christian message with them if they do not already believe it, because for such a person belief in that message is bound up with personal salvation and redemption. When the two considerations are brought together, writing books in order to awaken people to Christianity becomes the most obvious and natural vocation to follow. In this way, Kierkegaard can be seen as trying to love others through carrying out his artistic vocation. Of course, this is all a creative reading of the narrative of Kierkegaard’s life and for a moment I have been straying outside the borders of this more historiographical part of my enquiry, but asking these Kierkegaardian questions of Kierkegaard is highly important for my project nonetheless. This discussion will

again become more relevant in the second major Part of this thesis but it has been apposite to undertake it here in relation to this place in Kierkegaard's published writings where he most clearly sets out his thoughts on religious vocation under his own name.

## **EVEN MORE DIRECT?**

### ***Journals, 1848***

I now progress beyond 1847 into 1848. This was an important year for Europe<sup>113</sup> and it was an important year for Kierkegaard. On Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 1848, he wrote "N.B. N.B. My whole nature is changed. My concealment and reserve are broken—I am free to speak. [...] Maundy Thursday and Good Friday have become truly holy days for me."<sup>114</sup> Lowrie thinks the "speaking" he talks of here has to do with the potential public confession of his faith and that, although he still had a place for indirect communication at this time, from hereon in he resolved to become *even more* direct.<sup>115</sup> To "speak" could be an alternative to writing, or it could also mean writing even more directly under his own name.<sup>116</sup> However, only five days after this entry, by Easter Monday, we find him writing "N.B. N.B....No, no, I cannot lift my reserve after all, at least not now. The idea of wanting to do so will come so much to occupy every moment as to make it even more firmly

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<sup>113</sup> The 24<sup>th</sup> of February of this year was the start of the French revolution and there were similar uprisings all over Europe. Denmark's shift to a constitutional monarchy was much more peaceful, though also accompanied by a war with Prussia over the duchy of Schleswig-Holstein, which was lost. The Communist Manifesto was also first published in this year. See Perkins, *IKC:CD*, 2. For more on the historico-political background to Kierkegaard's writings, see Bruce Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>114</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 640 / JP 5*, 6131 (19 April 1848).

<sup>115</sup> Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 406.

<sup>116</sup> Hannay, *Papers and Journals: A Selection* (London: Penguin 1996), 283.

entrenched.”<sup>117</sup> He continues by saying that he sees his life as involving bringing tidings of comfort and joy to others while he himself remains “bound in pain.” One might ask, does he really believe that he is meant to be “bound in pain”—what about the forgiveness and grace offered by Christianity? To this Kierkegaard replies “Certainly I believe in forgiveness of sin, but I understand it in this way, as heretofore, that I must endure my punishment to the end of my days by remaining in the painful prison of this reserve, far from the society of other men in the deeper sense, yet with the mitigating thought that God has forgiven me.” In other words, he tells us, he cannot yet raise his faith to the point where he can let go of his pain and reserve with respect to speaking out, but he is thankful that God has allowed him to be blessed by the “spiritual activity” of writing, which serves to some extent to alleviate his despair.

What one sees in this entry is characteristic of the entries of this time, and of what has been becoming a pattern in the *Journals*: the dual identification of worldly, non-religious influences, such as melancholy and therapeutic catharsis,<sup>118</sup> and spiritual, religious influences including a sense of divine calling<sup>119</sup> as being the motivations for artistic communication. However, from 1848 onwards the former appear less and less frequently and Kierkegaard gives the spiritual influences on the writing yet more of the centre stage. To explain this change, of which he is aware, Kierkegaard invokes the term “guidance”, which we first saw in 1846, referring to the way that God has steered him or “brought him up” into writing for a religious purpose. Of guidance Kierkegaard says: “he has me in his power and guides me in such a way that it is always retrospectively that I best understand

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<sup>117</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 645 / JP 5, 6133 (24 April 1848).*

<sup>118</sup> See for e.g. *Pap VIII 1 A 641 / JP 5, 6132; Pap IX A 411 / JP 6, 6274 (1848).*

<sup>119</sup> See for e.g. *Pap IX A 25, 55, 471 / JP 6, 6146, 6158, 6288 (1848).*

how this or that is precisely in the service of the cause.”<sup>120</sup> However, with his upbringing by guidance there has now come a deep-set struggle over whether this spiritually-inspired artistic communication should be more indirect or direct, as we saw was the case in 1847. As Hannay observes, “the entries for this period are full of an uneasy blend of decisiveness and self-doubt. Many entries are no doubt Kierkegaard’s own working through these moods to wrestle out his future plan against the background of practical and moral difficulties.”<sup>121</sup> As he becomes increasingly preoccupied with this problem, the entries from 1848 on the subject of his artistic vocation become very dense, voluminous and complex. The following entry is a good indicator of the struggle taking place at this point:

That I have developed more and more religiously can be seen in the very fact that I now take my leave of the aesthetic because I don’t know where to find the time to be able or willing to dare fill with producing aesthetic works...it has been granted me here to present Christianity once again and in a way that provides a basis for an entire development: [...] the unrecognizability of the incognito in relation to the God-man, the impossibility of direct communication, etc.; all the essays contain to my mind such a wealth and abundance of ideas that again and again, and still again, I cannot praise God enough for having granted me so infinitely much more than I expected. And I am convinced withal that it will serve the inward deepening of Christianity.<sup>122</sup>

Not only does Kierkegaard seem to say here that God has been bringing him up to be more religious and see more of a purpose in his artistic works, he also sees himself as being developed *away* from the aesthetic *towards* the religious, and, in some respects associated with this, *away* from aesthetic, more indirect communication *towards* religious, more direct communication. But, just as he is

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<sup>120</sup> *Pap IX A 173 / JP 6, 6207; 1848. See also for e.g. Pap IX A 54 / JP 6, 6157; IX A 241 / JP 6, 6242 (1848).*

<sup>121</sup> Hannay, *Journals*, 283.

<sup>122</sup> *Pap IX A 227 / JP 6, 6238 (1848).*

struggling to “speak” and meditating extensively on exactly what form his communication should take, this transition is by no means smooth, simple, or clear-cut. The above entry says that he has no more time for aesthetic works, which he usually associates with the indirect method, but at the same time refers to the idea that direct communication of the religious is impossible!<sup>123</sup> Sometimes he paints indirect communication much more positively in depicting the transition, as when he says “in a way I began my activity as an author with a *falsum*...The fact is, in so-called established Christendom people are so settled in the delusion that they are Christians that if there is to be any question of making them aware, one will have to resort to many an artifice”, arguing that if someone not known as an author starts off as a “Christian author”, he will not “catch the ear” of his age”.<sup>124</sup> Yet he adds that having begun in this way as an aesthete he very rapidly reached the religious—so rapidly that it went unnoticed! He also maintains that, despite beginning as an aesthete, “The nerve in all my activity as a writer is really to be found in the fact that I was essentially religious when I wrote *Either/Or*.” Lastly, this entry also contains the following statement, important because it shows that Kierkegaard still aims to retain a capability for the aesthetic writing even while he is making hints about moving towards even more direct, religious communication:

Where I see my task is precisely in always understanding what the world’s vanity and worldliness covet most and the point of view from which people look patronisingly down upon the religious as something for run-down subjects—always able but not really willing. The world’s weakness is such that when it believes the person who proclaims the religious is incapable of the aesthetic it pays no attention to the religious.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> This idea will be most completely developed in *Practice in Christianity*.

<sup>124</sup> *Pap IX A 171 / JP 6, 6205 (1848)*.

<sup>125</sup> *Pap IX A 175 / JP 6, 6209 (1848)*.

These comments portray indirect communication in quite a positive light. Seeing himself in this way as an aesthete who has been brought up more and more by the religious and yet remains a proclaimer of the religious who is capable of utilising the aesthetic, Kierkegaard looks back approvingly on his aesthetic works. Further, he here sees his on-going task as being to expound Christianity in a way that is more direct, yet not entirely direct, and so is still indirect to an extent (perhaps “direct-indirect” again). This leads him to ascribe to himself a confusing variety of titles in 1848: He calls himself “a rather odd kind of genius—neither more nor less, with no authority at all and therefore constantly under instructions to annihilate himself so as not to become an authority for anyone”,<sup>126</sup> “a secret agent”<sup>127</sup> but “without daring in any special sense to call [himself] an instrument of God”,<sup>128</sup> “only a writer”,<sup>129</sup> and, while not quite yet a martyr, “a genius who possibly could become a martyr for the truth, in order to truly present what Christianity is.”<sup>130</sup> The cautious, peculiar contrast is revealing of the tension between indirect and direct communication that he was struggling with in the writing at this time. He is not completely satisfied with indirect communication and thus has become more direct up to a point, but neither will he yet venture out into *even more* direct communication fully in the public sphere, particularly when it comes to speaking about himself and his own work as an author, which would be a too highly personal affair.

However, to say all of this is to examine the tension from only one of its sides, as it were. On the other side, there are entries from 1848 that speak much

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<sup>126</sup> *Pap IX A 189 / JP 6, 6220 (1848).*

<sup>127</sup> *Pap IX A 190 / JP 6, 6221 (1848).*

<sup>128</sup> *Pap IX A 215 / KJN NB 6:63 (1848).*

<sup>129</sup> *Pap IX A 293 / JP 6, 6258 (1848).*

<sup>130</sup> *Pap IX A 302 / KJN NB 7:45 (1848).*

more in favour of direct communication and even that portray indirect communication negatively. After all, “The point in Christianity is that it is present to us. That is why no poet, no orator, can portray it; they use too much imagination. It is precisely on that account (that is, for the wrong reason) that poets and orators are loved and held in esteem.”<sup>131</sup> This seems to be one of those passages that might rule out any Kierkegaardian theory of Christian artistic communication if taken in isolation. But Kierkegaard went on portraying Christianity poetically and went on to call himself Christianity’s poet after he penned this entry (see below), so he cannot have finally decided that it is impossible to portray Christianity in *any* poetic manner. And he does go on in this passage to allow that “a dialectician can represent it by hallowing it into our presence, as it were, through constantly removing all our delusions.” What the entry *does* hint at is the beginnings of a disillusionment with more indirect, aesthetic, maieutic communication. For a little while later he writes that the “maieutic cannot be the last form...the maieutic teacher must become the witness”<sup>132</sup> and a little later still he claims “now because I am clear about direct communication I can illuminate indirect communication...Earlier I was constantly unclear about it.”<sup>133</sup> These remarks suggest that he was slowly coming to see the potential for even more direct communication to supersede completely more indirect communication, ultimately as the more valuable and useful form for communicating his religious message. But the tension is still profound—“constantly unclear” might also describe the thoughts on communication here—and the term “direct-indirect” still perhaps best

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<sup>131</sup> *Pap IX A 114 / JP 1, 761 (1848).*

<sup>132</sup> *Pap IX A 221 / JP 2, 1957 (1848).*

<sup>133</sup> *Pap IX A 265 / JP 6, 6248 (1848).*

characterises the theorising and the production of this time, with a slight leaning towards becoming “even more direct”.

### ***THE POINT OF VIEW FOR MY WORK AS AN AUTHOR***

While Kierkegaard was intensely thinking through the relative merits of the different forms of communication during this period, it is not surprising that he wrote a “direct” explanation of his authorship, a kind of authorial autobiography or in his case an “autographography”, at this time. This writing initially seems to have been prompted by considerations of what religious piece to publish alongside the second edition of *Either/Or* that the printers were now asking for, which Edna and Howard Hong note had become “agonisingly complicated by protracted reflection on indirect communication (pseudonymity) and direct communication”.<sup>134</sup> Whatever the precise spur, one day in 1848 Kierkegaard wrote “Now I can see my way to writing a short and as serious a presentation as possible of my previous authorship, which is necessary before the transition to the next.”<sup>135</sup> And why could he see his way to that? Simply, he says, because he now claimed to be “clear” about the way in which direct communication “is related to what is crucial in Christianity”, which in turn meant he could now understand indirect communication more fully.

One might be forgiven for harbouring suspicions about whether Kierkegaard really had become completely clear about indirect and direct communication at this time. In any case, *The Point of View for My Work as An*

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<sup>134</sup> *POV*, x. Note that for many commentators, and arguably Kierkegaard himself, indirect communication and pseudonymity are not necessarily equivocal.

<sup>135</sup> *Pap IX A 265 / JP 6, 6248* (1848).

*Author: A Direct Communication, report to History by S. Kierkegaard* was “as good as finished” by November 1848,<sup>136</sup> though Kierkegaard agonised endlessly over whether to publish it and in the end it was only published after his death.<sup>137</sup> Rather than going through *The Point of View* page by page,<sup>138</sup> I will here survey what it has to say about Kierkegaard’s understanding of his vocation as a Christian artist, organising the material thematically, and test its claims against the rest of the authorship as it existed up until that time. As one would expect, it is very similar in content to the journal entries of 1848, but with some important differences.

### **Religious from the Start**

The first thing to note is that in the text Kierkegaard states repeatedly what he takes to be the central issue, thrust, and hermeneutical key to his entire authorship thus far, which is as follows: “My whole authorship pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian, with direct and indirect polemical aim at that enormous illusion, Christendom, or the illusion that in such a country all are Christians of sorts.”<sup>139</sup> It is interesting that this mission statement contains both the words “direct” and “indirect”, with the former having syntactical priority. The point of view of *The Point of View* is that what Kierkegaard’s Christian art is really about is the issue of becoming a Christian, in the particular context of the illusory world of Christendom. So we hear that *Postscript*, the turning point of the

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<sup>136</sup> *Pap IX A 293 / JP 6, 6258* (1848).

<sup>137</sup> See *POV*, xiv.

<sup>138</sup> N.B. That *POV* contains more than this text; it also collects some other of Kierkegaard’s autobiographical texts. Perkins writes that “This collection has a common theme: the vocation of the religious writer, and especially a Christian writer in Christendom”, Perkins, *IKC:POV*, 1.

<sup>139</sup> *POV*, 24.

whole authorship, especially poses this issue<sup>140</sup> and that “this is an authorship of which the total thought is the task of becoming a Christian.”<sup>141</sup>

Moreover, consistent with the *Journals*, Kierkegaard says in *The Point of View* that it was human, earthly factors that initially contributed to his becoming an author. These include penance, melancholy, and again the simple *need* to write:

I know very well what offenses I *personally* may have committed. But I also know with God that precisely my work as an author was the prompting of an irresistible inner need, the only possibility for a depressed person, an honest indemnifying attempt by one deeply humbled, a penitent, to make up, if possible, for something by means of every sacrifice and effort in the service of the truth.<sup>142</sup>

Later in the book he gives a short account of how he became an author,<sup>143</sup> beginning with the facts that he was depressed from childhood but had the ability to cover it up, was instilled with Christianity early on, and had a very odd relationship with his father who mistook him for an “old man”.<sup>144</sup> The actual embarking upon the authorship had to do with a “thorn in the flesh” and the fact that he was a penitent who prayed for zeal and patience for the work God would assign to him.<sup>145</sup> Regine is not here mentioned by name, but he does record that there was another special “fact” prior to him becoming an author.

Becoming an author was also simultaneous with becoming a “poet” but he apparently found that his religiousness “annihilated” this reality so that “the poetic element had to be emptied out”.<sup>146</sup> He had planned on emptying out all his poetry and then becoming a priest but then discovered he had become a religious author

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 31, 55.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 79-84.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 85.

and that the need to write was so great that he could not do otherwise. Thus he understood himself as eventually satisfying “the religious” by becoming a religious author.<sup>147</sup> In presenting the matter thus, Kierkegaard admits again that his authorship started out being more aesthetic but became more religious as it went on and as in the *Journals* the explanation for this is that he has been brought up by guidance.<sup>148</sup> He later admits, crucially, “If...I were to go ahead and say that I had an overview of the whole dialectical structure from the very beginning of the whole work...it would be a denial and an unfairness to God.”<sup>149</sup> *But* at the same time he wants at every stage to argue that his was also a religious authorship *from the start*, even if it became more and more religious as time went on. He claims that there is an equivocalness or “duplexity” in the entire authorship<sup>150</sup> whereby both the religious and the aesthetic are present throughout and that the religious is present from the start in latent form just as the aesthetic is present at the end in mitigated form in his *Actress* articles.<sup>151</sup>

The inference from this is that the author is and *always was* to some degree a religious author; it is impossible to explain the whole authorship as the work of an aesthetic author, but it functions well as the work of a religious author.<sup>152</sup> This declaration is for Kierkegaard “*qua* human being [his] religious duty: namely, a direct declaration that the author was and is a religious author.”<sup>153</sup> It means that even when he wrote *Either/Or* he was latently a religious author: “When I began *Either/Or*...I was *potentialiter* as deeply influenced by the religious as I ever

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>148</sup> For guidance in *POV*, see 22, 24-26, 71-77.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 33-4.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 35.

became...I either had to plunge into despair and sensuality or absolutely choose the religious as the one and only". And it is not only *potentialiter* that Kierkegaard was a religious author at this time, because this was also the time when he started writing and publishing his *Upbuilding Discourses*. Famously he declares "With my left hand I passed *Either/Or* out into the world, with my right hand *Two Upbuilding Discourses*; but they all or almost all took the left hand with their right."<sup>154</sup>

### **Indirect and Direct Communication in *The Point of View***

In explaining how his religious intentions and purposes were fulfilled even by the aesthetic works in increasingly conscious measure, Kierkegaard also has much to say about indirect communication in *The Point of View*. As the Hongs tell us, "Kierkegaard's views on both indirect and direct communication were predicated on his conception of his task"<sup>155</sup> and as far as indirect communication goes, the way it serves that task is by working to "deceive" people out of Christendom: "the aesthetic in the works...is the incognito and the deception in the service of Christianity."<sup>156</sup> At the time of *The Point of View* Kierkegaard believes that this is *necessary* in order to communicate Christianity in Christendom, since

If it is an illusion that all are Christians, and if something is to be done, it must be done indirectly, not by someone who loudly declares himself to be an extraordinary Christian, but by someone who, better informed, even declares himself not to be a Christian.<sup>157</sup>

In other words, as we saw was developed in the *Journals*, if people are living in aesthetic or at most aesthetic-ethical categories then they need an aesthetic

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 43.

communication to ‘wake them up’, and so “the religious author... must begin with an aesthetic piece...in Christendom the religious author, whose total thought is what it means to become a Christian, properly starts out with being an aesthetic author.”<sup>158</sup> He must then “bring forth the religious as swiftly as possible as soon as he has gained their attention, so that with the momentum of being engrossed in the aesthetic the same people come face-to-face with the religious...”<sup>159</sup> As one of Kierkegaard’s section headings renders it “*If One Is to Succeed in Leading a Person to a Specific Place, One Must First and Foremost take Care to Find Him Where **He** Is and Begin There*”.<sup>160</sup>

But this is not the whole of the matter with regards to communication as far as *The Point of View* is concerned. As the Hongs also say in their introduction, for Kierkegaard at the time he wrote *The Point of View*, “Although indirect communication is not inferior to direct communication, it has limits defined by the communicator and the nature of the communication...with regard to Christianity the method is properly only provisional.”<sup>161</sup> They further observe that Kierkegaard acknowledges that “the requirement of witness (direct communication) is intrinsic to Christianity.”<sup>162</sup> But what is strange about *The Point of View* is that it actually has very little to say about direct communication, despite the title page declaring that it *is* a “direct communication”—far less than it has to say about indirect communication, in any case. Sometimes it reads like an *apology* for indirect communication that Kierkegaard is addressing to himself in trying to make sense of his earlier, more indirect authorship. And even on the topic of indirect

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 44, 47.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., xii.

communication it is not entirely clear. In one place Kierkegaard even confesses that he does not even know if the “aesthetic emptying out” he performed in the indirect works is something of which he should be repentant!<sup>163</sup> When he says on the next page that “The teleological suspension related to the communication of truth (temporarily suppressing something precisely in order that the true can become more true) is a plain duty to the truth and is part and parcel of a person’s responsibility to God for the reflection granted to him”<sup>164</sup> he sounds almost as though he is trying to *convince* himself that it is not something of which he needs to repent. Whatever his personal position, at the time of writing *The Point of View* there remains a heightened tension around how Kierkegaard portrays indirect and direct forms of communication.

### **Can *The Point of View* Be Trusted?**

The key points to note from *The Point of View* for this project then are that it: states that Kierkegaard’s task is to introduce Christianity into Christendom; explains that he did not see the whole plan for this from the start but how he can nonetheless say that he was a religious author from the beginning; and displays a by now familiar tension between indirect and direct communication. A question of interest for my thesis is whether in particular the second point really is consistent with what has come before and whether Kierkegaard can really make the claim that he was a religious author from the start, as some have challenged. I have already argued earlier with regard to *Either/Or* that it exhibits sufficient religious characteristics to warrant its being called a religious text. But now I shall examine the problem from the other direction, as it were, and evaluate *The Point of View’s*

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 89.

retrospectival claims about Kierkegaard's religiousness at the time of writing *Either/Or*.

There has been a huge amount of scholarly debate on this matter. Some, such as M. Holmes Hartshorne in *Kierkegaard, Godly Deceiver*, think that the author was straightforwardly, out-and-out religious in his intentions from the beginning.<sup>165</sup> Hartshorne flags up in his preface his belief that all of Kierkegaard's "pseudonymous books were a grand deception" intended to function in service of the religious, taking *The Point of View* straightforwardly at its word.<sup>166</sup> Pattison in his early work argues along similar but more subtly defined lines that "Although some commentators doubt whether Kierkegaard's authorship was as genuinely religious from the start as he claims it to have been in *The Point of View*", an analysis of the aesthetic works "supports his argument that the authorship did in fact point to the illusory element in the aesthetic".<sup>167</sup> Walsh is similarly sympathetic to this interpretation though is, like Pattison, slightly more tempered in her assessment of Kierkegaard's initial religiosity.<sup>168</sup> Yet even Hartshorne, whose argument is the most un-nuanced of these scholars, will admit later in his book that Kierkegaard's predominant motivation in writing was at first to process his feelings to do with the break with Regine and that he did not have an overall plan until he had written much more, as *The Point of View* says.<sup>169</sup> In any case, what these commentators have in common is that they all, with various different

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<sup>165</sup> See M. Holmes Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard, Godly Deceiver* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Walsh, *Living Poetically*, footnote to 11.

<sup>166</sup> Hartshorne, *Godly Deceiver*, xv.

<sup>167</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Theory and Critique of Art. Its Theological Significance* (PhD thesis: Durham, 1983), 308-9. See also Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, xv.

<sup>168</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, footnote to 11.

<sup>169</sup> Hartshorne, *Godly Deceiver*, 80.

qualifications, agree with Kierkegaard's retroactive assessment that his authorship always had some kind of religious character.

Others, such as Henning Fenger, Louis Mackey and Joakim Garff, strongly disagree with the idea that the earlier authorship was religious.<sup>170</sup> Fenger, in mind of what he calls Kierkegaard's "interpretations and rationalisations-after-the-fact",<sup>171</sup> asks "What are the autobiographical writings save a confession of a lifelong piece of playacting in the service of a higher cause?"<sup>172</sup> For Fenger, "the chronological facts do not support Kierkegaard's later interpretations of the authorship as having been planned from the start in accordance with religious categories. Rather, the facts contradict these interpretations."<sup>173</sup> He claims that Kierkegaard builds his thesis that his work was religious from the start in *The Point of View* on faulty assertions made by tampering with his bibliography in order to present the façade that there had always been an aesthetic and a religious element working simultaneously in the authorship. He thinks that the gap of three months between *Either/Or* and the first *Upbuilding Discourses* is too large and that the "Ultimatum" of the former should have been more overtly religious.<sup>174</sup> This leads to his assessment of *The Point of View* as exhibiting a "blend of a desire for

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<sup>170</sup> See Fenger, *The Myths and their Origins*, 21-23, 26-31; Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus' in, *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 86. Interestingly, Roger Poole, a famous postmodern interpreter, actually disagrees with Fenger (and thus Garff) on this point in his *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993). However, Poole still gives little credence to *The Point of View* and sees it as heavily re-interpretative of Kierkegaard's life. Cf. Poole, *The Indirect Communication*, 20-21. Poole sees readers who trust *The Point of View*, attribute the pseudonyms' views to Kierkegaard and take his *Journals* as giving away his own voice as "blunt". See 'The unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-century receptions' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* ed. Alistair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>171</sup> Fenger, *The Myths and their Origins*, 20.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-8.

honesty and naïve self-persuasion” and of Kierkegaard as a poet who both “make[s] literature out of his life” and “make[s] literature with his life”.<sup>175</sup>

Louis Mackey is the father of this kind of critique being made on Derridean grounds, employing a deconstructive reading of *The Point of View*. In *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* but also more clearly in *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard*, Mackey argues that *The Point of View* fails as an interpretation of Kierkegaard’s work and raises the possibility of it being an indirect jest itself. “Even in this “direct communication””, says Mackey, “Kierkegaard is still the ironist hiding behind a screen of equivocal signifiers that he himself has thrown up [sic].”<sup>176</sup> For Mackey, *The Point of View* cannot function as a meta-text that stands above the rest of the authorship because it only adds yet another set of signifiers to the body of material. The whole performance becomes a metaphor for the very indeterminacy of language itself. Transcendent perspective is not possible; Kierkegaard’s own name was one of his pseudonyms and even writing under it he cannot enable us to penetrate beyond the irony of the indirect works to some kind of mystical intentionality. After all, *The Point of View* is really only a point of view, in reality, and one that deconstructs itself according to Mackey. In the same way, Garff in his biography of Kierkegaard and in a well-known article “The Eyes of Argus” argues that *The Point of View* is a deception or self-deception, a sort of “documenta(fic)tion” or “retrospective reconstruction”,<sup>177</sup> either conscious or unconscious, claiming that “in this work Kierkegaard did not reproduce his own actions but in fact produced them as textual actions that claim to be facts”.<sup>178</sup> He observes that even a Danish reviewer at the time thought Kierkegaard was

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 29, 31.

<sup>176</sup> Mackey, *Points of View*, 163.

<sup>177</sup> Garff, ‘The Eyes of Argus’, 86, 88.

<sup>178</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 554.

deceiving himself when he said in *The Point of View* that the aesthetic works had been written with religious intention.<sup>179</sup> And to flavour his critique further, Garff adds some Freudian suggestions about Kierkegaard's writing really having been an "emptying out" of his sexual frustrations and his conflicting emotions to do with his parents into an obsession with writing.<sup>180</sup>

These different sets of scholars have, of course, argued at length over the issue. A highly intensified and amusing case-in-point when it comes to the clash between the sympathetic and the deconstructive readings of *The Point of View* is found in the Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter of the Hong Kierkegaard Library for the month of July 1999.<sup>181</sup> In it one can find a response to "The Eyes of Argus" penned by Walsh, followed by a response to Walsh's response from Garff himself. Reading them is a little embarrassing because the two scholars do not mince their words (though Garff is ruder to Walsh than she is to him). Walsh criticises Garff for trying to undermine Kierkegaard's idea that readers can discern his intentions from his works, arguing instead that he is not saying that his texts can *prove* his intentionality, but that they can *substantiate* it, or show that "his claims have some basis in the text as far as the reader can see."<sup>182</sup> Over and against a hermeneutic of suspicion, she prefers a hermeneutic of "earnestness",<sup>183</sup> equating it with presupposing "seriousness" and "love" on the part of the reader.<sup>184</sup> She criticises Garff for having "flimsy evidence" in making the case that Kierkegaard was being deceptive in *The Point of View* and for employing a form of "psychoanalytic

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<sup>179</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 560-1.

<sup>180</sup> Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus', 93.

<sup>181</sup> *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, No. 38, ed. Gordon Marino (Northfield: St Olaf College, 1999).

<sup>182</sup> Walsh in *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, No. 38, 6.

<sup>183</sup> A term taken from *POV*, 34.

<sup>184</sup> Walsh, *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, No. 38, 6.

[Freudian] reductionism”.<sup>185</sup> In his reply in the newsletter, Garff effectively builds his argument around the idea that it is inconsistent for Kierkegaard to say in *The Point of View* “I deceive, believe me!” He claims that his own Freudian passages are actually parodies and that his “ironic distance is embarrassingly evident” in them; that they are jokes! But is this itself a joke? It is hard to tell whether Garff is himself being deceptive or serious in the newsletter response. Maybe that serves his point. He concludes “That Walsh and I cannot be expected to come to an immediate agreement about such matters is obvious.”<sup>186</sup>

But these matters are not always obvious. As can be seen, *The Point of View* is an extremely troublesome text that presents a whole catalogue of interpretative problems. In many ways it is the locus and test-case for these incredibly complicated problems when it comes to reading Kierkegaard, perhaps the focal hermeneutical crossroads in the lonely labyrinth of his writings. Without oversimplifying, let me try then to state the matter as simply as possible and make my own case concerning it: *The Point of View* is a text to which Kierkegaard’s name is attached to it in which he ostensibly comments on other of his texts, some of which have his name on them and some of which do not, in order to say what he was trying to do by writing those earlier texts. Everyone agrees on this. What the different scholars disagree on is whether or not Kierkegaard is being sincere when he offers this interpretation and whether or not he is right or justified in offering it. What this comes down to, in essence, is the reader’s choice to suspect Kierkegaard of deception or self-deception on the one hand, or to earnestly trust that his reading of his own work is well-meant and accurate on the other hand.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>186</sup> Garff in *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, No. 38., 14.

The argument about whether to trust in the reading is, in many ways, an argument about having faith in language, the validity of the deconstructive attitude, and the belief in authorial intent, perhaps ultimately the existence of God (or guidance). A reader can choose to trust in Kierkegaard's interpretation of his own work, or not. A reader will be convinced, or not. But the possibility of doing either, the possibility of earnestly trusting in *The Point of View* or of getting offended by it and becoming suspicious of it, always remains. Just as the possibility of trusting in the meaning of language, authorial intent and perhaps ultimately the existence of God, or of becoming offended by them/him and suspicious of them/him, always remains. In my vetting of the secondary commentary on *The Point of View*, I can identify three kinds of readers: Straightforwardly earnest readers, who trust *The Point of View* without qualification or reservation, who are the oldest and most criticised category of readers; deconstructive, suspicious readers, who doubt *The Point of View* and suspect it of ironical deception at best and misguided self-deception at worst, and who react strongly against the first category of readers; and nuancedly earnest readers, who arrive at some kind of synthesis of the first two positions, admitting that *The Point of View* presents some self-deconstructing elements but taking it on balance to be a fair interpretation of the earlier work when its empirical claims are checked against the facts and when it is read sympathetically as an indicator of *Kierkegaard's* actual point of view.

The straightforwardly earnest readers include Niels Jørgen Cappelørn,<sup>187</sup> Julia Watkin,<sup>188</sup> Walter Lowrie, and M. Holmes Hartshorne. The most prominent

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<sup>187</sup> Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, 'The Retrospective Understanding of Kierkegaard's Total Production' in *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results* ed. McKinnon.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Perkins, *IKC:POV*, 13.

deconstructive, suspicious readers are Theodor Adorno,<sup>189</sup> Henning Fenger, Joakim Garff, Elesebet Jegstrup,<sup>190</sup> Louis Mackey, Roger Poole,<sup>191</sup> Mark Taylor,<sup>192</sup> Christopher Norris,<sup>193</sup> Mark Dooley,<sup>194</sup> Joseph Westfall,<sup>195</sup> Betel Pedersen<sup>196</sup> and Sylviane Agacinski.<sup>197</sup> Nuancedly earnest readers would be Eleanor Helms,<sup>198</sup> Carl S. Hughes,<sup>199</sup> David Law,<sup>200</sup> George Pattison,<sup>201</sup> Michael Strawser,<sup>202</sup> Mark A. Tietjen,<sup>203</sup> Sylvia Walsh and John F. Whitmire.<sup>204</sup> My own argument is that although *The Point of View* no doubt reinterprets history and works to some extent to deconstruct itself, it can also on the whole be read earnestly and trustingly as a documentation of Kierkegaard's personal understanding of his authorship, and this is the interpretative option that I select in accordance with my own subjectivity and based on weighing the evidence. Further, checking the factual claims that *The Point of View* makes, as I have done in this thesis, shows them to be accurate: *Either/Or* is a text which has religious characteristics and there was no

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<sup>189</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Adorno is even more suspicious than Garff and argues Kierkegaard's aesthetic is a mode of indirect communication which conceals and hints, but most ultimately reveals only Kierkegaard's ironic melancholy.

<sup>190</sup> Elesebet Jegstrup, ed. *The New Kierkegaard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>191</sup> Poole, *The Indirect Communication*, 2.

<sup>192</sup> Mark Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

<sup>193</sup> Christopher Norris, *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1983).

<sup>194</sup> Mark Dooley, *The Politics of Exodus: Kierkegaard's Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

<sup>195</sup> Westfall, *The Kierkegaardian Author*.

<sup>196</sup> Harold Bloom ed., *Søren Kierkegaard* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989).

<sup>197</sup> Sylviane Agacinski, *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1988).

<sup>198</sup> Eleanor Helms, 'Can Kierkegaard Be Serious? A Phenomenological Point of View for Kierkegaard's Authorship' in *IKC: POV* ed. Perkins.

<sup>199</sup> Carl S. Hughes, 'Communicating Earnestness' in *IKC: POV* ed. Perkins.

<sup>200</sup> David Law, 'A Cacophony of Voices' in *IKC: POV* ed. Perkins.

<sup>201</sup> More or less. Cf. Pattison, 'Kierkegaard's Hands' in *IKC: POV* ed. Perkins.

<sup>202</sup> Strawser, in *Both/And*, represents an odd border case, appearing to think that everything that Kierkegaard wrote is indirect but accepting some of the claims of *POV*.

<sup>203</sup> Mark Tietjen, *Kierkegaard, Communication and Virtue: Authorship as Edification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>204</sup> John F. Whitmire, 'Reconstructing the Religious' in *IKC: POV* ed. Perkins.

documented plan for the authorship at its outset. As for the claims about Kierkegaard's religious *intentionality*, I choose to take these as accurate on faith, rather than to be offended by them, also in the light of ample (but not incontrovertible) evidence in the texts. Therefore I find that *The Point of View* is largely consistent with what Kierkegaard produced before he wrote it, placing myself happily in the "nuancedly earnest reader" category.

### ***The Point of View: Conclusion***

To restate my argument: The difference between this project and the work of the scholars listed is that in it I have examined Kierkegaard's *Journals* chronologically and systematically with regards to this subject and so the evidence is ready to hand. First, there is the matter of what *The Point of View* actually claims which, as I have shown from my close reading, is *not* that Kierkegaard was overtly and completely religious from the start of his authorship, *nor* is it that he had a plan for the entire authorship in his mind when he commenced. Rather, it is that he was a religious author *at all*, because he wrote with a broadly religious purpose and theme, *even though* it is also possible to see the writing as arising from non-religious causes. His claim is also that "guidance" brought him up into working more and more for a religious purpose, so it is not necessarily true to say that he was *conscious* of the aesthetic works being an indirect deception from the start, though he *was* conscious of being a broadly religious author from the moment he wrote *Either/Or*. If one thinks back to what I found in examining the *Journals* from the time of the beginning of the authorship in Chapter One, these statements are consistent with those findings. It was clear from them that Kierkegaard did not have a plan of the authorship in his mind when he started writing, or at least that

he did not write one down, and that the start of his writing appeared to have had more to do with his melancholy and the split from Regine than a Christian sense of vocation, even though it was, broadly speaking, religious writing. Further, the theory of “indirect communication” was only developed after many of the indirect works had been written. But none of this is contradicted by anything that is said in *The Point of View*. In fact, the book supports all these points. There has been an enormous evolution and upbringing in Kierkegaard’s thought by the time he writes *The Point of View*, yes, but there has also been a consistent thread throughout: broadly religious themes and developing traces of religious intentions and purposes. Taking Kierkegaard at his word in *The Point of View* thus remains a valid interpretative option when it comes to reading it, one that I select with nuanced earnestness.

The analysis in this section has concentrated on whether *The Point of View* is consistent with what comes before it. But perhaps even more interesting is whether *The Point of View* is consistent with what comes *after* it was written. In the text itself, Kierkegaard says “With this present little book...I bring to an end the entire earlier work as an author, and then as the author (not as an author, but as the author) I go forward into the future.”<sup>205</sup> Kierkegaard did not stop writing after he had written his authorial autobiography and in the journals he says that once *The Point of View* was written he could now venture out into direct communication properly.<sup>206</sup> Although he did go on to say a year later that “The book [*The Point of View*] is true and in my opinion, masterly”<sup>207</sup> it remains to be seen whether or not Kierkegaard held to *this* point of view for the *entirety* of his authorial life. The

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>206</sup> Pap IX B 57 / KJN SFV ms.2.1 (1848).

<sup>207</sup> Pap X 1 A 78 / JP 6, 6327 (1849).

question becomes, then, not only 'Is *The Point of View* consistent with what came before it?' but also, 'Is *The Point of View* consistent with what comes after it?' To what comes after it, I now turn.

## Chapter Three: Direction

1849-1855

### THE TASK OF THE POET

#### *Journals*, 1849

1849 saw the publication of the second edition of *Either/Or*. However, other than the reissue of this “indirect” work, the authorship continued on the trajectory in which it had been traveling and Kierkegaard now only published more explicitly religious writings and *Discourses* for the rest of his career. For the period 1849-51, these included *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, *Two Ethico-Religious Essays*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Three Discourses at Communion on Fridays*, *Practice in Christianity*, *An Upbuilding Discourse*, *On My Work as an Author*, *Two Discourses at Communion on Fridays* and *For Self-Examination*. These were all under his own name, apart from the use of the pseudonyms “H.H.” for *Two Ethico-Religious Essays* and “Anti-Climacus” for *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*, whom he said was meant to be religiously “higher” than himself, which meant that those works were apparently *not* direct communication, strictly speaking.<sup>1</sup>

The *Journals* for 1849 are similar in theme to those from 1848 and build on them. They are not easy to assess because Kierkegaard continues to write voluminously on the themes of artistic vocation, guidance, upbringing and communication in 1849, and because of the continued tensions in his thinking it can be hard to tease apart the different strands. Like a character in a Dostoevskian

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<sup>1</sup> *Pap X 2 A 184 / JP 6*, 6528; 1849; *Pap X 3 A 625 / JP 1*, 680 (1850).

novel, often he will come out with statements that if taken in isolation can be seen to contradict a whole host of his other, even contemporaneous, utterances and therefore care should be taken to retain a view of the whole and make a wide survey of all the different entries on these topics. Here I will give an overview of the key themes in the overall development in the 1849 journals which, while they are still beset by tensions and are difficult to outline, show increasing signs of moving in the “direction” of privileging more “direct communication” *exclusively* and of speaking out even more directly.

To begin with, worldly causes for the authorship still rear their heads at this point, from time to time. When stressing that he was a religious author from the outset, Kierkegaard is still able to say, consistent with my findings so far, “it is true that as an author I had from the first a ‘religious purpose’, but there is another way of looking at the thing...I wrote for her sake, to clarify her out of the relationship.”<sup>2</sup> Though by now statements of this kind are becoming rarer and rarer. Since 1848 and the writing of *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard’s own sense of religious upbringing and purpose seem to be more at the forefront of his mind than ever before in connection with his writing, judging by his journals. To choose one example of this change, he says, “originally I conceived of authorship as an escape from, a temporary postponement of, this thing of going out into the country as a priest. But is not my position here essentially changed by the fact that I as an author reach the point of working for a religious aim?”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Pap X 1 A 266 / JP 6, 6388 (1849)*. For other worldly influences cited in this period, see for e.g. *Pap X 1 A 78 / JP 6, 6327; Pap X 2 A 10 / JP 1, 763 (1849)*.

<sup>3</sup> *Pap X 1 A 138 / JP 6, 6356 (1849)*.

In this entry, headed “N.B. N.B. N.B. N.B. N.B.” he also writes “I could go as far as the following thought: trying to introduce Christianity into Christendom, albeit poetically and without authority (that is, not making myself into a missionary).” This is an echo of the vocational statement he had settled on by the time of *The Point of View*. He here sees his religious purpose, though not involving authority and *not* being the work of a missionary, as a kind of obedience, since “Christianly the only question is of obedience.” And he goes on to question “How many times have I said this, that a warship does not get its orders until it is at sea?...has my situation not already changed, in that I have *qua* author begun to work for the religious?”, concluding that “guidance itself has kept me in harness.” The images of a warship getting its orders at sea and guidance bringing Kierkegaard up gradually to work for a religious purpose have by now become recurrent, and they continue to recur, in his journals. They typify his now firmly held position that he has been steered into a situation of writing by God, for God. What has become canonical, the ‘official’ position for Kierkegaard, is that guidance has helped him to understand the purpose of his authorship as it unfolded.

In meditating in this way on providence, in 1849 Kierkegaard starts to use a certain two words more and more often which certainly relate to his vocation as a Christian artist. The first of these is “task” (Danish: *Opgave*). From 1849 he uses the word “task” ever more frequently and states what his task is in a variety of similar, but subtly different, ways. For example, in one place we note thrice over that he writes “N.B. N.B. N.B. This was my task: to pose the riddle of awakening: an aesthetic and religious corpus in equilibrium, at the same time.”<sup>4</sup> By running all of

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<sup>4</sup> *Pap X 1 A 118 / JP 6, 6347 (1849)*.

the manifold statements he makes about his task at this time together,<sup>5</sup> one could say that, in 1849, Kierkegaard saw his task as a Christian creative artist as being something like “to pose the riddle of an awakening and deceive people into the religious by casting Christianity into reflection and presenting the ideal of being a Christian to them, whilst stepping back himself, in order to infuse inwardness into the established order.” While somewhat pedestrian, such an exercise does reveal that, although Kierkegaard spoke explicitly of his task in a variety of different ways, they were at least broadly consistent with one another and mutually supportive. We also note the tension between direct presentation and indirect deception in the synthesised statement.

The other word which now starts to appear much more frequently in the *Journals*, and which has a chequered history both in Kierkegaard’s writings and Kierkegaard studies, is ‘poet’ (Danish: *Digter*). Though in some places in his writings he has said and will continue to say disparaging things about the poet, as I explained above, in 1849 and beyond Kierkegaard will say over and over again that he *is* a poet and qualify this in an assortment of changing ways. He is only a poet of Christianity who fails to actualise it properly; therefore he is a “Christian poet.”<sup>6</sup> As if to remind himself that this is what he has concluded, Kierkegaard starts to repeat the phrase “I am only a poet” to himself almost like a sort of mantra in the *Journals*. “God be praised, I understand myself now... I will be the unhappy lover in relation to *being* the ideal of a Christian; I therefore become its poet...I am only a Christian

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<sup>5</sup> For other mentions of his “task” in this period, see for e.g. *Pap X 1 A 192 / JP 6, 6374; Pap X 1 A 281 / JP 6, 6391; Pap X 1 A 615 / JP 6, 6464; Pap X 2 A 106 / JP 6, 6511; Pap X 2 A 193 / JP 6, 6531.*

<sup>6</sup> *Pap X 1 A 281 / JP 6, 6391 (1849)*. See also for e.g. *WL, 46*. For more on the “Christian poet” and how this role differs from both the non-religious Romantic poet and that of someone who actually lives out the ideals that are poetically depicted, see Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 226-229; and Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, 149-150.

poet and thinker.”<sup>7</sup> In this particular entry we see repeated the very important qualification that part of the reason why Kierkegaard is the *poet* of Christianity’s ideal is because he does not himself claim to be someone who actualises that ideal since he sees it as being so high.

Being a poet goes hand in hand with having a task. Such a “Christian poet” may not be able to live out the Christian ideal him or herself, but they “must have the particular ability to do the kind of writing that helps people out into the current [of existence]...The first and foremost task is to create pathos...Here is my task.”<sup>8</sup> At the same time, there is another odd tension evident here when it comes to Kierkegaard’s repeated statements that he is “only a poet”: There is a strange kind of ambivalence whereby he seems to at least *want* to become more than a poet himself, if only at times. “Up to now I am a poet”, he says, “and it is a desperate struggle to will myself to go out beyond my limits.”<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard sees himself as a unique poet for his age but there are hints that he is straining beyond these limits towards becoming something *more* than a poet. In another place in 1849, for example, he toys with the idea of his becoming a “sacrificial victim” in the fulfilment of his purpose.<sup>10</sup> And yet he has clear reservations about such an existential sacrifice, whatever that might look like, and he cannot will himself out into making it fully.<sup>11</sup> As Garff says, “The poet of martyrdom would not [yet] yield his place to the martyrdom of the poet, so to speak.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Pap X 1 A 281 / JP 6, 6391* (25 April 1849). For other “only a poet” statements from this period, see for e.g. *Pap X 1 A 78 / JP 6, 6327*; *Pap X 1 A 273 / JP 6, 6390*; *Pap X 1 A 557 / JP 6, 6450*; *Pap X 2 A 106 / JP 6, 6511*.

<sup>8</sup> *Pap X 2 A 157 / JP 6, 6521* (1849).

<sup>9</sup> *Pap X 1 A 510 / JP 6, 6431* (1849).

<sup>10</sup> *Pap X 1 A 167 / JP 6, 6370* (1849).

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. *Pap X 1 A 421 / KJN NB 11:122* (1849).

<sup>12</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 634.

With and related to this ambivalence there recurs another old ambivalence in the entries about his being a poet, that which has to do with indirect and direct communication, though now it seems at times as if the former might be being made obsolete by the latter. Kierkegaard has normally associated poetry and the poet mainly with the aesthetic sphere and loosely with indirect communication, so presumably the role of the Christian poet in some way involves using indirect communication. But now we hear that “*absolutely* indirect communication in the relation between persons is demonic. The question is whether a human being is permitted to that extent to take God’s side against other human beings: is it not to betray people and insult God?”<sup>13</sup> Leaving aside the question of what exactly he means here by “demonic,” this entry portrays utterly indirect communication in a negative light. This is a new development in the journals. The implication seems to be that indirect communication *par excellence* can only be reserved for God, and that human persons should be a little more direct. This is an important counterweight to ideas that will appear soon about the impossibility of direct communication for the God-man in *Practice in Christianity*. Later in 1849 Kierkegaard says that “with respect to communication Christianity has a singularity which brings entirely unique categories into force”.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the old category of indirect communication will no longer be of service in the same way as before, then? Or perhaps, rather, a balance must be struck? For, just a little later still in 1849 we read that “WITNESSING is still the form of communication which strikes the truest mean between direct and indirect communication.”<sup>15</sup> Apparently the aim has now become to strike a “true mean” between each form of

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<sup>13</sup> *Pap X 1 A 122 / JP 1, 666* (1849). Even “The life of Christ can throw no light on this, for he himself was God.”

<sup>14</sup> *Pap X 1 A 216 / JP 1, 669* (1849).

<sup>15</sup> *Pap X 1 A 235 / JP 1, 670* (1849).

communication rather than to prefer one over the other! Kierkegaard goes on to explain that witnessing is a form of direct communication but one that indirectly makes God, as opposed to oneself or one's contemporaries, into the power that validates the communication, by deferring the claim to authority upwards (perhaps then it is best described as "direct-indirect", though this term does not reappear here).

The question is whether the poet can be someone who witnesses in this way, or whether the title "poet" itself needs to be superseded by the title "witness". Although Kierkegaard has attempted to qualify his understanding of his vocation as a "poet" by introducing the term "Christian poet" or "poet of the religious" to describe himself, there are signs that he is not entirely satisfied with this qualification either, with only being a *poet* of the religious, in keeping with the signs that he might be moving even further away from preferring indirect communication. In one entry he explains that the "most difficult of tasks is this: from 'poet' to Christian; for the poet clings fast to this world even though he suffers in it",<sup>16</sup> and that the poet, even the religious poet, can poetically depict the ideal but still does not actually strive towards it. Is Kierkegaard talking about himself here, is he still willing to have this definition of "poet" attributed to himself? Yes, for he tells us, "Alas, in many respects it is as if this had been written about me. Yet there may still be enough of the better in me that at least I have dared venture out far enough so that providence can get hold of me." The "Alas" is telling. He *is* still a poet then, but there is again a hint that he might have the potential to become something more, perhaps something "better", than a mere poet, even than a Christian poet, something which he regrets not having yet become. At this stage it

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<sup>16</sup> *Pap X 1 A 346 / JP 1, 168 (1849).*

seems that this something more and something better would involve actually trying to live out the Christian ideal instead of only poetising it, but it may also involve discarding more indirect communication in exclusive favour of more direct communication in some way.

Sometimes this hint of potentiality tips over into actuality. A while later in 1849, there is found an infuriating entry where, after having said again and again “I am a poet”, “I’m essentially a poet” and “I’m only a poet after all”, Kierkegaard now has the audacity to proclaim “Really I am rather more than a poet”, his reason being “I have at least had the courage to dare to expose myself to ridicule, and have held out.”<sup>17</sup> This entry is also highly idiosyncratic because, after explaining again that Christianity must be actualised and not only poetised, in it Kierkegaard states that

There is no way...of communicating it except for the purpose of, or in, edification and awakening...Christianity should never be communicated in the medium of rest (unless the person who did so dared to maintain that everyone was a Christian). That is why, in the Christian context, it is a sin to engage in art, literature, speculation, research, dogmatics – how do I dare give myself pause to sit and trifle with that?

‘Yes,’ we might say to Kierkegaard, ‘how dare you?’ If taken in isolation this is another quotation that could be taken to render the entire present project obsolete. But one must remember that most of what he has been engaging himself with producing up until this point has been art and literature—if not quite speculation, research and dogmatics—and, as will be shown, this is what he continues to produce. If it is to be held in balance with the overall picture of Kierkegaard’s work this passage should therefore be read as hyperbole;

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<sup>17</sup> *Pap X 1 A 558 / JP 1, 508 (1849).*

Kierkegaard is at this point prepared to call Christian engagement with art and literature a sin, but only in the context of acknowledging that it is not the same as actualising (what he takes to be) the Christian ideal, that it is not the same thing as living out the ideal personally. As Walsh puts it, “Though as a religious poet Kierkegaard comes closer to depicting the Christian ideality under the conditions of actuality than the usual poet does, actual reduplication of the Christian qualifications or determinants in existence is still required.”<sup>18</sup> Be that as it may. But that requirement should not render all Christian engagement in art and literature useless and sinful, so long as it is held in proper perspective.

### ***THE LILY OF THE FIELD AND THE BIRD OF THE AIR***

I will now examine the next piece of writing that Kierkegaard produced after the second edition of *Either/Or* appeared: *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air: three devotional discourses* (hereafter *The Lily and the Bird*). This text can be found in English in a volume edited by the Hongs entitled *Without Authority*, a collection of a number of Kierkegaard’s works from this period.<sup>19</sup> The title of the collection comes from his own disclaimer in the *Journals* and elsewhere that he was a writer

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<sup>18</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 229.

<sup>19</sup> The one other piece in this collection which might have merited examination in this thesis, but which there is not space to include, is *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* by ‘H.H.’, particularly the first essay, ‘The Difference Between A Genius and an Apostle.’ In the *Journals* Kierkegaard says that these essays are “Not an element in [the authorship] but a point of view.” –*Pap X 1 A 351 / JP 6*, 6407 (1849). The basic point of the essay is that Christian apostles are not artistic geniuses; they operate, quite rightly, in entirely different categories from those of the poetic. By contrast, “The poet, the thinker...does not have any authority...his utterance is evaluated purely aesthetically or philosophically by evaluating the content and form.” (*WA*, 97) Furthermore, the genius does not communicate or write for others, in order “to help them onto the right road, in order to accomplish something” which the apostle does. (*WA*, 108) Suffice to say, this is extremely problematic given the statements that Kierkegaard, who sometimes referred to himself as a genius, makes in *The Point of View* about the purpose and aim of his authorship. It may be that H.H. is not in agreement with Kierkegaard here. This is yet another example of ambiguity and tension to do with the issue manifesting itself in the writings.

without authority, particularly the sanctioned church authority of an ordained priest.<sup>20</sup> These works represent yet another decision to continue writing and publishing after a planned halt, where Kierkegaard had intended once more to discontinue his work with *Crisis*.<sup>21</sup> Of the new works, which were now exclusively religious in mood and genre though sometimes still penned under pseudonyms, *The Lily and the Bird* was the first to appear, accompanying as it did the second edition of *Either/Or* in 1849.<sup>22</sup> *The Lily and the Bird* then is an important text because it stands at another one of those junctures where Kierkegaard resumed his writing after an apparent pause and altered his approach again, though now more subtly. But even if this were not the case, it would still be important to examine it here because it largely concerns itself with what is now portrayed as the *conflict* between the categories of the aesthetic and of Christianity.

*The Lily and the Bird* is one of those texts which if read in isolation could well give rise to the illusion that Kierkegaard had a wholly negative stance towards the poetic. In fact, he is disparaging towards poets and “the poet” throughout, despite calling himself a poet frequently in the *Journals* of the time.<sup>23</sup> But before examining this feature of the text, a few words should be given to the Preface of the work. This explicitly recalls the Preface to the first *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, presenting the devotional discourses to “that single individual whom I...call my reader”, and states that veronymous discourses such as these are offered by Kierkegaard’s right hand, whereas the pseudonyms are offered by his left, an

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<sup>20</sup> See *WA*, ix, referencing *Pap IX B 10 / SKS BOA ms.5.6*.

<sup>21</sup> See *WA*, x, referencing *Pap X 1 A 79 / SKS 21, 251*.

<sup>22</sup> Though it can also be seen as a parallel-piece to *Two Ethical-Religious Discourses* –see *WA*, xi.

<sup>23</sup> As Perkins says in the introduction to the *International Kierkegaard Commentary on Without Authority*, the category of the poet had become “the key to his own sense of vocation” –Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Without Authority* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 3.

image which had recently been committed to paper in *The Point of View*.<sup>24</sup> There then follows a “PRAYER” which neatly sums up the content of the discourses, imploring God, as “Father in heaven” to help the speaker and hearer learn what it is to be a human being, the religious requirement and “silence, obedience, joy” from the lily and bird.<sup>25</sup> *The Lily and the Bird* is as such unapologetically religious, more direct and confessional, as well as reinforcing distinctions within the authorship that have been made earlier on, and this sets the tone for all of what Kierkegaard will now produce until the next lull in his writing.

The first discourse proper opens with a scriptural quotation from the Gospel of Matthew about the lilies and birds who neither toil nor spin and yet of whom God takes care. As early as the seventh page, the derogatory remarks about “the poet” begin: “But perhaps you will say with “the poet” that you wish you were a bird, I wish I were a flower. So speaks the poet.”<sup>26</sup> This is not what the Gospel says, reprimands Kierkegaard, and this means that “the poet cannot come to an understanding with the Gospel.”<sup>27</sup> Whereas the Gospel demands appropriation and application of the lessons of silence, obedience and joy taught by the lily and the bird, the poet would rather dream idly of actually *being* a lily or a bird and thus despairs because he cannot become what he wishes. The poet as such has the requisite imagination to be able to envisage the requirement, but misuses it by fantasising about potentialities without ever actualising them (or in this case even being *able* to actualise them). So “The poet is the child of eternity”, having all the

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<sup>24</sup> WA, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 8.

necessary equipment to relate to eternity, “but lacks the earnestness of eternity.”<sup>28</sup> The Gospel earnestly says to the poet that the lily and bird *shall* teach you, but the poet only laughs in return and cannot translate this command into an existential performance.<sup>29</sup>

To the believer who will learn, by contrast, the lily and bird teach silence, obedience and joy, as we have heard. Interestingly, the ability to be silent is called here by Kierkegaard an “art” and he notes it is an art that somehow corresponds with training oneself to “seek first God’s kingdom, and his righteousness”.<sup>30</sup> This word and phrase are a hint that although Kierkegaard speaks negatively of “the poet” in this text he is not dismissing “poiesis” or artistry altogether and also a reminder that his thinking about it is steeped in the New Testament and his Christian spirituality.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, soon we hear that this artful silence of learning to seek God’s kingdom first is actually “prayer”.<sup>32</sup> The poet fails in regard to this as well, as he prefers natural silence, the quaint appealing silence of a beautiful poetic scene, to submissive human silence before God.<sup>33</sup> The lily and the bird are silent and *suffer*, apparently, yet the poet lacks earnestness and cannot do this, instead daydreaming of imaginary silence, becoming an eloquent, unhappy lover of “the exploit” but never carrying it out.<sup>34</sup> His great plans never become actuality, they become...“the poem.”<sup>35</sup> But for Kierkegaard it is never enough merely to make an

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. my discussion of Kierkegaard’s scriptural hermeneutic and his own devotional life in Chapters Four and Five, below.

<sup>32</sup> WA, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 18.

imaginary poem *about* existence, rather the Christian must seek to make an actual poem *out of* existence, translating the imagined requirement into actuality.

So ends the first discourse of *The Lily and the Bird*. It continues with the second, “No One Can Serve Two Masters...”,<sup>36</sup> and third, “Look at the Birds of the Air...”<sup>37</sup> which elaborate on the same themes as the first and as the prayer in the Preface. “The poet” does not reappear until right at the end of the work, towards the culmination of the third discourse. In the relevant passage, Kierkegaard is explaining how the lily and bird teach unconditional joy and exhorts his readers to cast their sorrow on to God as they do.<sup>38</sup> He then repeats his rhetorical device “Perhaps you will say with the poet...” and this time the poet is suggesting that joy could be found by retreating into nature as a hermit in order to live peacefully with the lily and bird, away from society and its troubles.<sup>39</sup> The poet receives a similar admonition to before, being told “you must not talk this way.” He is invited to look more closely at the matter and shamefully admit that it is really *because* of their joy that the lily and bird are not disturbed by society, “since society is still there”. In unconditional silence they are “just as joyful in solitude as in society”,<sup>40</sup> so the shame-faced poet should not try to reconstruct their example by wandering off into nature on their own. Again, “the poet” is rebuked harshly, set up as a kind of negative type in contrast with the authentic Christian and indeed with the lily and the bird themselves, and serves as a negative example of how *not* to behave if one is seeking true silence, obedience and joy.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 44.

All of this might give the overall impression that Kierkegaard, at this point in his career and in this text, adopts a wholly critical attitude towards poetry and the poetic. But the reader should pause before hastening to this conclusion. To begin with, it is important to observe that this text itself is highly “poetic” in that it uses a literary form that abounds with metaphor, artistry and elegant turns of phrase. This is a point that will be made again below in regards to other texts from this period where Kierkegaard is critical of poetry. The Danish reviewer Ludwig Helweg wrote of *The Lily and the Bird* that it has a “subtlety of structure, clear profundity of thought-development, the same flowing poetic language” as others of Kierkegaard’s texts and I am inclined to agree.<sup>41</sup> As is normal for Kierkegaard, the work overflows with images, similes, and lengthy multi-clause sentences where he develops his themes very poetically. So the admonitions and harsh words towards “the poet” in *The Lily and the Bird* cannot be read as a straightforward undermining of all poetic enterprise unless Kierkegaard is being hypocritical in some way. Much more probable and, as we will see, well supported, is the idea that Kierkegaard is using “the poet” and “poetry” here in a certain, specialist sense. For even when Kierkegaard is being critical of poetry he writes in a very poetic mode.

There is actually a journal entry that openly acknowledges this fact in special connection with *The Lily and the Bird*. In 1848, when he was starting to plan and write the work the year before it was published, Kierkegaard wrote that in it there would be “a development of the conflict between poetry and Christianity, how in a certain sense Christianity is prose in comparison with poetry.”<sup>42</sup> There is a conflict and Christianity *is* prosaic in regards to poetry, presumably because it

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<sup>41</sup> *Danish Kirkeetidende* IV, 48 (September 2, 1849), col. 799, as quoted in *WA*, xix.

<sup>42</sup> *Pap VIII 1 A 643 / JP 2*, 1942 (1848).

lays such an emphasis on actualisation and on not being carried away by flights of fancy. Again, were that all Kierkegaard had to say on the matter there would be a strong case for saying that he is wholly critical of poetry. But this conflict, importantly, only operates “in a certain sense” and the sentence goes on “and yet it [Christianity] is the very poetry of the eternal”. There is a subtle tension at work here, perhaps a function of Kierkegaardian dialectic, and although in a sense Christianity is unpoetic prose, in *another* sense it is itself poetry, poetry of the eternal no less. He then goes on to say that “of course” the writing in *The Lily and the Bird* “will this time have an even more poetic tone” but this is “simply to indicate that the poetic must be put aside, for when poetry in truth shall fall...it ought to wear its party clothes.”

This is a complex idea and in some ways it does not follow obviously on from the statement that Christianity is eternal poetry. What we see here is Kierkegaard acknowledging that he will write in a very poetic manner in order to make his critique of poetry but this is itself supposed to contribute to that critique as a kind of ironic self-referential flourish. And yet, poetry cannot be *wholly* useless for Kierkegaard, precisely because he is still going to use a poetic mode of language to do this and because we have just heard in this same entry that Christianity is the “poetry” of the eternal. These facts, along with his contemporaneous assertions which I have examined above that he is a “poet of the religious”, must serve to balance the negative critique of “the poet” and poetry that is found in texts such as *The Lily and the Bird*. Rather than wanting to “set aside” the poet and poetry altogether, what it seems Kierkegaard wants to do is to set aside the kind of poetic practice that *remains* in the realm of potentiality and poetising but never ventures

forth into actuality to live out the Christian requirement. The poet is still “the child of the eternal”—we need an imagination and poetic capabilities to a certain degree, in order to envisage the requirement as well as receive the prospect of new possibilities from God.<sup>43</sup> But *then*, so to speak, poetry must be set aside, or at least this kind of purely imaginative poetry must be set aside and superseded by what Johannes Climacus might call the art of existence, the actual artful translation of poetic possibilities into existential action. This is why Kierkegaard is even somewhat shy about calling himself a “poet of the religious” and cautions all throughout this period that he himself does not claim to live up to the ideal that he is poetically depicting. He will soon come to invent a new kind of pseudonym to encapsulate just this point. However, all through the writings from this time onwards there is another kind of tension brewing as he wonders increasingly whether he should in actual fact be doing any more than he is to live out the religious possibilities that he is poetically representing. We shall see that tension continue to develop.

### ***Armed Neutrality***

Before I move on from 1849 there is one more piece of writing that, though never published until after Kierkegaard’s death, was written that year<sup>44</sup> and merits examination here because it typifies these ongoing ambivalences surrounding the key terms “task” and “poet” that I have been examining. Even its title, *Armed Neutrality*, is symptomatic of the strange dichotomy that Kierkegaard was trying to work out at this time between being a religious idealist and someone who did not

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. “Kierkegaard was entirely in tune with scripture and the early church in representing the human imagination as a prime locus for the work of the Holy Spirit.” –Timothy Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 204.

<sup>44</sup> *POV*, xxv.

live up to the ideal that he stood for. The work, subtitled “ON MY POSITION AS A CHRISTIAN AUTHOR IN CHRISTENDOM” is basically another short, direct defence of Kierkegaard’s own communicative technique and self-understanding. To explain it using its eponymous metaphor, “Armed” basically stands for Kierkegaard’s militant desire to carry out “the task of producing [an] ideal picture of Christianity”<sup>45</sup> in Christendom, and the term “Neutrality” refers to his non-commitment to saying whether or not he himself conforms to that ideal picture: “I keep it neutral with regard to my being a Christian”.<sup>46</sup> As above, and as one would expect, the keyword ‘task’ makes a noticeable appearance here. Kierkegaard says that “to present...the ideal picture of being a Christian: this was and is my task”<sup>47</sup> and “The task, then, is to present the ideal of a Christian, and here I intend to do battle.”<sup>48</sup> So does the keyword ‘poet’, as he tells us that “the one who presents this picture...actually relates himself only poetically or *qua* poet to the *presentation* of this picture, while he (which is his difference from the ordinary conception of a poet) in his own person relates himself Christianly to the *presented* picture, and that only as a poet is he ahead in presenting the picture.”<sup>49</sup>

There are some interesting particular qualifications in this work that are made with respect to these familiar statements. Kierkegaard here says “I myself am brought to a halt by the ideal...I am so far from being it that in a whole lifetime I very likely will not finish the task of rightly discovering and being able to present the ideal”<sup>50</sup> which suggests that he is *still* progressing and developing in his

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 134.

understanding of his task at this time. The suggestion of martyrdom also reappears: "I do not cowardly flee from a martyrdom, but I must be aware of and be of one mind about how I can defend falling as a martyr."<sup>51</sup> But most interesting of all, in this work, and most convoluted, are the qualifications he makes with regards to his being called a "Christian" or not. While he maintains that he cannot call himself a Christian in writing or human speech, "face-to-face with God I would have to use a much humbler expression: I trust to God that in his mercy he will receive me as a Christian."<sup>52</sup> Along with this, we read that at the same time he has to an unusual degree the qualifications to present what it actually means to be a Christian and he thinks it is his duty to do this, simply because it seems to be forgotten in Christendom.<sup>53</sup> But whether he has been specially called by guidance to do this "duty" is now downplayed because "it is completely accidental that I am the one who has the task of presenting this picture; yet someone must do it."<sup>54</sup> Then, puzzlingly, the decree arrives "I am a Christian", only to be followed by the qualifier "but in the capacity of a poet, a thinker, etc." To explain this, Kierkegaard ends by reminding us that he has not here said that he does not know *himself* whether he is a Christian or not but that he has said that to *call* oneself a Christian only makes sense in view of God and therefore should be done with fear and trembling. Just as "Armed" and "Neutral" are almost contradictory terms, Kierkegaard seems here only barely to evade self-contradiction as he struggles forwards in the enactment of his religious duty and one wonders whether sooner or later he will ditch the contradictions entirely and plunge into a fully-fledged form of martyrdom. This by now often observed tension between indirect poetry

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 140.

and direct witness is reaching its climactic tenor at this point in his writings—Kierkegaard is being brought to his limit.

## **“MY LIMIT”**

### ***Journals, 1850-1851***

I can now proceed more swiftly through the *Journals* since, though from here on Kierkegaard “became ever more preoccupied with understanding what...he refers to as his ‘task’”,<sup>55</sup> after 1849 most of the groundwork for this thinking has already been laid and at times the *Journals* become less dense, even punctuated by periods of silence. By now the cataloguing of the entries should be familiar. There are still some infrequent recognitions of the worldly causes behind the authorship, though they have become much sparser: “as a matter of fact it was she, my relationship to her, which taught me indirect communication”.<sup>56</sup> There is still an uneasy tension between indirect and direct communication: On the one hand, “Christ” himself is said to have “continued with the indirect method until the last, for the fact that he was incognito, in the guise of a servant, makes all his direct communication nevertheless indirect”; on the other hand, “his life has a phase which is otherwise denied—the Resurrection from the dead, the Ascension—here is really his first direct communication”.<sup>57</sup> The tension is so pervasive that even when he is considering his chief prototype and exemplar, Christ, Kierkegaard cannot make up his mind as to whether that prototype models indirect or direct communication,

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<sup>55</sup> Hannay, *Papers and Journals*, 454.

<sup>56</sup> *Pap X 3 A 413 / JP 2*, 1959 (1850). See also for e.g. *Pap X 2 A 619 / JP 6*, 6603 (1850). Kierkegaard also says in the first entry that direct communication is not superior to indirect communication, but that he has felt impelled to use it at times.

<sup>57</sup> *Pap X 2 A 367 / JP 1*, 677 (1850).

though if the “Resurrection” supersedes Christ’s earlier state then Kierkegaard could be saying that direct communication must eventually supersede indirect communication.

Meanwhile, he continues to refer to his “task” and he starts to write entries headed simply “MY TASK”, such as two of which that define his task as “to be able to fall restrainingly with a hundredweight upon the whole of this politically profane reforming of the divine”<sup>58</sup> and “to provide the existential corrective by poetically presenting the ideals”<sup>59</sup> respectively. In addition, he continues to refer to himself as a poet. In one entry he sets a new record for himself by managing to call himself a poet at least eight times: “I learnt that to be a Christian is something so infinitely elevated that I scarcely dared call myself one. But I was given leave to use the ideals *poetically*...I am a poet—alas, just a poet...I am just a poet, alas, just a poet...I am just a poet...I am just a poet...I am just a poet...I only call myself a poet.”<sup>60</sup> One wonders whether he is trying to drive home the point or to persuade himself of it because he still writes of a troubled preoccupation with the prospect of progressing *beyond* the status of the poet. For example, in a slightly earlier entry titled “MY LIMIT” he admits “There is a predominantly poetic element in me which I am insufficiently spiritual to be able to stifle, or even...really to grasp how it can be God’s will with me”, but neither is he “spiritual” enough to become an ascetic, which is apparently the alternative.<sup>61</sup> After then observing how he has an unusual degree of knowledge of what Christianity is and that he has used his talent to present it, he says

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<sup>58</sup> *Pap X 4 A 6 / JP 6, 6721 (1851).*

<sup>59</sup> *Pap X 4 A 15 / JP 1, 708 (1851).*

<sup>60</sup> *Pap X 4 A 33 / JP 6, 6727 (1851).*

<sup>61</sup> *Pap X 3 A 191 / JP 6, 6647 (1850).*

There is still one thing I believe I will be granted the strength to do, namely impart a constant reminder, reminding people gently and kindly, but out of love of the truth, that once I have got them to go into [what Christianity is], the reason why they are doing so is precisely that I myself am not the truly religious person on a grand scale but something of a poet...who has used gentler, in other words in the highest sense, less true means; whereas precisely the truly religious person would have been badly received and persecuted because he used the absolutely true means, was in truth earnest, turned everything into ethical reality, rather than conceding a somewhat poetic relation to it, both to himself and to others.

Here one finds Kierkegaard right up against the border between being a poet and a direct witness or martyr for Christianity, right up against his "LIMIT". Although in this entry Kierkegaard says that he is not the "truly religious person" here portrayed, he seems to be dropping repeated hints that in holding to this position he is as it were settling for 'second best' and there are more explicit indicators that at least part of him wants to move out beyond the "LIMIT" of the merely poetic and into the truly religious. In another entry titled "MY INWARDNESS",<sup>62</sup> seeing that "in Christian terms, giving keen expression to Christianity not only in writing but in life incurs the world's disfavour and ridicule" he questions "whether [he] dare keep up this hidden inwardness." Then he discloses, "True, my way of life can have, and has had, its importance as espionage; still, it could be that my ingenuity has often made things too easy for people, and in that case should be redeemed through a direct declaration." Of course, this entry could be referring to the possibility of a direct declaration about the *authorship*, but it could also connect with a more direct, religious statement of his beliefs under his own name, particularly with regard to the presentation of Christianity

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<sup>62</sup> *Pap X 3 A 252 / KJN NB 19: 89 (1850).*

within Christendom. It is noteworthy that he here equates making a more direct utterance with a kind of redemption. Whichever he is alluding to, what Kierkegaard actually *did* next with regard to direct declaration (though there will be other events to explore, below) was to publish in 1851 a work called *On My Work as an Author*, which had been written in 1849 but held back till now.<sup>63</sup> This was a “little book” which he called “no literary product, no new work, but an action.”<sup>64</sup>

The final point to note from the *Journals* of this time is that in 1851 Kierkegaard yet again declares that his authorship has reached its conclusion: In an unused Preface to *For Self-Examination* he reflects, “What I have understood as the task of the authorship has been done. It is one idea...the idea of religiousness in reflection.”<sup>65</sup> This is a “task”, a “duty”, a “responsibility” that has occupied him

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<sup>63</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 560.

<sup>64</sup> *Pap X 4 A 383 / JP 6, 6780* (1851). *On My Work as an Author* is a very short text, and covers almost exactly the same ground as *The Point of View* in miniature. In it Kierkegaard says that in his authorship there has been a traversal from indirect communication or “communication in reflection” which is defined as “to deceive into the truth” towards “direct communication” which is defined as, simply, “to communicate the truth directly.” (*POV*, 7.) *On My Work* states this in a bolder and more developed way than *The Point of View* does, itself operating in a more direct mode than the purported “direct communication” of the latter managed to do. But even here, in this published work from 1851, Kierkegaard is not entirely sure whether he should now aspire to be more direct and less satirical and poetic in making this presentation: “Yes, if I were a strong ethical-religious character—alas, instead of being hardly anything but a poet!—and therefore justified and duty-bound in proceeding more rigorously on behalf of the truth, it would no doubt be possible that I would only encounter opposition instead of finding access to my contemporaries.” (*POV*, 18). *On My Work* then, while stating more boldly than the *Point of View* that there is a movement from indirect towards direct communication in Kierkegaard’s authorship, is still mired in the thorny tension between the two, and this comes through once again in Kierkegaard’s repeated insistence that he is limited by being “only a poet” but that he could potentially become something *more*.

<sup>65</sup> *Pap X6 B 4:3 / JP 6, 6770* (1851). There is one other pithy restatement of the purposes of the authorship that appears at this time in the Preface to *Two Discourses at Communion on Fridays*. The Hongs calls this “Perhaps the most adequate, yet brief, expression of the nature of Kierkegaard’s authorship” –*TMLW*, x. In that Preface, Kierkegaard writes “An authorship that began with *Either/Or* and advanced step by step seeks here its decisive place of rest, at the foot of the altar, where the author, presumably most aware of his own imperfection and guilt, certainly does not call himself a truth-witness but only a singular kind of poet and thinker who, *without authority*, has had nothing new to bring but “has wanted once again to read through, if possible and in a more inward way, the original text of human existence-relationships, the old familiar text handed down from the fathers”–(see my postscript to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*)” –*WA*, 165. (That the *Two*

totally. Kierkegaard says that it does not matter if anyone has read his work since he has been religiously obedient in labouring at it. And yet again here he wonders if it is now time to use his own voice and to speak in “direct address” to his contemporaries, “winning men, if possible”. So even when Kierkegaard was trying one more time to wrap up his authorship in this year, he could not help himself from wondering whether the moment had come to step forward and speak out even more directly. This speaking out would not come until after a silence of about three years. Before I examine his final, most direct speech, however, attention must now be turned to one of the texts that had appeared in the meantime, published in 1850 under the name “Anti-Climacus”.

### ***PRACTICE IN CHRISTIANITY***

*Practice in Christianity* is the second of two works that appear in this late stage of Kierkegaard’s authorship under the name of “Anti-Climacus”, the other being *The Sickness unto Death*. The new pseudonym complicates interpretative matters concerning the authorship still further and was apparently invented to highlight the fact that the very high “ideality” of the presentation of Christianity in these works was not a standard that Kierkegaard claimed to live up to himself; rather he only set it forth poetically.<sup>66</sup> The Hongs explain that “Anti-” can mean “before”, as in a relation of rank, so that Anti-Climacus, with regards to Christian ideality, ranks higher than Kierkegaard, who himself ranks higher than the earlier pseudonym

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*Discourses* are the resting place of the authorship is reaffirmed at *Pap X 2 A 148 / JP 6, 6519; 1849.*) This is a restatement of many familiar ideas: that Kierkegaard himself does not embody the ideal he presents and that he is without authority, in this case erring on the side of caution and seclusion as opposed to stepping forward boldly in direct witness. That was going to change, however.

<sup>66</sup> See *PC*, xii.

Johannes Climacus, creating a tripartite hierarchy of Christian-ness.<sup>67</sup> Perkins has also made a convincing case that “Anti-” can mean “against”, so that Anti-Climacus is against Johannes Climacus as well, but in the sense of coming from the opposite direction, looking at Christianity from the perspective of a Christian personality, as opposed to a non-Christian one.<sup>68</sup>

What complicates matters is that, as well as representing a kind of “second pseudonymity”<sup>69</sup> that is very hard to classify because it reads like a more direct religious work and yet incorporates the more indirect device of a pseudonym, *Practice in Christianity* and *The Sickness unto Death* nonetheless name Kierkegaard in print as having “edited” them on their title pages.<sup>70</sup> These texts then, perhaps more than any other, even than *Postscript*, blur the lines between the pseudonymous and the veronymous, and between “indirect” and “direct”, in the authorship. As we shall see, this is highly appropriate given the subject matter and conclusions of *Practice in Christianity* itself. Of the two Anti-Climacus works it is this text that I shall focus on here, since although *The Sickness unto Death’s* treatment of possibility and actuality is relevant to Kierkegaard’s aesthetics and self-understanding as an artist, all the relevant information can be gathered just as well from *Practice in Christianity*, which has more to say specifically on these matters. As a last word of contextualisation, *Practice* represents the early tremors of what would build to become Kierkegaard’s polemical attack on the established order of “Christendom” in a few years’ time. A contemplated subtitle for it was “A

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>68</sup> Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), 5, following *PC*, 279. Perkins also points out that Anti-Climacus originally started out in the *Journals* as an ironic, humorous and “uncaring” aesthetic character, only later evolving into his more stringent, idealistic, religious self. See Perkins, *IKC:PC*, 2-4.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. “ANTI-CLIMACUS IS NOT INDIRECT COMMUNICATION since there is a forward by myself.” – *Pap X 3 A 625 / JP 1*, 680 (1850).

Contribution to the Introduction of Christianity into Christendom”.<sup>71</sup> However, rather than yet being an outright “attack” on institutional Danish Christianity, Kierkegaard saw it more as a “defence” by way of a corrective, and later journal entries would corroborate this.<sup>72</sup>

## NO. II

*Practice in Christianity* is divided into three major sections, NO. I, II, and III, however the second and third sections are most relevant here. Section NO. II is headed “BLESSED IS HE WHO IS NOT OFFENDED AT ME” and noted to be “A BIBLICAL EXPOSITION AND CHRISTIAN DEFINITION BY ANTI-CLIMACUS”.<sup>73</sup> However, despite being called a “BIBLICAL EXPOSITION” and being anchored to a scripture quotation, the prose is very much in the same vein, both thematically and stylistically, as *Fragments* and *Postscript* rather than the *Upbuilding Discourses* or *Works of Love* (which other parts of *Practice* resemble). It is in effect a highly technical philosophical-theological treatise on the possibility of offense in relation to Christ and the implications this has for the concepts of “direct” and “indirect” communication. Thus it is the most important section of the work to be examined here. At root its basic argument is that Christ, as the indirect sign of contradiction, himself constitutes the possibility of offense because people are free to respond to him however they wish and this means that he is prevented categorically from communicating in a direct mode, which puts strong limits on the usefulness of direct communication for Christianity. Anti-Climacus’s account of all this is highly

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<sup>71</sup> *Pap IX B 45:1 / JP 2*, 1643 (1848).

<sup>72</sup> See *PC*, xiv-xvii.

<sup>73</sup> *PC*, 71.

nanced, dense and, as I have mentioned, technical, so a careful analysis of the text is required.

The passage entitled “The Categories of *Offense*, That Is, of Essential Offense” is the most important for my purposes.<sup>74</sup> Here we read that in Christendom, where the possibility of offense is abolished, “people delude themselves into thinking that all Christianity is nothing but *direct* communication, in its simplicity even more direct than the professor’s profound dictations.”<sup>75</sup> We see already that direct communication, especially *entirely* direct communication, is not going to fare so well in this text. Anti-Climacus states further that whenever a communicated teaching is supposed to be reduplicated in the teacher and in the student, it cannot be a “direct paragraph-communication or professor-communication” because there is always a personal subjective element which preserves the aspect of indirectness.<sup>76</sup> This is a repetition of what was put forward in *Postscript* and Anti-Climacus also agrees that “Reduplicated in the teacher through his existing in what he teaches, the communication is in manifold ways a self-differentiating *art*.”<sup>77</sup> So again art has still not been abandoned even if purely imaginative poetry is frowned upon. In this respect Anti-Climacus is similar to his cousin Johannes. But he now goes so far as to say that when the teacher is a paradox (the God-man) “then all direct communication is impossible.”<sup>78</sup> This is an extreme statement that is new to *Practice*. The logic runs that even a human teacher, when he seeks to reduplicate a teaching in his or her own life, cannot communicate purely directly because there is always an indirect component

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 123, italicised emphasis mine.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 123.

involved in free response. How much more, then, is Christ prevented from communicating directly when he himself presents an absolute paradox who can only be believed in freely and whose whole teaching pivots around an invitation to come to him freely and believe in him by choice? So just when Kierkegaard seems at this time to be moving in a more “direct” direction, as it were, we find this troubling statement that, actually, when it comes to religious matters all direct communication is impossible.

Having set forth these central ideas, Anti-Climacus develops them further in seven sub-sections. The substance of his thinking could be put across simply by quoting the titles of the different sub-sections in order, but I will endeavour to explain what they mean. The first sub-section, “THE GOD-MAN IS A *SIGN*”,<sup>79</sup> provides us with Anti-Climacus’s, and likely Kierkegaard’s, definition of a sign, which is necessary for an understanding of exactly what the God-man is: “What is meant by a *sign*? A sign is the denied immediacy or the second being that is different from the first being.”<sup>80</sup> To put it another way, as he goes on to say, a sign is not immediately the something that it signifies but a second thing that points towards that something. As a sign, then, the God-man is not immediately God, but a second being different from God that nonetheless points to the reality of his simultaneously and paradoxically also being God. This necessitates a further qualification, which is that the God-man is “the sign of contradiction” because he uniquely contains a contradiction in himself—a human being cannot be God, cannot be a sign of incarnate deity.<sup>81</sup> To encapsulate this in a definition, “A sign of contradiction is that which draws attention to itself and, once attention is directed

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 124.

to it, shows itself to contain a contradiction.”<sup>82</sup> Anti-Climacus notes that because the God-man is a sign which is a reflected immediacy, and the sign of contradiction no less, “direct communication is an impossibility” for him. The reason modern Christendom confuses everything by making it into simplistic direct communication is because it leaves out, forgets and ignores the *communicator*: the God-man.<sup>83</sup> This is a heavy blow to direct communication.

The second sub-section is called “THE FORM OF A SERVANT IS UNRECOGNISABILITY (THE INCOGNITO)”.<sup>84</sup> This time Anti-Climacus provides a definition of unrecognizability: “What is unrecognizability? Unrecognisability is not to be in the character of what one essentially is—for example, when a policeman is in plain clothes.”<sup>85</sup> Christ is therefore unrecognisable, incognito, because as the sign of contradiction he does not appear in the character of what he essentially is, God. This is perfectly in keeping with what *Practice* has to say later about Christ being the “prototype” and the idea of the Christian artist as modelling himself or herself on Christ’s example is one that I will return to later in this project. But to stay with the present exposition, the identification of the unrecognizability of Christ as the incognito sign of contradiction provides another way of saying why direct communication is impossible for the God-man.<sup>86</sup> Direct communication directly states what something essentially is, but as an unrecognisable incognito the God-man cannot do this about himself.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 127. This is a favourite metaphor of Kierkegaard’s that will reappear in his late self-descriptions.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 131-33.

The third sub-section is extremely important and the most relevant: “THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DIRECT COMMUNICATION”<sup>87</sup> underlines what has been said already and states it most clearly. It contains the weighty statement that “The opposite of direct communication is indirect communication”<sup>88</sup> which has also not appeared in Kierkegaard’s corpus before and for the first time makes explicit what has been implicit all along, that direct and indirect communication are two opposite ends of a spectrum, two opposing poles in a dialectic. Their juxtaposition here makes it plain that in contrast to impossible direct communication, for the God-man indirect communication can be the only possibility. This, according to Anti-Climacus, can be carried out in one of two ways. In the first way, “Indirect communication can be an art of communication in redoubling the communication.”<sup>89</sup> This involves the communicator playing down their own significance and subjectivity, providing an opportunity for “double-reflection” or the redoubling of the communication in the hearer’s own subjective existence as they respond to it in their own free manner, appropriating or rejecting its message as they see fit. As a reminder, consistent with what was written before in *Postscript*, this is an “art”. And Anti-Climacus cheekily notes that it is an art that has been practiced by “some pseudonyms” of whom he is aware.

The other way in which indirect communication can operate, the passage goes on, contains one decisive difference: “indirect communication can also appear in another way, through the relation between the communication and the communicator.”<sup>90</sup> Where in the first kind the communicator was left out, here he or

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 134.

she is included. Normally, this would actually be an example of direct communication, but there is one exception to this—when the communicator, left in, is himself “dialectically defined” then his communication becomes indirect by virtue of who he is as a communicator, for it is impossible for him to say anything direct about himself. This is of course the case of the God-man, whose being is defined in reflection as an absolutely paradoxical union of the divine and the human, the eternal and the temporal, the sign of contradiction.<sup>91</sup> In these ways there are two different kinds of indirect communication: redoubling human communication and God-man communication. All of this has the potential to be enormously far-reaching for Kierkegaard’s theory of communication, as he, via *Anti-Climacus*, is here distinguishing between two *different* types of indirect communication and he says outright that one is practiced by his pseudonyms and another is better applied to Christ. Commentators such as Roger Poole and Louis Mackey would have done well to pay more heed to this distinction when electing to categorise the *entirety* of the authorship as emphatically “indirect communication”, particularly Poole who makes specific use of the example of Christ as an indirect communicator in his analysis.<sup>92</sup> The God-man is a unique case; for him any attempt at direct communication is impossible because he is the sign of contradiction. It may very well be the case, as I hope to explore below, that Kierkegaard’s own use of redoubling indirect communication is modelled on this example and is a kind of *imitatio Christi* in itself, but at the same time the unique dialectical case of the God-man should not be used as a lens with which to interpret *all* of Kierkegaard’s purely *human* communication.

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>92</sup> Poole, *The Indirect Communication*, 26f.

The remaining sub-sections develop these themes further but do not add very much to them. The only point of interest here is that in one place Anti-Climacus says “with respect to the maieutic I do not decide to what extent, Christianly speaking, it is to be approved.”<sup>93</sup> Apparently Kierkegaard has *still* not completely made up his mind on the extent to which the indirect-maieutic can be used in service of Christianity, even though he is here discussing how all Christian communication will to some degree be indirect. It might be helpful, now, to summarise the whole of what is said in these sub-sections using the different definitions that Anti-Climacus himself provides to gain a clearer overall view of the material. I do this to highlight the fact that there is a quite lengthy definitional ‘chain’ to be followed in *Practice* that it is important to identify. For in this part of *Practice*, we learn that all of these things ultimately have the same referent:

Christ = the God-man = the incognito = the paradox = a sign (the denied immediacy that is different from the first being) = the sign of contradiction = unrecognizability (not to be in the character of what one essentially is) = the possibility of offense = the impossibility of direct communication = the secret of suffering = the requirement of faith.

When laid out diagrammatically in this way, it is easier to see some of Anti-Climacus’s most profound points. From the definitions, we see that the secret of Christ’s suffering is that he requires faith, for example, and that this is derived from his being himself as the incognito God-man, as are all of the definitions. Most pertinently, we also see that the impossibility of direct communication is itself derived from Christ’s ontological character: Because Christ is who he is, he cannot communicate directly, and this too is suffering to him, but is fundamentally related to the possibility of offense which he must preserve in order to allow for faith (and

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<sup>93</sup> *PC*, 143.

by implication love, though that is not mentioned in the formulaic definitions). This is a good way to sum up *Practice's* teachings on communication, and I will revisit all of these ideas.

### NO. III

With the third major section of *Practice*, NO. III., Anti-Climacus returns once more to the flowing exegetical style of an upbuilding discourse. NO. III is titled after a scriptural quotation with which it chiefly concerns itself, "FROM ON HIGH HE WILL DRAW ALL TO HIMSELF", being this time much more obviously a set of "CHRISTIAN EXPOSITIONS by ANTI-CLIMACUS."<sup>94</sup> It explicates this Bible verse (John 12:32) in again seven sections, which each read like a miniature upbuilding discourse, numbered with Roman numerals. The first is footnoted with an explanation that, being a "discourse", it was "delivered by Magister Kierkegaard in Frue Church on Friday September 1, 1848. Since it actually has given me the idea for the title, I have, with his consent, printed it."<sup>95</sup> This is perhaps the most convoluted piece of meta-reference in the whole of Kierkegaard's published corpus, representing as it does his pretending to speak about his real personality in the voice of a plagiaristic pseudonym whom he has elsewhere referred to *as a pseudonym in the same book!* When the text refers to "you, my listener"<sup>96</sup> who "have come here today"<sup>97</sup> there is no more doubt that we are in the territory of a devotional discourse and have left the technical deliberations behind. Nonetheless, philosophical insights do not disappear from the text, and in one passage in the second discourse Anti-Climacus even offers a definition of "a self" that reuses

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 152

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 156.

terms that were earlier applied to indirect communication: To be a self is to be a “redoubling” (which is “freedom”), therefore it also means “to draw a duplexity to itself.”<sup>98</sup> In simpler terms, much in the same way that indirect communication is (covertly) self-referential, a self is self-referential (a self “relates itself to itself” as Anti-Climacus says elsewhere in *The Sickness unto Death*).<sup>99</sup> And as this is part of what it means to be free, so a self can only draw another to itself through the provocation of a choice and thus Christ “wants to draw the human being to himself, but in order truly to draw him to himself he wants to draw him only as a free being to himself, that is, through a choice.”<sup>100</sup> The observations about indirect communication and the possibility of free offence continue to resonate through this section.

A passage in the third discourse about a child being shown a picture of the resurrection<sup>101</sup> might at first glance seem relevant to Anti-Climacus’s theory of art, but in the end only ends up saying that the sight of the abased Christ is incredibly moving. More relevant are the comments on imagination in discourse four, where Christ is first named as the prototype (Danish: *Forbilledede*) who is to be imitated.<sup>102</sup> Imagination, try as hard as it might, can never make the imagined image actual, so to properly emulate the prototype a person must not just imagine living in a Christ-like manner, perhaps along with making beautiful little artworks that play out these imaginative possibilities, but actualise just such a life.<sup>103</sup> Imagination, “which is the capacity for perfecting (idealising), is essentially related to loftiness,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>99</sup> *SUD*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> *PC*, 160.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 164-179.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 184. Just before, the Arminian theodicy has been restated yet again: “Because [Christ] wants to draw all to himself, it does not follow that all will let themselves be drawn. But if this does not happen, the fault is not in him, for he wants to draw all to himself.” – *ibid.*, 181

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 188.

to perfection, and is related only imperfectly to imperfection”<sup>104</sup> but nonetheless the person who can imagine the ideal perfect standard of Christ must not stop there but actually strive to reproduce that standard in their own life, however imperfect their attempt may be. Discourse six picks up and develops this theme further, concerning itself with the imitation of Christ. The true Christian is not the “imager” or the “admirer” but the “imitator” only; and Christianity contains enough requirements for actualised imitation to make it dangerous, dynamic and divisive.<sup>105</sup> In fact, Anti-Climacus goes so far as to say that the admirer actually assumes a pagan relation to Christianity, because he remains detached from living out its requirements in reality.

While making these comments about admiration’s pagan relation to Christianity, Anti-Climacus coincidentally offers us his starkest comments on Christian art, when he says that “this is also how admiration, in the middle of Christendom, gave birth to a new paganism—Christian art (Danish: *Kunst*).”<sup>106</sup> This comment does not bode at all well for a project on Kierkegaard’s Christian aesthetics, especially one that is already well underway! Certainly not at face value. For Christian art is here named as a kind of paganism precisely because it remains firmly in the realm of detached, admiring imagination and has nothing to do with the actualisation of the Christian requirement in real life. Indeed, Anti-Climacus is so offended and shocked by the notion of Christian art that seeks to represent Christ that he says he could never participate in it: “Would it be possible for me, that is, could I persuade myself, to dip my brush, to lift my chisel in order to

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 254.

represent Christ in colour or carve his figure? This I cannot do.”<sup>107</sup> That he has no artistic talent whatsoever is irrelevant to the issue, he goes on to say, rather it is because the whole enterprise is incomprehensible to him and because it goes so much against the grain of Christian existentiality that he cannot do this. He cannot even envision how an artist could gain the disinterested calmness to paint the awesome and terrible figure of Christ, without it occurring to them whether Christ would wish to be painted.<sup>108</sup> And worse still, when the painting is done, it will only ever promote dislocation from true religiousness, for the beholder can only ever admire the work *as art*; it will never, says Anti-Climacus, prompt imitation. As such, it is a “sacrilege”.<sup>109</sup>

### **The Invalidity of Christian Artwork?**

With the sixth discourse of section NO. III, I close my survey of *Practice*, since discourse seven is really more of a devotional prayer than a discourse, but I have landed in a highly problematic place. Is this another one of those locations in the authorship that could potentially undermine all attempts to construct a Kierkegaardian theory of Christian creative artwork? It does seem so at first. However, the passage repays careful inspection. For one, it is important to note that Anti-Climacus modifies and mitigates his comments by saying “This is not a proposal to assail the artist or any particular work of art, by no means; no, it is a riddle I feel obliged to submit.”<sup>110</sup> In other words, he is not offering an outright theoretical attack on all Christian artwork, he is more posing a “riddle” to challenge his readership into thinking about how Christian artwork can properly be

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 256.

undertaken. And what is in central focus is not in actual fact Christian art itself but the importance of imitation for Christianity as opposed to mere admiration, which the comments on art serve to illustrate, rather than the other way around. Secondly, a few pages after these scathing words about Christian art, Anti-Climacus is actually wondering aloud whether art *can* be useful for Christian communication. In a rich and provocative passage, we read:

Soon it will have gone so far that people must make use of art in the most various ways to help get Christendom to show at least some sympathy with Christianity. But if art is going to help, be it the art of the sculptor, the art of the orator, the art of the poet, we will have at most admirers who, besides admiring the artist, are led by his presentations to admire what is Christian. But, strictly, the admirer is indeed no true Christian; only the imitator is that.<sup>111</sup>

One of the reasons this quotation is so interesting is because it can be read as an ironic self-reference on Kierkegaard's part, placed in the mouth of Anti-Climacus, to the whole of his own authorial production. Indeed, what is his authorship, according to *The Point of View* and other recent autobiographical comments, if not a large-scale attempt to make use of art in the *most* various ways "to help get Christendom to show at least some sympathy with Christianity"? It is highly relevant that this critique of Christian artwork is appearing in an artfully written piece of Christian literature published under the creative name of a pseudonym. Strictly speaking, Anti-Climacus *has* been portraying Christ—only with a quill as opposed to a brush or a chisel.

We should expect then, that in these sentences Anti-Climacus does allow that art *can* "help" the cause of reintroducing Christianity into Christendom in some way, and "the art of the poet" is included within this, as we would also expect

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 257.

of a writer who had come to call himself a “poet of the religious”. What is really under scrutiny, then, is not *whether* art can be useful to Christianity or not but *how far* and *in what manner* art can be useful for Christianity, and when it is not useful, as well. And again, the keynote of the critique lies in the subject of admiration versus imitation: It is important for the artist to aim at inspiring an admiration of what is Christian through their artwork, not just an admiration for the art itself, and even then it must be borne in mind that admiration never amounts to imitation, which is superior and preferable to it. Presumably, the best kind of Christian art would be art that leads not only to admiration of what is Christian but consistently aims to incite the reader to imitation of it—perhaps by repeating over and over again that imitation is more important than admiration (as, of course, Kierkegaard’s artwork does)? *Practice*, then, does not offer us a total indictment of all Christian art but rather a careful critique of it that reminds the Christian that art should always remember its place as belonging to the world of admirable imagination and, by implication, where possible strive to provoke persons to actual imitation.

### ***Practice in Christianity as an Outworking of Artistic Vocation***

These observations also go some way to showing how *Practice* serves as an example of the outworking of Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation at this stage in his literary career. It cannot be stressed enough how important it is that these mitigating comments about Christian art appear in a book that has a highly artistic character, often resembling the prose-poetry of the upbuilding discourses, and making use of, as Kierkegaard always did, numerous extended metaphors, rhetorical devices and literary flourishes. In order to critique Christian art as he

sometimes does in this work, he still produces: Christian art. The critique is profound but not invalidating of all Christian artwork on Kierkegaardian grounds, because it comes in an artistic text, it deals with the special case of the God-man, and though it provides extremely important caveats it does not explicitly rule out the possibility of Christians communicating effectively through art. However, as I have shown, the work also contains lengthy discussions of how direct communication of the religious is *impossible*, at least in the case of Christ, and where the upbuilding discourses before were classed as “more direct” material it is not so easy to classify *Practice*. If it had been published under Kierkegaard’s own name alone, it would no doubt much more readily have been taxonomised by Kierkegaard scholars traditionally as a “more direct” work, along with *Works of Love*. And it still retains some of this directness with Kierkegaard named as editor. But the addition of the pseudonym Anti-Climacus lends an uncomfortable ambiguity to the work and this ambiguity is reflected by what it has to say about communication.

It seems that at this late stage Kierkegaard *still* cannot fully make up his mind about direct and indirect communication: Should he publish this work “more directly” under his own name or “more indirectly” make use of a pseudonym? Direct communication is impossible for Christ, but does this rule out all directness on the part of his followers’ communication? And art has little to do with existential imitation, but can it still be useful for Christianity? I would argue that Kierkegaard’s answer to all of these questions at this point is ‘yes’. But the answers do not come without a huge amount of wrestling and back-and-forth changes of mind, as seen in the *Journals* of this time. In *Practice* Kierkegaard is plainly still

writing in a “more direct” mode, but he is holding to a remnant of his “more indirect” style in the use of the pseudonym and the work’s discussion of the impossibility of direct communication. Some of what he was holding on to, though, would in a few years’ time be discarded, when at last he came to exclusively publish more direct, polemical writings under his own solitary name and the “defence” of the established order in *Practice* became an “attack” on Christendom. To that attack I must now attend.

## **THE ATTACK ON CHRISTENDOM**

### ***Journals and Papers, 1852-1855***

In the final period of his life Kierkegaard made a directly communicated attack on “Christendom”. Christendom, as the Hongs remind us, is “acculturised, accommodated religion”,<sup>112</sup> the kind of nominal religion that has more to do with a token association with a cultural stereotype than a passionate, subjective faith and praxis. The repeated use of this term, coined from the time of *Practice in Christianity*, underlines how only the contrasting authentic form of religion has the privilege of truly being called Christianity, which was the conceptual thrust of the attack. However, it took a few years for this attack to build before it was finally launched and Kierkegaard published nothing at all between 1852 and late 1854. During the time that Kierkegaard was preparing for his attack, however, he continued in his journals to puzzle out his conception of his religious vocation and how he was going to fulfil it in making the assault. Indeed, towards and during the

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<sup>112</sup> *TMLW*, xvi.

attack on Christendom he became more preoccupied than ever before with grasping what exactly his “task” was, and there are many journal entries about his task and the general significance of his project in the silent years before the storm strikes.<sup>113</sup> Here Kierkegaard is still convinced that he has no special authority and yet more tempted than ever before by the idea of himself as some kind of religious martyr. As Hannay says, “Kierkegaard was to be plagued until the end by the thought that his death was what the truth required, that Guidance was writing the plot in which the ‘collisions’ produced by his pen created both the truth in whose cause a martyrdom was called for and the conditions of the martyrdom itself, but that he lacked the authority a martyrdom requires.”<sup>114</sup>

It is possible to see both aspects of this position, the denial of any special authority and the sense of a special call to martyrdom, as operating simultaneously, though during this period the second aspect intensifies greatly relative to the first. Some commentators see things more in terms of the former, such as Walsh, who argues that in his final phase Kierkegaard most clearly understands himself as a Christian poet (and still not a Christian martyr).<sup>115</sup> Others see things more in terms of the latter, such as Garff, who believes that towards the end of his life Kierkegaard lost the nuanced “dialectical dimension” to his theology and that “thanks to this loss, [he] finally gained clarity about his extraordinary task.”<sup>116</sup> Garff thus perhaps surprisingly echoes Lowrie, who thinks that by the time of the attack on Christendom Kierkegaard seemed to see himself as at least

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<sup>113</sup> See Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 401.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>115</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 18.

<sup>116</sup> Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 715.

some kind of a martyr, as well as one with a unique task.<sup>117</sup> This is the more accurate view. Juxtaposing each of the roles, Kierkegaard says again in 1852 that he is “‘without authority’—this is and remains [his] category...”<sup>118</sup> but at the same time he comes to see himself as “a little pinch of spice” in world-history, “a sacrifice”, and holds that this makes him unique, since “it is a woeful error if he who is used for applying the corrective becomes impatient and would make the corrective normative for others”.<sup>119</sup> Increasingly he sounds like someone who might perhaps dare “to speak in God’s name”,<sup>120</sup> which, he notes, “means to meet all possible opposition, to become the most wretched of men, hated, persecuted, etc.” He is then increasingly preoccupied with the idea of himself as a God-endorsed martyr who is going to sacrifice himself in world-history by witnessing directly.

Despite the intensification of this martyr-idea (or is it a complex?) the actual language with which Kierkegaard continues to meditate on his specific task in the *Journals* remains much the same. The task still basically comes down to the introduction or re-introduction of Christianity into Christendom. As he puts it in yet *another* journal entry headed “MY TASK” of 1852, “It will readily be seen that I am concerned not to dispute with this or that person whether he is a true Christian; no, what concerns me is the change which has obviously occurred in the entire race...in comparison with the whole New Testament.”<sup>121</sup> Kierkegaard is looking to call Christendom back to the genuine Christianity of the New Testament church. In the last few years of his life the idea of this “task” is practically an

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<sup>117</sup> Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 459-460.

<sup>118</sup> *Pap X 4 A 599 / JP 4*, 4293 (1852).

<sup>119</sup> All *Pap X 4 A 596 / JP 1*, 709 (1852).

<sup>120</sup> *Pap X 4 A 487 / JP 4*, 4949 (1852).

<sup>121</sup> *Pap X 4 A 581 / JP 1*, 536 (1852).

obsession.<sup>122</sup> In fact Kierkegaard is so taken with the idea of having a religious task that he says

If there were a man who had attained perfection in this art of being able to perceive a task, to perceive a task in every situation and at every instant...if there were such a man, then to see him in relationship to God who knows how to set a task every second and in every situation...that would be the most beautiful sight.<sup>123</sup>

This quotation demonstrates just how preoccupied Kierkegaard became with the idea of finding a divine task that he could enact and leaves the impression that it has become his sole priority. His ambition almost seems to become this very “man”.

An entry dated 13<sup>th</sup> October 1853, called “ABOUT MYSELF” is also very important.<sup>124</sup> In the *Journals* the miniature autobiographical sketch has by now become standard practice and almost a genre in and of itself—it would be easy to fill a small book with all of Kierkegaard’s autobiographical sketches from them. In this one, he reviews all of the ideas that I have been surveying in this thesis which have now become commonplace in the *Journals*, such as his beginning the authorship because of Regine and for worldly reasons including a “creative urge”, but nonetheless being a “religious author” from the start and being brought up into this more by “guidance” over time. The reason to focus on this particular biographical sketch though, one of very many in which he says these things, is because in it he makes some statements which are rarer and indicative of the change in his thinking going on at this time. Firstly, he says “No doubt in what I wrote about myself in the journals from ’48 and ’49 some creativity still slipped in.

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<sup>122</sup> For yet more entries on it in this period see also for e.g. *Pap XI 1 A 136 / JP 6, 6872; Pap XI 1 A 439 / JP 6, 6901; Pap XI 2 A 21 / JP 6, 6918; Pap XI 2 A 206 / JP 6, 6932; Pap XI 2 A 250 / JP 6, 6936; Pap XI 3 B 53 / JP 6, 6943.*

<sup>123</sup> *Pap XI 1 A 456 / JP 4, 4480 (1854).*

<sup>124</sup> *Pap X 5 A 146 / JP 6, 6843 (13 October 1853).*

It isn't easy to keep such things out when one is as poetically productive as I am. It comes as soon as I have pen in hand." This kind of statement plays into the hands of commentators like Mackey and Garff who argue that Kierkegaard always fictionalised his autobiography, but it at least might signal that a more up to date position may soon be offered in earnest. Next he says "There are two ideas I have had for so long that I really can't say when they first arose."

The first "idea" is characteristic of the time, as has been shown, and "is that there are people whose destiny is to be sacrificed, to be sacrificed for others in one or another war in order to promote the idea—and that because of my particular cross I was such a person." This is more evidence that Kierkegaard's thoughts were moving further and further in the direction of an existential self-sacrifice during this time. The second "idea" is "that I would never be exposed to having to work for a living, partly because I believed I would die very young, and partly because I believed that, out of consideration for my particular cross, God would keep this suffering and this task from me." This idea reinforces what has come before and carries the sense of a looming, self-fulfilling prophecy. But even this is not what is most distinctive about the entry. A little while later, Kierkegaard comes out with what for him is an enormous, earth-shattering statement: In light of his renewed and persistently demanding awareness of the "strain" of the existential requirement made by Christianity, he says that "Writing seems almost a foolish prank." Writing, a foolish prank? Then what has Kierkegaard been doing all this time and why is he now at his desk writing this journal entry? And what is the alternative? Well, "starving on the other hand" seems "more like Christianity. For what, after all, is Christianity? Not a sum of doctrinal principles, but serving in

character.” Here we find again a struggle that pivots around Kierkegaard’s persistent belief that it is not enough to depict, represent, and describe Christianity in writing, for Christianity itself requires that it be lived out, strived towards and “served in character”.

This degree of struggle as to not only whether he should be writing but also as to the level of worth that writing even has in itself as an activity is new to the year 1853 and unprecedented, though it is not the first time it is documented that year. On Easter Monday of 1853, Kierkegaard, explaining why he had not published anything since 1851, says that he now sees his “enormous productivity as a kind of magnificent distraction” because “the Christian thing is not to produce but to exist.”<sup>125</sup> Elsewhere he records that he has come to see the pseudonymous works as too “subtle” to be of real religious use.<sup>126</sup> This is monumental. These statements are astonishingly different from the position elucidated in the *Point of View* where he says that he *needed* to begin as an aesthetic author in order to move into the religious if he was to be an effective communicator. It is an enormous about-turn from all that I have outlined above regarding his views on indirect communication being useful for maieutically deceiving people into the truth when practiced using pseudonymous aesthetic works. This late change in position is not often identified by Kierkegaard scholars, probably, and ironically enough, because the indirect aesthetic works have been far more popular and well received by the world than the more direct religious writings or the writings that would come after 1853. Kierkegaard certainly must have become disenchanted with productivity, because

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<sup>125</sup> *Pap* X 5 A 105 / *JP* 6, 6840 (1853).

<sup>126</sup> *Pap* X 6 B 232 / *JP* 6, 6842 (1853).

towards the end of 1853 he stops making journal entries altogether, though not forever, and the entries are now far fewer and further between.<sup>127</sup>

Thompson embellishes that, “Having tried to make his home in the world but finding it ultimately uninhabitable, Kierkegaard finally forsakes it, not in the ambiguous guise of poet or ironist, but unequivocally as a religious enthusiast.”<sup>128</sup> There is some truth in this for, towards the end of his life, the term “poet” falls out of favour in Kierkegaard’s assessments of himself. To be sure, while the attack is initially building, the word “poet” is just as present in the writing as it ever was. For instance, in an autobiographical sketch of 1852 headed “MY LIFE’S COURSE” Kierkegaard summarises how he has arrived at his current position:

Suffering terrible inner torment I became a writer...Then [in 1848] I dared to say to myself: I have understood the highest...But almost instantaneously something new struck me: the highest, after all, is not to understand the highest but to do it...when I did understand this, I was willing to declare myself a poet.<sup>129</sup>

However, as the existence of this particular poet intensifies in the direction of some kind of martyrdom, what is very interesting is that in 1854 and 1855 the word “poet” loses its special place as Kierkegaard’s favourite title for himself as he experiments with some alternatives. Instead, he becomes for example a “policeman”,<sup>130</sup> “a police detective”,<sup>131</sup> or a “Christian auditor”<sup>132</sup> whose job is “to undertake a complete auditing of all the Christian concepts” in order to “work towards an awakening”.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Thompson, *Kierkegaard*, 209.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>129</sup> *Pap X 4 A 545 / JP 6*, 6801 (1852).

<sup>130</sup> *Pap XI 1 A 277 / JP 6*, 6890 (1854).

<sup>131</sup> *Pap XI 2 A 250 / JP 6*, 6936 (1854).

<sup>132</sup> *Pap XI 2 A 36 / JP 6*, 6921 (1854).

<sup>133</sup> *Pap XI 3 B 53 / JP 6*, 6943 (1854).

In fact, Kierkegaard's last reference to himself as a poet comes in an undated, possibly early, entry from 1854 where he incants for one very last time that he is "only a poet".<sup>134</sup> In 1855, the last of year of his life, he nowhere refers to himself as a poet in his writings and I will show how he goes on to say in his final published writings that he was only "disguised" as a poet earlier. This has not always been attended to by Kierkegaard scholars either.<sup>135</sup> My conclusion from this is that it is illustrative of how, just as in my first chapter I demonstrated a slow movement towards the theory of indirect communication in the early journals, in the final period of Kierkegaard's life he moved slowly towards and in favour of more direct communication as his *exclusively* preferred means of enacting his religious task, even to the extent that the aesthetically-associated term "poet" fell out of favour with him and he came to be disenchanted with the concept of indirect communication completely.

Kierkegaard was now exemplifying the most mature conception of his task that he would arrive at in the course of his life. Indeed, in the same year 1855, he also took it upon himself to pen a short postscript to the "Two Notes" at the end of *The Point of View* in which he talks about the "special nature of [his] task" and says "my entire work as an author has also been my own development, in which I myself have ever more deeply concentrated on my idea, my task."<sup>136</sup> The special task is then stated one final time: "My task is to work against a given wrong propagation (therefore not a task of propagating something)...the task is precisely to shed light upon this scoundrel trick that to the benefit of the princes of the

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<sup>134</sup> *Pap XI 3 B 57 / JP 6, 6947* (1854). Though note also that in 1854 the statement "My thought is that God is like a poet" appears, and the title is transferred to God himself –see *Pap XI 2 A 98 / JP 2, 1445* (1854). I will examine this statement below.

<sup>135</sup> Pattison, Walsh and Mackey all omit it from their studies.

<sup>136</sup> *POV*, 125.

Church [of Christendom]...has procured...millions.”<sup>137</sup> In other words, he is saying (again) that his task is to show that true Christianity is not the same thing as Christendom.

Kierkegaard’s last ever journal entry is headed “THIS LIFE’S DESTINY IN CHRISTIAN EYES”.<sup>138</sup> In it he talks about how human beings’ destiny is to be “brought to the highest pitch of world-weariness” and that only the person to whom this can happen and who can still confess that God is good and loving is “ripe for eternity”. A little while after writing this, he collapsed in the street and was taken to hospital.<sup>139</sup> Even the doctor’s hospital record for his stay refers to his religious task:

He considers the sickness fatal. His death is necessary for the cause which he has devoted all his intellectual strength to resolving, for which he has worked alone, and for which alone he believes that he was intended; hence the penetrating thought in conjunction with so frail a physique. If he is to go on living, he must continue his religious battle; but in that case it will peter out, while, on the contrary, by his death it will maintain its strength and, he believes, its victory.<sup>140</sup>

In hospital Kierkegaard was visited by his old friend Emil Boesen, who recorded a remembrance of his confession that, because of his thorn in the flesh, “I concluded that my task was out of the ordinary. I then tried to carry it out to the best of my ability, I was a pawn for guidance which made me an outcast and I was to be used...that is always the life and fate of the emissary extraordinary.”<sup>141</sup> He also reportedly said “I am happy to die, so that I can be certain that I solved the

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>138</sup> *Pap XI 2 A 439 / JP 6*, 6969 (25 September 1855).

<sup>139</sup> Possibly from tuberculosis. See e.g. Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 411-9.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 412.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 413; see also Kirmmse, *Encounters*, 121-8.

problem I was set. People often listen to what someone who has died has to say, more than what comes from someone still living”, as well as “I’ve had a fitting, important and difficult enough task.”<sup>142</sup> Kierkegaard died on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1855. He was adamant about the importance of his vocation as a Christian creative artist until the end.

### ***The Moment and Late Writings***

Kierkegaard’s final publications are collected together in the volume translated by the Hongs entitled *The Moment and Late Writings*. For convenience I will examine them together here as they all appear in this one tome. The material consists of some newspaper articles that he composed at the beginning of his attack on Christendom, some other stand-alone pieces that appeared in the newspaper *The Fatherland*, the pamphlets which Kierkegaard distributed himself on the streets of Copenhagen and by subscription known as *The Moment*, and some final religious discourses. What is immediately noteworthy for this thesis about all of these works is that they are all more “direct” in mode insofar as they communicate their ideas straightforwardly and even bluntly, that they are all religious in genre if we follow the scheme of classification used thus far in the writings, and that they were all published under Kierkegaard’s own name. In the final year of his life, then, corresponding with the disillusionment found in the *Journals*, “indirect communication” is abandoned, or at least the indirect elements of the writing do not function to anywhere near as pronounced or consciously documented an extent as they do in the earlier, “aesthetic”, “indirect” authorship, and pseudonymity is discarded entirely. Even if one wants to maintain and qualify

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<sup>142</sup> Hannay, *Papers and Journals*, 654.

the matter that, perhaps following on from *Practice in Christianity*, all communication is indirect up to a point, especially communication about religious ideas, the fact nonetheless remains that Kierkegaard ends his life and his career exclusively privileging and practicing a more direct form of communication.<sup>143</sup>

As has been rehearsed, the key theme of *The Moment and Late Writings* is that contemporary “Christendom” has strayed and departed in form from the original, authentic model of Christianity set out in the documents of the New Testament. In condemning this form of religion and bringing it into sharp relief against its predecessor, Kierkegaard is in these writings often brutally polemical, acerbic and populist in his style. In other words, he is more direct than ever before. After deliberating for so many years over whether to step forward and speak out in his own voice to become even more direct, he finally does it. But the reader should not mistake this stepping forward as also being an abandonment of sophistication or literary flair in the writing. I agree with Perkins when he argues that Kierkegaard’s

attack on the established church is just as deliberately intentional, conceptually focused and executed as the critical thought in the previous pseudonymous and signed literature. [...] The acid-like rhetoric should not hide us from the fact that many of the literary skills we associate with the pseudonymous literature are still used in the [Moment] writing: powerful analogies, conceptual analysis, maxims, humour and irony. Only the indirectness is lost; the literary form has been transformed from literary masterpieces to popular polemics, but

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. Law: “For Kierkegaard...there appears to be no discontinuity between that attack literature and his authorship, but only in the *mode* of the attack, which has moved from being indirect to direct.” –Law, ‘Irony in the Moment and the Moment in Irony’ in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Moment and Late Writings* ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), 81. It may be that this directness is employed more for the purposes of the attack on the cultural accommodations of Christendom than it is for a proclamation of the “Gospel”, but this consideration will be attended to in due course. In any case Kierkegaard is certainly seeking to proclaim at this time what I will go on to call a “conceptual Christian message”.

there is profound continuity in the goal of his writing: to assert and remind us of the authority of God.<sup>144</sup>

So admittedly there is to the last an odd ambivalence at play here with regard to the way that Kierkegaard carries out his Christian artwork, right to the very end of his writing: his “indirectness” of genre is indeed now lost, but he could never completely abandon his poetic manner of expression.<sup>145</sup> And yet, to add another shade of ambivalence to this, I have signalled how in the *Journals* the term “poet” actually falls out of favour with Kierkegaard during this last year of his life and I will show how this happens in the published works as well. To put things in the most qualified way possible then: he ends by writing in an exclusively more direct mode, still with the skill and techniques of a poet, though eventually no longer calling himself a poet. Matters never were straightforward for Kierkegaard.

***Was Bishop Mynster a Witness to the Truth? and This Must Be Said, So Let It Be Said***

So to the late writings which I will inspect in turn. The very start of the attack opens and the silence is broken with a newspaper article published in *Fædrelandet* in 1854 which asks “Was Bishop Mynster ‘a witness to the truth,’ one of ‘the true witnesses to the truth’ —*is this the truth?*” This is clearly a different world from the subtle suggestivity of a title like *Either/Or* or *Fear and Trembling*.

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<sup>144</sup> Perkins, *IKC:TMLW*, 3-4. For example, *The Moment X*, section 6 alone, examined below, is full of metaphor, simile and melodramatic exclamations. In it Kierkegaard calls state pastors the “legions of huckstering knaves”, (*TMLW*, 340) speaks to an imaginary Socrates in the second person, (*ibid.*, 341) laments the “torments of his youthful days”, (*ibid.*, 344) and uses Latin phrases (*ibid.*, 345). This is clearly creative writing—though of a popular, polemical, journalistic kind—which is the only point I am trying to defend. One does not have to think it Kierkegaard’s best creative artwork to concede that it is still creative artwork.

<sup>145</sup> Because of this persistent ambivalence some commentators still like to describe the late writings as in some way “indirect”. So Timothy Pollk: “because the witness to Christ against Christendom requires the indirection of rhetoric (i.e. the poetic imagination), the emissions [of poetry] continue —[they] cannot in fact be eliminated and the poet is in the direct works too” —Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 209. But note how even Polk categorises these writings as broadly “direct”, even if the poetry and so aspects of something which some choose to call “indirection” remain.

Initiated as it was by Professor H. L. Martensen's eulogy for the late Bishop Mynster, the article focuses on the application of the term "truth-witness" (Danish: *Sandhedsvidne*) by the former, an old teacher of Kierkegaard's, to the latter, an old family friend and mentor.<sup>146</sup> The answer to the question is that no, Bishop Mynster was not an authentic witness to the truth, since this is a New Testament term that properly applies to martyred Christian evangelists. On the contrary, Mynster's preaching and the New Testament did not coalesce, Kierkegaard has come to see, as he "considerably scaled down what is essentially Christian", omitting from his teachings some key elements of the faith such as dying to self, suffering and strenuousness.<sup>147</sup> A real truth-witness is someone who suffers, in poverty, lowliness, abasement and persecution, and who is eventually martyred.<sup>148</sup> Bishop Mynster was none of these things, so he was not a truth-witness.

Never before had Kierkegaard been so direct. The last time he had published under his own name in a newspaper had been in his twenties, before even *From the Papers of One Still Living* appeared, but that had not involved communicating about Christian ideas. This direct article was followed by twenty more newspaper articles in the same vein, which widen the attack from focusing on Martensen and Mynster to bring the whole Danish state church into the firing line. Of particular interest are: Article VII, which speaks of "What Must Be Done", noting "It Will Happen Through Me Or Someone Else", namely that "It" must be exposed that the official Danish religiousness is not the Christianity of the New Testament;<sup>149</sup> Article IX on "The Religious Situation",<sup>150</sup> which is such that "not a

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<sup>146</sup> For the background, see Garff, *Kierkegaard*, 727-9.

<sup>147</sup> *TMLW*, 4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

single one of us is in the character of the Christianity of the New Testament”, though this is qualified with “no more than I am; I have repeated again and again and repeat once again: I am only a poet”<sup>151</sup> (an instance of poetic profession persisting into this year, though it is soon to be modified); Article X’s summarising “Thesis – Just One Single One” which is of course that “The Christianity of the New Testament does not exist at all” because it has been abolished and forgotten;<sup>152</sup> and lastly Article XX, which concerns itself with the Preface to *Practice in Christianity*, explaining that were that book to appear now, after Mynster’s death and Kierkegaard’s arriving at these conclusions, it would appear without the poetic pseudonym, under his own name alone and without the thrice-repeated Preface and Moral to its first section, which would make it, too, an attack on the established order and no longer a defence.

Having brought out these biting articles, in 1855 Kierkegaard then published an essay under his own name called *This Must Be Said, So Let It Be Said*. There is nothing indirect about this title (except perhaps that which is indirect that inheres in language itself) and the writing is as direct as Kierkegaard’s would ever be. What must be said, that we must let be said? Essentially that

Wherever you are, whatever your life is otherwise, my friend—by ceasing to participate (if you usually participate) in the public divine service as it now is (professing to be the Christianity of the New Testament), you always have one and great guilt less—you are not participating in making a fool of God by calling something New Testament Christianity that is not New Testament Christianity.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 35-38.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 73.

Again, we see that the consistent complaint, made now directly and straightforwardly by the voice of Søren Kierkegaard, is that contemporary Christianity is not the same as New Testament Christianity. This piece is marked at the end as being originally written in December 1854. A second section marked 1855 repeats the same imperative saying.<sup>154</sup> An “ADDENDUM” of April 9, 1855 then resolutely records “Just as carefully as it has been hitherto concealed what my task could become, just as decisively shall I now, when the moment has arrived, make it known.”<sup>155</sup> This is an accurate statement. Before, the copious meditations on his “task”, as we saw, were confined to Kierkegaard’s *Journals* and autographographical writings. Now they start to leak out more and more into the published material. At first, here, it is only defined negatively, as Kierkegaard makes it clear that he does not understand his task as involving launching any kind of popular movement. But in *another* addendum of April 11 1855 he goes on to talk about his own agony in being made a sacrifice of in the current generation for the sake of God’s love, one of the ways of expressing his task that he had been starting to use in his *Journals*.<sup>156</sup> Now, these poignant (overblown?) self-portraits appear not just in *Journals* but in published professions attached to his own signature. The public mode of communication has indubitably shifted, even to the extent that the boundaries between his “private” *Journal* thoughts and his published thoughts about himself are blurring.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 78.

### ***The Moment and Christ's Judgment on Official Christianity***

Finally, *The Moment* arrives. This work does not take the form of newspaper articles or short essays but rather a serial pamphlet containing brief polemical articles which Kierkegaard distributed himself on the streets of Copenhagen and by subscription. They are very much in the same vein as the earlier newspaper articles and *This Must Be Said, So Let It Be Said*, repeatedly hammering home in a variety of creative, provocative and concise ways the point that New Testament Christianity and Danish Christendom have dramatically diverged. I will here attend to the articles that are specifically relevant to the subject of Kierkegaard's vocation since he now writes about that unreservedly in his publications. The very first Moment article, No.1, 1.1, "Exordium", falls into this category. In this "Exordium", Kierkegaard opens by referring to Plato's idea from *The Republic* that the best rulers will not want to rule. He then makes an analogy between this idea and the "task" which he now says lays before him, "to work in the moment" which God knows is something he dislikes doing.<sup>157</sup> He admits that being an author does obviously appeal to him, and indeed he has been in love with being "productive" as an author, but this has been categorically different from what he now understands to be the task he has been selected for, to work "in the moment" in order to give "a true presentation of Christianity".<sup>158</sup>

In this way, *The Moment* and the other late writings are presented as being categorically different from all that has come before them. Presumably, working "in the moment", as well as referencing the title of the pamphlet, means to write in this new, most direct manner in order to address the public in the present time and

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 92.

place. “The moment” (Danish: *Øiblikket*, “the eye-blink”, “the moment” or “the instant”) is also a technical term in Kierkegaard’s writings that is at least as old as *Philosophical Fragments* and refers there to the un-Socratic instant in which the god imparts saving paradoxical truth to a learner and to which allusions may be being made here.<sup>159</sup> Note that if the allusion obtains then in this analogy it is possible to construe Kierkegaard as the godlike imparter of saving truth.

The next time the “task” appears in the articles is in No. 2, 2.2, entitled “That the Task Has a Double Direction”.<sup>160</sup> Here, in a passage reminiscent of *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard explains that “When Christianity [first] entered the world, the task was to proclaim Christianity directly” but that this is no longer the case in Christendom, where if Christianity is to be introduced “first and foremost the illusion must be removed.”<sup>161</sup> This then is “the task”, but it has a double direction: In one direction, it is aimed at instruction, stirring people up with ideals and rousing them to passion “with the gadfly sting of irony, scorn, sarcasm, etc. etc.”<sup>162</sup> (Some of this language sounds like it could be used of the “aesthetic”, pseudonymous authorship, though we are reminded that Kierkegaard is here speaking of his task in this present moment.) But the situation in Christendom is not only that people imagine they are Christians, but also that they imagine that the state religion is genuine Christianity, so there is another direction to the task. In this second direction, the task is aimed at getting the state to remove the illusion. This, we assume, is also what Kierkegaard is aiming to do through *The Moment* and the other late writings. He tells us that, if he were to compare this task

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<sup>159</sup> *PF*, 2f.

<sup>160</sup> *TMLW*, 107-8.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

to something, he would say: “It resembles the medical treatment of a medically ill patient.”<sup>163</sup> This particular article does not identify the method of treatment with indirect or direct communication and is somewhat frustrating because in it Kierkegaard does not appear to be completely clear or consistent with what he has said recently in his *Journals* about struggling with indirect communication and indeed *needing* to proceed more “directly”. But what is clear nonetheless is that the mode of operation of these articles is far more direct, more direct than ever before. A legitimate interpretation could be that although Christianity cannot be “directly” proclaimed in Christendom, the idea that Christendom being the same thing as Christianity is an illusion *can* be proclaimed directly, since this is what Kierkegaard appears to be doing.

After the first two issues of *The Moment* there is a brief break in the circulation because this is when another short essay appears called *Christ’s Judgment on Official Christianity*. This essay is absolutely fascinating from the point of view of this study because, in a work of which the title purports to pronounce Christ’s views on the state religion, Kierkegaard actually spends most of his time talking about his understanding of—what else?—his own vocation and career as an author! Marked “June 1855”,<sup>164</sup> it refers damningly to the way that the employed clergy have misappropriated the name of Christ in order to make money and obtain worldly comfort. But before too long, after holding forth about this subject for only a few lines, Kierkegaard is talking about his own authorship again:

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 108. There is indeed a certain resemblance between the issues of Kierkegaard’s *The Moment* and the free pamphlets that you can read in British doctors’ surgeries that inform of various common health conditions that one might be in danger of having. Maybe *The Moment* should be added to GP waiting rooms? It is easy to imagine it fitting very well into the catalogue of pamphlets about different self-diagnosable maladies: Chicken Pox, Meningitis, Depression, Gonorrhoea, High Blood Pressure, Testicular Cancer, Nominal Christianity...

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 128.

“Anyone who has carefully followed my entire work as an author”, he says, will have noticed that he has gone about it with a certain method, that it has been aimed at exposing the criminal fraud of Christendom, and that it betrays, as he calls it “a detective talent”.<sup>165</sup> Kierkegaard now relates a narrative of his career as an author of the kind that usually appears in the *Journals* and what is striking about it this time is that now, at the last, the term “poet” is finally discarded. The story begins “Just think about this so you can follow the progress of the case. I began by passing myself off as a poet, subtly aiming at what I thought was the truth about official Christianity...”<sup>166</sup> This sentence seems to correspond to the whole of the writing up until at most 1854, during which Kierkegaard had been repeating “I am only a poet” over and over again. During all this time, nobody suspected that “something was hiding behind this poet—that his method was that of a detective in order to make those in question feel safe.”<sup>167</sup>

Next, however, we hear that the poet became offensive to people, and this corresponds to the recent clash with Martensen.<sup>168</sup> After this, “Then the poet suddenly changed; he—if I may say it this way, threw away his guitar and—took out a book called *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, and with—yes, indeed, it was with the eye of a detective—he put it to these good oath-bound teachers.”<sup>169</sup> Bizarrely enough, the title of “poet”, as anticipated by some of the more eccentric passages I have called attention to earlier in this project, is as such eventually superseded by the title “police detective” (which is, granted, itself an artful, if earnest, characterisation). The job of this police detective is to bring to

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 130.

task the horrendous violations of religious and moral law that have been made by the perpetrators of Christendom, as Kierkegaard develops the analogy further.<sup>170</sup> Now that he speaks directly, in his own name, apparently as a police detective, he says it is “no longer possible to escape me in [this] way, that I am a poet and thus it is indeed others who represent the truth.”<sup>171</sup> In the rest of the piece he goes on to put his detective talent to work to expose how Christ’s words in scripture speak judgment on the contemporary church’s hypocrisy and nominal, cultural form of Christendom. But what has been so outstanding about the piece is that in it Kierkegaard replaces his so frequently preferred title of “poet of the religious” with the title “police detective”.

Granted, this may very well be to some degree an example of more Kierkegaardian irony and it is certainly a humorous and unusual term, showing that he is still poetically playful to the end, despite what he says. After all, the title of “policeman” is still a metaphor and therefore a kind of poetic image, since Kierkegaard was not literally a Danish police constable or private detective. But at the same time, contra Louis Mackey *et al*, it is extremely important to note that at the end of his career the term “poet” falls out of favour in Kierkegaard’s writings and is at the very least ostensibly demoted in his hierarchy of titles to be surpassed by the term “police detective”: At this time when he comes to speak very directly and in his own voice in open publications, his language shifts from speaking of himself as a poet to speaking of himself as a policeman who was *disguised* for a time as a poet. It would be a stretch of hermeneutical imagination to posit that he *consciously* disguised himself as a poet before, but this is how he playfully casts

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 130-1.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 131.

himself in the final year of his life, as no longer a disguised poet but exposed as a policeman. It is a small wonder, then, that *The Moment and Late Writings* have so often been neglected in critical studies of the writings, when so many scholars want to defend the idea that Kierkegaard is singularly a “poet” in his own self-understanding right up until the very end of his life.

The remaining issues of *The Moment* published after *Christ’s Judgment on Official Christianity* continue the same theme and repeat the same points, with greater and greater degrees of sharpness and provocation towards the comfortable clergy of state Christendom.<sup>172</sup> I will focus on two articles from among them that are especially relevant here. Article 4.6 is called “The Difficulty of My Task”.<sup>173</sup> Here the difficulty of the task is expressed in terms of New Testament Christianity being fundamentally at odds with the attitudes and proclivities of the “natural man”.<sup>174</sup> Thus, when Kierkegaard tries to point out that the Christianity of the age is not the Christianity of the New Testament, most people confuse the fact that the Christianity of the New Testament does not immediately *please* them with the fact that whether or not it pleases them has no bearing on the question of its truth and importance.<sup>175</sup> What is interesting about this presentation of the difficulty of the task is that, characteristically for these writings, it is so different from similar presentations that have come before. Before, Kierkegaard had usually spoken about the difficulty in terms of people already thinking that they were

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<sup>172</sup> After this piece and before the final issues of *The Moment* there also appeared a final publication in the vein of an upbuilding discourse entitled *The Changelessness of God* which is not so relevant here because it does not discuss Kierkegaard’s vocation. Suffice to say that it is a more direct work, it is dedicated to Kierkegaard’s father, it is marked as being originally delivered as a spoken discourse in the Citadel Church of Copenhagen in 1851, it begins with a “PRAYER”, it unpacks a scripture quotation (James 1:17-21) and it refers, in the manner of an upbuilding discourse, to “my listener”. See *TMLW*, 268-281.

<sup>173</sup> *TMLW*, 169-171.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

Christians and so of the necessity for him to “deceive people into the truth”, perhaps maieutically and indirectly by means of an aesthetic deception in the service of the religious. The root issue, then, remains the same, but again, the language used about the way in which he has to deal with this root issue has now shifted. The technical discussions about maieutically deceiving people into the truth have vanished and now it suffices to talk about the issue in plain terms, in a publication under the name “S. Kierkegaard”, in an even more direct way than ever before.

Article 7.1 of *The Moment* bears the title “Why do “People” Love “the Poet” above All? and Why, in a Godly Sense, is Precisely “the Poet” the Most Dangerous of All?”<sup>176</sup> Once again, the poet has been turned upon. And it is much harder now to make the mitigated, qualified reading that this is only a particular *kind* of poet, as for example was possible at the time of *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, because there is no longer any contemporaneous presentation of the poet in more positive terms here. The poet is dangerous, of course, as we know so well by now in the writings, because he only relates himself to reality imaginatively, depicting ideals without existentially actualising them himself. People love this kind of dangerous poet because they are disinclined towards actualising existential requirements themselves. By contrast, for the public, “A truth-witness, who himself made [the good and the beautiful] an actuality—frightful, that would be unendurable.”<sup>177</sup> And shockingly, hypocritically, academic theologians and state clergy have made this kind of poet-relation out of what they call Christianity, producing poet-professors and poet-pastors, so that in fact we hear that the title of

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 225.

the article is not altogether true. Even *more* dangerous than a poet, who only claims to be a poet, is a poet who passes himself off as a pastor, and yet is only a poet”—indeed “*This is hypocrisy to the second power.*”<sup>178</sup> Because this has happened, “a detective talent was needed, someone who simply by mentioning the word, by claiming to be a poet, could get behind all this disguise.” The article thus reaffirms the narrative examined above that tells the story of how Kierkegaard was only a poet in disguise and has ended his career not primarily as a poet but as a police detective.

Found among the *Journals and Papers* is the final, unpublished tenth issue of *The Moment* which never made it to press, recorded in the journals as being drafted on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1855. This is the last thing that Kierkegaard ever wrote with the apparent intent of publishing it during his lifetime. The sixth and final section of it in particular is headed “My Task”.<sup>179</sup> In this section Kierkegaard underlines yet again: “I do not call myself a Christian; I do not speak of myself as a Christian.’ It is this that I must continually repeat; anyone who wants to understand my very special task must concentrate on being able to hold this firm.”<sup>180</sup> This may seem like madness, Kierkegaard concedes, but it is true, as he insists; “I am not a Christian –and unfortunately I am able to make it manifest that others are not either.” Again we hear that there is no analogue for this task in 1800 years of Christianity, which is presumably why it is very special.<sup>181</sup> Thus he is able to announce “I stand quite literally alone” in world history.<sup>182</sup> Kierkegaard’s own footnote to this announcement runs: “the apostle is only a human being. My task

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 340, 344.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 341.

requires being pressed to the limit” and explains that he has held up Christ’s standard, perhaps even more stringently than the apostles themselves!<sup>183</sup> The only possible analogy that could be made with him is Socrates, since his task “is a Socratic task, to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian”.<sup>184</sup>

At the very end then, apparently the title ‘poet’ and even ‘policeman’ is superseded by the term ‘auditor’: “My task is to audit the definition: Christian”<sup>185</sup> is the statement of his religious vocation here, and it is still an artistic vocation because of the means by which he carries it out—distributing his creative writing. Because he is alone in this, no-one is qualified to review his work; he “was never like the others.” And along with this, the idea of sacrifice has also now reached full-term and matured, so that he is able to say

in agonies such as mine a person is brought up to be able to endure being a sacrifice, and the infinite grace that was shown and is shown to me is to be singled out to be a sacrifice, to be singled out for that—yes, and then one thing more, under the cooperative influence of omnipotence and love to be developed to be able to hold firm that this is the highest degree of grace that the God of love can show anyone, and this only toward the loved ones...[it is] an indescribable grace that is shown [a person]: to be sacrificed.<sup>186</sup>

As never before, Kierkegaard in his final writing explicitly states that his life has been meant as a sacrifice and fully subscribes to the concept of himself as a martyr who has been “singled out” by God. There only remains for him to repeat that Christianity is “something infinitely high” before the draft finishes. The rest of the distinct draft material is marked “*Minor Remarks*”, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> August and concerns

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 341n.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 345-6.

the hypocrisy of Danish pastors—it does not have anything further to add about his religious task.<sup>187</sup>

### ***The Moment and Late Writings as an Outworking of Artistic Vocation***

How then does *The Moment and Late Writings* serve as an outworking of Kierkegaard's artistic vocation at its ultimate stage? The writings make clear in their own terms that their aim is to reintroduce Christianity within Christendom and to highlight the discrepancy between Christendom and the New Testament by whatever means necessary. This is certainly continuous with what had become Kierkegaard's documented intent in writing over the past years. But I have repeated the point enough times now that in the final phase of Kierkegaard's writings there is a change in the methodology used in pursuit of this goal towards the exclusive privileging of more direct communication. Even if all the points made above in relation to *Practice in Christianity* about how all communication, especially of religious ideas, is indirect up to a point still obtains (and it is not recalled forthrightly in the late writings) the mode of expression here is justly identified as much more direct and uniformly so. Exactly how Kierkegaard finally arrived at this method in his own mind is up for debate. Perkins argues that

Aware that he was nearing the end of his life, Kierkegaard understood that the message he had laboured to present through the pseudonymous works and the upbuilding discourses had not been heeded, even if most of the works had been well received from a literary point of view. His philosophic and theological arguments, usually presented in elegant literary form, had failed to turn the Danish reading public, the cultured elite, and the church from their aestheticism toward the eternal and infinite. Now setting high literary art aside, Kierkegaard attempts to appear as blunt and forthright as a

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 347f.

barker at the state fair or like a sworn witness giving a damning deposition.<sup>188</sup>

As has been shown, there is some evidence for this in the *Journals* and in the published writings of the time, so it is not too much of an “intentionalist” reading to make, staying in front of the texts. However, far more interesting for my purposes is simply the fact that Kierkegaard *did* end up exclusively privileging more direct communication over more indirect communication in his authorial practice by the end of his life. He may have held on to the idea that Christ is a sign of contradiction who can only ever be communicated about indirectly, although it does not appear in his latest writings, but in any case he chose to write in an exclusively far more direct manner in the last years of his life. At the last, after a documented struggle with directness and how direct to be in the writings, particularly in the *Journals* surrounding *Practice in Christianity* and in the years leading up to the “attack”, the work settles and ends on a profoundly direct note, with Kierkegaard “stepping forward” as a kind of auditing truth-witness to speak boldly in his own voice. Readings that try to take the *whole* of Kierkegaard’s corpus as an ironic, tongue-in-cheek and jesting game fail to pay due attention to the earnestness of this last period.

And what it also means is that, when it comes to the relative indirectness versus directness of its authorial mode, Kierkegaard’s work actually offers us examples of practically every different approach to Christian communication through artwork that it is possible to take: less consciously employed indirectness (e.g. *Either/Or*); more consciously employed indirectness (e.g. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*); more consciously employed directness (e.g. *Two*

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<sup>188</sup> Perkins, *IKC:TMLW*, 4.

*Upbuilding Discourses*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* and *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, though granted these texts also exhibit some indirect characteristics); mitigated directness (e.g. *Practice in Christianity* with its overt religious content and peculiar pseudonym); straightforward directness (e.g. *The Moment*); and almost everything in between (e.g. *The Point of View* and the *Journals*, perhaps). Now that I have finished my survey of these key texts and the different communicative strategies that they embody, as well as tracing the development of Kierkegaard's concept of his artistic vocation throughout his works and journals, I can go on to ask: From a theological perspective, and taking leads from Kierkegaard's own scriptural hermeneutic, what is the most effective form of communication to put to use as part of the vocation of the Christian artist?

## **Part Two**

### **The Vocation of The Christian Creative Artist**

## Chapter Four: Biblical Bridges

### Scriptural Resources in Kierkegaard and Beyond

From my detailed examination of Kierkegaard's *Journals* and key indirect and direct writings, I have found that he began his writing as a religious author in practice, though without a documented plan for his authorship, which started out by being more indirect but became ever more direct until his goal finally became "to communicate Christianity in Christendom" in a more direct manner. The question I am now interested in asking is: For the contemporary Christian creative artist, which of these approaches is preferable—the more indirect or more direct approach? In other words, what is the vocation of the Christian creative artist today, expressed in a Kierkegaardian vocabulary? This question widens the scope of my enquiry from focusing on the well-established academic genre of Kierkegaard-studies in order to contextualise it further within modern theology as a whole and, indeed, church life more generally. Therefore, where the first Part of this dissertation is more historical, the second is more constructive in its approach.

Before I can properly sketch the outline of such a "theopoetics" on Kierkegaardian grounds, however, I will need another base of reference with which to coordinate my thinking—an external "Archimedean point" with which to move the world, as it were. This will serve as the connector between my examination of Kierkegaard's theory and practice of his Christian artistic vocation and a more general discussion of Christian artistic vocation in the present day. For such a reason this chapter focuses on the *scriptural hermeneutic and resources* that informed Kierkegaard's approach to his vocation as a Christian artist. This line of enquiry is easily justified, since Kierkegaard's work is steeped in scripture. As

Hugh Pyper, author of *The Joy of Kierkegaard: Essays on Kierkegaard as a Biblical Reader*, says, “the Bible is key to understanding Kierkegaard” and there is a “fundamental importance of Scripture to his authorship”.<sup>1</sup> Or, in the words of Rasmussen, we can say that most of the works of Kierkegaard “can justly be read as exercises in biblical interpretation”.<sup>2</sup> As we have seen throughout our survey of those works he frequently quotes, alludes to and even prefaces his writings with Christian scripture. Scripture appears in the *Journals*, it is often in the background of the pseudonymous works and it is usually placed right at the very front of the upbuilding discourses and signed writings, unapologetically employed as the starting point for the meditations therein. Not an enormous amount has been written on Kierkegaard and scripture compared with other themes, however, so this is relatively underexplored territory.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Pyper, *The Joy of Kierkegaard: Essays on Kierkegaard as a Biblical Reader* (London: Equinox, 2011), vii, viii.

<sup>2</sup> Joel Rasmussen, ‘Kierkegaard’s Biblical Hermeneutics: Imitation, Imaginative Freedom, and Paradoxical Fixation’ in *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, ed Lee C. Barret and John Stewart, Tome II (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 249.

<sup>3</sup> Lee Barrett and Jon Stewart state that “Kierkegaard was an intensively scripturally shaped writer whose natural idiom was the language of the Bible and who viewed the world through biblical lenses. Oddly, this aspect of Kierkegaard’s work has rarely received sustained attention.” - *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, ed. Lee C. Barret and John Stewart, Tome I, ix. Although see also the work of Timothy Polk *The Biblical Kierkegaard* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997); Jolita Pons, *Stealing a Gift: Kierkegaard’s Pseudonyms and the Bible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004) and Hugh Pyper, *The Joy of Kierkegaard*, who would all make one think that you have to have a name beginning with the letter ‘P’ to write on scripture in Kierkegaard, were it not for Joseph Rosas, *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* (Nashville: Broadman and Holdman, 1994). There is also a Princeton index of scripture verses appearing in Kierkegaard compiled by Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto, *Kierkegaard and the Bible: An Index* (Princeton Theological Seminary: Princeton, 1953). The books that do deal with Kierkegaard and scripture uniformly point out how important the Bible is for his work, as Pyper and Rasmussen do above. So for example Pons: “The Bible is at least as important a text for Kierkegaard as the works of, for example, Hegel or Kant. It is therefore my intention to show that readings ignoring the role of the Bible in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works overlook many nuances of meaning that depend on his use of the Bible.” – Pons, *Stealing A Gift*, xii. And Minear and Morimoto: “The impress of this reading [of the Bible and other edifying books] is sharply etched on almost every page of his journals, his letters, and his essays.” – Minear and Morimoto, *Index*, 3.

## ***FOR SELF-EXAMINATION***

It will be fruitful first to enquire as to exactly what kind of hermeneutical approach shapes Kierkegaard's reading and application of scripture. The best place to go for his clearest presentation of this, under his own name, is the 1851 text *For Self-Examination*. This is collected in English along with its companion piece, *Judge for Yourself!*, although the latter was not published during Kierkegaard's lifetime. In the spirit of an upbuilding discourse, the text itself begins with a scripture quotation for its epigram, from 2 Corinthians 5:11, before continuing with a "PREFACE" that implores the reader to "read aloud, if possible" and asserts now in quotation marks that its author is "without authority", eventually proceeding with another scripture quotation from James 1:22ff, Kierkegaard's favourite Bible passage, and the customary "PRAYER".<sup>4</sup> This prayer itself is telling of Kierkegaard's scriptural hermeneutic when it speaks of the Bible as "God's Word." As another aside, although this work often speaks negatively of the categories of the "poetic" and the "artistic" in contrast with positive actualisation of the Christian ideal,<sup>5</sup> we recall what was said in response to similar matters in *Practice in Christianity* and other texts: the negative remarks nonetheless appear in what is still an artistic-poetic (literary) work, they are nuanced, and they are directed at a particular *kind* of artistic-poetic practice—one that pays no heed whatsoever to actuality.

What is more relevant here is that from page 25 of *For Self-Examination*, which basically has to do with examining oneself in order to gauge whether one is a true Christian or not, Kierkegaard asks the question "*What Is Required in Order to Look at Oneself with True Blessing in the Mirror of the Word?*". His answer

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<sup>4</sup> *FSE*, 2-13.

<sup>5</sup> For e.g. at *FSE*, 12, 13, 21, 48.

effectively gives us his scriptural hermeneutic, at least at this moment of writing four years before his death. The reply is threefold and expressed in terms of three requirements: "*The first requirement is that you must not look at the mirror, observe the mirror, but must see yourself in the mirror.*"<sup>6</sup> In other words, focusing on the paraphernalia of scriptural interpretation, such as the minutiae of translation or historical-critical scholarship, is not the correct way to read scripture, for Kierkegaard. To illustrate this requirement, he likens the reading of scripture to the reading of a letter from a lover, which is probably the best metaphor to focus on in order to understand his hermeneutical approach. The way in which we should read a letter from a lover shows us how to read scripture, although interestingly Kierkegaard tells us that this is based on some assumptions which not all readers will share: "I assume God's Word is just as precious to you as this letter is to the lover. I assume that you read and think you ought to read God's Word in the same way the lover reads this letter."<sup>7</sup> Of course, not everyone who reads or has read Kierkegaard's text will treat scripture as preciously as this or think that it *ought* to be read as a lover reads a letter from the beloved, but Kierkegaard tells us that this is what he assumes on the part of his reader all the same.

A letter from a lover can be in a foreign language but, once the translation has been done, the particular linguistic issues of the translation are not as important as reading the letter itself; there is a difference between the *objective* attempt to clarify meaning and the *subjective* reception of that meaning. The same goes for the Bible, for which Kierkegaard believes the scholarly preliminaries of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 26.

translation etc. are merely a “necessary evil”.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, when one reads a letter from a lover, even if it is in one’s native tongue or has been translated, there may be hermeneutical problems to do with exactly what this or that phrase might mean, but it is better to try to obey what you *can* read than to wrangle indefinitely over such problems of interpretation. When you come face to face with your lover later, they will much prefer it if you say “I didn’t quite understand what you meant, but I did my best to act in accordance with it” than if you say “I didn’t quite understand what you meant, so I did nothing at all”.<sup>9</sup> It is the same with the Bible. Kierkegaard says that if we think we understand even just one command of scripture, we should do our best to obey it with every effort. The emphasis, as ever, is on doing and on enacting the requirement of the Word, rather than sitting around endlessly discussing exactly what it might mean and exactly what the historical details of its composition and transmission were.

The second requirement for reading scripture properly *“is that in order to see yourself in the mirror when you read God’s Word you must (so that you actually do come to see yourself in the mirror) remember to say to yourself incessantly: It is I to whom it is speaking; it is I about whom it is speaking.”*<sup>10</sup> This means that whatever we read in the Bible we should read it as in some way directly addressed to us, implicating us, to be applied to our own lives. For example, if you read Jesus’s parable of the Good Samaritan, you must see yourself alternately as every character in the story, identifying and empathising with each accordingly, and the story as addressed to you.<sup>11</sup> This mode of reading leads most effectively to self-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 40-1.

examination and to the appropriation of scriptural values, as we end up seeking to avoid reproducing the actions of the negatively portrayed characters and to emulate those of the positively portrayed. In connection with this requirement, Kierkegaard also looks at another of his favourite Bible stories, the story of David and Nathan in which the king is told by the prophet “You are the man!” and which I will examine in more detail below. An interesting feature to note here of this second requirement, however, is what we might call its direct-indirect quality: In hearing the scriptural passages as addressed to us when reading, it is as though they speak *directly* to us. However, scripture is not always (though it is often) written in the second person, so sometimes, as in the case of the self-contained narratives of parables, this second person address must be inferred *indirectly*. This could be a clue as to a way in which Kierkegaard’s communicative methodology is itself structured by his scriptural hermeneutic, as I will elaborate on shortly.

The third and final requirement is that *“if you want to look at yourself in the mirror with true blessing, you must not promptly forget how you looked, you must not be the forgetful hearer (or reader) of whom the apostle says: He looked at his bodily face in a mirror but promptly forgot how he looked.”*<sup>12</sup> As noted, this requirement is one that is explicitly mentioned by “the apostle”, James, and is not just a poetic embellishment by Kierkegaard. The point is that once scripture has been read as a letter from a lover, once it has been read as being addressed directly in the second person to the reader, it must not simply be forgotten. One’s own image seen reflected clearly in the mirror of the Word must be held in the memory, so that when the reader goes away from scripture and carries on with the affairs of their life, the lessons learned in front of it will be carried through and enacted in

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 44.

those affairs too. Scripture, particularly in the letter of James, demands consistency, 'follow-through', and to be lived out. The implication is that the reader will also benefit from repeated, daily visits to the mirror to check on their reflection the better to preserve its requirements in the memory, so as better to carry them out. Again, the emphasis is on doing, obedience, and existential appropriation, as we would expect of the Bible, James, and Kierkegaard himself, perhaps at this stage in his writing career more than ever.

For Kierkegaard, then, scripture is to be read as a letter from a lover, addressed directly to oneself, to be acted on and personally appropriated. This is his scriptural hermeneutic. It has been pointed out by some of its few commentators that there could be a certain problematic subjectivism or arbitrariness to this. For example, Pyper observes that reading the Bible solely as a 'love letter' could be used in attempts to justify "hate-crimes" for some readers.<sup>13</sup> If our own subjective reception and appropriation is the hermeneutical key to reading the Bible, are there not as many readings as there are people and couldn't different people's readings be exploited in defence of all sorts of morally reproachable behaviours? Some have tried to rescue Kierkegaard from this charge of hermeneutical subjectivism, such as Timothy Polk, who along with the requirements above identifies "Christian love" as the "Rule of faith" in Kierkegaard's works by which we are to read the Bible, pushing the 'love letter' illustration further.<sup>14</sup> For Polk, reading that instils, preferences and interprets by the Rule of Christian love is the best kind of Kierkegaardian reading of the Bible: "shouldn't Christian love, as Kierkegaard understands and practices it, govern the

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<sup>13</sup> Pyper, *The Joy of Kierkegaard*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 2, 13, 61.

Christian use of scripture?"<sup>15</sup> Polk also rightly points out that Kierkegaard has an incarnational/canonical Christology/hermeneutic, whereby reading scripture using the Rule of love makes itself into an occasion for contemporaneity and even encounter with Christ, and that this places him very much in the Lutheran-Barthian protestant tradition.<sup>16</sup> He acknowledges that there is a certain circularity to this, since scripture speaks itself to us of the love of God, but it is only by the Rule of the love of God that we can read it.<sup>17</sup> The Rule of love is thus self-establishing and is accepted on faith.<sup>18</sup> For Polk, then, what protects Kierkegaard from arbitrary subjectivism is the Rule of reading by love, which is established in the act of reading. This will not be enough to satisfy every critic.

But further, as Polk also observes,<sup>19</sup> Kierkegaard does not actually say in *For Self-Examination* that the Bible has *no* objective content and that the tools of translation and historical criticism are not useful *up to a point*. Much in the same way as in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* the "HOW" of existence is more important than but does not completely nullify the "WHAT",<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard here is not seeking to do away with 'objectivity' altogether, but rather to stress again the importance of subjective appropriation where the objective element has been overemphasised. Because the Bible itself does emphasise and feature 'Christian love' so strongly, as well as God's love for mankind, when its own objective content is allowed to set the agenda (perhaps including when this is done for considered reasons) then the hermeneutic of the love letter does not have to be a completely

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>20</sup> *CUP*, 202.

arbitrary selection pulled from nowhere.<sup>21</sup> In other words, when the text is encountered as an object by a subject, on its own terms it seeks to set itself up as a place of loving encounter with another subject, the Divine Subject no less. As Rasmussen argues, in Ricoeurian language, Kierkegaard's "aim is not to deny that we read in terms of interpretative horizons, but rather to insist that God's word establishes a subjective relationship with the Divine Lover that reconfigures one's horizon and gives a new perspective on every other feature of life."<sup>22</sup>

However, just as is the case with the absolute paradox in *Philosophical Fragments*, the totality of this subjective relationship remains inscrutable to objective thinking, and there *is* a kind of *sui generis* experience here, at least when it comes to Kierkegaard's scriptural hermeneutic. To quote Rasmussen again, "The transition by which the words of the Bible might become for us the Word of God remains ever a divine gift".<sup>23</sup> To a certain extent, this will mean that Kierkegaard *is* always left open to the charge of "subjectivism" at this level by some. But one would hope, and Kierkegaard seems to think also, that because the Bible *does* have particular objective content relating to love and has been translated in a particular way, with the help of historical-critical scholarship, the subjective appropriation of it in relation to the Divine Lover will not generally lead to the undertaking of hate-crimes, except in cases where something has gone wrong with the hermeneutical process. Of course, the Bible does not *only* contain objective content about love, but I think and again Kierkegaard seems to think that the theme of love and the

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<sup>21</sup> Naturally, those more influenced by a poststructuralist approach to texts may take issue with this argument. But even if its objective meaning is finally indeterminate, one may still trust that *some* overlap of common meaning is bestowed by a text on every intelligent reader of it, and this is what I call 'objective content'. In this way I employ more of a 'phenomenological' than a poststructuralist hermeneutic along the lines of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and arguably Kierkegaard himself.

<sup>22</sup> Rasmussen, 'Kierkegaard's Biblical Hermeneutics', 273.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

material relating to knowing God as lover are strong enough to undermine any potential for reading by a Rule of hate.

As a final note on this problem, it could be that there are two subtly different things at stake here: the relative subjective/objective means by which one establishes that the Bible is an authoritative text, on the one hand, and the relative subjective/objective means by which one establishes what hermeneutical approach one should adopt when reading the Bible, on the other. The issue may be problematic because Kierkegaard at times seems to conflate the two, or at least to say less about one than the other, and it can be hard to tell which he is speaking about at a given time. But what he appears to say or at least imply in *For Self-Examination* is that the Bible establishes itself as authoritative and establishes the hermeneutic with which it should be approached simply on the basis of a reader's attentive, listening encounter with it: Because reading it can serve as an occasion for a contemporaneous encounter with Christ and the reception of a direct address and command from subject to subject that invests the text with authority, the process of reading the text creates the hermeneutic by which it is to be read. This is a view very similar to that of Karl Barth, and it may be that I am interpreting Kierkegaard too much in the light of an awareness of Barth's use of Kierkegaard,<sup>24</sup> but this could be a consequence of Kierkegaard not spelling out his thoughts on the basis of scripture's authority and his reasons for selecting the hermeneutic that he does in enough detail. It could very well be that, behind the talk of the "paradox", and "contemporaneity with Christ" and so on, the historical Kierkegaard did

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<sup>24</sup> For Barth's famous citation of Kierkegaard as a chief influence on his thought, see Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 4. For his view of the authority of God's word being self-establishing, see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I trans. G. Bromiley (London: T&T Clark, 1999), Chapter 1.

actually think that there were also *reasons* for accepting scripture as authoritative and for adopting this particular scriptural hermeneutic. But he did not take the time to spell them out in detail and the debate still goes on. What is important here, however, is that it has been shown what Kierkegaard's scriptural hermeneutic *is*, whatever its basis and whether or not it can rightly be criticised as "subjectivist".

### ***WORKS OF LOVE***

*Works of Love* is another text that merits brief examination here in relation to Kierkegaard's scriptural hermeneutic. Published veronymously in 1847,<sup>25</sup> six months after *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, it is an important work that I have not discussed until now in order to avoid repetition of the contemporaneous *Journals* material. Indeed, nothing in *Works of Love* contradicts or modifies what was said in the *Journals* of the time about Christian artistry and vocation, though it *is* another place where Kierkegaard speaks negatively of the poet of pure potentiality, yet also calls himself a "religious poet", under his own name. Dealing with the profound theme of love in a series of scriptural expositions, very much in the manner of an upbuilding discourse, the text uses "poet" as a negative term in its first forty-five pages: Christian love should not be sung about by the poet, who sings about erotic love, but must be lived.<sup>26</sup> In fact, "Christianity certainly knows far better than any poet what love is and what it means to love"<sup>27</sup> and the poet

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<sup>25</sup> *WL*, ix.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

cannot really understand hardy, eternal Christian love because it is so different from transient, self-centred poetic love.<sup>28</sup>

As was the case for *Practice in Christianity* and *For Self-Examination* above, however, *Works of Love* is itself poetic and in many ways it is a poetic love-song about Christianity.<sup>29</sup> In this way, *Works of Love* could be seen as undermining itself, what with its potentially being a paradigmatic example of the genre which it criticises. This textual feature could be interpreted as an ironic redoubling, as the text referencing itself in order for Kierkegaard to negate his own enterprise, working to conceal his authorial persona once again behind the contradictions and mystifications of the text, even a veronymous text. Polk makes suggestions along these lines when he compares this passage in *Works of Love* to Kierkegaard's introduction of the fictional "poet" brought in to speak on his behalf in *The Point of View* and aligns himself with Mackey's idea that Kierkegaard was one of his own pseudonyms who, to his own chagrin, "could never quite elude the poet in himself".<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, another legitimate interpretation involves positing that when Kierkegaard speaks negatively of the "poet" in *Works of Love* he is speaking of a different kind of poet from that which he aspires to be which is a second kind of poet who is ethically-religiously superior to the first poet. The case for this interpretation is stronger because of the way that it coheres with what I have shown from the *Journals* and other published works in the rest of this thesis and because it fits the plain meaning of the text better. For, in fact, eventually in *Works*

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 29-31.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 208.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 208.

of *Love* Kierkegaard's language about the "poet" changes. After explaining how the poet will search in vain for a word about friendship in the New Testament that would please his sensibilities, Kierkegaard then sets up the rhetorical question "is the poet, then, no Christian?"<sup>31</sup> He answers that he has indeed not said this but only said that *qua* poet, the poet is not a Christian: in his capacity as a poet, the poet is not necessarily a Christian. And yet "a distinction must be made, for there certainly are religious poets. But these do not sing about erotic love [*Elskov*] and friendship [*Venskab*]; their songs are to the glory of God, about faith, hope and love [*Kjerlighed*]." <sup>32</sup> It seems, then, that there *are* at least two different kinds of poet and that *Works of Love* need not completely undermine itself because this second kind of poetry is at least superior to the first in that it can be practiced in a Christian mode. Kierkegaard clarifies, "the religious poet is a special case, but the secular poet, *qua* poet, is not a Christian. Yet it is the secular poet we think of when we ordinarily speak of the poet."<sup>33</sup> In other words, being a poet is not a sufficient condition for being a Christian. However, it is possible to be both a Christian and a poet and so a different kind of religious poet, and confusion arises because the term "poet" is usually taken to refer to "secular poet". Kierkegaard goes on to elaborate in the next few pages on how the secular poet deals with preferential erotic love and friendship in riddles, but the Christian poet deals with non-preferential love with the wisdom of eternity.<sup>34</sup> Judging from the fact that this is what *Works of Love* attempts to do, from the evidence of his other works and from announcements to this effect from his *Journals*, it is fair to say that Kierkegaard, as

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<sup>31</sup> *WL*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-52.

far as we know him from these writings, identified himself as *this* kind of religious poet.<sup>35</sup>

The reason that *Works of Love* is more specially relevant here, nonetheless, is it can be seen as an epitome of Kierkegaard's biblical hermeneutic.<sup>36</sup> Though Polk concedes that "in *Works of Love* and the *Upbuilding Discourses* Kierkegaard does not so much talk *about* the Bible as kaleidoscopically *use* it" and that there is more of a praxis than a theory of hermeneutics in *Works of Love*, he argues that Kierkegaard's praxis exceeds his theory.<sup>37</sup> Correspondingly, he believes that *Works of Love* is an exercise in what he locates as Kierkegaard's Rule of Faith for reading scripture by love.<sup>38</sup> To make this point, Polk puts his finger on one particular passage of *Works of Love* as being paradigmatic for Kierkegaard's scriptural hermeneutic.<sup>39</sup> There is only one small obstacle: the pages he chooses entirely lack the word "scripture"!<sup>40</sup> All the same, Polk uses this passage to draw out what in his assessment are the key themes in Kierkegaard's practice of the Rule of Faith regarding reading scripture by love: It uses distinctive categories,<sup>41</sup> it posits intratextuality,<sup>42</sup> it is practiced for instruction/edification<sup>43</sup> and it is visionary.<sup>44</sup>

Polk makes an excellent choice in homing in on this passage from *Works of Love*. It reveals some principles that are telling of Kierkegaard's hermeneutical approach to the extent that it does almost merit being singled out as a special

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<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting in passing also that *Works of Love* talks about love as an "art", a skill to be developed, much in the same way that *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* talks about existence as an art at *WL*, 217. After all, for Kierkegaard the goal of our existence is to become a self by learning how to love.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> *WL*, 291-3, from "It is always..." to "...organised".

<sup>40</sup> Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

manifesto for his hermeneutic as I take Polk as trying to do. However, at the same time it is important to bear in mind that it is primarily a passage to do with interpreting *people*, not texts, and I do not agree with some of Polk's use of twentieth-century jargon in discussing it. The passage itself begins with the idea that "the explanation makes the object of explanation what it becomes",<sup>45</sup> an acknowledgement of the hermeneutical idea that *phenomena* such as people or texts are always *interpreted*: "objects" of experience are always "explained" by subjects in a way which inevitably modifies them from subject to subject and from explanation to explanation. Having introduced this idea, Kierkegaard then explains (and note that he is explaining an object of his own experience here) that lenient, mitigating explanations are the more loving kind of explanation and "hide a multitude of sins", a reference to 1 Peter 4:8 which is the heading for this section of *Works of Love*. In other words, when we seek to explain other people's behaviour in the more generous, forgiving way, giving them the "benefit of the doubt" as it were, we are making the explanation, choosing the hermeneutical option that is more loving and so is to be preferred from a Biblical standpoint. For indeed Christians are "called by God to love, that is, with the aid of a mitigating explanation to hide the multitude of sins", and this is juxtaposed with the police sleuth who must spend all of their time being suspicious and assuming the worst of people.<sup>46</sup> To help us envision a role model for this kind of behaviour, Kierkegaard asks us to imagine alternatively a person who could practice "the art of interpretation that with the help of the mitigating explanation hides the multitude

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<sup>45</sup> *WL*, 292.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

of sins”, which is actually the only place where the word “interpretation” appears in this passage.<sup>47</sup>

This is potentially a highly fecund passage for constructing a Kierkegaardian theory of interpretation then, so Polk is right to concentrate on it. Though the passage does not talk about “texts” per se, texts can be treated in some ways as analogous to people, in that they can work to communicate personal meaning, and it does talk about “objects” of explanation. We do not *have* to treat texts as people to recognise their communicative meaning, but the analogy can be fruitful. In the personal realm, the passage advocates interpreting people in a lenient and mitigating way, overlooking mistakes and assuming the best about them until shown otherwise.<sup>48</sup> In the textual realm, this could correspond to interpreting texts in a lenient and mitigating way, overlooking mistakes and *assuming that they mean what we think they mean* until shown otherwise. To lovingly interpret a person, on this view, would be to trust them and take them at their word; to lovingly interpret a text, to trust it and take it at its words. This approach could aptly be contrasted with “a hermeneutic of suspicion”<sup>49</sup> which assumes that the text does *not* mean what we think it means and posits that there is some underlying factor which makes the text untrustworthy, perhaps even its own nature as an unstable system of signs as in the case of a poststructuralist approach. A hermeneutic of suspicion assumes that meaning must be doubted because there are hidden principles subverting it or because texts deconstruct themselves. By contrast, we could call the approach advocated here a “hermeneutic

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>49</sup> A Ricoeurian term coined in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970).

of trust” as does Mark Tietjen,<sup>50</sup> a “hermeneutic of earnestness”, a “hermeneutic of sympathy”, a “hermeneutic of faith” or just a “hermeneutic of love”. A hermeneutic such as this assumes that meaning must be earnestly trusted, taken on faith, and that a text must be read sympathetically, as this is the most loving approach to it, and perhaps to the person originally responsible for the text.

It is this choice between a “hermeneutic of suspicion” and a “hermeneutic of love” (for that is the opposite term which I shall settle on using) which is at play among the different interpretations of *The Point of View* and which is played out between Walsh and Garff in their heated exchange in the *Kierkegaard Newsletter* that I discussed above: Garff opts for a highly deconstructive hermeneutic of suspicion, *doubting* both Kierkegaard’s claim that he was a religious author from the start of his career and his presentation of the unity of his authorship as reliable or serious, finding evidence that cooperates with this conclusion in the deconstructive and fragmented nature of Kierkegaard’s texts. Walsh, on the other side, opts for a hermeneutic of love, *believing* both in Kierkegaard’s claim that he was a religious author from the start of his career and in his presentation of the unity of the authorship as reliable and serious, finding evidence that cooperates with this conclusion in the religious and unified nature of Kierkegaard’s texts. If Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* is right, then Walsh is being more loving towards him. But who is right? Ultimately, it is impossible to say. For who can make a reasoned argument for why it might be better to be suspicious or to trust, to withhold love or to give it? Both remain hermeneutical options and I imagine that

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<sup>50</sup> Mark A. Tietjen, *Kierkegaard, Communication and Virtue: Authorship as Edification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), Part II, Chapter 5.

the debate over how to interpret Kierkegaard on this matter will go on for as long as there are Kierkegaard readers.

My own exegesis of Polk's chosen passage has so far only dealt with people, and texts, in general. But what about the specific text, or collection of texts, that is found in the Bible? How does a sympathetic, Kierkegaardian hermeneutic of love apply to that? As I signposted earlier, we must be careful not to take this idea too far, as the passage examined does not actually mention texts, let alone the Bible. But when it comes to reading the Bible, interpreting in a "lenient" and "mitigating" manner could also amount to assuming that the Bible does actually make sense(!), that it has a coherent, unified message to offer, and overlooking 'mistakes' it makes (perhaps inconsistencies in the narrative or instances that clash with historical-critical findings) as not really mistakes, or not so important, giving the *Bible* the benefit of the doubt. If we compare this to our findings from *For Self-Examination*, where Kierkegaard says that you must make the best of obeying what you have to go on from your understanding of the Bible, we can see how the passage can be taken as epitomising his scriptural hermeneutic, up to a point: Reading with a hermeneutic of love means trustingly assuming that from your reading of it the Bible has offered you something substantial and that you have understood it, until shown otherwise. To state this in even more subjective terms, since for Kierkegaard reading the Bible can be an occasion for an encounter with Christ, we might even say that this hermeneutical approach to scripture boils down to putting

trust not just in the *text*, but in *God*, in a God who speaks and reveals himself through the words of the Bible.<sup>51</sup>

Of course, the charge of subjectivism will still be levelled at this approach from certain quarters, but that comes with the territory—“subjects” who have not had the experience of hearing Christ addressing them through scripture might not necessarily see any reason to adopt this approach to it. But there are some specific aspects of Polk’s reading of this passage where I would want to further guard against problems that have to do with “subjectivism”. Chiefly, when Polk speaks of generously overlooking the features of scripture that you do not *like*, likening them to the multitudinous “sins” that are covered over by love in Kierkegaard’s quotation from 1 Peter—that really is subjectivism!<sup>52</sup> Naturally, I would concede that any hermeneutic of love is going to involve trusting that aspects of scripture which one finds unappealing can still be integrated into its overall unity. Though if this equates with simply ignoring them or discarding them then is the objectivity of the text (and remember, for Kierkegaard, of God’s speech) really being allowed to set the interpretative agenda? A hermeneutic of love would involve overlooking the “sins” of unappealing passages of scripture by assuming that they must still have some kind of veracity and worth, even if that is not yet apparent, and continuing to hope to discover those things.

Let me now pull back from Polk’s favoured passage and look more generally at what *Works of Love* has to say on the subject of scripture. As with most, if not all, of Kierkegaard’s other texts it is very difficult to track the way that it “uses”

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Most evangelical theology, the work of Karl Barth, but also George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), where faith in the meaning of a text, the presence of the author and the existence of God are all connected.

<sup>52</sup> Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 52.

scripture simply because the use of scripture is so ubiquitous. However, there are two places in *Works of Love* where Kierkegaard discusses the precise term “holy Scripture” (Danish: *hellige Skrift*) at any length. Both of these are telling for the way that he uses scripture in general. The first runs

it is very upbuilding to see how [holy] Scripture manages to describe the highest with this simple word [“upbuilding”] and to do it in the most inward way...“To build up” is a metaphorical expression; yet with this secret of the spirit [i.e. “playing stranger with the old and familiar” in order to appropriate it inwardly] in mind, we shall now see *what this word signifies in ordinary speech*.<sup>53</sup>

The emphasis in this passage is Kierkegaard’s, not mine. This short quotation shows very well just how Kierkegaard anticipates some of the thought of deconstruction and yet at the same time how he is really not a postmodern deconstructionist. How? Because he speaks of the “inward”, of the aporia between the external sign and the inward appropriation of the sign, of the “secret of the spirit” which knows that old words can always be interpreted in new ways. And yet, at the same time, he is bold enough, despite this secret which means that the familiar word “upbuilding” can always be appropriated in strange, new ways inwardly, to speak about “*what this word signifies in ordinary speech*”. A deconstructive thinker would balk at this clause. A deconstructive thinker could not write it in good faith. How can Kierkegaard be so audacious as to claim that there is a “*what*” that a word can properly signify in ordinary speech at all, when there is no such thing as a ‘transcendental signified’? Kierkegaard is not a twentieth- or a twenty-first-century deconstructionist. With his hermeneutic of love, he believes that Scripture can “describe” things, even “the highest”, which, although they can carry different inward senses as personal appropriation plays

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<sup>53</sup> *WL*, 210.

stranger with the old and familiar, nonetheless carry some kind of consensual, plain, ordinary meaning which can be trusted in by the reader's choice, transmitted from the author.

A quotation from the one other developed appearance of "Scripture" in *Works of Love* reinforces my point:

Holy Scripture is very consistent in its use of language. It does not name as hope any and every expectancy, the expectancy of a multitude of things; it knows only one hope, the hope, the possibility of the good; and of this hope, the only one that *could* be put to shame because to have it is an honour, of this hope Scripture says that it shall not be made ashamed.<sup>54</sup>

What is the scriptural hermeneutic that this quotation betrays? We can note first that it is not just "Scripture" that is under discussion, but "Holy Scripture". As ever, Kierkegaard writing under his own name has a very high view of Scripture, and it seems close to the kind of Protestant view that places it in a special category of its own with a unique and powerful authority. Second, Scripture is "very consistent in its use of language". It is not a seething mess of contradictions, lacunae, misreferences; it is consistent. Third, and as such, this means that Kierkegaard believes (or writes here as if he believes) that he can make empirical claims about what it "name[s]" and what it "says" and make theological inferences from these claims. It could be that Kierkegaard is saying that Scripture is only consistent with regards to "hope", but the plainer reading is that he is saying that it is consistent in general. Indeed, this passage is typical of Kierkegaard's scriptural hermeneutic and the way it is practiced in the veronymous texts: He has a high view of Scripture, he believes it has a special authority to impart truth and shape one's life, he believes it is consistent and actually references things in reality (though it may do this *via*

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 262.

metaphor) and he approaches it with a hermeneutic of love. The only special characteristic not really mentioned or demonstrated here is that it is also for him the potential locus for an encounter with Christ, and so with God.

## **KIERKEGAARD'S SCRIPTURAL HERMENEUTIC AS AN INFLUENCE ON HIS ARTISTIC VOCATION**

I will now examine the way in which Kierkegaard's scriptural hermeneutic and readings of key scriptural texts can be seen as shaping and influencing the development of his vocation as a Christian artist. Paul Minear and Paul Morimoto, the compilers of the Princeton Index of scriptural references in Kierkegaard's work, are bold enough to claim that Kierkegaard's "sense of vocation emerged out of reflections on the vocation of the prophets and apostles" as found in scripture.<sup>55</sup> They do not go on to substantiate this claim but I believe they are correct and that key scriptural passages can be seen as contributing to his sense of vocation. Kierkegaard nowhere explicitly tells us that these passages were an influence on his vocation but he does discuss them in detail in his work, often in relation to his ideas about his communicative methodology, so we might infer an influence. Further, my aim here is to draw points of connection from which to talk about the vocation of the Christian artist more generally, *not* to make strong claims about Kierkegaard's intentions. Even so, the first, most obvious, thing to be said here is that *if* Kierkegaard had such a scriptural hermeneutic as detailed above, it would have and *must* have had an influence on the enactment of his vocation. If, as a

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<sup>55</sup> Minear and Morimoto, *Index*, 6.

Danish Lutheran Christian, influenced by elements of pietist Moravianism,<sup>56</sup> he read the Bible as a love letter addressed directly to him telling him what to do, then what he *did* with his life—making literary artworks—would have been influenced by his reading of the Bible. One way of construing the overriding second-person commands of the Bible, the whole of the law and the prophets and Jesus’ and the apostles’ teachings, is as being to “love God and love others”, the theme of *Works of Love*. If Kierkegaard was in agreement with this principle in his own subjective appropriation of the objective Biblical text, his life-work of writing would have in some way been an effort to fulfil these commandments, and I have found statements to this effect implicit in the *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* and explicit in *The Point of View* already. There is a visible correlation between Kierkegaard’s reading of scripture and how he carried out his artistic vocation. This much can be affirmed without committing a kind of intentional fallacy.

Another preliminary note to make here is that the very *genre* of “scripture” can be construed as having artistic-vocational significance for Kierkegaard and more generally for Christian creative artists. Minear and Morimoto, again, claim that “The form and structure of Biblical tradition conditioned the form and structure of [Kierkegaard’s] own literary work.”<sup>57</sup> The Bible is, after all, a collection of (mainly narrative and poetic) *writing* and so in some sense has a (literary) artistic character. As Polk observes, the New Testament itself, in communicating

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<sup>56</sup> As detailed in Christopher Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>57</sup> Minear and Morimoto, *Index*, 6. L. Joseph Rosas even goes so far as to say that “Kierkegaard’s biographical crises are the foundations for understanding the function of Scripture in his thought.” –Rosas, *Scripture*, 16, though this is too far for me. Cf. also Martens: “The Bible provided him with innumerable literary images and tropes; it provided him with ethical imperatives and ammunition for cultural critique; and perhaps most important of all, it provided him with spiritual nourishment and *direction* in his relationship to God.” –Paul Martens, ‘The Bible’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard* ed. John Lippit and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 150, italicised emphasis mine.

about the paradoxical God-man and allowing for the possibilities of offense and misuse, can be seen as a form of indirect communication.<sup>58</sup> What wonder then that a man attempting to carry out an authorial career in the service of Christianity should begin with indirect communication: It is not surprising that a person who believes that the Bible is a means of God's self-revelation to man through the medium of written words should embark on a project in which they seek to communicate ideas about God *through the medium of written words*. And, whatever else it is, the Bible is certainly polyphonic, in that it contains a huge variety of different voices, characters, sub-genres and settings. Like Kierkegaard's authorship. So, one major example of the scriptural influence on Kierkegaard's artistic vocation is arguably the very form of scripture itself.

Iben Damgaard extends this analogy to apply it to the dialectic of both indirect *and* direct communication in a way which is pertinent for my study, arguing that the "doubleness of rigorousness and leniency" in scripture is "embodied in the interplay between different biblical genres such as imperative and parable."<sup>59</sup> He holds that Kierkegaard imitates this biblical strategy in his own communication which "combines the long, circuitous route of the indirect, metaphorical playing stranger...with the direct and rigorous questioning of the reader." It is not just indirect communication which can be seen as being modelled on the genre(s) of scripture, but direct communication can too. This observation works as a helpful signpost for my developing thesis and reflection on it may

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<sup>58</sup> Polk, 'Kierkegaard's Use of the New Testament' in *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, ed Lee C. Barret and John Stewart, Tome II, 244. Cf. Scripture functions "by indirect communication that appeals to readers to exercise their own imaginations to enter a world counter to the current one." –Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 76.

<sup>59</sup> Iben Damgaard, 'Kierkegaard's Rewriting of Biblical Narratives' in *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, ed Lee C. Barret and John Stewart, Tome I, 220.

prompt the reader to begin to anticipate my provisional conclusion: Are the more direct elements of scripture and the more indirect elements mutually exclusive, or mutually reinforcing and interdependent? If the latter, does one depend *more* on the other? Which are more effective for the communication of Christianity? If one set were removed, would the remaining set serve well enough to communicate Christianity by themselves? These are the kinds of questions that Kierkegaard wrestled with across his authorial career and that I will be suggesting some provisional answers to in my final chapter.

Another recent commentator who picks up on this genre affinity between scripture and Kierkegaard's writings is Jolita Pons in her *Stealing A Gift: Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms and the Bible*: "the way in which Kierkegaard writes and, in particular, the way in which he uses the Bible often has a precedent in the Bible itself."<sup>60</sup> However, Pons adds an extra twist to the narrative by arguing that Kierkegaard's *use* of the Bible is also "an essential part of his indirect communication", particularly because of the peculiar way that he quotes it.<sup>61</sup> To make this case she argues that the quotations from the Bible in Kierkegaard, in this consideration specifically where they appear in the pseudonymous writings, are not "ornaments" or "attachments" to the text, but rather an "integral part" of them, in such a way that they actually "blend together" with the rest of the writing so that they have a kind of "invisible omnipresence".<sup>62</sup> This leaves their omnipresence to be discerned by the personal choice and recognition of the reader—a hallmark of

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<sup>60</sup> Pons, *Stealing a Gift*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., xiv, 49. Note that Pons' own definition of indirect communication runs "we can define indirect communication (as a method) as a series of specific communication techniques (dialogue, Socratic midwifery, double reflection, teleological deception, and as I will argue—the peculiar use of biblical quotations), the (secret) aim of which is to communicate that which is not communicable directly: the essential truth." -ibid, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 134-6, 146.

indirect communication. Pons thus concludes that “the employment of biblical quotations forms a crucial part of Kierkegaard’s indirect communication and is its example *par excellence*, indeed perhaps the only tangible proof of such communication”.<sup>63</sup> This is saying too much and it is careless to say that biblical quotations could be tangible proof, let alone the only tangible proof, of indirect communication, but Pons is right in that Kierkegaard’s quotations from the Bible *can* be construed as a part of his indirect method: Particularly in texts such as *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the Bible is often nowhere and everywhere and appears explicitly at odd places that might provoke the reader to reflect “What is going on here? I thought I was familiar with that Biblical quotation but now I see it in a strange, new light,” or similar.<sup>64</sup> So as well as it being possible to see the genres of the Bible as an influence on his vocation, Pons highlights how Kierkegaard’s particular use of the Bible can be seen as consistent with his vocation which is, at least at times, to communicate indirectly in the service of the religious.

## **OLD TESTAMENT RESOURCES**

### **Nathan and David**

What I will do now is examine some specific scriptural passages that Kierkegaard discusses in relation to his communicative methodology and that can be seen as relating to his artistic vocation. I begin with the Old Testament. The example *par excellence* here is the story of Nathan and David in 2 Samuel 12 which

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. for e.g. the discussion of Johannes Climacus’s covert scripture references at *PF*, 68f.

I alluded to earlier. The story goes that, after committing adultery with a woman called Bathsheba and having her husband killed, King David is approached by the prophet Nathan who tells him a tale about a poor man who once had a prize little lamb which was stolen by a rich man. David is outraged by the tale and very angry at the rich man, upon which Nathan tells him “You are the man!”, exposing David’s guilt by way of analogy to his crime and making him feel convicted for it. In Kierkegaard’s authorship, this story becomes a paradigm for indirect communication, appearing in both pseudonymous and veronymous texts: It appears in the *Journals*,<sup>65</sup> in *Either/Or* from the pen of Judge William,<sup>66</sup> in *Works of Love* during an exposition of the Gospel of Luke,<sup>67</sup> and is alluded to in *Christian Discourses*.<sup>68</sup> Nathan’s tale is a piece of indirect communication because it does not, within itself, address David directly but becomes an aid that awakens him to reflect on his own existential situation. In the same way, we have seen how Kierkegaard records that he hopes the indirect element of his authorship will awaken his own readers to reflection. He implicitly understands himself as a kind of “Nathan” who constructs indirect tales in the service of God to fulfil a spiritual and prophetic purpose. Mathias Engelke puts it thus: “The motif of Nathan’s denunciation “You are the man” was critically important to Kierkegaard’s literary strategy of provoking the reader to apply Kierkegaard’s writings to the reader’s own self.”<sup>69</sup>

The story of Nathan and David also appears in *For Self-Examination*.<sup>70</sup> But there it is not just straightforwardly cited as an example of indirect

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<sup>65</sup> E.g. *Pap* II A 57 / *JP* 3, 3698 (1837).

<sup>66</sup> *EO* II, 6.

<sup>67</sup> *WL*, 14.

<sup>68</sup> *CD*, 235.

<sup>69</sup> Mathias Engelke, ‘David and Solomon’ in *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, ed. Barret and Stewart, Tome I, 104.

<sup>70</sup> *FSE*, 37-39, as signposted earlier in this thesis.

communication; it is embroidered and developed. In this telling, both David and Nathan are “famous authors”, David the renowned psalmist being “the most famous poet” in the land.<sup>71</sup> The prophet’s parable here morphs into his writing of a “short story” to which, we are told in language recalling *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, David listens “objectively” at first. But Nathan shows him that he must come to listen to it “subjectively” and hear the story as being addressed to him in the second person, just as we must attend to God’s Word. This rendering of the tale, more than any other of Kierkegaard’s uses of it, highlights the way in which it serves as a model of indirect communication. By employing the vocabulary of *Postscript*, which argues that indirect communication is the only appropriate mode for communicating subjective knowledge, Kierkegaard closely ties it, the story of Nathan and David, and his own artistic vocation to one another.

Pyper also discusses Kierkegaard’s use of this passage in *For Self-Examination* in his *The Joy of Kierkegaard*. In particular, he notes that that in both texts Nathan is not necessarily given the short story “by God”—he may have composed it himself.<sup>72</sup> There is a point to be made here about the freedom of the communicator. For the Christian artist seeking to communicate a religious message indirectly, it may be that although their message is divinely revealed and so in a sense dictated (it is assumed, after all, that Nathan knew about what David had done through a prophetic revelation from God), the means by which they communicate that message is up to their own freedom. It may involve composing a short story, a tale, a parable, even *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling* or *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. On the other side, Pyper observes how “It is quite open to

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<sup>71</sup> *FSE*, 38.

<sup>72</sup> Pyper, *The Joy of Kierkegaard*, 37.

David to say to Nathan, 'What do you mean, 'I am the man?''<sup>73</sup> This is a point about the freedom of the recipient. With a communication which is something like Nathan's parable, the reader or listener is especially free to interpret and respond to it however they want in line with their own existential choice. Both of these features of the story highlight the way in which it serves as a paradigm for indirect communication and how it may well have acted as an influence on Kierkegaard's understanding of his own artistic vocation.

But the use of the Nathan and David story in this way is not entirely unproblematic. For instance, although as a self-contained parable the "story within the story" (Nathan's tale) has a highly indirect quality, it is afterwards illuminated by Nathan saying "You are the man!" to David, which is a much more direct statement, about as direct as one can imagine in terms of the moral of the parable. It is interesting that even when discussing an Old Testament passage that serves as a model for indirect communication, Kierkegaard selects one that still seems to incorporate this more direct element. Pyper warns us not to see Nathan's retort as a completely direct statement in contrast to the indirection of his tale and to remember the former's dependence on the latter, but it is clearly *more* direct to say "You are the man!" than to tell an allegorical parable. Secondly, there is the question of whether the whole story's function within the Bible is itself indirect or direct. Nathan's tale cannot function in quite the same way for us as for David, unless we have committed a crime like David's. However, this is *less* problematic, because from within Kierkegaard's hermeneutic the story can still affect us in a way that is indirect. When Nathan says "You are the man!" we may not think "Yes, I have committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband," but we may

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 38.

well think “Yes, I am a man or a woman who is complacent in my guilt about my mistreatment of others and yet quick to judge hypocritically the mistreatment of others when I hear it reported.” And yet the question remains whether it is better to label this process as a kind of “indirect” inference being made by the reader *from* the text or a “direct” address being made to the reader *by* the text (or by God, via the text). The process has an ambivalent “direct-indirect” quality. We are back again to looking for more nuanced categories between the pure types “direct” and “indirect”.

### **Other Old Testament Resources**

There is not actually very much else in Kierkegaard’s writings from the Old Testament that specifically applies to artistic vocation; this is mainly concentrated on the story of Nathan and David. Indeed, this may be symptomatic of the fact that there is a lot more of the New Testament in Kierkegaard’s writings than there is of the Old Testament in the first place.<sup>74</sup> Of course, Kierkegaard was profoundly influenced by the Old Testament and other Old Testament stories, passages and tropes, even though it does not appear in his works as much as the New Testament. As Lori Unger Brandt writes in her excellent chapter on Kierkegaard’s use of the Old Testament, “he quoted it variously and widely, at times throwing in an off-hand allusion to an obscure passage, and at other times delving deeply and prolongedly into a particular text.”<sup>75</sup> Examples of the latter are the use of the story of Abraham being commanded to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis that provides the theological cue and framework for *Fear and Trembling* and the extended meditation on the story

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<sup>74</sup> On this fact see Paul Martens, ‘The Bible’, 151, 161. See also McKinnon, *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results*, 143.

<sup>75</sup> Lori Unger Brandt, ‘Kierkegaard’s Use of the Old Testament’ in *Kierkegaard and the Bible* ed. Barret and Stewart, Tome I, 233.

of the suffering of Job found in *Repetition*.<sup>76</sup> We might say that at some points in his life Kierkegaard may have seen himself as a kind of Abraham who teleologically suspended the ethical choice of marrying Regine in order to commit himself to his religious writing, or as a kind of Job who experienced intense suffering through the breaking of his engagement to Regine in order to write, but these parallels do not have so much to do with his artistic *methodology*. Examples of shorter, off-hand references to the Old Testament include the use of the figures of King Solomon in *Stage's on Life's Way*, Adam and Eve in *The Concept of Anxiety* and Moses in *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* and of the Book of Ecclesiastes' injunction to "remember your creator".<sup>77</sup> Again, there is not really much here that pertains to the concept of artistic vocation.

So much then for the candidates for the Old Testament influences on Kierkegaard's artistic vocation. But before I move on to the New Testament influences, since this chapter is serving as the bridge to the final more constructive chapter of my project, I want to ask, very briefly, what are some other Old Testament sources that Kierkegaard *could* have employed in the shaping of his artistic vocation? For instance, had he been so inclined, he might have written about Genesis 1 where, right at the start of the Hebrew Bible, God "creates", and we are told that man is made in the image of God. If Genesis 1 were our only scriptural text, it would not be difficult to make the synchronic reading from it that man's being created in the image of God means that man is himself creative. He might have examined "Bezalel" in Exodus, who is filled "with the Spirit of God, with skill,

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<sup>76</sup> *RT*, 197-209.

<sup>77</sup> *SLW*, 156, 346, 250-2, 508; *CA*, 26, 46-66, 189; *TDIO*, 25; *EUD* 233, cf. Ecclesiastes 12:1.

ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts, to make artistic designs”<sup>78</sup> in the service of God, in this case the building of the Tabernacle. He might have looked at other of the prophets who, from Isaiah to Malachi, consistently make use of poetic form, metaphor and simile in their transmission of the message of the Lord to the people of Israel. He might have looked at the Psalms and the Song of Solomon, and how they function as poetic expressions of religious thought. And so on. These sources are not referenced explicitly by Kierkegaard in relation to artistic vocation, though as he was an avid reader of the Bible they may well have influenced his self-conception as an artist.

## **NEW TESTAMENT RESOURCES**

### **Christ as the (Direct-Indirect?) Prototype**

In terms of specific New Testament influences on Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation, these must be seen as clustering around the person of Christ in the four gospels. This is because, not only is Christ such a huge influence on Kierkegaard’s artistic vocation, he is also an influence on his scriptural hermeneutic more generally, to the extent that Rasmussen can call his interpretative approach a “Christian hermeneutics of the imitation of Christ”.<sup>79</sup> Kierkegaard’s aim is “to contour the Christian life in the light of the divine life incarnate”<sup>80</sup> and this means that he reads the New Testament and the rest of scripture through the lens of Christ. To recall the three requirements of *For Self-Examination*, we might say that the Kierkegaardian Christian does not look “at” the mirror of scripture but “in” it the

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<sup>78</sup> Exodus 35:31.

<sup>79</sup> Rasmussen, ‘Kierkegaard’s Biblical Hermeneutics’, 251.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

better to see the image of *Christ*, hears a second-person address from scripture made to themselves by the voice of *Christ*, and must go away to carry out the commands of scripture so that their reflection may come to resemble more and more the form of *Christ*.

Furthermore, a major theme that becomes central to Kierkegaard's mature authorship is that Christ is the "prototype" and this connects well with ideas about artistic vocation, as I will show. I have touched on this theme in relation to *Practice in Christianity*, but a good place to go to in order to examine it further is the companion piece to *For Self-Examination*, which is called *Judge For Yourself!* and was not published until after Kierkegaard's death. *Judge For Yourself!* is very similar in style and content to *Practice in Christianity* and the *Moment* writing which followed a few years later. Addressing itself as usual to the individual reader, it is divided into two sections.<sup>81</sup> The first takes 1 Peter 4:7, "Therefore be sober", as its starting point and then after its "PRAYER" presents a lengthy meditation on the dialectic of worldly and spiritual sobriety contrasted with drunkenness.<sup>82</sup> Although it contains a passage very similar to the one in *Practice in Christianity* examined above which seeks to undermine the portrayal of Christ in visual artwork,<sup>83</sup> the same points apply here in defence of Christian artistic practice so I refer my reader to what was said earlier: the argument is not necessarily an all-out indictment of *all* Christian art and it is made in a text which has literary-artistic qualities.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, this time Kierkegaard actually turns

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<sup>81</sup> *JFY*, 91.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 95f.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122. A brief passage on 138 is similarly critical of religious artistic production but at less length.

<sup>84</sup> After all, as is typical of this period, Kierkegaard calls himself an "unauthorised poet" three times in the text, at *JFY* 133, 134 and 142.

to the specific case of *literary* art in his critique: “But what if the art of words tried its hand at [portraying Christ]?”<sup>85</sup> He imagines such a wordsmith demanding to have absolute peace and quiet and the right environment and mood to do his work properly and says that this is a form of worldly intoxication. Christianity, on the other hand, “believes that being sober is that your understanding is your acting.”<sup>86</sup> But note that again he does not explicitly rule out the possibility of portraying Christ with words, which is just what he *does* in *Judge For Yourself!* Indeed, the passage can be read as saying that it *is* possible to portray Christ with the art of words, but that rather than sitting around waiting for the perfect conditions for this it is better just to get on with it! After all, what Christ commands in scripture is that his disciples go forth and *speak* about him, and that is what Kierkegaard is doing in this text in a poetic manner.

More interesting here is the second section of *Judge For Yourself!* This takes Matthew 6:24f on “No one can serve two masters” as its starting point and is itself entitled “Christ as the Prototype.”<sup>87</sup> Although Kierkegaard makes use of the idea of Christ as the prototype in other texts, nowhere does he set it forth more explicitly and at more length than here. A petition from the opening “PRAYER” sums up the idea of Christ as the prototype nicely and addresses him thus: “you left your footprints, you, the holy prototype for the human race and for every individual, so that by your Atonement the saved might at every moment find the confidence and boldness to want to strive to follow you.”<sup>88</sup> The idea is very simple: Christ, as the prototype for humanity, is to be followed and imitated by Christians in their own

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 147.

conduct. The upbuilding discourse-like section then proceeds to go through Jesus's life, from Christmas to Easter, showing how it was an expression of not serving two masters, as we human beings all do, but one. The inference, sometimes vocalised and sometimes tacit, is that Christians must strive to imitate Christ in this and all other matters, endeavouring to follow his prototypical example by living in such a way that they too serve only one master, God. There is a tension here because we will never be able to do this perfectly in this earthly life so we must rely on the gracious forgiveness of God that is itself offered by Christ. The last words of the text also serve as a neat *précis* of this idea: "the Saviour of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ, did not bring any doctrine into the world and never delivered lectures, but as the *prototype* required *imitation*, yet by his *reconciliation* expels, if possible, all anxiety from a person's soul."<sup>89</sup>

I hope that it is immediately clear how this Christocentric reading of scripture connects with an idea of vocation: If Kierkegaard held himself to his own standard then he would have strived to live his own life in imitation of Christ, to line up his own work with the example of Christ as the prototype. What is less immediately clear is how this connects to the idea of *artistic* vocation. But, as I have said at many points throughout this thesis, what Kierkegaard spent most of his time *doing*, certainly 'working' on, was literary artwork. So again, if he held himself to his own Christocentric scriptural standard then there is a connection to be made here as well. The God-fearing worker will increasingly understand that "God is the co-worker!"<sup>90</sup> and indeed this is how Kierkegaard presents his self-understanding as an artist as having unfolded in *The Point of View*. But even if the connection

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 186.

cannot be made definitively with regard to Kierkegaard's own personal thoughts, I want to make it with regard to theology more generally as I move into the final chapter of my project. For, a reader familiar with *Judge for Yourself!* might object, as with regards to *Practice in Christianity* and *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, that the text is actually critical of art and poetry. After all, in it Kierkegaard does say "How a person will get on in the world is something the Gospel (unlike stories, novels, lies and other time wasters) does not waste many moments thinking about."<sup>91</sup> He also talks about how "poetry and art" have become acceptable in preaching, where they should not be, and how the imitation of Christ is intended to prevent the Gospel from becoming poetry.<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, still bearing in mind my responses to *Practice in Christianity's* and the above section of *For Self Examination's* critiques of religious art, and that in these instances it is probably a specific form of "art" that is being critiqued, the art of "intoxication,"<sup>93</sup> there is also a more positive use of the term "art" in this text. Speaking of the lily and the bird, two of Kierkegaard's favourite teachers along with Christ (and Socrates), he calls the bird "an unrivalled professor in the art of living" and the lily a "great artist" who practices a "master's art" in her handling of sorrow.<sup>94</sup> Although itself humorous and poetic, which reinforces my point, this language shows that it is still possible at this literary moment for Kierkegaard to distinguish between at least two different kinds of art and poetry, one negative and the other positive. The negative kind, as we have seen many times, is art and poetry that concerns itself merely with the realm of possibility and remains within

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 158, 187.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 181, 182.

that realm without venturing out into actuality. The positive kind is the art and poetry of existence, the artistry that consists in living out life well, as the lily and the bird do. It is debatable whether Kierkegaard believed he actually achieved this second form of artistry in his own life or not. In one sense, he claimed that he did not, as for a long time he refers to himself as “only a poet” in the sense of possibility and as not living up to Christianity’s requirement himself. In another sense, he does state at times, as in *The Point of View*, that he believes that his artwork has been guided by Governance to be of some spiritual value and worth and so presumably it might be considered to be art of a greater sort, the work of a specifically “religious poet”.

### **Christ the Indirect Storyteller**

I now want to take this whole line of thinking about Christ as the prototype to its conclusion by suggesting some ways in which Kierkegaard’s artwork can be seen as following the example of Christ. To reiterate, the central thrust of the second section of *Judge for Yourself!* is that Christ must be imitated. Christ was not a professor or lecturer, so he is not to be imitated by professoring or lecturing. *But*—and now I move beyond Kierkegaard’s outspoken observations very consciously into the territory of inference and implication—Christ *was* a storyteller. Throughout the four gospels, particularly the first three ‘synoptic’ gospels, Christ is portrayed as telling stories and parables, which have an indirect character in that they do not (usually) impose a didactic message directly on their listeners, but are left ‘open-ended’, with the listeners free to interpret and apply them howsoever they choose. In fact, in Mark 4:10-12, Jesus says (quoting Isaiah 6:9-10) that he communicates in parables so that some may grasp their secret

meaning and others may see and hear them spoken but never perceive or understand their meaning. This sounds a lot like Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication and Christ as a teller of parables can be seen in this way as an influence on Kierkegaard's artistic practice. Indeed, Polk contends that "Jesus' own fondness of parable fed Kierkegaard's metaphorical appetite."<sup>95</sup> We recall Charles Bellinger arguing for a reading of *Either/Or* as a recasting of the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 (or the parable of the father and two sons, as it is properly identified). Though the definitive conclusion that this was what Kierkegaard intended was rejected, the observation of the similarity of form between indirect parable and indirect pseudonymous text is still apt. A good number of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works *can be read as* indirect, novelistic parables, particularly *Either/Or*, *Repetition* and *Stages on Life's Way*.

In relation to Bellinger's article in Chapter One above, I also mentioned *Parables of Kierkegaard* by Thomas Oden, a collection of what Oden identifies as some of the shorter parabolic units found within Kierkegaard's texts. Here Oden argues in his Introduction that "Kierkegaard ranks among the best of the great parabolists of the Western tradition",<sup>96</sup> that his theory of indirect communication accounts for "his writing in parable and story form under pseudonyms" and that he "clearly envisioned parabolic communication as an integral part of his philosophical method."<sup>97</sup> He even goes so far as to argue that "It can be said of Kierkegaard as it was said of Jesus that 'indeed he said nothing to them without a

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<sup>95</sup> Polk, 'Kierkegaard's Use of the New Testament', 237.

<sup>96</sup> Oden, *Parables*, vii.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, vii-viii.

parable”<sup>98</sup> his definition of parable being “a brief story of spare characterisation and surprising reversal, with the underlying intent of moral or spiritual illumination.”<sup>99</sup> It is verifiably the case that Kierkegaard often used brief stories of spare characterisation and surprising reversal in his writing, which are what Oden fills his collection with, and the Hongs have a section in their edition of the *Journals* devoted to his “PARABLES”.<sup>100</sup> Further, Kierkegaard often used the particular and familiar parables of the New Testament itself when he was describing ethical and religious correlations.<sup>101</sup> His conversance with actual New Testament parables serves as evidence that strengthens the case that he consciously modelled his communication on parables many times over. But the genre of indirect parable also applies more broadly to the more indirect works as a whole. If a parable can also be defined, as I think it can, as “an indirect story that does not try directly to impose a monological, didactic message on the reader but leaves itself open to interpretation by free existential response” then many of Kierkegaard’s works are broadly parabolic in form. And if Christ is the prototype and Christ told indirect

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., ix, quoting a verse in Matthew which most historical-critical scholars would argue is dependent on Mark 4:34.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., x, as quoted earlier in this thesis. Oden argues that Kierkegaard used parables for at least five reasons: 1. They make for a stark contrast to stilted, non-experiential Hegelian logic. (ibid., x) 2. He relishes meeting his reader this way since the “story format...disarms the reader, putting him or her in a non-defensive, receptive frame of mind that allows the author to enter more deeply into personal communication with the reader.” (ibid., xi-xii) 3. They are necessary for the implementation of indirect communication, which has the double-reflection of presentation and the author’s concern for appropriation. (ibid., xii-xiii) 4. They are the only way to communicate a capability. (ibid., xv) And 5. They are designed to preserve oral tradition, able to stand alone and stay in the memory. (ibid., xvi)

<sup>100</sup> *JP* 3, p. 387. Cf. also *JP* 3, p. 845.

<sup>101</sup> See *JP* 3, section on ‘Parables’, pp. 845-846. These include, for example, his depiction of the heavy lot of those who suffer in the strictest sense. The Hongs narrate how, mobilizing for the Church conflict, Kierkegaard the ironist stocked his journals with parables which either would strike at what to him were the empty forms of Christendom or would present his own position.

parables, then in employing indirect communication Kierkegaard is in part following the model of Christ.<sup>102</sup>

### **Christ the Direct Preacher**

However, as well as telling indirect parables, Christ also preaches more direct messages in the gospels. Correspondingly, Kierkegaard did not *just* communicate in indirect, parabolic form, but also in ways that were at least *more* direct and *less* open-ended. Thus Christ's preaching of more direct messages can be seen as an influence on Kierkegaard's artistic practice too. What kind of sayings constitute Christ's more direct messages? Statements such as "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15), "Whoever wants to become my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me," (Luke 9:23) and "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest....For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28, 30) These are the kinds of sayings that Kierkegaard often takes as his cues for writing the *Upbuilding Discourses* and the *Anti-Climacus* works which are more direct in character than his open-ended novels.

Of course, arguably all of these statements also exhibit indirect elements too. To begin with, they all involve metaphors: of burdens and easy yokes, of taking up one's cross—even in the Markan saying quoted the "good news" that is being referred to has to do with the "kingdom of God" coming "near". As such they all to some extent involve the open-endedness and indirectness of metaphor. Additionally, because Jesus, in preaching about himself directly (or perhaps more precisely, the gospels, in portraying Jesus as preaching about himself directly)

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<sup>102</sup> 'Intentionally' or not.

seeks in the end to communicate a message about himself as being the invisible God incarnate in visible form, his message is always unavoidably “indirect” in some capacity. No one is better than Kierkegaard himself at pointing this out: As was examined above, in *Practice in Christianity* he goes to great lengths to show how everything that Christ says is in a sense indirect because of his very nature as an indirect “sign of contradiction”: the paradoxical God-man who is the representation of the un-representable. The Gospel of John perhaps best exemplifies this tension. In John, instead of telling indirect parables about the Kingdom of God, Jesus speaks directly about himself in the form of extended discourses.<sup>103</sup> However, even when he is speaking about himself more “directly”, Jesus chooses to speak in metaphors. Most famously, he says “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6)—three nouns for which it is not *immediately* clear how Jesus “is” any of them. Jesus says something about himself more directly which can only be understood indirectly as metaphorical speech. Have I then contradicted myself by saying that the direct messages of Christ are unavoidably indirect? No, because they have both direct and indirect qualities. *But* when Christ says “Repent and believe in the good news!” he is saying something *more* direct than when, for example, he tells the parable of the prodigal son and leaves it uninterpreted. Perhaps what is needed is a definitional scale of “more indirect” to “more direct” that incorporates considerations to do with both the *genre* and the *content* of a given communication. This is what I will go on to develop in my final chapter.

### **Other New Testament Sources**

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<sup>103</sup> Discourses which nonetheless often blend with the voice of the narrator so that it is hard to separate out what is meant as being said by the character of Jesus and what is meant as being said by the author—how Kierkegaardian!

Kierkegaard's use of other New Testament material is also manifold, and more prominent than his use of the Old Testament.<sup>104</sup> However, again partly because his use of the New Testament is so ubiquitous, it is hard to identify any other specific passages that specially pertain to the concept of artistic vocation. What Lee Barrett says of Kierkegaard's use of the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7 (which he claims alone "virtually saturates Kierkegaard's authorship") could be applied to his use of the *whole* of the New Testament in general: "At times he bases entire discourses on portions of it, often he directly quotes verses from it, and most frequently he echoes its distinctive phrases."<sup>105</sup> The New Testament seems to be everywhere in Kierkegaard. His favourite parts of it appear to be that sermon on the mount (particularly the pericope about the lilies of the field and the birds of the air); Jesus' saying about his yoke being easy and his burden being light; the accounts of Jesus' meetings with the woman taken in sin; James' saying about every good and perfect gift being from above and Peter's saying about love covering a multitude of sins.<sup>106</sup> These are the passages that he seems to return to most frequently and most often takes as the headings for his upbuilding discourses. None of them have very much to say on the subject of artistic vocation,

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<sup>104</sup> My own survey of the veronymous writings finds that the following New Testament passages are directly quoted and discussed at length: In *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, Galatians 3:23f, James 1:17-22, 1 Peter 4:7-12, James 1:17-22 again, Ephesians 3:13f, James 1:17-22, James 1:17-22, Luke 21:19, Luke 21:19 again, Luke 2:33-40, 2 Cor 4:17-18, John 3:29-30, 2 Corinthians 12:7, and 2 Timothy 1:7; in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, James 4:8, Matthew 6:24f, Luke 14:27, Matthew 11:30, Hebrews 5:8, Luke 23:41, various other passages including from 1 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Acts 5:41; in *Works of Love*, Luke 6:44, Matthew 22:39, Romans 13:10, 1 Timothy 1:5, 1 John 4:20, Romans 13:8, 1 Corinthians 8:1, 1 Corinthians 13:7, 1 Corinthians 13:5, 1 Peter 4:7-12, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Ephesians 6:13; in *Christian Discourses*, Matthew 6:25-34, Matthew 6:24, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Matthew 19:27, Romans 8:28, Acts 24:15, Romans 13:11, Matthew 5:10-12, 1 Timothy 3:16, Luke 22:15, Matthew 11:28, John 10:27, 1 Corinthians 11:23, 2 Timothy 2:12-13, 1 John 3:20, Luke 24:51; in *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, Matthew 6:25-34, Matthew 6:24, Matthew 6:25-34 again; in *Three Discourses at Communion on Fridays*, Hebrews 4:15, Luke 18:13, Luke 7:47; in *One Upbuilding Discourse*, Luke 7:37f; and in *Two Discourses at Communion on Fridays*, Luke 7:47 and 1 Peter 4:8.

<sup>105</sup> Barrett, 'Jesus' Sermon on the Mount' in *Kierkegaard and the Bible* ed. Barret and Stewart, Tome II, 33.

<sup>106</sup> Matthew 5-7; 11:30; John 8; Luke 7:37f; James 1:17-22; 1 Peter 4:7-12.

they have more to do with topics like worry, rest and forgiveness, but in enacting his artistic vocation Kierkegaard frequently chose these passages as the headings from which he would creatively develop his literary themes.

In the small but slowly growing secondary literature on Kierkegaard's use of particular passages from the New Testament I have only found one brief comment on the way that it could link to his creative vocation. This is made by Leo Stan, who writes in an article on Kierkegaard's frequent use of the Matthean Jesus' "lilies of the field and birds of the air" that "the active element in such detachment [i.e. the detachment of the lilies and birds from material cares] (with *aesthetic* implications, *nota bene*) lies in the free and trusting consent to a divine purposiveness that reigns over everything in the wisest possible way."<sup>107</sup> The aesthetic implications that Stan would like his reader to note well are, I believe, the connection between the trust in divine purposiveness exhibited by the lilies and the birds and the trust in divine purposiveness exhibited by Kierkegaard as author. This is the kind of trust in *Styrelsen* (guidance) spoken about in *The Point of View* and elsewhere that the aesthetic efforts of the published writing will be able to serve a religious purpose in the hands of guidance. But this is just one example of the many minor links that could be made between Kierkegaard's favourite New Testament passages and his approach to his vocation. However, they remain difficult to trace with any comprehensive level of detail simply because the New Testament is so pervasive in his writings and he does not develop the links overtly. It seems that, rather than very particular sections which would be easier to pick

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<sup>107</sup> Leo Stan, 'The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air' in *Kierkegaard and the Bible* ed. Barret and Stewart, Tome II, 64.

out and exposit, simply the *whole* of the New Testament, along with the rest of the Bible, shaped his thinking and his approach to his vocation.

Here are a few suggestions of some other New Testament passages that Kierkegaard could have mentioned in connection with creative vocation: He might have made more of the “great commission” in Matthew 28:19 where Jesus commands his followers to go into all the world, preach the good news and make disciples, a passage that its often connected to Christian vocation in popular preaching. He might have made use of Mark 4:34, where it is recorded that Jesus did not say anything to the crowds without using a “parable”, a kind of indirect communication, a pericope that Oden alludes to.<sup>108</sup> He might have dwelt more on the various presentations of the Christian message by the apostles in the book of Acts and the relative directness or indirectness of their means of presentation, which is often being made to those who are already “religious” and believe that they are living in a right relationship with God by virtue of their national identity, much like the propagators of Danish Christendom. He might have overcome his Jamesian and Petrine bias to pay more attention to Paul’s plea that the good news be preached in Romans 10:14, his affirmation that “we are God’s [artistic] poem” in Ephesians 2:10 and his positive example in disseminating the Christian message of becoming “all things to all people” in 1 Corinthians 9:22. He might even have looked more at the book of Revelation and at the wild, prophetic, creative and artistic symbols that are contained within in it. Surprisingly, none of these passages appear explicitly in Kierkegaard, at least according to my readings and the scriptural indexes of his works that have been made thus far.

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<sup>108</sup> Oden, *Parables of Kierkegaard*, ix.

## **Scriptural Resources: Conclusion**

In conclusion and summary of this chapter, I can say with Barrett that Kierkegaard's work is saturated with scripture. His scriptural hermeneutic, as it is expounded in his writings and betrayed by his practice, involves attributing a high degree of authority, coherence and worth to scripture. It involves reading as much as possible in order to hear in it a second person address from God himself so that it becomes a place of subjective encounter with Christ that transforms the individual, influencing their existential acting and not just staying at the level of intellect or emotion. It is clear that his reading of scripture influenced his vocation as a Christian artist, although this influence is not always easy to trace because scripture is so omnipresent in his writings. At the least, the genres of scripture seem to have influenced his vocation, being as it is varied, polyphonic, often narrational, at times more indirect and at times more direct. The Old Testament passage that seems to have had the greatest influence on his vocation is the story of Nathan and David in 2 Samuel 12, though there are other places he could have gone to look for more vocational cues from the Old Testament. The New Testament figure that seems to have had the greatest influence on his vocation is the person of Christ, who both preaches more direct messages and tells more indirect parables, in his varyingly direct-indirect presentation of himself as an indirect sign of contradiction or the God-man, though there are also some other places that could have gone to look for more vocational cues from the New Testament. Having examined this scriptural hermeneutic and these scriptural influences on Kierkegaard's creative vocation, I am now in a position to proceed to my final, more constructive chapter in which I will ask, using these Kierkegaardian

resources, how might we conceive of the vocation of the Christian creative artist working today?

## **Chapter Five: Theopoetics**

### **Kierkegaard and the Vocation of the Christian Creative Artist**

#### **POSITIONING OUR POINT OF VIEW WITH KIERKEGAARD**

Imagine (if you need to) that you are a Christian, an adherent of the Christian faith. Also imagine (if you need to) that you are a creative artist, that you have decided that you would like to engage yourself in the activity of making creative artwork, potentially even to sell or publish or distribute. If you are the kind of Christian who believes that your faith should affect and be relevant to every other dimension of your life, you will want to think through how your faith could and should influence your artwork, what regulative principles and purpose the one can lend to the other. Since in a traditional Christian faith, one of the highest callings or activities a believer can engage in is sharing or communicating that faith with others, both as this is a genuine consequence of believing and because Christ commands it in the Christian scriptures, it is a natural question to ask 'Can the making of artwork serve to communicate the Christian faith, and if so, how?' Kierkegaard is extremely useful for thinking through this question. We can position alternative Christian vocational-artistic theories differently according to the different positions Kierkegaard adopted (both theoretically and practically) throughout his life.

This is because, as I have shown in the previous 80,000 words, at different points in his life he adopted virtually every position that it is possible to adopt on the spectrum of opinion regarding this question: To begin with, he simply got on with it, without reflecting on the question too much, and for some the school of thought will be that one has to simply 'get on with it' and just create however one

happens to create. At other times, he believed that his artwork could communicate a Christian message, but “indirectly”, not by being overtly, avowedly or directly religious but by working within a non-religious genre to “deceive” people into the religious and cause them to reflect on their own existential situation by “meeting them where they are” (his language, not mine<sup>1</sup>), aiming to be a midwife to belief through a kind of covert infiltration of the non-religious sphere. Correspondingly, for some the school of thought will be that a Christian message can be consciously communicated but that the best way to do this is without being too explicitly religious, but rather by infiltrating the realm of secular art and indirectly gesturing towards the religious by working within it on its own terms. At other times, Kierkegaard believed that his artwork could communicate a Christian message by way of “direct”, explicit, overt religious address, indeed for a long time this method ran parallel to the indirect method, though towards the end of his life Kierkegaard privileged this approach exclusively. And similarly, for some the school of thought will be that the way to communicate a Christian message through artwork is to make more direct, explicitly religious art that straightforwardly and overtly puts across a Christian message. As a result, wherever a person falls on the spectrum, it is possible for them to identify with Kierkegaard at a certain point in his career and he makes for an excellent foil and conversation-partner for thinking about this question.

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<sup>1</sup> *POV*, 45.

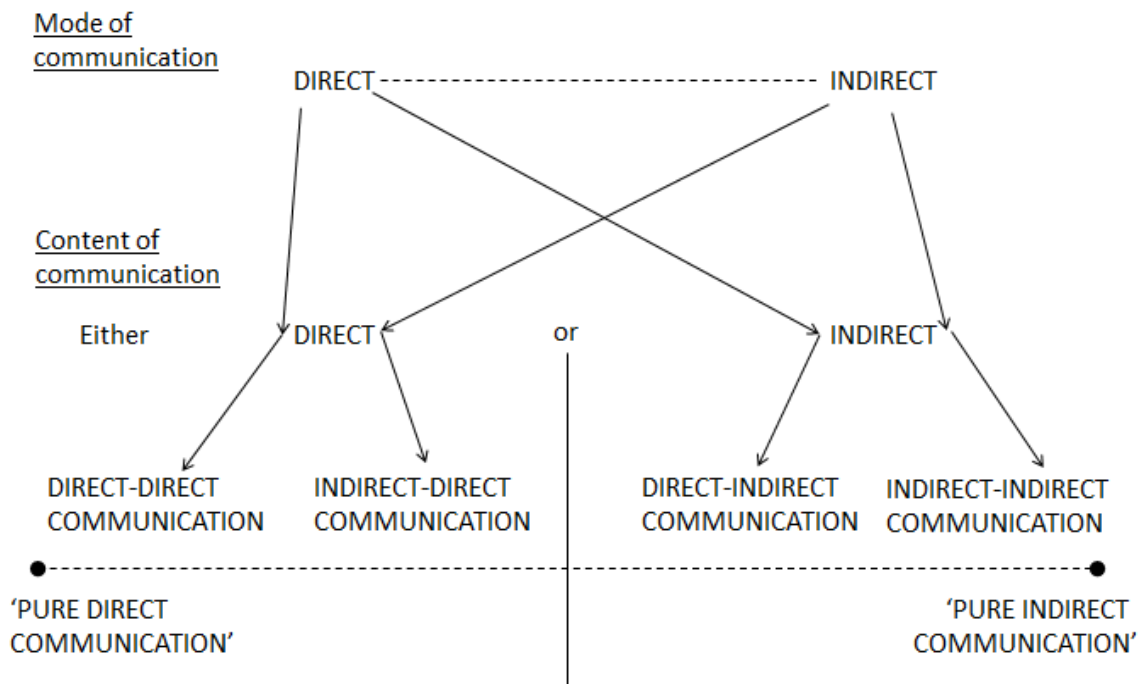
## The Direct-Indirect Spectra

Using Kierkegaard then, we might speak of a spectrum of Christian artistic communication that moves from 'more direct' to 'more indirect'.<sup>2</sup> Or perhaps more precisely we might speak of two parallel 'spectra', given the further complications that have arisen from my study of Kierkegaard's texts: On these spectra, one initial axis has to do with the relative directness or indirectness of the *mode* of the communication. A second consideration then involves whether the *content* of the communication is *either* direct *or* indirect in the sense of Kierkegaard's terms: Is it a directly observable empirical fact about the world or something that can only be apprehended indirectly like the incarnation of the God-man? This would result in a synthesised spectrum ranging from more 'direct-direct' communication on one side to more 'indirect-indirect' communication on the other, with the first modifying term referring to the mode or genre of the communication and the second priority term referring to the content or substance of the communication, with 'purely direct communication' and 'purely indirect communication' at either extreme. Under this schema, which I am putting forward as my own constructive theopoetic contribution, any given communication can be classified dialectically as more or less 'direct-direct', 'indirect-direct', 'direct-indirect' or 'indirect-indirect'.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. "It is doubtful whether Kierkegaard's own "direct" communication constitutes a pure type in contrast to his "indirect" communication" –Nerina Jansen, 'Deception in the Service of the Truth' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Macon: Mercer University Press, ) ed. Perkins, 125. Jansen argues that he saw them as parallel and complementary, so it is better to think of them as "on a continuum ranging from more to less direct" (Jansen in IKC on CUP, 125) Cf. also "There is a categorical distinction between direct and indirect communication, and most communication is complex enough to require both categories for its full explication" –Ed Mooney, 'Exemplars, Inwardness and Belief: Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication' in *IKC:CUP* ed. Perkins, 141.

# The Direct-Indirect Spectra



It should be noted that for those who are not experienced readers of Kierkegaard this typology may seem somewhat counterintuitive. Many readers might intuitively understand “direct” content as having to do with theological doctrine and “indirect” content as having to do with empirical facts about the world. But for Kierkegaard in a large part the reverse is the case. As I have shown above, he makes it very clear in *Practice in Christianity*, speaking as Anti-Climacus, and in his *Journals* that, when Christ is the intended subject of communication, its content is *always* indirect. This is because Christ is *himself* a “sign of contradiction” who indirectly represents transcendent divinity; his divinity cannot be directly seen and so communication about it is by necessity indirect.<sup>3</sup> So for Kierkegaard, using this terminology, direct-direct communication and indirect-direct communication are going to be less useful for the communication of Christian ideas

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. *PC*, 123-5.

than direct-indirect and indirect-indirect communication. In any case, “pure direct communication” is probably impossible *anyway*, no matter whether the communication is Christian or not. It is impossible ever to communicate directly about something that is directly understandable in such a way that one can be sure of a perfect transference of sense between the communicator and the recipient of the communication. Communication always involves some form of mediation, some loss and some surplus of meaning, and the intended sense will always to an extent ‘run away’ from the communicator. This is what I take Derrida and the poststructuralists to be saying (perhaps over and over again because they need to say it as many times as possible in order to maximise the chances of their readers grasping what they have said).

It may be useful to treat each type of communication in turn. “Direct-direct communication” is saying something in a direct mode about a directly observable fact in the world. The closest one could get to pure direct-direct communication might be saying something like “ $1 + 1 = 2$ ”, but even then numbers and mathematical symbols belong to a system of signs that must be learned and the meaning of which is always open to ‘mistaken’ interpretation. However, note that a statement such as “nominal, cultural Christendom is very different from New Testament Christianity” *is* on the face of it a piece of “direct-direct communication”, though it is not pure direct communication: it involves saying something overtly about a straightforward empirical fact. Of course, one of Derrida’s insights (I take it) is that even this mode of communication isn’t *completely* direct, because meaning is *always* ultimately indeterminate and we can never get behind

representation to the direct 'referent' of a given communication.<sup>4</sup> However, though in many ways he anticipated the thought of poststructuralism and in some places he gives clues that maybe *all* communication about anything is indirect to a certain degree,<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard was *not* a late twentieth century poststructuralist and "direct-direct communication" can still serve as a good placeholder term for classifying some of his communication, particularly parts of his *Moment* writings about the state church.

The next type of communication on the synthesised spectrum is "indirect-direct communication". This is the strangest type of communication and the only kind of communication that Kierkegaard does not mention explicitly. Indirect-direct communication, remembering my schema, involves speaking about something indirectly that is a direct empirical fact about the world and not an inherently paradoxical idea like the incarnation. An example of an indirect-direct communication might be telling a story with multiple interpretative options in order to get hearers to reflect on the idea that "1 + 1 = 2", or presenting a person with a picture that looks like two different things at the same time and saying "Here's a picture. It might be a cup or it might be two faces: You decide." Arguably, *this* is what Derrida *et al* are saying all ordinary communication and writing actually ends up being because it is impossible to speak purely directly about facts in the world so really all saying is indirect in mode. But as I say, Kierkegaard is not interested in this kind of communication so much, except possibly for when he uses more indirect means to try to get his readers to reflect on contingent truths, as again for example at times in *The Moment*.

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<sup>4</sup> See for e.g. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' in *Writing and Difference* trans. Alan Blass (London: Routledge, 2011), 354.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Pap VIII 2 B 81 / JP 1*, 649 (1847).

This brings me to “direct-indirect communication”. Direct-indirect communication involves saying something in a more direct manner about truths that are only indirectly apprehensible. An example of this is preaching. When Jesus says “Believe in me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me,”<sup>6</sup> he is speaking directly-indirectly, under this schema, though this is a special instance that involves the paradoxical God-man communicating about himself. Equally well, when a Christian says “Jesus is the Son of God, believe in him and be saved,” in church, in public or through a Christian artwork, then direct-indirect communication is happening. Kierkegaard employed the term “direct-indirect communication” himself when he was trying to write a series of lectures on communication in his *Journals*, where it appears that this came to be his preferred term for ethical-religious communication.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of my theopoetic schema, direct-indirect communication includes Christian artworks that aim to present something of a Christian message *more* directly than through an open-ended narrative, perhaps by including elements of preaching or simply through being an artistic rendering of a gospel message which announces itself as such. Kierkegaard’s own *Discourses* and once again parts of *The Moment* come under this category, I would argue.

Lastly, I come to “indirect-indirect” communication. Indirect-indirect communication is saying something in an indirect manner about something that can only be apprehended indirectly, such as a theological concept to do with God, the incarnation, or salvation. An example of indirect-indirect communication might be the following:

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<sup>6</sup> John 14:11.

<sup>7</sup> *Pap* VIII 2 B 89 / *JP* 1, 657 (1847).

There once was a father who had two sons. One left him and squandered his inheritance, the other remained with him and tried to earn his love. One day the first son returned, and the father ran out to meet him and welcomed him back with open arms. The second son was bitter about this, but the father told him that he loved him just as much, regardless of his attempts to earn his love.

This, after all, is a little artwork that arguably aims to communicate theological ideas but is open-ended and can be interpreted in different ways. The majority of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings come under this "indirect-indirect" classification, particularly *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. But note that when Jesus presents his indirect-indirect parables in the gospels, to them is usually appended a small piece of direct-indirect communication: "the Kingdom of God is like..."<sup>8</sup> Arguably this is what Kierkegaard needed in order to make his communication Christian too, in the form of the *more* direct *Upbuilding Discourses* and so-called "meta-texts" that comment on his authorship. At the extreme of the spectrum, "pure indirect communication" involves speaking in such a way that one guarantees that *no* meaning at all is transferred, perhaps by saying something like "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" (though even here this word conjures a particular sense from its context) or, more properly, simply spouting incomprehensible nonsense (as some accuse Derrida of doing).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Mark 4:26.

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps most famously John Searle in 'Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida' in *Glyph* 1 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 198-208

## TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN ARTISTIC VOCATION

Having developed some more precise terminology to classify Christian artwork using Kierkegaard's thought, I am now in a position to summarise my findings from among Kierkegaard's oeuvre concerning the vocation of the Christian creative artist, offer some of my own thoughts on the matter and suggest some avenues for future research in this area by way of a conclusion. I have shown in this thesis that Kierkegaard began writing without a clearly documented sense of vocation or communicative methodology. Initially the production of his own primary literary artwork as portrayed in his *Journals* appears to have been more contiguous with the breaking of his engagement to Regine Olsen than anything else. However, when he began what he would later refer to as his "authorship" he was nonetheless a "religious author", as he later claimed, because of the content and character of that authorship already evinced in 1843 by *Either/Or* and *Two Upbuilding Discourses*.

As Kierkegaard continued to write, in his published works and in his *Journals* he reflected on his production and came to document a more developed sense of Christian artistic vocation and a theory of indirect communication with which he reinterpreted his work. At the same time, he produced works that were both "more direct" in genre, such as the *Upbuilding Discourses*, and "more indirect" in genre, such as *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. By 1847 he came to speak of Christian communication in his *Journals* as being "direct-indirect" because it involves the communication of some knowledge but must proceed on indirect grounds. This term at the same time indicates ambivalence towards the two forms of communication, "indirect" and "direct", in his writings. Then, over the rest of his career, Kierkegaard's work became more and more direct, until he eventually came

to privilege exclusively a more direct form of communication in his published writing, moving through works like *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* and *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* to *The Moment and Late Writings* in 1855.

The most concise expression of Kierkegaard's mature conception of his vocation as a Christian artist became "to communicate Christianity within Christendom" in a more direct mode. Simultaneously, it may be the case that, because of ideas developed in *Practice and Christianity* and the *Journals*, for Kierkegaard Christian communication must always in some way be "indirect" in content. Following this, we can speak of Christian artwork as being comparatively more "indirect-indirect" or more "direct-indirect", where the first term refers to the relative mode or genre and the second term refers to the content of the artistic communication. And in writing these more indirect-indirect and more direct-indirect works, Kierkegaard was profoundly influenced by both the genres and content of Christian scripture. His own scriptural hermeneutic was one which accorded a high level of authority to scripture and saw it as a potential place of encounter with Christ, as demonstrated by his texts *For Self-Examination* and *Works of Love*. Following such a scriptural hermeneutic, and the preeminent example of Christ, the traditional Christian creative artist might exhibit a preference for more indirect-indirect or more direct-indirect communication. Both options have been explored and exemplified by Kierkegaard, although he came to settle on the latter.

In closing, then, we might ask: By what means can one evaluate which of these approaches to communication is preferred by the Christian creative

artist? Is it better to let art simply be art and not try to shape it with conscious Christian intent? Or is it possible to construct a Christian *ethic* in order to regulate a communicative *aesthetic*? These are interesting questions for future reflection and work, and here I can only offer in response to them some provisional suggestions as they emerge from my scholarly engagement with Kierkegaard. My judgment would be that insofar as Christian *scripture* is taken as a normative basis for a Christian ethic, as it was for Kierkegaard, the following is true: First, direct-indirect and indirect-indirect communication are the two kinds of communication that are most useful to the Christian artist of the four kinds that I identified, because of the content of Christian scripture. Second, of these, direct-indirect communication is ultimately *more* valuable to the Christian artist than indirect-indirect communication for the purposes of communicating a conceptual Christian message. And third, at the same time, indirect-indirect communication is still valuable for this purpose when used in conjunction with direct-indirect communication.

I would provisionally conclude these things for the following reasons: Firstly, because, as was seen in Chapter Four, Christian scripture itself exhibits both indirect and direct communicative genres, though theologically speaking its proper subject(s) can only be apprehended indirectly, so if it is being allowed to set the communicative agenda then both must be affirmed.<sup>10</sup> For example, the bulk of the Old Testament is narrative and poetry, full of “indirect” mimetic examples to its readers, metaphorical images and contrasting points of view, while other parts

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<sup>10</sup> I concede that I am for a moment here talking about “communication” as opposed to “artwork” and that not everyone will consider the Bible to be “artwork”. At the same time, I have shown how the genre(s) of the Bible likely influenced Kierkegaard’s artwork and believe that I can apply the communicative approach embodied by Christian scripture to a Christian theory of artistic communication, where admittedly my own definition of artwork is very broad.

of scripture are more didactic, imperative and overtly direct(ive). Secondly and most importantly, Christ himself, who is taken as the prototypical mimetic example *par excellence* by Kierkegaard and by traditional Christians, used both these forms of communication. If we *only* had remaining record of Christ's indirect-indirect communication, for example his parables left un-interpreted to *any* more direct degree, then the Christian message would not have survived in anything like its traditional form. It would have lost its strong, *more* direct-indirect doctrinal content about Jesus being the Son of God, the inauguration of his Kingdom, his atoning death, and so on. Thirdly, the early Christians as documented in the New Testament used both these forms of communication too, again with what seems to me to be an overall preference for direct-indirect communication. The paradigmatic scriptural passage for exhorting direct-indirect communication might perhaps be Romans 10:14-15:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Similarly, the paradigmatic passage for indirect-indirect communication might be Paul's appropriation of a Greek cultural motif in Athens as portrayed by the writer of Acts 17:22-23:

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship

But note that Paul goes on to say "—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you." While the more indirect-indirect method of covertly appropriating cultural

motifs in order to “meet people where they are” is valuable, in the scriptural witness it only works as a complement to more direct-indirect communication. Hence my provisional conclusion, based on a traditional Christian and a Kierkegaardian scriptural hermeneutic, that for the Christian artist both direct-indirect and indirect-indirect communication are valuable, but direct-indirect communication is ultimately *more* valuable for the communication of a conceptual Christian message.

Thus my own closing judgement here is that both modes of artistic communication are valuable and to be used at the discretion of the artist but that in the final estimation more direct communication is *more* valuable for the purposes of communicating a conceptual Christian message: Both modes of communication are modelled by and in Christian scripture, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and pre-eminently in the example of Jesus. But more indirect communication must eventually lead to more direct communication if a conceptual Christian message is to be put across. After Nathan tells his story to David, eventually he comes to say “You are the man!”; to every parable of Jesus a small piece of more direct communication is appended; Paul appropriates Greek cultural motifs, but he then goes on to proclaim and preach. If the Bible were *only* a set of more indirect stories, with no more direct communication of any kind of doctrinal information, Christianity would look very different, and standing in line with Christian tradition would look like something very different. So again, why my provisional conclusion? Scripturally, because the Bible exemplifies both forms of communication but Christ seems to give ultimate preference to more direct communication; traditionally, because this has been how Christians have most

often approached the matter as recorded in scripture; and reasonably, because it makes sense that to arrive at the goal of putting across a conceptual Christian message more direct communication must in the end be used.

Someone might protest that I have completely missed the point of what art is about, that art is not for the communication of conceptual Christian messages, which belong to the realm of preaching, but that art is for the making of beautiful things for aesthetic enjoyment. To such a protest I would reply the following: I am not suggesting that more indirectly communicative art forms are of *no* worth. They are of inestimable worth and value because of their beauty, which may be to the glory of God, and their making should be undertaken by Christian creative artists according to their own discretion, discernment and preference. But I am suggesting with Kierkegaard that it is possible for artwork to communicate a conceptual Christian message in a more direct mode and that ultimately this mode is more valuable for that end. This is important precisely because many traditional Christians would think from their reading of the Bible that communicating a conceptual Christian message is the wider primary vocation to which they are called in the secular world, namely witnessing to Christ. Kierkegaard thought this too, as evinced by the entire trajectory of his life becoming aligned with the goal of “communicating Christianity” (in Christendom). Christianity invites the believer to make every other endeavour and activity of their working life subordinate to and cooperative with the work of loving God and loving others, and one supreme traditional way of carrying out this work is by proclaiming the good news of Christ. Christian artists, compelled by the love of Christ, hearing his mandate to “make

disciples of every nation”,<sup>11</sup> at the very least must allow this call to unsettle them and to cause them to question and reflect on their artwork. They must allow themselves to think “How can my artwork point towards Christ? How can it speak of him, witness to him, give him glory, help to bring in his kingdom?” Maybe this process will result in more indirect-indirect artworks at times and more direct-indirect artworks at others, as it did for Kierkegaard. But sooner or later something more direct must be said, whether in art, or in life, or in the art of life. After all, a Christian message cannot be communicated without “a little knowledge”.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, I would also contend that for Kierkegaard (as demonstrated at length above), the New Testament authors, and the traditional Christian, existential appropriation of Christ’s teaching in one’s ordinary life is much more important than making creative artwork, which should not be their primary *preoccupation*. At the same time, I am arguing that making creative artwork can still be a valid occupation for the traditional Christian *within* a life that prioritises existential imitation of Christ, for those who are called to it. We remember that the precedents here are Kierkegaard himself, who although he was honest about his own existential shortcomings did nonetheless see his authorship as a kind of “worship” and “service to Christianity”,<sup>13</sup> and Christ himself, who both told more indirect-indirect parables and preached more direct-indirect messages. Granted, this does mean that the lines between preaching and artwork could get blurred somewhat. But preaching (Greek: *kerusso*) does not have to be a ‘dirty word’. Some of the best and most popular direct-indirect Christian works of art contain

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 28:19, discussed briefly above.

<sup>12</sup> *Pap VIII 2 B 85 / JP 1, 653 (1847)*.

<sup>13</sup> *POV, 73, 24*.

elements of preaching or are even sermonic in form, such as Kierkegaard's own *Upbuilding Discourses*. Equally, the best Christian sermons are works of art.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the best form of Christian direct-indirect communication is public preaching, not literary (or any other kind of) artwork, but that does not make direct-indirect literary (or any other kind of) artwork obsolete. Ideally, for me, those who are called to be Christian artists will make direct-indirect *and* indirect-indirect works of art, *and* preach the good news publicly, actualising the Christian ideal in their own lives, like Christ.

Another point that may go some small way towards tempering the offense of a reader who thinks that I have completely missed the point of what art is about here is that I am not saying that more direct-indirect Christian artworks should not still be first-rate examples of craftsmanship. I think that they should be enjoyable for their beauty and the aesthetic delight they have to offer. There are too many "Christian artworks" which are terrible examples of art, pieces of kitsch made shoddily and hastily because they will be accepted in light of the low standards of a cloistered sub-culture simply for bearing the label "Christian". And I am not advocating the making of art that self-consciously classifies itself within the *consumer genre* of "Christian art" either, be it "Christian lit", "Christian contemporary music", "Christian painting" etc. Maybe it is extremely difficult to make an artwork that is technically excellent, aesthetically enjoyable and that communicates something of a Christian message in a more direct mode in the secular realm. But that does not mean that it is impossible and that it should not be aimed at. The same apostle who writes that the Christian good news must be

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. "to preach is really the most difficult of all arts and the art that Socrates praised, the art of being able to converse"—CA, 16.

communicated as a conceptual message and everything done to the glory of God also writes “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not men”.<sup>15</sup> For those who work as artists, this would mean working at art with all of their hearts, excellently. Jesus’s parable-artworks, after all, were ‘good’ enough aesthetically speaking to have stuck in the minds of those who heard them and in the church’s consciousness for thousands of years afterwards.

My tentative conclusion then is most strongly a critique of a Christian approach to artistic vocation that would not seek *ever* to imbue artwork with *any* kind of more directly communicated Christian content at all. After that, it is an affirmation of both more indirect-indirect and more direct-indirect forms of Christian artwork as valuable, with a preference for the more direct-indirect when it comes to communicating Christianity. I acknowledge that this conclusion may be controversial for some people, but it is the conclusion that I come to all the same from beginning to reflect theologically on Kierkegaard’s work. It may be that the more direct-indirect Christian proclamation of an artist exceeds their artwork and takes place in their own wider life. It may be that aesthetically excellent, more direct-indirect Christian artwork has not yet been produced or is extremely rare or difficult. It may be that such works are never accepted by the critical establishment. But the point is that if Christian artists do not ever seek actively to witness to Christ in their artwork *in some way*, as we have seen Kierkegaard sought to do too, then there is nothing in their work to identify them as “Christian” artists at all. In sum: Are you a Christian artist? Then work to communicate the Christian good news, say Kierkegaard and I, generally through indirect-indirect means,

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<sup>15</sup> Colossians 3:23.

specially through direct-indirect means, and above all through the existential imitation of Christ in your own everyday life.

Perhaps at the last, theologically speaking, this communicative model is actually a reflection of the communicative model of the Divine Artist. This brings me full-circle around to another kind of theopoetics which I said in my Introduction was not my primary preoccupation here but nonetheless also merits a closing mention, a theopoetics which conceives of God as the divine poet. In a late journal entry which was only footnoted above because it was not strictly relevant to Kierkegaard's self-conception of his vocation as a *human* artist, Kierkegaard wrote the following:

My thought is that God is like a poet...The poet is related in the same way to his poetic productions (also called creations). But just as it is a mistake to think that what a particular character in a poem says or does represents the poet's personal opinion, so it is a mistake to assume that God consents to all that happens...God's wanting to work as a poet in this fashion...lies in God's passion to love and be loved, yes, almost as if he were himself found in this passion, O, infinite love, so that in the power of this passion he cannot stop loving, almost as if it were a weakness, although it is rather his strength, his omnipotent love.<sup>16</sup>

It may finally be that the richest and most mature "theopoetics" synthesises these two images of the Christian artist and of God as being "like a poet". Kierkegaard never went on to combine this private, fragmentary vision of God as being like a poet with a developed theory of the corroborative human poet who can work in cooperation with God's own artistry. But he might have had he lived longer. At the other end of his career, in his *magister* dissertation Kierkegaard wrote of the possibility of "living poetically"<sup>17</sup> and we have seen how this motif recurs in *Either/Or* where the artist in living allows himself to be poetically composed in a

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<sup>16</sup> *Pap IX 2 A 98 / JP 2*, 1445 (1854).

<sup>17</sup> *CI*, 280.

drama that the deity is writing. What would result if this vision of living poetically were combined with the vision of God as being like a poet in the context of the vocation of the Christian artist? Just as the communicative model I have outlined here might be reflected back on to an analogy of God as a Master Artist, perhaps that analogy, more fully explored, might in turn shed more light on the communicative model of the Christian artist? In attempting to offer the suggestion of such an exploration and sketch a summary outline of a preliminary theopoetics which might be expanded in a future project, I enter a more “direct-indirect” mode of writing myself, departing from the academic idiom for a moment, and close this thesis:

God is the Master Artist. Everything that he does is artful. Out of infinite possibility, he brings forth beautiful actualities that fit together wonderfully to display majestic unity, diversity and richness. These, the glories of the natural world, testify to his own reality, beauty and goodness in an indirect-indirect mode, pointing like a sign back to him in a way that does not provide a logical proof for his existence but nonetheless witnesses to his personality and character similarly to how a human artwork witnesses to the personality and character of its maker. Within this creation, the Master Artist also creates multitudinous miniature artists, the crowning glory of his creation, who possess something of his own creative powers. Very mysteriously, these artists have the freedom, presumably as the Master Artist does, to create and poetise in whatsoever manner they please, to do good or do evil, to love him or not to love him. To reach out to and reveal himself to these artists, the Master Artist poetises himself in the likeness of a human being,<sup>18</sup> incarnating himself into his own artwork like an author making himself a character

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<sup>18</sup> *PF*, 36.

in his own story. As an incarnate human artist, the Divine Artist tells more indirect-indirect stories about himself and also utters more direct-indirect statements that point to his identity and explain that belief in him is the way to cooperate with the overall theme of the Artwork. This is his most direct form of witness to himself.

Meanwhile, some of these miniature artists take it upon themselves to adopt the earthly occupation of making creative *artworks*, apparently as modelled to them by the Master Artist. Of these, some are those who have chosen to try to cooperate with the overall theme of the Artwork as it is revealed by the incarnate Master Artist by believing in him. These Christian artists, theological poets, theopoets under the Great Theopoet, may pray and hope that their work will too be incorporated into the overall theme of the Artwork of creation and woven into some greater good by the Master Artist. However, in the exercising of their theopoetics, these theopoets still have a free choice to make as regards their methodology: Some simply get on with this occupation without thinking too much about how to do it. Some seek to gesture towards the Master Artist through their artwork in a more indirect-indirect way. Some seek to gesture towards the Master Artist through their artwork in a more direct-indirect way. If they are to follow the example of the Master Artist most completely, how should they go about their art? By employing both indirect-indirect and direct-indirect witness to him. This thesis is, at the very least, a plea with Kierkegaard for Christian creative artists to consider how they might possibly witness to Christ through their creative artwork. At the very most, it is an argument with Kierkegaard for at times taking a more direct-indirect approach to communicating a conceptual Christian message

through creative artwork, even if that communication spills over into the artwork of life or the artwork of gospel proclamation.

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