The Edifying and the Polemical in Kierkegaard's Religious Writings

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Toward a Theology of Encounter

Submitted to the Faculty of Theology

University of Oxford

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Hilary Term 2014

Length: 99, 229

Abstract:

This thesis provides a theoretical framework that brings the unity of Kierkegaard's 'middle period' into relief. I will analyse Kierkegaard's writings between 1846 and 1852 when, I argue, the socially constructive dimension of his thought comes to prominence, involving two dialectical aspects of religiousness identified by Kierkegaard: the *edifying* and the *polemical*. How these two aspects come together and get worked out in the lives of individuals form the basis of what can be called a Kierkegaardian 'social praxis'. I conclude that the tension between the edifying and the polemical can be coherently maintained in a communicative life that is also characteristic of a *militant faith*. This militant faith and life is presented as a critical guard against absolutisms, fundamentalisms, and intellectual aloofness; but the '*militant'* individual is also utterly dependent, in need of edification and critique, and therefore chooses the risk of encountering others, seeking relationships out of a commitment to the development of persons and communities in co-operation. Therefore, not only does this dialectic provide readers with an important theoretical framework for understanding Kierkegaard's 'middle period', but it is also a valuable resource for a constructive analysis of active social living suitable for theology in the twenty-first century.

***Extended Abstract*:**

This thesis provides a theoretical framework that brings the unity of Kierkegaard's 'middle period' into relief. I will analyse Kierkegaard's writings between 1846 and 1852 when, I argue, the socially constructive dimension of his thought comes to prominence, involving two dialectical aspects of religiousness identified by Kierkegaard: the *edifying* and the *polemical*. How these two aspects come together and get worked out in the lives of individuals form the basis of what can be called a Kierkegaardian 'social praxis'. I conclude that the tension between the edifying and the polemical can be coherently maintained in a communicative life that is also characteristic of a *militant faith*. This militant faith and life is presented as a critical guard against absolutisms, fundamentalisms, and intellectual aloofness; but the '*militant'* individual is also utterly dependent, in need of edification and critique, and therefore chooses the risk of encountering others, seeking relationships out of a commitment to the development of persons and communities in co-operation. Therefore, not only does this dialectic provide readers with an important theoretical framework for understanding Kierkegaard's 'middle period', but it is also a valuable resource for a constructive analysis of active social living suitable for theology in the twenty-first century.

The Theological basis for this study:

The edifying and the polemical dialectic appears in Kierkegaard's presentation of religious life because it corresponds to three basic theological principles that I take to be fundamental to his theology. 1) There is an infinite qualitative difference between God and creature. Everything polemical in (Kierkegaard's) Christianity confronts all human attempts to assert power, authority, control, or self-justification with the qualitative difference between God and creature. Religiously, attempting to collapse or abolish the difference does not eliminate God, however it does obscure human relationships. 2) There is an intimate proximity between God and creature. Everything edifying in (Kierkegaard's) Christianity corresponds to this – that there is forgiveness and reconciliation, and that human 'creatureliness' can participate in the divine life. 3) As a result of these two principles of proximity and difference comes a third: all of our relationships are implicated in and informed by the human-divine relationship. An acknowledgment of God's gift of life and love binds individuals to a life of love and upbuilding. Behind the dialectic of the edifying and the polemical stand these

theological principles: the qualitative difference between God and creature and the intimate proximity between God and creature. When these are appropriated and communicated in the lived existence of individuals it is manifest that all our social relations are implicated in the human-divine relationship. The polemical aspect respects the qualitative difference, while the edifying aspect looks for and affirms the proximity established between God and creature. This provides the theological framework for this thesis.

The Method and structure of the project:

I examine the religious dialectic of the edifying and polemical in three locations, each coinciding with a particular *encounter* that Kierkegaard draws attention to in this period: 1) the dialectic is aimed at the *individual* and functions inwardly where the individuals encounter themselves before God, where upbuilding and opposition facilitate continual existential and psychological struggle in order to deepen authentic subjective faith and guard against lackadaisical faith; 2) the dialectic is directed outwardly in society as an encounter with '*the public*' and '*the neighbour*' in the form of culture critique and 'works of love'; 3) the dialectic is pointed inwardly within a community as an encounter with the *Church*. Here, the dialectic is aimed at maintaining a critical 'militant' faith, against a non-critical 'triumphant' belief or ideology.

The dissertation is organized into four sections: Section I consists of one chapter that identifies four main sources of Kierkegaard's intellectual and theological development, some of which become the target of his critique and corrective. They are: Romanticism, Danish Lutheranism, Hegelianism, and the emergence of cosmopolitan and liberal-democratic society. A brief overview is given of Kierkegaard's engagement with each of these in order to establish the environment that gives rise to Kierkegaard's own religious response. This chapter also serves as the social starting point from which Kierkegaard's *single individual* can *become* a self before God and a genuinely social human being.

The second, third, and fourth sections correspond to the three 'encounters,' as listed above, where the edifying and polemical dialectic operate. Section II examines how Kierkegaard communicates the edifying and the polemical as they are directed inwardly in religious individuals. Here, we consider the spiritual encounter with a self who exists before God. By focusing on *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*

(1847), *Christian Discourses* (1848), *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), and discourses published between 1849-1850, we consider that one place Kierkegaard locates this religious encounter is in Church. I argue that the occasions and practices of confession and communion are essential components in Kierkegaard's theology of the qualitative difference between God and creature and the intimate proximity established between God and creature (chapters 2 and 3). Furthermore, I explain how these occasions and practices equip persons, in part, with the spiritual foundation to engage in cultural critique and participate in socially edifying projects.

Section III considers the edifying and the polemical aspects of religiousness outwardly as an encounter with '*the public*' and with the '*the neighbour*'. The movement of this section corresponds to the movement of persons as a return to the social sphere, a return to social encounters and social engagement. This section involves an analysis of Kierkegaard's culture-critique (chapter 4), his religious corrective to relationships characterised by levelling (chapter 5), and it considers a Kierkegaardian communicative praxis that maintains the edifying and polemical tension in works of love (chapters 6 and 7).

Section IV returns the edifying and the polemical aspects of religious life inward again, yet not just within a single person but now we ask how the edifying and the polemical life is communicated through an encounter with the Church. Chapter 8 examines Kierkegaard's polemical engagement with a Church that conforms to the levelling tendency of the age. Although Kierkegaard is not commonly seen as a resource for ecclesiology I claim that the edifying and the polemical come together cohesively in a religious life precisely in relating to his understanding of what it means to be a part of the *Church militant* (Chapter 9). With this concept of Church the religious categories of *contemporaneity* and *imitation* find their social significance in the life of a community of individuals that strives to exist "without authority" and communicate indirectly for upbuilding. Finally, I suggest a way forward for a consideration of a Kierkegaardian ecclesiology that maintains a commitment to an open community and a militant faith (chapter 10).

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank the various institutions that have supported this project. In addition to financial assistance, Regent's Park College afforded me the space and resources to carry out my work, and in its collegial environment I was able to develop my ideas. I would also like to thank the Squire /Marriot Bursary and the Faculty of Theology studentship for their financial assistance. I wish to thank the Faculty of Theology at Trinity College in the University of Toronto and especially Prof Abrahim H. Khan for generously providing me with study space in the summer of 2011.

I am immensely grateful for the many colleagues and friends who have demonstrated the truth of the edifying spirit through their intellectual engagement, feedback, and daily friendship. From the faculty, Dr. Judith Wolfe, Dr. Philip Kennedy, and Dr. Simon Podmore provided helpful feedback on early drafts. From Regent's Park College I wish to mention, Dr. Michael Burdett, Andrew Dunstan, Geoff Dargan, Christopher Shaw, Ellie McLaughlin and Luke McLaughlin. I would also like to mention the steady friendship and motivating wisdom of Stephanie Silverman, Daniel Lowinski, Honor Brabazon, Kheya Bag, Blair Ogden, Read Marlatte, and Matt Polisson.

I am truly grateful for the opportunity to write this dissertation under the supervision of Prof George Pattison. His work on Kierkegaard is the reason I came to Oxford for graduate study. It has been wonderful to discover that he is every bit as encouraging, constructive, humorous, and friendly an educator as he is knowledgeable about Kierkegaard. I am also grateful to my examiners, Prof Joel Rasmussen and Dr. Steven Shakespeare, for their time and attention and constructive feedback.

Finally, I would like to thank my family who have been an immeasurable support, even as they have been forced to support me from afar while I studied in the UK. My parents, Vera and Frank, and my brothers Derek and Steven, you know me so well and you always know just what to say to make me smile and put me at ease. Your love is encouraging and you are more of an intellectual support than you may know. I am also grateful for the enduring love and support of the whole James family. Above all, I wish to thank my true partner Dr. Leslie James. Giving criticism when criticism is needed, giving encouragement when encouragement is needed and loving all the way through. There is no way to consider my own development, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, without reference to you.

Abbreviations

The following are abbreviations of Kierkegaard's works used in this thesis.

BA	*The Book on Adler*
CA	*The Concept of Anxiety*
CD	*Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of an Actress*
COR	*The Corsair Affair*
CUP	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*
EO	*Either/Or* (followed by volume number)
EPW	*Early Polemical Writings*
EUD	*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*
FSE	*For Self-Examination* and *Judge for Yourself!*
FT/R	*Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*
JP	*Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (followed by volume and entry number)
M	*The Moment and Late Writings*
PC	*Practice in Christianity*
PV	*The Point of View*
SKS	*Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (followed by volume and page number)
SLW	*Stages on Life's Way*
SUD	*The Sickness Unto Death*
TA	*Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review*
UDVS	*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*
WA	*Without Authority*
WL	*Works of Love*

Apart from *SKS* all of the abbreviations correspond to the Princeton University Press edition of Kierkegaard's writings. Details can be found in the Bibliography.

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Introduction

In 1847, between the publication of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* and *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard admits in his journal that,

> Despite everything people ought to have learned about my maieutic carefulness, by proceeding slowly and continually letting it seem as if I knew nothing more, not the next thing … they will probably bawl out that I do not know what comes next, that I know nothing about sociality. The fools! Yet on the other hand I owe it to myself to confess before God that in a certain sense there is some truth in it, only not as people understand it – namely, that continually when I have first presented one aspect clearly and sharply, then the other affirms itself more strongly. Now I have the theme for my next book. It will be called: Works of Love (*JP* V, 5972).

This highlights a set of problems within Kierkegaard's authorship: he acknowledges that there are questions lingering about the social implications and relevance of his thought; he claims he actually is concerned with sociality and it will be affirmed; and he suggests that people are inattentive to how his social contribution is already present (inversely) in the category of *the single individual*. Yet despite these reassurances criticisms have persisted.

Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884), a life-long interlocutor and theological rival, wrote of Kierkegaard that he "did not want to found a congregation or establish any new society. He totally denied every notion of society or associations, and he looked only to individuals."[1] In the twentieth century many prominent social theorists, philosophers, and theologians came to the same conclusion as Martensen.[2] What is

[1] Quoted in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Social-Political Thought*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 14, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), x-xi (*cf. Encounters with Kierkegaard*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996], 203).

[2] Notably, Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1980 [1954]), Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-

revealing about Kierkegaard's journal entry above is how he responds to criticisms like Martensen's. He admits there is some truth in them. He does not attempt to found a new religious sect or endorse an old one; neither does he strive to establish new political administrations or endorse old ones. According to Kierkegaard, politicking, statecraft, and the pursuit of legal-legislative authority (including doctrinal forms) does not produce the kind of sociality he regards as humanly edifying – and therefore it is not desirable.[3] Instead it is the category of *the single individual* that Kierkegaard first presents "clearly and sharply" as his corrective to an alienated sociality of the present age. This, he tells us, is "the decisive category," "the category of spiritual awakening" (*PV*, 121), and "the category through which, in a religious sense, the age, history, the human race must go" (*PV*, 118). The category of the individual is the goal of Kierkegaard's existence philosophy. Thus we discover that the movement of his authorship is "from the public *to* 'the single individual'" (*PV*, 10).[4] What his critics do not understand, Kierkegaard claims, is how a clear and sharp defence of one aspect (*the single individual*) is also oriented to an affirmation of the other aspect (a truly human sociality). Therefore the argument of this thesis follows an extra step in the movement: *from* alienating sociality ('the public') *to* genuine sociality *through* the category of the individual. The broad task of this thesis is to demonstrate that Kierkegaard's religious individuals are indeed critically engaged with society and committed to human social well-being.

Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989 [1962]), and Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954) were each unable to reconcile their leftist politics with what they perceived as Kierkegaard's acosmic individual. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns [from the sixth edition, 1928] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM, 1959 [1937]), and Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000 [1952]), each in some way theologically indebted to Kierkegaard, are also critical of his *individual* and undervaluation of the social.

[3] Section III of this thesis provides a focused analysis of Kierkegaard's social critique.

[4] See also, *PV*, 9, 103-104, 117-118.

Further focus is provided by such questions as: What *activity*, according to Kierkegaard, does a life of faith involve? And what does Kierkegaard regard as a religious contribution to social life in modernity? The question is how does Kierkegaard suggest co-ordinating this movement from alienating social life to genuine social existence through *the individual*? To this end I argue that the social significance of Kierkegaard's presentation of Christian existence takes shape within a particular *religious dialectic* that gets communicated in the form and content of his writings between 1846 and 1852. I will provide a theoretical framework that allows the unity of Kierkegaard's middle period to become visible as a socially interested enterprise. In the process I hope to demonstrate how 'Kierkegaardian' religious individuals are fully grounded in socially active, embodied, historical life.

The Dialectic of Religious Life in Kierkegaard's Authorship after 1846:

Kierkegaard claims that "Every decisive qualification in being Christian is according to a dialectic or is on the other side of a dialectic" (*PV*, 130). By 'dialectic' Kierkegaard is broadly following a Hegelian scheme, which suggests a process whereby opposing (or different) qualifications of existence (i.e. universal/particular, freedom/necessity, etc.) are brought together in such a way that produces new qualifications while preserving the difference and tension of the antithesis.

Prior to 1846 Kierkegaard's authorship consisted of aesthetic (or philosophical) and religious aspects (*PV*, 5-11). The task, as Kierkegaard describes it, was to communicate what it means to *become* a Christian by presenting the various modes of existence (aesthetic, ethical, religious) poetically (*PV*, 55). This communication was also certainly dialectical with an emphasis on the dialectic of inwardness that produces subjectively existing individuals. Thus we encounter the psychology of

spiritual struggle in *Fear and Trembling* and *The Concept of Anxiety*, the existential dilemmas of self-choice and ethical positioning in *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*, and the existential inquiry of faith and subjectivity in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. After 1846 the dialectic of religious inwardness remains but it is redirected through more decisively religious categories.[5] In addition to this, Kierkegaard increasingly strives to inform his present age of the social effects of genuine religiousness; this brings the task 'outward' and that produces a new dialectic: the encounter of religious inwardness with society.

Setting aside for a moment what it means to be on the 'other side of a dialectic', what emerges in this period after 1846 is a dialectic specific to religious existence. I identify two main qualifications of religious life that are prominent in Kierkegaard's authorship after 1846, and which bring the social task forward. One is the *edifying* or 'upbuilding' aspect of religiousness and the other is the *polemical* aspect. In *The Sickness Unto Death* Kierkegaard writes, "From the Christian point of view, everything, indeed everything, ought to serve for upbuilding" (*SUD*, 5); and in *The Point of View* we read, "The true Christian qualification is polemical within or away from finitude toward the eternal" (*PV*, 130). A corollary of this is the claim that "the essentially religious person is always polemical" (*PV*, 67). The polemical is concerned with critique and judgment, whereas the edifying is affirming and constructive. My argument is that what Kierkegaard offers sociality in terms of a social praxis is based on this dialectic of the edifying and the polemical. Kierkegaard's effort after 1846 is to present these as the existential requirements of Christian existence "so that it can appear as a task, beckoning" (*PV*, 130).

[5] Categories such as, sin, forgiveness, grace, offense, contemporaneity, etc.

The Theological basis for this study:

The edifying and the polemical dialectic appears in Kierkegaard's presentation of religious life because it corresponds to three basic theological principles that I take to be fundamental to his theology. 1) There is an infinite qualitative difference between God and creature. In the *Postscript* Climacus writes, "Precisely because there is the absolute difference between God and man, man expresses himself most perfectly when he absolutely expresses the difference" (*CUP*, 412-413). Everything polemical in (Kierkegaard's) Christianity confronts all human attempts to assert power, authority, control, or self-justification with the qualitative difference between God and creature. Religiously, attempting to collapse or abolish the difference does not eliminate God, however it does obscure human relationships. From the qualitative difference comes the Divine NO in the Barthian sense. But as Barth also recognises, "precisely because the 'No' of God is all-embracing, it is also His 'Yes'. We have therefore, in the power of God, a look-out, a door, a hope."[6] This leads us to the second principle: 2) God's YES and our hope indicate the intimate proximity between God and creature that Kierkegaard expresses Christologically. Everything edifying in (Kierkegaard's) Christianity corresponds to this – that there is forgiveness and reconciliation, and that human 'creaturliness' can participate in the divine life. Anti-Climacus writes, "no teaching on earth has ever really brought God and man so close together as Christianity" (*SUD*, 117). Yet there is one way that humans can never become like God, and that is in forgiving sin (*SUD*, 122). That difference is both edifying and polemical. Our human life can participate in the divine life but our human life can never assume divine authority. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 elucidate the edifying and polemical qualifications of this difference and proximity. 3) As a result

[6] Barth, *Romans*, 38.

of these two principles of proximity and difference comes a third: all of our relationships are implicated in and informed by the human-divine relationship. An acknowledgment of God's gift of life and love binds individuals to a life of love and upbuilding. Thus we read in *Works of Love*, "Because to love people is the only thing worth living for, and without this love you are not really living" (*WL*, 375). Behind the dialectic of the edifying and the polemical stand these theological principles: the qualitative difference between God and creature and the intimate proximity between God and creature. When these are appropriated and communicated in the lived existence of individuals it is manifest that all our social relations are implicated in the human-divine relationship. The polemical aspect respects the qualitative difference, while the edifying aspect looks for and affirms the proximity established between God and creature. This provides the theological framework for this thesis.

Refined Statement of the Project:

The distinctive contribution of this thesis is to provide a theoretical framework that brings the unity of Kierkegaard's 'middle period' into relief. I will analyse Kierkegaard's writings between 1846 and 1852 when, I argue, the socially constructive dimension of his thought comes to prominence, involving two dialectical aspects of religiousness identified by Kierkegaard: the *edifying* and the *polemical*. How these two aspects come together and get worked out in the lives of individuals form the basis of what can be called a Kierkegaardian 'social praxis'. I conclude that the tension between the edifying and the polemical can be coherently maintained in a communicative life that is also characteristic of a *militant faith*. This militant faith and life is presented as a critical guard against absolutisms, fundamentalisms, and intellectual aloofness; but the '*militant'* individual is also utterly dependent, in need of

edification and critique, and therefore chooses the risk of encountering others, seeking relationships out of a commitment to the development of persons and communities in co-operation. Therefore, not only does this dialectic provide readers with an important theoretical framework for understanding Kierkegaard's 'middle period', but it is also a valuable resource for a constructive analysis of active social living suitable for theology in the twenty-first century.

1846 to 1852:

I have chosen to engage primarily with texts Kierkegaard produced between 1846 and 1852 for two main reasons: one is *formal* the other is *historical*.

The formal: As indicated the year of 1846 to 1847 signals a turning point within Søren Kierkegaard's literary output, which sees a shift in emphasis toward religious existence and its impact on modern life. Commentators frequently refer to the body of writings between 1846 and 1855 as Kierkegaard's "second authorship" and distinguish its predominantly religious emphasis from the more aesthetic and philosophical writings typically associated with the period prior to 1846. In fact, Kierkegaard himself gives credence to this description through comments made in his journals and in his posthumously published *Point of View*. There, speaking of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (published 1846), he writes, "This book constitutes the turning point in my entire work as an author, inasmuch as it poses the *issue*: becoming a Christian. Thereafter the transition to the second part is made, the series of exclusively religious books" (*PV*, 63).[7] If the aesthetic authorship presents

[7] Kierkegaard insists all his writings speak with 'one voice' (*PV*, 6), and that the religious and aesthetic writings are a concurrent authorship (*PV*, 8). These comments only refer to the writings prior to 1846 and does not apply to the so-called 'second authorship,' which appears overwhelmingly religious in focus. However, even after 1846 the aesthetic authorship continues to be presented alongside the religious: *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard's cultural critique in the form of a literary review of Mlle. Gyllembourg's novel *Two Ages*, appears in 1846, *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*

the development of a subjectively concerned and subjectively critical individual, showing the existential possibilities for existing in the aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres, then the authorship between 1846 and 1852 is primarily concerned with Christian categories as they pertain to *doing* and *relating*, to active living, to participation in corporate projects, and to genuine encounters with people in society.

The tenor and content of the works in this period reflect the significance of the edifying and the polemical for Christian religiousness. The ironic and literary playfulness of previous texts gives way to communiqués that are either polemical, edifying, or an ironic combination of the two – to be judged by the reader. Under the heading of 'polemical' we have *Two Ages* (1846), *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* by H. H. (1849), *Practice in Christianity* by Anti-Climacus (1850), *For Self-Examination* (1851), and *Judge For Yourself!* (1851 [published posthumously, 1876]). Under the heading 'edifying' – with a current of polemics – we have, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847), *Works of Love* (1847), *Christian Disc*ourses (1848), *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air* (1849), *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (1849), *An Upbuilding Discourse* (1850), and *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (1851).[8] *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849) is a peculiar but important text of this period. Although it features a psychological analysis of despair and the traumatic human predicament of existing before God, Kierkegaard insists in its subtitle that the book is meant for "awakening and upbuilding."[9] But like *Christian Discourses* and *Works of Love* it is just as polemical as it is edifying. This is part of Kierkegaard's 'maieutic carefulness,' which lets the matter rest with how the reader

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is a pseudonymous theatrical review published in 1848, shortly following *Christian Discourses*, and a second edition of Either/Or is published in 1849 – the same year that saw a number of discourses and *The Sickness Unto Death*.

[8] For a full timeline of Kierkegaard's publications see *The Point of View*, xxiii-xxvii.

[9] In Simon Podmore's, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011) he argues that what determines the qualitative difference, according to Kierkegaard, is not sin but forgiveness (xi).

appropriates the communication. These texts, when read together as a set, communicate the edifying and polemical character of Christian existence.

The historical: Between 1846 and 1852 is the epochal year 1848. Although Kierkegaard indicates at times that he is not interested in politics (*LD*, 253), the writings of this period are, without a doubt, responding to the historical social changes sweeping though Europe and also Denmark. Between 1848 and 1849 Denmark transitions to a democratic constitutional monarchy (without recourse to revolution), and the Lutheran Church becomes the established 'People's Church' of Denmark. Kierkegaard's presentation of Christian life as edifying and polemical is aimed specifically at this new political-religious situation.

Situating the study:

Recent scholarship has witnessed a renewed interest in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard throughout humanities disciplines. Authors are exploring interpretations of Kierkegaard that go beyond the standard twentieth-century portrait of him as the philosopher who one-sidedly defended the particular individual *against* universal categories and who venerated the hidden inwardness and 'absurdity' of faith *against* the rationally accessible and negotiable social realm of history and ethics. Alternative portraits of Kierkegaard that depict his 'single Individual' as a historically and socially concerned figure have proliferated for some time now, to the extent that it may be appropriate to speak of a social-critical 'school' or 'tradition' of Kierkegaard reception. This dissertation belongs to that school yet with a further specification – I am engaged in the theological discourse that operates within this stream of Kierkegaard research. Here I shall briefly outline the lineage of this project and also stipulate where I hope to help forge a path in Kierkegaardian theology.

In the final quarter of the twentieth century a number of essays and books appear in English that attempt to situate Kierkegaard's thought in his historical context, thereby offering more socially concrete readings of his Christian existence philosophy.[10] Each of these authors insist that Kierkegaard's contribution to social thought is all the more social and historical precisely because it does not stand alone as a system of 'social theory,' but it only presents itself through an analysis and investigation of the relation between his thought and Danish politics, Danish theology and philosophy, Danish theatre, journalism, and the urban life of a 'Biedermeier' Copenhagen.

Another group of commentators have focused on the intersection of philosophy and theology for an understanding of Kierkegaard's social analysis. In this case Kierkegaard is read conceptually in relation to Hegel and Kant before him,[11] Marx and Nietzsche beside him,[12] and the school of Critical Theory after him.[13] For these authors Kierkegaard's intellectual project provides a critique of culture and ideology that occasionally coincides with Marxian Critical Theory but also stands on its own as

[10] See Michael Plekon's essay, "Kierkegaard, the Church and Theology of Golden-Age Denmark," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34, no. 2 (1983): 245-266, John Elrod's *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), Bruce Kirmmse's *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), George Pattison's '*Poor Paris!' Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1999), and *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For a concise overview of studies that engage with the social dimension of Kierkegaard's thought see George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare, eds., *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 5-19.

[11] Stephen Crites' *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History*, AAR Studies in Religion, No. 2 (Chambersburg PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972) as well as Gregor Malanstchuk's *Kierkegaard's Thought*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) and *The Controversial Kierkegaard*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1980) are instrumental here.

[12] See Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), James Marsh, "Marx and Kierkegaard on Alienation," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, Vol. 14 (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 155-174, and Robert Perkins' "Kierkegaard's Critique of the *Bourgeois* State," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1984): 207-218.

[13] See Martin Matustik's *Postnational Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), Alison Assiter, *Kierkegaard, Metaphysics and Political Theory: Unfinished Selves* (London: Continuum, 2009), and Marcia Morgan, *Kierkegaard and Critical Theory* (Lenham: Lexington Books, 2012).

a unique theological or existential alternative to the social critiques that have their origin in the nineteenth century. Alongside these two streams is a third current that is dedicated to correcting the imbalance of attention paid to the pseudonymous writings prior to 1846 at the expense of the rich theological material after 1846. Particular attention is drawn to Kierkegaard's upbuilding discourses, *Works of Love*, and the works of Anti-Climacus.[14] The present study incorporates each of these streams and, cognizant of their interactions, aims to consolidate them hermeneutically through the edifying and polemical dialectic of religious existence. I will situate Kierkegaard's thought in the social, political, and theological landscape of Denmark in the nineteenth century; I explore his culture critique and 'theology of crisis' as an analysis pertinent to contemporary theological reflection and action; I anchor both of these in Kierkegaard's theology after 1846.

A Kierkegaardian Theology of Encounter: the Method and structure of the project:

I examine the religious dialectic of the edifying and polemical in three locations, each coinciding with a particular *encounter* that Kierkegaard draws attention to in this period: 1) the dialectic is aimed at the *individual* and functions inwardly where the individuals encounter themselves before God, where upbuilding and opposition facilitate continual existential and psychological struggle in order to deepen authentic subjective faith and guard against lackadaisical faith; 2) the dialectic is directed outwardly in society as an encounter with '*the public*' and '*the neighbour*' in the form

[14] Representative of this group is Sylvia Walsh, *Living Christianly: Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Christian Existence* (University Park PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2005), M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), C. Steven Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands & Moral Obligations* (2004), George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), R. A. Furtak, *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

of culture critique and 'works of love'; 3) the dialectic is pointed inwardly within a community as an encounter with the *Church*. Here, the dialectic is aimed at maintaining a critical 'militant' faith, against a non-critical 'triumphant' belief or ideology.

The dissertation is organized into four sections: Section I consists of one chapter that identifies four main sources of Kierkegaard's intellectual and theological development, some of which become the target of his critique and corrective. They are: Romanticism, Danish Lutheranism, Hegelianism, and the emergence of cosmopolitan and liberal-democratic society. A brief overview is given of Kierkegaard's engagement with each of these in order to establish the environment that gives rise to Kierkegaard's own religious response. This chapter also serves as the social starting point from which Kierkegaard's *single individual* can *become* a self before God and a genuinely social human being.

The second, third, and fourth sections correspond to the three 'encounters,' as listed above, where the edifying and polemical dialectic operate. Section II examines how Kierkegaard communicates the edifying and the polemical as they are directed inwardly in religious individuals. Here, we consider the spiritual encounter with a self who exists before God. By focusing on *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847), *Christian Discourses* (1848), *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), and discourses published between 1849-1850, we consider that one place Kierkegaard locates this religious encounter is in Church. I argue that the occasions and practices of confession and communion are essential components in Kierkegaard's theology of the qualitative difference between God and creature and the intimate proximity established between God and creature. Furthermore, I explain how these occasions

and practices equip persons, in part, with the spiritual foundation to engage in cultural critique and participate in socially edifying projects.

Section III considers the edifying and the polemical aspects of religiousness outwardly as an encounter with '*the public*' and with the '*the neighbour*'. The movement of this section corresponds to the movement of persons as a return to the social sphere, a return to social encounters and social engagement. This section involves an analysis of Kierkegaard's culture-critique (chapter 4), his religious corrective to relationships characterised by levelling (chapter 5), and it considers a Kierkegaardian communicative praxis that maintains the edifying and polemical tension in works of love (chapters 6 and 7).

Section IV returns the edifying and the polemical aspects of religious life inward again, yet not just within a single person but now we ask how the edifying and the polemical life is communicated through an encounter with the Church. Chapter 8 examines Kierkegaard's polemical engagement with a Church that conforms to the levelling tendency of the present age. Although Kierkegaard is not commonly seen as a resource for ecclesiology I claim that the edifying and the polemical come together cohesively in a religious life precisely in relating to his understanding of what it means to be a part of the *Church militant*. With this concept of Church the religious categories of *contemporaneity* and *imitation* find their social significance in the life of a community of individuals that strives to exist "without authority" and communicate indirectly for upbuilding. Finally, I suggest a way forward for a consideration of religious practice appropriate for a Kierkegaardian ecclesiology that maintains its commitment to an open community and a militant faith (chapter 10).

Section I

Kierkegaard's Social and Intellectual Context

Chapter 1

The Historical and Intellectual Context of Kierkegaard's Authorship

There are four main social and intellectual factors that stand out as providing the context in which and against which Kierkegaard develops a theology of the edifying and the polemical. They are: German Romanticism, eighteenth and nineteenth century Danish Lutheranism (inclusive of Pietism), Hegelianism, and the emerging cosmopolitanism and constitutionalism of cities and states. This chapter provides a brief explanation of these elements and Kierkegaard's relation to them, grounding the present study in the intricacies of Kierkegaard's cultural milieu. But the chapter also serves another purpose: it suggests that while Kierkegaard always wants to capture the individual as the subject of *spirit* and religious concern, he does not imagine that individuals begin with themselves – beginnings are not the acts of *self-creation* – and neither does one become an individual, spiritually considered, by removing oneself from one's history and one's social relationships. In the argument of this thesis, which follows a movement *from* alienating sociality *to* genuine sociality *through* the category of the individual, this chapter reconstructs the modern social setting *from which* a Kierkegaardian individual emerges and *into which* those individuals are able to become socially edifying and culturally critical.

1.1. Kierkegaard's Modern Copenhagen:

An absolute monarchy ruled Denmark from 1660 to 1849 when it became a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament on June 5, 1849 – only three years

after Kierkegaard published his most overtly 'political' essay: *A Literary Review* (*Two Ages*).[1] Revolutions on the continent were generally tumultuous and violent whereas in Denmark the threat of revolution was enough to convince the king to establish an elected assembly that would form a new constitution.[2]

Circumstances in Denmark were somewhat different than the rest of continental Europe and England by the middle of the nineteenth century. The amount of industry and urbanization that occasioned other industrial revolutions was not matched in the mostly rural Denmark. Neither was the relationship between the monarchy and the people of Denmark at the beginning of the nineteenth century comparable to the strained relationships in Germany and France between the ruling elite and the labouring population. Some historians have even referred to Denmark's monarchy as 'enlightened.'[3] Therefore, the siren of political and social reform sweeping through the region between 1789 and the 1840s sounded at a slightly reduced pitch in Denmark. Yet in spite of the differences from the rest of Europe Denmark did undergo tremendous transformation, much of which occurred in Kierkegaard's own lifetime (1813-1855).

Despite general complacency with the government, what emerged at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century was a growing cultural and political divide between the country's rural peasantry, who made up the clear majority, and the urban (Copenhagen) minority. Denmark's declining economic

[1] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 9, 70.

[2] Ibid., 66-67. The king did establish the assembly but only once there were 15,000 citizens standing outside his palace and their representatives (particularly Orla Lehmann) demanding he do so, or else… However, an 'or else' was not required in Denmark.

[3] Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom*, 8; Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 9. The historian, E. J. Hobsbawm, notes that Demark's monarch was one of two European governments to initiate liberalising reforms for peasants prior to 1789. See, E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (London: Cardinal, 1988 [1962]), 37; for details of these reforms see, Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 15, and Elrod, *Christendom*, 5.

standing, its foreign policy, and the influence of political ideology from abroad exacerbated this divide.

Denmark's liberal movement was largely confined to Copenhagen and even there it was propagated by a small percentage of households, totalling approximately 10,000 families.[4] More significant was the growing unrest and economic struggle of 67,000 landed peasants, most of whom were newly owners or tenants of land, and 70,000 cottagers who having no ownership and no protections made up the majority population.[5]

In 1846 a peasant-liberal alliance was formed and the Society of the Friends of the Peasant was founded. This society was a movement for liberal and peasant demands, but most importantly, their mission would include the demand for a "free, representative constitution."[6] At a meeting in Copenhagen, where the urban National Liberals were joined by their peasant counterparts as well as the (socialistic) craftsmen and artisans, the question of universal (male) suffrage was raised and the liberal leadership had to assure a crowd of peasant representatives that universal suffrage would be incorporated into the proposal.[7] However, once the king agreed to dissolve his ministry and permit an elected Constitutional Assembly the conservatives and the National Liberals granted the Crown the appointment of 25 percent of the delegates in order to offset the peasant vote.[8] This move spelled the end of the peasant-liberal alliance. The elections had produced an Assembly made up of 33 Conservatives, 32 National Liberals, and 44 Friends of the Peasant. As a result liberals held the balance of power, brokering between the other two sides.[9] What the

[4] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 51-52.
[5] Ibid., 53-54.
[6] Ibid., 57.
[7] Ibid., 66.
[8] Ibid., 68.
[9] Ibid., 69.

Assembly produced was a constitution that, although it included universal (male) suffrage, established a bicameral parliament with a minimum income requirement for entrance into the upper house.

Once a new government was in place nationalism became the foremost priority ahead of defending constitutionalism and democracy.[10] Therefore the victory of liberalism in Denmark amounted to "a triumph of city over country" and the establishment of the bourgeoisie into the political ranks of power.[11] Through education and geographical upbringing Kierkegaard belongs to the demographic of the new authority, yet he would come to maintain a vigilant opposition to it. Later, when we read of Kierkegaard's suspicion of political reform it is important to remember that his apparent 'anti-liberal' sentiment is directed at a politics that preaches radical change while it actively enforces a re-organization of the status quo – where there is essentially no change to the structures of power, wealth, social belonging.

The relationship between the new State and the Lutheran Church in Denmark is significant for Kierkegaard's religious thought. Included in the constitution was a somewhat ambiguous phrase: "the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the Danish People's Church and as such is supported by the state," and "the constitution of the People's Church will be ordered by law."[12] This signals for Kierkegaard the absolute domestication of Christianity into national culture – that Christianity has become *Volksreligion* of the Danish national project. From 1849 the Church exists within the Ministry of Culture, along with education, theatre, museums and other cultural affairs.[13]

[10] Ibid., 72.
[11] Ibid., 67.
[12] Ibid., 75.
[13] Ibid., 76.

Little Copenhagen: The 'market town'

Kierkegaard occasionally refers to Copenhagen as a little market town (*PV*, 65). By 1845 the population of Copenhagen was 126,787 (*SUD*, 178, *n*. 18). At the beginning of the nineteenth century the gates to the city were locked each night and the key was delivered personally to the King, making him the paternal guardian of Copenhagen.[14] The walls, which encircled the city still in 1844, retained a medieval form of a city – one that is cohesive, familiar, and 'manageable'. The modern symptoms of a densely crowded yet sprawling and expansive city, with the need for 'bureaucracy' and 'infrastructure', was only beginning to show itself in Copenhagen. And in 1844 Kierkegaard declares that Copenhagen may be regarded as a big city or a small town depending on one's fancy. By analogy, Kierkegaard imagines the city as a party at which he functions sometimes as its host or sometimes as a guest (*JP* V, 5763). This Copenhagen is presented as a *polis* that is becoming a *metropolis*.

Big Copenhagen: A spectacular city

Tivoli Gardens can be credited as the event and the site that symbolizes Copenhagen's coming-of-age and permits its inclusion in the modern urban experience of capital enterprise, aesthetic culture, and crowds.

Tivoli was a privately owned and operated pleasure garden open to the public (with an entrance fee), and is a prototype of today's theme parks and expos. The site, built just outside the city walls, was modelled on the Tivoli Gardens of Paris and the Vauxhall Gardens of London.[15] The land was purchased from the military and it contributed to the development and population of the area immediately outside the

[14] Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*, 56.
[15] Pattison, *Poor Paris*, 21.

walls of the city.[16] Thus the walls no longer stood as the cultural or popular boundary of the city.

The park opened late in the summer of 1843, the same year as the publication of *Either/Or*, but in its first full summer season of 1844 Tivoli welcomed 372,237 patrons – "over three times the population of Copenhagen"[17] and "about a third of the population of the whole country."[18] Visitors attending Tivoli could experience an urban 'crowd,' perhaps for the first time.[19] Sceptics regarded Tivoli as a sign of the erosion of traditional values and an emergence of liberalization, contributing to the disintegration of family life, a work ethic, and class boundaries.[20]

Much of what was on offer at Tivoli consisted of simulation, imitation, and optical stimulation. It was the paradigm of novelty and spectacle. At Tivoli one could enjoy an afternoon *as if* one were in Paris; one could even walk and eat *as if* one were dining in the world's southeast. Tivoli provided a formative example of the emerging culture industry. One would expect to see an oriental 'bazaar', a diorama of dissolving pictures (a precursor to moving pictures), scenes of moving wax figures, a daguerreotype studio, a roller coaster, a steam roundabout, and fireworks.[21]

More important to Kierkegaard than what took place at Tivoli was that it symbolised a shift in how people began to relate to themselves and others in Copenhagen. Culture, along with desire and authentic experience, is being produced for a public to consume. But even consumption is simulated because it is entirely optical. The modern urban subject is reborn as a voyeur (like Johannes the Seducer of

[16] Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*, 56-57.
[17] Pattison, *Poor Paris*, 22-23.
[18] Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*, 55.
[19] Ibid., 55.
[20] Ibid., 57.
[21] Pattison, *Poor Paris*, 23.

Either/Or), one who observes existence and visually consumes its presentations. The existing subjective '*I*' is able to 'aestheticise' life and exist as an 'eye'.[22]

Kierkegaard also considers another consequence of the 'aestheticisation' of public life: an 'audience' and a 'public' can be substituted for each other. He depicts the city typologically as a stage or 'arena' where cruelty plays out before a popular audience, like Rome, Jerusalem, and Babylon.[23] Certainly elements of Kierkegaard's analysis of the city bear the marks of *The Corsair*'s polemic against him, and the belief that his task of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom has made him a martyr in 'Christian' Denmark. Kierkegaard's experience of the collision between the smallness and the largeness of Copenhagen informs his assessment of modernity and his relational corrective. In *The Point of View*, written in 1848 and reflecting on *The Corsair* scandal of 1846, Kierkegaard writes,

> How terrible it is when blather and grinning threaten to become "public opinion" in a little country. Denmark was about to be absorbed into Copenhagen, and Copenhagen was just at the point of becoming a market town (*PV*, 65).

This, we shall see, gets carried into a broader social critique.[24] However, we should not lose sight of Kierkegaard's ambivalent relationship with the city. He has also been referred to as Copenhagen's most famous peripatetic; he loved to walk through the city streets, engage with people, and he also loved to walk at the edges of the city.[25] Despite briefly considering a position as a rural pastor, Kierkegaard never advocated monastic retreat from society; his texts, particularly of the period this thesis investigates, should not be read as a polemic against 'Denmark' or 'Copenhagen' but rather as a defence of an existentially open and honest social life.

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[22] Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, second edition (London: SCM, 1999), 11, 13.

[23] Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*, 69-70.

[24] Section III of this thesis deals specifically with Kierkegaard's culture-critique.

[25] Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007 [2005]), 309-313. Subsequent references to this book will be indicated by *SAK*.

1.2. Romanticism – Universal Harmony and Creative Production of Life:

Golden Age Denmark also enjoyed the influence of Romantic literature and philosophy popular throughout Europe. German Romanticism emerged as an intellectual response to the far-reaching rationalism of the Kantian critical method. Out of rationalism grew a series of boundaries and divisions between the "determinism of natural science and the realm of freedom in moral law, art, philosophy, and religion."[26] The efforts of Romantics consist of various attempts to reconcile these divisions.

There existed no Romantic orthodoxy and no recognizable doctrines or precepts, which meant Romantic thought in one region could be quite different from that in other regions. The Romanticism that found its way to Denmark was more welcoming of its empirical and scientific elements than the German brand, and closer to Idealism than British Romanticism.[27] Unlike Germany, where Romanticism and Idealism were increasingly extending into politics, Danish Romanticism and Idealism concerned itself predominantly with criticism in literature, philosophy, and theology.[28] Despite regional differences there is agreement among Romantics in their assessment that the age is suffering a crisis of fragmentation and antinomy. Describing the mood of the early Romantics one commentator writes, "Philosophy may have identified this malaise of the modern age – fragmentation – but it cannot heal it."[29] The Romantic

[26] Richard Crouter, introduction to *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, by Friedrich Schleiermacher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xxvi.

[27] Pattison, *Aesthetic and Religious*, 5.

[28] Ibid., 10.

[29] Azade Seyhan, "What is Romanticism, and where did it come from?" in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11.

strategy was to remedy fragmentation through the *poetic*, which is believed to give form and expression to an otherwise inexpressible Absolute.

Henrik Steffens (1773-1845) is credited with popularizing Romanticism in Denmark through a series of lectures he delivered between 1802 and 1803. He also represents Denmark's closest relation to Jena authors such as F. Schleiermacher (1768-1834), F. J. W. Shelling (1775-1854), and F. Schlegel (1772-1829), being himself a member of that group.[30] Steffens' notion of 'premonition' encapsulated the Romantic quest for a universal harmony of the finite and the infinite.[31] Premonition is best expressed poetically, which gives form (coherence) to the eternal, thereby electing aesthetics to the critical status of philosophy.[32] Following Steffens other notable Danish intellectuals would proceed with Romantic idealism either in the form of a critique of Hegelianism (F. C. Sibbern) or in the form of a Romantic reinterpretation of Hegelian aesthetics (J. L. Heiberg).[33] When Kierkegaard began his theological studies in 1830 there was already a well-established tradition of Danish Romanticism and Idealism.

Although it is misleading to enlist Kierkegaard as a Romantic, the concepts and motifs of authors such as F. D. E. Schleiermacher, J. G. Hamann (1730-1788), J. W. von Goethe, J. G. Fichte (1762-1814), and F. Schlegel are present in his work. In fact it is reasonable to suggest that significant elements of existentialism, popularly attributed to Kierkegaard, issue from the deeper well of German Romanticism, particularly its concept of *Bildung* (education or development) and the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman* (development or maturation novel). Describing the romantic genre Azade Seyhan writes,

[30] Pattison, *Aesthetic and Religious*, 5.
[31] Ibid., 6.
[32] Ibid., 6.
[33] Ibid., 10, 16.

> The novel, as early Romantics' idea of a genre of genres, a *Mischgedicht* ('mixed poem'), also assumed the form of a Fragment, albeit a large one. It was a hybrid form that incorporated a mixture of genres, dialogue, philosophical musing, letters, song, poem, and novella. The novel was both an art form and a forum for critical reflection.[34]

Not only does this serve as an uncanny description of *Either/Or*, but the Romantic motif of 'the fragment' can also be found on display in a number of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works (*Philosophical Fragments*, *Prefaces*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Repetition*). Even if his intention was to satirize the Romantic view the point is Kierkegaard often communicated his satire *within* this literary aesthetic mode.

F. Schlegel, one of the founders of Romanticism, celebrated a Romantic version of 'irony' in his "Fragments" and his *Lucinde* was judged by Golden Age Denmark to be "the instantiation of 'irony' in the form of a practical guidebook."[35] Although a use of irony as an existential category unites the two thinkers it also marks their divergence.[36] The problem, as Kierkegaard sees it, is the Romantic understanding of poetry's relation to reality. The existential path that Julius follows in *Lucinde* – "the movement away from the world, into oneself, and back to the world again" – is a path that Kierkegaard advocates.[37] But, as Söderquist states, Kierkegaard disagrees with Schlegel's way back to the world. Schlegel believes that it is through irony that one comes back to the world whereas Kierkegaard believes that this way is merely an illusion.[38] Kierkegaard is not satisfied with Schlegel's constructive element.[39] Romantics are accused of claiming that irony has the productive ability to create actuality[40] but Kierkegaard believes Romantic creativity can alienate the self from the

[34] Seyhan, "Romanticism," 18.
[35] K. Brian Söderquist, "Friedrich Schlegel: On Ironic Communication, Subjectivity and Selfhood" in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome III: Literature and Aesthetics*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 6, Ed. Jon Stewart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 187.
[36] Ibid., 186.
[37] Ibid., 198, 202.
[38] Ibid., 198.
[39] Ibid., 193.
[40] Ibid., 209-211.

outer world rather than reconciling the self. Since authority for the ironist is really only his own will the self is only ever reconciled to another (poetically) imagined actuality, and then is despairingly confronted with life's given imperfect actuality.[41] This philosophical and aesthetic issue also impinged on theological matters. In the existential sequence that moves from an outer world of objectivity and convention to an inner spiritual subjectivity and then to a reformed reunion with the world, Kierkegaard formulates the 'return' theologically.

Regarding the perennial debate concerning the relationship between faith and reason, Kierkegaard leaned more toward Hamann than either Kant or Hegel. Kierkegaard paid close attention to Hamann's critique of Kant, drawing on both content and style (Hamann's texts were also occasionally penned by pseudonyms).[42] Warding off the 'Irrationalist' label Hamann claims that faith begins at the endpoint or limit of reason, and therefore renders the zero-sum choice between the two a false choice.[43] Like Hamann, Kierkegaard's defense of faith is not itself a rejection of reason or reflection, although both do claim that faith cannot be absorbed into philosophical and scientific reason.

The Romantics attempted to provide a literary presentation of the conditions and possibilities for the construction of a modern self that Kierkegaard made use of, regardless of his acceptance or rejection of specific theoretical positions.[44] What appealed to Kierkegaard in the various presentations of Romanticism was the wealth of creative and critical resources it provided him. With these resources he formed his

[41] Ibid., 219.

[42] Sergia Karen Hay, "Hamann: Sharing Style and Thesis: Kierkegaard's Appropriation of Hamann's Work" in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome III: Literature and Aesthetics*. Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 6, Ed. Jon Stewart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 106.

[43] Hay, "Hamann," 99.

[44] Söderquist, "Schlegel," 198. Examples of this motif that Kierkegaard would have been familiar with include *Emile* (1762) by Rousseau and *Lucinde* by Friedrich Schlegel.

own unique position against the rationalism of Kantianism and the speculative Idealism of Danish Hegelianism. And, not insignificantly, Romanticism promoted inwardness and an expressive mode of life, which Kierkegaard appropriates for his own project.

1.3. Danish Lutheranism and Pietism:

Religious issues in eighteenth and nineteenth century Denmark could be viewed through the lens of confessional identity and the forms of religious practice. However one chooses to begin, what surfaces as the link between certain beliefs and a certain practices is the social subtext of politics, geography, and class. The impact of various religious movements in a society undergoing profound political change, and the impact of rapid social reorientation on the various traditions of religious practices led to an irresolvable relationship of entanglement between the two social forces. Kierkegaard made it his life's work to wrestle with this entanglement, but not so that politics would have victory over the religious or that religion would rule politics. What is at stake in all of this for Kierkegaard is clarification and earnestness with respect to genuine Christian existence.

In 1813 (the year of Kierkegaard's birth) Denmark was almost exclusively Christian and the Crown had officially endorsed Lutheranism since 1536.[45] However, Kierkegaard's combined experience of pietism and Lutheranism also informs his culture-critique and religious communication.[46] At its core, orthodox Lutheranism stressed the primacy of faith and right doctrine (institutional and sacramental

[45] Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and the Church in Denmark* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels, 1984), 12.

[46] See, Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

authority), whereas pietism insists upon right action, good works, and a pious personal character (individual authority/accountability).

Unlike in some other countries, Denmark's pietists were permitted to develop within the established Lutheran fold.[47] One form of Pietism, termed Halle Pietism after the German 'state pietism' inspired by Halle professor August Hermann Francke, managed its way into official Danish Christianity and its legacy includes strict Sabbath laws, the source of popular religious literature, and the institution of compulsory confirmation of all youth, thus amalgamating adult citizenship and confirmation in law.[48] Additionally, Kirmmse suggests,

> The only other lasting influence of this official pietism was, as mentioned, the subversion of the veneration and authority accorded to traditional Christian and Reformation doctrines. This subversion paved the way for the triumph of the radical reinterpretations espoused by Enlightenment Christianity, which was both the antithesis and the child of pietism, and which was, in its turn, an irritant which helped to produce the neo-pietist awakening of the nineteenth century.[49]

Pietism spawned its own adversary by undermining the authority and necessity of established Christian doctrines. It also inspired more radical versions of liberal Christianity in the nineteenth century. Here is where issues of class, geography, and power come to the foreground, and where Kierkegaard's own intellectual and social positioning is informative.

Religious differences in nineteenth-century Denmark were split largely along the rural/urban divide, with a rationalistic Enlightenment Christianity establishing itself in the cities (most importantly, in Copenhagen) while the more evangelical and emotive religious 'Awakening' movements took hold in rural regions. These divergent Christianities actually shared a common philosophy. Even the terms, 'Awakenings' and 'Enlightenment,' are united by their sense of *self-knowledge* in contradistinction

[47] Barnett, *Pietism and Holiness*, 37.
[48] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 31; Barnett, *Pietism and Holiness*, 37-40.
[49] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 31.

to what was perceived as an antiquated and oppressive structure of authority in earlier forms of Christianity. In urban establishment Lutheranism this took the form of a liberal-rationalist Christianity. Modern veneration of autonomy and confidence in reason meant that an orthodox belief in doctrines was replaced by an historicised and de-mystified approach to Scripture and Jesus in particular, emphasizing the general moral significance of the religious tradition.[50] Belief in God and immortality remained but more as functional components in a system of natural theology.

In Denmark the most prominent proponents of this kind of Enlightenment Christianity were Henrik Nicolai Clausen (1793-1877) and, later, Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884). Although their positions were slightly different (Martensen was Hegelian) each would, at some point, instruct or tutor Kierkegaard, and Martensen in particular would endure unwavering opposition from him.[51]

Both Clausen and Martensen were theologically indebted to F. D. E. Schleiermacher who described religion in experiential terms such as mood, feeling, intuition, or a taste for the infinite and a personal sense of absolute dependence.[52] Hidden within the experiential language was a more individualist approach to matters of faith, which allows Clausen to find in Schleiermacher a way to "ground Christian faith on inner conviction tempered with rational reflection rather than on church tradition or scriptural dogmatism."[53] Clausen held that the church practitioners must build doctrine and ordinances on the authority of professional theological research,

[50] Ibid., 35-36; Mogens Müller, "Kierkegaard and Eighteenth- and Nineteenth Century Biblical Scholarship: A Case of Incongruity," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, *Tome II: The New Testament*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, eds. Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 286-287.

[51] Garff, *SAK*, 29-31, 729-739; see also, Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 [2001]), 50.

[52] F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22-23; Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 50.

[53] Hugh S. Pyper, "Henrik Nicolai Clausen: The Voice of Urbane Rationalism," in *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries*, *Tome II: Theology*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 42.

which is based on the robust critical analysis of the biblical scholar or historian.[54] Ultimately, for Clausen, revelation must be subject to rational scholarly scrutiny – if revelation is not rationally comprehensible, if it does not adhere to philosophical (and scientific) principles then it is not revelation.[55]

Another strand of established Enlightenment Christianity featured a speculative character, which harmonizes Hegelianism with Christianity. Initially Martensen's theology resembled this though he eventually departed from Hegelianism and became more accepting of orthodoxy as his career went on. Even from the beginning Martensen realized a need to go beyond Hegel since Hegel's notion of autonomy elevated humanity disproportionately and did not ultimately acknowledge the true autonomy of God.[56] In spite of this seemingly orthodox position what invites opposition from Kierkegaard and the various pietist movements is the speculative principle of mediation toward a comprehensive theological systematization of revelation and history, and this includes a harmonization of culture and Christianity that simultaneously secularizes faith and sanctifies (bourgeois) culture.

Danish Christianity was somewhat different throughout rural areas. Following the peasant reforms of the 1780s and 1790s,[57] and emboldened with the spirit of inwardness that was characteristic of the period, rural Christianity became much more anti-clerical and horizontally structured. Pietistic 'Awakening' movements emerged

[54] Pyper, "Clausen," 42.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Curtis L. Thompson, "Hans Lassen Martensen: A Speculative Theologian Determining the Agenda of the Day" in *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries*, *Tome II: Theology*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 231.
[57] Throughout this period policies were implemented by the Danish Crown which began to provide peasants with increasing independence and negotiating power over their own labour. For a detailed account of this period see, Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 12-26.

in direct opposition to the rationalistic or speculative theology of the mainstream, and politically opposed the social-economic disparity prevalent throughout Denmark.[58]

Perhaps the most significant pietist movement for the Kierkegaards was the Congregation of Moravian Brothers. Initially, Moravian Pietism was only permitted by the Danish crown to set up missions in its colonies, though there was some activity in Denmark.[59] However, in 1739 Moravians set up societies for "upbuilding" in Denmark with the permission of Christian VI.[60] That same year the Brethren established a *Brødresocietet* (Society of Brothers) in Copenhagen, which would be the society attended by the Kierkegaard family in Søren's youth.[61] Hannay describes its teachings as "diametrically opposed" to the established liberal-rationalist theology.[62] Its theology presented a deeply emotional and sensual Christology, emphasizing the pain and suffering of the Savior's crucifixion with regular reference to his blood and tears.[63] By the eighteen twenties, when the new pietistic Awakening movement took place, the rural model was that of laity led assemblies.[64] Although there was much opposition to these assemblies by the ruling classes, including laws drawn to stop them, rural pietism established a growing congregation in Copenhagen.[65] The congregation of Moravian Brothers was located somewhere between the radical separatist movements of the "divine assemblies" and adherents of state-sanctioned Lutheranism. Kierkegaard's father was deeply influenced by the Moravian tradition, particularly the Stormgade gatherings, in which he developed the

[58] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, chapters 3 and 5; Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 37; Jørgen Bukdahl, *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, translated and edited by Bruce Kirmmse (Cambridge Mass: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 35.
[59] Barnett, *Pietism and Holiness*, 41-42.
[60] Ibid., 43.
[61] Ibid., 43; Bukdahl, *Common Man*, 34.
[62] Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 37. See also, Bukdahl, *Common Man*, 35.
[63] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 32.
[64] Ibid., 41.
[65] Bukdahl, *Common Man*, 20.

importance of inner conviction and belief in a suffering Christ.[66] By all accounts Kierkegaard's father had a profound and incalculable impact upon the spiritual development of his household.[67] Modern urbane Lutheranism that is comfortable in the idiom of the Enlightenment certainly leaves a positive mark on Kierkegaard, evident in the philosophical and theological nuance of his thought, and Pietism also informs his personalistic theology of experience and Christology. But we shall also see where Kierkegaard veers from crude emotivism and the overly reflective objectivism of rationalism.

1.4. Hegel

For many philosophers Kierkegaard is best known as another nineteenth century critic of Hegel alongside Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche. Whereas Hegelianism supposedly proclaims the achievements of history and reason, Kierkegaard is believed to take up "the cause of the concretely existing individual"[68] while waging philosophical warfare on Hegel's speculative system. While he does take issue with elements of Hegelian philosophy, in general, he also critically engages a specific group of Danish Hegelians (the philosopher and poet J. L. Heiberg, theologian H. L. Martensen, and the Danish theologian and pastor Adolph Peter Adler in particular). Furthermore, his contention with speculative philosophy, such as the role of

[66] Bukdahl, *Common Man*, 33.
[67] Bukdahl, *Common Man*, chapter 4; Garff, *SAK*, 14-15; Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 34-38; Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 259-260.
[68] Lore Hühn and Philipp schwab, "Kierkegaard and German Idealism," translated by George Pattison, in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, eds. John Lippit and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 63.

mediation, the resolution of the inner and the outer, and the question of beginnings, coincides with existing debates in Germany and Denmark.[69]

Most recently Jon Stewart has challenged what he calls "the standard view" of Kierkegaard as a decidedly anti-Hegelian thinker.[70] Stewart argues that in fact "Hegel exerted a more or less straightforwardly positive influence on Kierkegaard"[71] in the period before 1843, and after 1846 Kierkegaard rarely mentions Hegel because, as Stewart suggests, Hegelianism was already out of fashion in Denmark by 1849.[72] Even in the period, between 1843 and 1846, which contains the most polemical engagement with Hegelianism, affinity is also evident. What we discover in all periods of Kierkegaard's writing is a "twofold tension between productive appropriation and critical distance" to Hegel.[73] Kierkegaard expresses his ambivalence in a journal entry from the year *Stages on Life's Way* was published,

> I feel what for me at times is an enigmatical respect for Hegel; I have learned much from him, and I know very well that I can still learn much more from him when I return to him again … I have resorted to philosophical books and among them Hegel. But right here he leaves me in the lurch. His philosophical knowledge, his amazing learning, the insight of his genius, and everything else good that can be said of a philosopher I am willing to acknowledge as any disciple … But, nevertheless, it is no less true that someone who is really tested in life, who in his need resorts to thought, will find Hegel comical despite all his greatness (*JP* II, 1608 [1845]).

Kierkegaard takes from Hegel a methodological approach to existence that is dialectical. This marks a limit of Kierkegaard's devotion to Hegel and the crux of his dispute with the speculative system. Kierkegaard's commitment to dialectical reasoning is evident throughout his authorship, but his ambivalent appropriation of

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[69] Hühn and Schwab, "Kierkegaard and German Idealism," 63; Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel & Kierkegaard* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 162-164. Hühn and Schwab identifiy Schelling's debate with Hegel as a source for Kierkegaard's own position. Also, F. C. Sibbern was a notable Danish critic of Hegel whose work Kierkegaard would have been familiar with (Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 171; Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, 163-164).

[70] Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2003.

[71] Ibid., 597.

[72] Ibid., 614.

[73] Hühn and Schwab, "Kierkegaard and German Idealism," 62.

Hegel is most directly evident in their explanation of the idea of spirit. Kierkegaard describes spirit as "the self," but "the self is a relation that relates itself to itself" (*SUD*, 13). In *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel also describes spirit as "that which relates itself to itself."[74] Such deliberate reference to Hegel reveals that Kierkegaard agrees spirit involves the self-relation of opposing tensions.[75] What makes Kierkegaard's method and the self-relation of spirit *Hegelian* is his commitment to a negative dialectic. This means, as Merold Westphal explains, a person can achieve some amount of self-understanding through "the determinate negation of positions that cannot survive the critical scrutiny of being compared to their own, self-imposed standards."[76] This "tarrying with the negative,"[77] as Hegel refers to it, is what Kierkegaard regards as a true description of the human situation, thus much of his social and theological critique is aimed at a version of Hegelianism (which can be found in Hegel's own work) that tends toward the positive and is forgetful of the negative.[78]

A defining difference between Kierkegaard and Hegel concerns the appropriate application of the dialectical method. Kierkegaard notices that Hegelian dialectical method has become the crowning achievement of the historical sciences, but he suspects that this process has abandoned the human psychological and ethical conditions of existence.

> In ancient times, one would have smiled at a method that can explain all of world history absolutely but cannot explain a single person even mediocrely … The malpractice in Hegel is easily pointed out. The absolute method explains all world history; the science that is to explain the single human being is ethics. On the one hand, this is quite neglected in Hegel, and insofar as he explains anything, it is usually in such a way that no living being can exist [*existere*]

[74] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 14.
[75] Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, 144.
[76] Westphal, *Reason and Society*, 32.
[77] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 19.
[78] Westphal, *Reason and Society*, 32.

> accordingly, and if he were to exist according to the few better things to be found there, then he would instantly explode the absolute method (*JP* II, 1606 [1844]).

In order to remain true to the lived existence of human beings Kierkegaard redirects the dialectical method to psychological (ethical/spiritual) life, tearing it away from metaphysics. The result is, as Hühn and Schwab claim, that Kierkegaard transforms Hegel's "dialectical self-mediation of Absolute Spirit," into "a paradoxical dialectic of existence that never finds its point of rest in a final result or a positive mediation."[79] Hegelian mediation is replaced with tension, paradox, and contradiction. These Kierkegaardian categories always signal that a person is brought to the point of a decision from which a new dialectic emerges. This is also how Kierkegaard differentiates his understanding of the transition from one existence "stage" to another.[80]

While dialectic certainly represents Hegel's most formative influence on Kierkegaard, it is the theological and ontological differences that inspire Kierkegaard's social and religious concerns. Kierkegaard opposes Hegelian ontological immanence. Hegel, in company with such diverse enlightenment thinkers as Fichte, Kant, Leibniz, Locke, and Newton, all ascribe to "a cosmology of 'self-moving' rather than 'dependent' being," regardless of the significant philosophical differences between them.[81] Kierkegaard, evidently close to the theology of

[79] Hühn and Schwab, "Kierkegaard and German Idealism," 63.

[80] Whereas Hegel's phenomenology follows the rational progression of *Spirit* as it dialectically moves from ethics (culture), aesthetics, religion, and finally philosophy, Kierkegaard reorders the sequence (aesthetics, ethics, philosophical religion, paradoxical religion) and makes transition a matter of existential self-choice. See Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1996), 22-23; Karl Ameriks, "The legacy of idealism in the philosophy of Feuerbach, Marx, and Kierkegaard," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [200]), 274.

[81] Harvie Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1995), 16.

Schleiermacher, constructs his ideas within the idiom of absolute dependence.[82] This gives rise to an essential Kierkegaardian formula: to exist *before God*. Or, as David Kangas interprets it, "God is the before whom of existence itself."[83] But in this case our concept of God cannot be our concept of our own freedom or ourselves.[84] God for Kierkegaard is not the ground of our self-moving, self-sufficient activity, and neither is God "this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'."[85] Although Kierkegaard subscribes to a dialectical individualism that acknowledges a historically and culturally situated individual (an 'I' that is invariably associated with 'We') he harbours deep reservations about a 'We' that regards itself subjectively as an 'I'. This, in Kierkegaard's view, amounts to the lèse-majesté which eliminates God by deifying humanity *as such* (*SUD*, 117-118). Kierkegaard insists that if humans are to have a true conception of themselves then that requires coming to terms with an infinite qualitative difference between God and humans (*CUP*, 412-413). Therefore the fundamental theological question that differentiates Hegel's philosophy (and Hegelianism) from Kierkegaard's theology is this: "Does the human race become God or does God become human?" – It is a question that Westphal expresses as the difference of "*apotheosis vs. incarnation*."[86] Hegelianism casts a shadow over this project insofar as it represents a rival to Kierkegaard's answer to the question: What is the relationship between God and humanity, and how does that relationship affect our human relationships with each other?

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[82] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, eds. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976 [1830]), 19-20.

[83] David Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 6.

[84] Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociality* (London: Verso 2009 [1981]), 103.

[85] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 110.

[86] Westphal, *Reason and Society*, 37.

Conclusion

From Romanticism and Idealism Kierkegaard appropriates literary form, an existential appreciation of irony, and an emphasis on personal development. However, as we shall see, Kierkegaard's religious response to the fragmentation and social alienation of the age departs from the speculative and Romantic forms of self-creation and reflection. Instead, Kierkegaard's concept of human freedom will be depicted as working within a cosmology of dependence rather than self-moving autonomy. Kierkegaard's dialectical method is undoubtedly indebted to Hegel but he redirects dialectical theology away from the historical movement of *Geist* and aims its questions at individuals, each of whom is characterized individually as *spirit*. Kierkegaard also hopes to redirect modern social-ethical life away from the Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* toward more subjectively interested modes of social relationships. Similarly, Kierkegaard's ambivalence toward modern urban life and the dominant Christian traditions of Denmark form the setting against which, in which, and through which Kierkegaard develops the category of *the individual* in distinctly theological terms; it is the category of "spiritual awakening," the "decisive category" upon which "Christianity stands or falls" (*PV*, 121-122); and it is a category that Kierkegaard insists, "the age, history, the human race" must pass *through* (*PV*, 118).

The next section examines the edifying and polemical aspects of religiousness when that dialectic is directed at the individual in the inwardness of faith. Therefore the first 'movement' in our construction of a Kierkegaardian theology of encounter is a movement "from the esthetic – *from* 'the philosopher,' from the speculative – *to* the indication of the most inward qualification of the essentially Christian" (*PV*, 5): the self who exists before God.

Section II

The Edifying and the Polemical in the Individual

Encountering the self before God in Confession and Communion

Introduction: Genre, Occasion, Place, and Practice

This section introduces the edifying and polemical aspects of religious existence as it pertains to individuals in the inwardness of subjectivity. Here we encounter a self who exists before God. The dialectic, then, is treated as a struggle of faith. For Kierkegaard, to exist before God is to wrestle with questions of who God is and what it means to be a human being. These questions are given focused attention in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847), *Christian Discourses* (1848), *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), and a series of discourses published between 1849 and 1851.[1] In each of these texts the matter of existing before God is treated as a polemical and edifying experience. Inwardness of faith is the first 'location' for our analysis of Kierkegaard's construction of active religious life. But even as our focus is drawn to the *individual* and *inwardness*, their dialectical counterparts – the *social* and the *outward* – simultaneously take shape and appear as the true place and purpose of a person's ultimate religious concern. Kierkegaard's Christian psychology is sutured to the human (outward) experiences of event, movement, and activity. These writings, therefore, also feature a concerted attention to *occasion*, *place*, and *practice*.

A cartography of religious life appears in the edifying discourses and with it we may trace how this Christian dialectic operates in Kierkegaard's religious writings. There are places where Kierkegaard directs the individual to develop inwardness: in the countryside with the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and in the space and liturgy of the church. Emphasis on place is accompanied by consideration of

[1] "The Lily in the Field and the Bird in the Air" (May 1849); "Three Discourses a the Communion on Fridays: The High Priest, The Tax Collector, The Woman Who Was a Sinner" (November 1849); "An Upbuilding Discourse" (December 1850); "Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays" (September 1851). These are included in the Princeton edition of Kierkegaard's Writings, *Without Authority*.

particular occasions: the occasion of confession and communion. Confession and communion are the specifically religious practices that Kierkegaard uses to demonstrate his essential theological position that there is an infinite qualitative difference between God and creature and an intimate proximity between God and creature. Furthermore, I argue that these occasions and practices equip people, in part, with the spiritual foundation to engage in cultural critique and participate in socially edifying projects.

The shape of the argument:

A number of movements take place together, one layered upon another, following an existential trajectory from *the crowd* to the social through *the individual*. Chapter 2 considers how Kierkegaard's discourses aim to take hold of the individual, moving from (urban) spaces of the home, cafes, theatres, the university, and the city streets (locations familiar to the pseudonymous texts prior to 1846), in order to enter the space of the church. Relocation to the church, where one is encouraged to imaginatively consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air as tutors of the religious life, represents a turn to inwardness as the domain of the category of the individual.

In the church another set of movements featured in the discourses are the steps through liturgical moments of prayer, confession, homily, and finally to the altar for communion. This chapter considers what it means to exist before God on the occasion of confession. In confession the individual is asked to consider two perplexing questions: whether God is love in everything and how it can be a joy that one is always guilty before God.

Chapter 3 considers existing before God on the occasion of communion where the edifying is affirmed in the divine commitment to active life and love. The purpose of highlighting these occasions, places and practices is to identify the edifying and polemical dialectic of religiousness with concrete and embodied existence expressed in the place and practices of church. Through confession and communion (sin and love), Kierkegaard provides us with his dialectical theology of the qualitative difference and proximity between God and creature, which forms the basis for our common life together. From here, there is a return to the societal space of the city where individuals seek involvement in a mutual process of edification. The movement 'back' to the societal still requires continual and repeated movements to and from the sacred space of the church (in inwardness), and to and from the secular space of the city or "the world."

Chapter 2

In Church, On the Occasion of Confession

2.1. The Edifying Discourse Is A Polemic Against The Individual

What is it to edify? Kierkegaard asks his reader this question in a series of discourses titled 'States Of Mind In The Strife Of Suffering' (1848). He answers:

> The first answer to this is what the upbuilding is at first: it is the *terrifying*. The upbuilding is not for the healthy but for the sick … but for a healthy person it would of course be terrifying to discover that he has fallen into the hands of the physician who summarily treated him as sick (*CD*, 96).

An edifying discourse addresses the reader as one who is sick. Like a physician the upbuilding discourse investigates the sickness, is not weakened by suffering, and speaks plainly and honestly about the matter at hand – the ailment. But the discourse itself is not edifying. Simply writing or reading a religious discourse does not edify. Rather, these discourses communicate *for* edification: they communicate what edifies and they hope to assist the individual toward edification – to make a person aware of the divine, not of the author. Such a possibility, Kierkegaard claims, presents itself only when confronted with the terrifying. We are told that there is forgiveness of sin, and that is edifying. However, "the terrifying is that there is sin, and the magnitude of the terror in the inwardness of guilt-consciousness is proportionate to the dimension of the upbuilding" (*CD*, 96). The deeper one burrows into the terrifying, in this case the sin, anxiety, and despair, the more elevating the upbuilding can be. The edifying can accomplish the difficult task of turning a poison into a remedy. And thus, believing we are well, we discover that we are sick and can be healed. Without

confronting the terrifying, or polemical, aspect of religiousness the truly edifying cannot come forth. Here we examine how the religious encounter with God, staged by an edifying discourse, is first isolating and destabilising.

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Following the dedication to the single individual Kierkegaard petitions his reader to read aloud, slowly, and repeatedly (*UDVS*, 5). The point, Kierkegaard assures us, is not to celebrate the writing or the writer, but to allow for appropriation, which is the explicit intent of an upbuilding discourse. In this we foresee the liturgical quality of his religious discourses. These actions are offered for the reader as a way into inwardness so that the text exists "as if it had arisen in [the reader's] own heart" (*UDVS*, 5). The interaction of appropriation and performance is at the core of the genre. The reader encounters herself as a single individual while reading the upbuilding discourse. Enabling upbuilding is the hope of the discourse but the work of being *built-up* belongs to the single individual as her own spiritual task.

In the third section of "An Occasional Discourse" Kierkegaard directly reminds his readers of the relationship between the discourse, confession, and those reading. Here, Kierkegaard is most forthright concerning how the genre functions, and how on this particular occasion the discourse facilitates a certain action and encounter. What is at stake for the discourse genre is that "it must *decisively* require something of the listener" (*UDVS*, 122). Since the discourse does not know who *you* are, or even that you exist at all, its truth only becomes apparent when the reader regards herself as the one addressed.

> It will seem to you, whoever you are, as if [the discourse] were speaking directly to you. This is not the merit of the discourse; it is the action of your self-activity that you on your own behalf assist the discourse and on your own initiative will to be the one intimately addressed as: you (*UDVS*, 123).

Self-activity, Kierkegaard tells us, finds its analogy in the performing arts. In the theatre there is a prompter for the actor – this person, who whispers the lines if necessary, is concealed and hopes to go unnoticed. The actor "draws everybody's eyes to himself," and in the act of performance the words whispered by the prompter "now finds truth in him, truth through him" (*UDVS*, 124). Theatrical performances, as examples of "performances of the secular arts" (*UDVS*, 123), are in the aesthetic mode of communication, a mode clearly differentiated by Kierkegaard from religious communication.[1] Kierkegaard's claim, however, is that there exists the possibility (or the danger) of approaching religious discourses as one would commonly approach secular forms of rhetoric. Continuing with the theatrical analogy, Kierkegaard explains the aesthetic approach to a discourse. Normally when we read we imagine that the text occupies the place of a performer, the one onstage, and we are the audience observing (reading), judging, maybe learning something or feeling something as spectators do. In this case attention is drawn to the discourse itself or its writer as the object of either admiration or disdain. But with the religious the scenario changes dramatically. Through the analogy of the theatre Kierkegaard begins to reveal the unsettling aspect of a religious discourse. Now,

> The stage is eternity, and the listener, if he is the true listener (and if he is not, it is his own fault), is standing before God through the discourse. The prompter whispers to the actor what he has to say, but the actor's rendition is the main thing, is the earnest jest of the art; the speaker whispers the words to the listener, but the main thing, the earnestness, is that the listener, with the help of the discourse and before God, in silence speaks in himself, with himself, to himself … In the theatre the performance is played before persons present who are called spectators, but at the religious address God himself is present; in the most earnest sense he is the critical spectator who is checking on how it is being spoken and on how it is being heard, and for that very reason there are no spectators. Thus the one speaking is the

[1] Aesthetic communication and ethical-religious communication are distinguished by the kind of choice required from the reader/hearer. For aesthetic communication the resolution to any conceptual or dramatic problems are found outside the individual readers and hearers. But if the communication, whatever the genre, finds its resolution in the subjectivity of the reader/listener/observer then it has an ethical-religious quality.

> prompter, and the listener is present and open before God; he is, if I may put it this way, the actor, who in the true sense is acting before God (*UDVS*, 124-125).

It would seem as though the reader has stumbled into a sort of Beckettian nightmare, where one simply sits down to read and yet somehow finds oneself alone, on an empty stage, in an empty theatre, where the only spectator is God – in his hidden but also nascent presence. Yet if this scene is a nightmare it is a nightmare of our own making. If we choose to speak the words as if they are our own, then we indeed place ourselves on stage. If there is a time for performance anxiety, this is the time. Alternatively, it might seem that appropriation and a performative existence could just as easily lead to the celebrity of the individual rather than volatizing her or him.

George Pattison, in his analysis of the above passage, draws attention to the volatile status of the individual, which emerges from this shift in perspective, or *recasting* of the individual. Although the individual reader is presented as the first-person narrator of the discourse, he is also "the one who, in and as he reads the work, has become the object."[2] Since becoming an object is a distinctly *un*-Kierkegaardian notion this point should not be misunderstood. What we learn from the theatrical example is that every human individual is the object of the divine gaze.[3] To be objects of the divine gaze forces a question upon *us*, and a response from *us*. It is the occasion, rather than the abolition, of choice and freedom.

The question for the individual is what conclusion to draw concerning the nature of that divine gaze. Does God's gaze disclose 'him' as the *big Other*, as some Orwellian panoptical, even voyeuristic authority, ever vigilant against the slightest infraction or sign of disobedience? Or can being an object of God's gaze have a liberating

[2] Pattison, *Upbuilding Discourses*, 95.
[3] Ibid.

outcome?[4] Existing before God, in Kierkegaard's analysis, will mean being the object, or free recipient, of God's regard. However, at this juncture, prompted by the discourse, every individual is placed in a position that threatens human self-certainty and human autonomy.

Kierkegaard concludes his brief explanation of the function of a religious discourse by returning the reader to the space of the church sanctuary and recollecting the specific liturgical activity of praying the appointed prayer in a church service. When a layperson in church reads the appointed prayer it is also actually the listener who is praying those words. The listener "is not speaking, his voice is not being heard; neither is he saying something else softly to himself but is silently and sincerely praying before God with the audible voice of the one who is reading the prayer aloud and whispering to him what he is to say" (*UDVS*, 125). The explanation, following from an analogy of the theatre to an example derived from church, demonstrates how a religious discourse *polemicises* the individual precisely by isolating the reader/listener as speaker/confessor of the words read. To *polemicise* the individual is not to attack the concept of individuality, but it involves challenging the concepts of autonomy and authority associated with a particularly modern notion of a self.[5] In addition to this another aspect is under scrutiny – the desire of individuals to disappear into the crowd and avoid ethical responsibility. This modern (urban) advantage of anonymity is shaken in the religious predicament of existing *before God*. For it is not the author or the discourse, or an audience or a crowd that requires an accounting; it is the individual reader who is being questioned.

[4] Following Anti-Climacus's notion of becoming transparent selves, C. Stephen Evans explains faith, in part, as the comfort and willingness "to stand before God and open myself to his gaze." See, C. Stephen Evans, *Søren Kierkegaard's Christian Psychology: Insight for Counselling and Pastoral Care* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1990), 59.

[5] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See especially, p. 305, where Taylor singles out "individualist," "autonomy," "self-exploration," and "subjective rights" as part of the modern makeup of ethical identity.

2.2. In Church, Before God:

To exist before God is, for Kierkegaard, certainly a spiritual aspect of human life, yet he deliberately locates this spiritual experience in the space of church and occasion of confession in order that religious life remains grounded in the materiality of existence. Additionally, Kierkegaard's edifying discourses and *The Sickness Unto Death* develop an explanation of what Climacus means when he says that humanity expresses itself most perfectly when it expresses the difference between God and creature (*CUP*, 412-413). In confession and communion a person is confronted with a decision regarding what it means to be human and who God is. Kierkegaard regards this inner struggle that is initiated by confession, then communion (working through guilt and forgiveness, freedom and grace), as the foundation for and paradigm of broader social activity – works of love.

Christian Discourses follows a structure attentive to the psychological and liturgical expression of Christian practice.[6] By 'liturgical' I mean ritual movements and recitations in church that intend to unite spiritual belief with physical sensory expression, culminating in an encounter between the human and the divine. *Christian Discourses* begins by reflecting on 'secular' wisdom and concerns ('The Cares of the Pagans'), and then it psychologically explores the Christian reformulation of and reorientation to contingencies and necessities of existence ('States of Mind in the Strife of Suffering').

[6] Published 1848, although its composition began in 1847 (*CD*, xi-xii).

Topographically, the structure represents a movement from a secular space beholden to the cares of worldliness[7] to the space of the Church, where one begins to review these cares within Christian categories. That movement from secular (city) to sacred (church) space corresponds to Kierkegaard's psychological movement of inward deepening – from the aesthetic category to the ethical-religious existence category. Following a turn inward, the third section of discourses brings the reader into church in order to reflect on matters of doctrine and Christology ('Thoughts That Wound From Behind – For Upbuilding'). The discourses conclude at the communion table, two of which were delivered by Kierkegaard himself for the communion homily at *Vor Frue Kirke* in Copenhagen (*CD*, 249).

Part three of *Christian Discourses*, begins with a discourse titled, 'Watch Your Step When You Go to the House of the Lord.' Once again the address draws attention to a warning – that entering church will be unsettling, especially for those who expect to find tranquillity, who expect assurance of one's life, or who even expect admiration and thanks for simply showing up (*CD*, 165). Instead, "we go to God's house to be awakened from sleep and to be pulled out of the spell" of the crowd and its evasions (*CD*, 165).[8] Stepping into church in faith means turning one's back on the crowd because in church the qualification of existing before God requires a faithfulness and commitment of spirit that no conglomerate can proxy.

It might seem as though Kierkegaard overlooks the culturally normative expectation of attending church, which would dissolve any distinction between the crowd 'out there' in the world and a congregation in church as a crowd that is

[7] These cares, that Kierkegaard associates with 'secularity' or 'the pagans' are listed as poverty, abundance, lowliness, loftiness, presumptuousness, self-torment, indecisiveness, vacillation, and disconsolateness. Of course any person, including a religious person, must also experience these cares and anxieties, and therefore what Kierkegaard means by 'pagan' is an approach to these which is viewed entirely within an immanent horizon of finitude and temporality.

[8] Section III below contains an extended analysis of Kierkegaard's assessment of "the crowd" and "the public."

historically and socially obligated to gather every Sunday. In fact, Kierkegaard is aware of what he sees as the social homogenisation of the secular and sacred. Church too easily, in Kierkegaard's view, becomes yet another arena where people can be *seen* performing, as on a stage, their socially obligated roles (*M*, 249).[9] In short, church easily becomes another place where the existing form of society affirms itself or declares itself good. 'Watch Your Step When You Enter the House of the Lord' cautions against this self-affirmation. Its claim is that although congregants make up an assembly in church, no crowd and no public can form as a result of the qualification 'before God.' That means, to use the theatre analogy above, every individual still stands alone before God despite gathering together in church.

At issue is a matter of proximity and intimacy with respect to our relationship with the divine and to the eternal. This proximity intensifies awareness of one's highest responsibility – to God. In church the infinite qualitative gap between God and humanity is usually formulated in the imagination as, God in heaven – we, here on earth. However, the discourse warns,

> Do not imagine that he in his loftiness is far away: this is exactly the earnestness and responsibility – that he, the infinitely lofty one, is very close to you, closer than the people you have around you every day, closer than your most intimate friend before whom you feel that you can show yourself as you are (*CD*, 166).

Despite the comforting description of closeness there is also an unsettling aspect. Perhaps this is due to the strangeness of 'the lofty one.' The discourse reveals that in church, before God, our typical relationships and distinctions are either dissolved or made strange. Normally, distance stands between the lofty person and the lowly person – a distance of power, compatibility, values, material comfort, etc. Equality, on the other hand, signals closeness. "But when loftiness is very close to you and yet is loftiness, then you are in a difficult position" (*CD*, 166). This is the position one

[9] Plekon, "Church and Theology," 249. See also, Crites, *Twilight of Christendom*, 4-15.

enters when entering the house of the Lord. God's loftiness is not a safe distance away from lowliness. God is able to come very close to the lowliest and yet remain in his infinite loftiness. But the human, regardless of her or his loftiness or lowliness, meets God in *His* loftiness and lowliness.[10]

Such proximity is meant to extract honesty. To be this close to the eternal and this close to the divine is to be disclosed. The theatre metaphor above was used to describe the human-divine relationship. We recall that metaphor when individuals are addressed in church, where one is directly before God. There one is asked the question in conscience, not by the pastor or the neighbour but by God, "Are you now living in such a way that you are aware of being a single individual and thereby aware of your eternal responsibility before God (*UDVS*, 137)?" Once the individual broaches this question then the knowledge that one has an eternal responsibility cannot be ignored without guilt or the consciousness of guilt (*CD*, 171). Even when one acknowledges the God-relationship and chooses to honour one's infinite responsibility, then one is again confronted with guilt – of occasionally being unable or unwilling to align one's life with the responsibility. Whether one ignores this responsibility or attends to it guilt meets the individual on either side. Guilt-consciousness and forgiveness are dialectically intensified in the subjective category "*before God*."

Religiously, existence "before God" universally applies to every person without exception. Of course for the atheist, aesthete, speculative thinker, or the one whom Kierkegaard calls the 'natural man' this qualification holds no currency since, for them, one does not exist before another who is qualitatively different. Anti-Climacus, pseudonymous author of *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), admits that there is a

[10] Emphasis on 'His' here indicates the possessive, and not gender.

distinction to be made here that also signals the point where the religious and non-religious conceptually part. They part on the basis of the psychological criterion before which one becomes a self. According to Anti-Climacus "the criterion of the self is always: that directly before which it is a self" and the non-religious self is the self whose criterion is humanity (*SUD*, 79). Conversely, the 'theological self' is "the self directly before God" (*SUD*, 79). Confession calls attention to this theological self. More importantly, confession is perhaps the first liturgical activity that isolates every individual (equally) and confines him to the intimate dialectic of the God-relationship. Here the psychology of the consciousness "before God" is intensified through its corollary consciousness of sin.

2.3. Sin:

Consciousness of sin is treated aesthetically through the pseudonyms Vigilius Haufniensis (*Concept of Anxiety*), while Frater Taciturnus (*Stages on Life's Way*) and Johannes Climacus (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) confront sin from ethical-religious categories.[11] From the perspective of the (ideal) Christian category Anti-Climacus presents sin, in *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), as the necessary starting-point for life's education in Christian qualifications. He claims, "Christianity begins here – with the teaching about sin, and thereby with the single individual" (*SUD*, 120). Sin and individuality are an essential pairing for Anti-Climacus. According to him the two must be thought together. Although in one sense sin gathers all of humankind together under a common rubric as 'sinners' without prejudice, "no matter

[11] To consider something aesthetically or poetically means to treat a topic conceptually or at arms' length. Aesthetic or poetic treatment does not consider something as a problem or task for appropriation, but only as a matter of investigation or curiosity – it does not require that the reader be existentially committed to the outcome of particular line of enquiry. See, Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, 22.

whether man, woman, servant girl, cabinet minister, merchant, barber, student, or whatever" (*SUD*, 85). Sin gathers only negatively in the sense that no one is excluded from its participation. Essentially, sin separates – yet still not by way of comparison to others. In his analysis of sin as despair Anti-Climacus directly addresses this spiritual isolation.

> The teaching about the sin of the race has often been misused, because it has not been realized that sin, however common it is to all, does not gather [people] together in a common idea, into an association, into a partnership ("no more than the multitude of the dead out in the cemetery form some kind of society"); instead, it splits [people] up into single individuals and holds each individual fast as a sinner (*SUD*, 120).

Outside of the pseudonymous writings and before this treatise on sin Kierkegaard says something similar in the *Upbuilding Discourses* with respect to confession. In the third part of "An Occasional Discourse" Kierkegaard writes, "Husband and wife, even though they go together *to* confession, nevertheless they do not confess together, because the person who is confessing is not in company; he is as a single individual before God" (*UDVS*, 151). Furthermore, since judgment is not meted out *en masse*, but individually, a person cannot seek shelter behind others or even history, and therefore each must make an accounting for herself or himself (*SUD*, 123).

However, the point for Anti-Climacus is not to demonstrate sin's pervasiveness or argue its primordial architecture in order to puritanically condemn human nature and scold the modern individual for this or that moral infraction. Rather, Anti-Climacus aims to demonstrate how the radicality of sin is marked with the potential for edification. Sin, in Anti-Climacus's hands, acts as one of the few litmus tests Christianity presents to the individual for determining the constitution of one's faith. Sin is an indicator of faith. When consciousness of sin is awakened a number of questions confront the individual which s/he ponders inwardly at confession: (1) Is there an infinite qualitative gap between God and humanity? (2) Will I be offended by

or believe in sin? (3) Will I be offended by or believe in the forgiveness of sin? One can be offended by sin and despair over it, or one can believe in the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. How one answers these questions determines why one might continue on to the communion table and *how* one leaves the church building.

Answering the first question comprises the subtext of Anti-Climacus's entire work on despair. This question is also at the root of Kierkegaard's broader critical assessment of nineteenth century culture. Anti-Climacus believes philosophy and even theology have either abolished the distinction between God and humanity or flippantly discarded it as an insignificant question. But for Anti-Climacus the question is paramount. For him, the dialectical result of this collapse precipitates the dissolution of the category of the individual.[12] What Kierkegaard regards as a kind of dual catastrophe also gets blamed for the ever-encompassing phenomenon of modern social, psychological, and spiritual alienation. We are not at this point interested in Kierkegaard's critique of modernity as such, but we are attending to the problem speculative philosophy creates for the God-relationship and how in confession the individual learns that an ethical-religious existence requires existing in non-speculative categories. What is needed, according to Anti-Climacus, is categorical clarity with respect to knowledge and faith. Sin, we are told, does not belong to both categories.

Anti-Climacus refutes the claim that speculative philosophy can mediate or conceptually overcome sin, and thereby absorb sin into systematic knowledge. Life viewed philosophically – what Kierkegaard calls "the Greek mind" (*SUD*, 93) – operates by the rule of thought and comprehension: "The secret of modern philosophy

[12] In *The Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus writes, "The greater the conception of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater the conception of God" (*SUD*, 80). The inverse is also implicated: the disappearance of selves precipitates the disappearance of God, and the disappearance of God precipitates the disappearance of selves.

is essentially the same, for it is this: *cogito ergo sum* [I think therefore I am], to think is to be" (*SUD*, 93). Christian categories are qualified not by knowledge but by belief. Anti-Climacus repeats the biblical phrase, "according to your faith, be it unto you," which he interprets as, "as you believe, so you are, to believe is to be" (*SUD*, 93). The distinction is essential although easily misunderstood. Anti-Climacus is not recklessly suggesting that the religious person abandon knowledge or eschew scientific enquiry of the natural and social world (of which religion is a part), nor is he suggesting that religious belief is without a kind of knowledge or comprehension of its claims. Instead, he insists that viewed religiously certain concepts and categories present a different sort of questioning and invite a different sort of claim on individuals that cannot be formulated and contained within the objective realm of speculative or scientific knowledge. That is, religious life presents certain paradoxes that cannot be mediated conceptually, but must be grappled with by individuals.

Of course, everything *can* be mediated conceptually. Everything can be given as an object for thought and theoretically situated through rationalization. Far from disputing such a possibility Anti-Climacus simply insists that when this occurs the essentially religious effectively disappears. Sin cannot be thought speculatively and remain 'sin.'

The distinction between knowledge and faith in this case also corresponds to the distinction Kierkegaard often makes between objectivity and subjectivity. Knowledge belongs to objectivity, which requires personal detachment and intellectual abstraction if the knowledge achieved is to be universal. Knowledge of sin is therefore divested from any real existential relation to it, except to consider sin in general as an object for thought. When sin is thought speculatively Anti-Climacus says it is determined as negation and ultimately sin itself is *conceptually* negated

(*SUD*, 96-97, 119). Sin gets defined negatively as absence or lack of knowledge; it is recognizable as an amount of ignorance or naivety, weakness or sensuousness, etc., which could be overcome with sufficient knowledge and understanding. But Anti-Climacus insists that to regard sin in this way is actually to disregard sin altogether. What speculative thought does when it treats sin as negation is eliminate any boundary between "understanding" and "doing." Anti-Climacus accuses the philosophical approach of not having "the courage to declare that a person knowingly does wrong, knows what is right and does the wrong; so it manages by saying: If a person does what is wrong, he has not understood what is right" (*SUD*, 95). According to this logic, the more knowledge there is the less sin appears; sin indicates a deficit of knowledge and therefore knowledge has the power to abolish sin. God, or even consciousness of God, is noticeably absent from the dilemma of sin as it is conceived philosophically.

The philosophical position, Anti-Climacus argues, does not distinguish between "not *being able* to understand and not *willing* to understand" (*SUD*, 95). Alternatively, Christianity presents a more offensive view of sin and teaches that a person is unwilling to understand what is right, that "a person does what is wrong (essentially defiance) even though he understands what is right, or he refrains from doing what is right even though he understands it" (*SUD*, 95). Anti-Climacus denies any attempt to subtract sin from the lived reality of an existing individual, insisting that, "the individual human being lies beneath the concept" of sin (*SUD*, 119). Sin is therefore divorced from the category of knowledge. When knowledge is removed from the determination of sin and replaced with will, then sin shifts from being a negation to a position. Anti-Climacus writes, "Sin has its roots in willing, not in knowing, and this corruption of willing affects the individual's consciousness" (*SUD*, 95).

Although we have embarked on a significant detour through the complex treatment of sin offered by Anti-Climacus, we have not abandoned our own theological trajectory that follows the double movement of Christian inwardness and liturgical practice as continual and repetitive preparations for being in the world *Christianly*. Sin, as we have seen, in a sense is *for* faith. It holds this question of guilt dialectically in fear and trembling. We have seen how sin polemically is brought forward like a legal suit against humanity, how it opposes every Promethean affront to God. Now we turn to consider how sin, viewed dialectically in relation to faith and through the question of guilt, may edify faith and embolden the individual through hope.

2.4 Confession:

Confession presupposes guilt or sin (understood here as particular transgressions) but this is not, strictly speaking, what a Christian learns to confess, although guilt and sin are present in confession. To confess is not to recant or apologise; it is not, humanly speaking, a negation. To *confess* can also mean to testify to something, to proclaim, and to *profess*. In the 'Discourses at the Communion on Fridays' (1848) Kierkegaard affirms that the congregation is "gathered here today to *confess* him [Christ], or by being gathered here today and with the purpose of being gathered you do indeed *confess* [*bekjende*] him" (*CD*, 283 / *SKS* 10, 304, emphasis mine).[13] In confession individuals profess something of what it means to be human and something of who God is. This 'something,' Kierkegaard believes, partially needs to be learned through sin and guilt-consciousness. He explores this theme in the third section of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* titled 'The Gospel of Sufferings.' There he examines a

[13] In Danish '*bekende*' (*bekjende*) also retains the double meaning of 'confess' and 'profess'.

source of edification in what is commonly regarded as its antithesis – the spiritual suffering of guilt consciousness.

Kierkegaard treats various forms of spiritual trial as edifying, even a joy. Here attention is given to the discourse titled, 'The Joy of it That In Relation to God a Person Always Suffers as Guilty.' How can it be that always suffering as guilty is a joy? Kierkegaard acknowledges that the saying is not self-evidently true. In order to ascertain its truth it is necessary to investigate how it is *made true* in the world, "how it goes out into the world and is acted upon by others" (*UDVS*, 264). This means looking for those whose lives bear witness to the truth of the saying.

Kierkegaard regularly uses examples from erotic love to illustrate the God-relationship and this is also how he explains guilt. In legal matters the question of judgment is about guilt or innocence, being in the right or in the wrong. Legally speaking, we desire to be judged as innocent (*UDVS*, 266). However, Kierkegaard draws a different conclusion where erotic love is at issue. There, the "highest possible wish is to be in the wrong, yes, to be the guilty one" (*UDVS*, 266). Why is this? Because, Kierkegaard tells us, the worst unhappiness for love is that the beloved should appear unlovable. Consequently, the lover determines that to be in the right or the wrong is a trifle since if the lover is in the wrong the beloved will readily forgive. But if the beloved is in the wrong, if the beloved is guilty then all is lost for the lover because then doubt surfaces about the beloved being a 'worthy' object of love. Were the beloved to demonstrate guilt or error it calls into question the love and devotion shown by the lover, the questionable decision to love the evidently unlovable. Therefore the lover would rather be the guilty one "if only the beloved might be in the right" (*UDVS*, 266-267). This imaginary example raises a number of questions and its share of problems. However, the interest of the discourse is not the psychology of

erotic love but the psychology of the God-relationship as an analogy. But this does not make the questions any easier.

When asked to consider the nature of the God-relationship, as in the office of confession, Kierkegaard once again claims that we have another example of what it means to prefer being the guilty party. If, "when it all became dark for your soul, as if there were no love in heaven … when it seemed to you as if there were a choice you had to make, the dreadful choice between being in the wrong and gaining God or being in the right and losing God" (*UDVS*, 267), the discourse asks whether we would not choose the former. Like the lover in the previous example, we should rather be the guilty party than face losing God. But how could one lose God? To be innocent before God is to doubt God's love. At stake for the individual who has come to a consciousness of God and an awareness of sin is a decision about whether or not God is love. When we find ourselves in that analogy at the beginning of this section, on stage alone before God as the sole spectator, are we able to believe that God is love, or do we conclude that he is a cunning god or detached demiurge? As the object of divine gaze do we feel violated in our exposure or does this gaze clothe and protect? Do we conclude that the evidence of God's love is so thin as to be utterly absent that he cannot exist at all, and that the theatre must ultimately be empty? These questions force a *decision* for or against faith.

Kierkegaard says Christianity stakes everything on the claim that God is love. He writes,

> If the slightest thing happened that could demonstrate or could even merely appear to demonstrate that God was not love – well, then all would be lost, then God would be lost, for if God is not love, and if he is not love in everything, then God does not exist at all (*UDVS*, 267).

But surely, one might say, there isn't paper enough in the world to write up all the examples of horror, catastrophe, or indifference that makes up the cruelties of history,

and surely on the testimony of history alone it is quite evident that God is not love. What we learn from Kierkegaard is to be precisely dialectically in agreement with this accusation. Yes, every example stands, and still one can choose to trust that God *is* love. However, to say that God is love is not to say so *in spite of* the 'evidence,' as if to refuse the reality which is brought forth or to justify atrocity, but it is the claim that God's love abides and is both originary and final. Non-religious understanding might reasonably regard this as bewildering. In fact, it goes against the understanding. Or, to the understanding it seems that to hold that God is love denigrates the horrors of history, not taking them seriously enough and therefore risks repeating them. Kierkegaard responds,

> We are not, after all, required to be able to understand the rule of God's love, but we certainly are required to be able to believe and, believing, to understand that he is love. It is not dreadful that you are unable to understand God's decrees if he nevertheless is eternal love, but it is dreadful if you could not understand them because he is cunning (*UDVS*, 268).

The first part of this quotation insists that the matter is not to be settled by knowledge. Whether or not God is love is not a question that can be solved by working through any theory. It is a question that belongs properly to belief, presenting a choice (*either* God is love *or* not love) followed by an activating imperative (it is incumbent on the individual to demonstrate in life – not discursively, theoretically, or propositionally – that God is love). This is what the second portion of the quotation alludes to, the condition that hangs on the 'if': If God is love or if God is cunning. If God is cunning then we are like characters in an ancient tragedy, the playthings of fate and a fickle power. If the individual decides that this is too absurd and that there is no God at all then the universe remains indifferent and the human struggle is to infuse meaning and affect where there is *really* only cause and effect. For Kierkegaard, the prospect of a

cunning or indifferent universe is enough to compel us to live *as if* God is love. In a passage containing near mystical passion the discourse makes this appeal,

> Whereas many indefinitely put off the thought of whether God actually is love, it would truly be better if they made the love in them blaze just by the thought of the horror that God was not love, made the love blaze, because if God is love, then he is also love in everything, love in what you can understand and love in what you cannot understand, love in the dark riddle that lasts a day or in the riddle that lasts seventy years (*UDVS*, 268).

There is a hint of defiance or human tenacity expressed in this passage. It seems as though Kierkegaard encourages humanity in its attempt to demonstrate and produce love where God is unable. It seems as though the human love, which is to blaze forth, can be the criterion for what love is and should be. But that would mean humanity must work against God, or in spite of God, even on behalf of God, and that God is actually a liability to love. Rather than advocating this type of human Promethean retrieval of love, Kierkegaard calls this despair. It is not despairing to doubt oneself, but it is despairing to give up on God, to deny that God is love (*UDVS*, 101).

What grounds doubt is not the existence of suffering but the idea or presumption of innocence. Kierkegaard states that for doubt to take hold it must have innocence to appeal to, and not the legal innocence before others, but an ontological innocence before God. To be innocent before God dissolves the qualitative difference between God and humanity; it is to deny that sin has any foothold in human existence. Thus Kierkegaard draws our attention to the Passion and the acknowledgement made by the robber next to Christ. Only Christ is innocent before God. Only he, Kierkegaard reminds us, suffered "the superhuman suffering" of "justifiably mistrusting that God is indeed love" (*UDVS*, 270). The robber teaches us that suffering as guilty is "alleviation" in comparison with the suffering of one who is innocent before God (*UDVS*, 272). When it is a question of my guilt or innocence before God I bear no

resemblance to the one suffering in the middle (Christ), but I am in complete fraternity with the robber, who suffers as guilty.

Keeping in mind the title of the discourse our thoughts are stretched to consider the joy of being guilty before God. The joy, according to Kierkegaard, is hope. When a person professes and confesses his guilt then he "has God to hope in… then he has, if I may put it this way, rescued God" (*UDVS*, 273). In his "if I may put it this way" Kierkegaard acknowledges the potentially heretical nature of this claim. We have already cited from this discourse passages that suggest God needs human assistance in order to be *God*; that seems to fit nicely with Hegelian philosophy of history, how the movement of *Spirit* comes back to itself only after going out into the world in history.[14] But in fact what is being rescued is the acknowledgement of the qualitative difference between God and humanity.

As if to ward off the charge of heresy (or the accusation of adhering to a brand of Hegelianism) Kierkegaard immediately draws attention to another certain heresy: to want to make God the defendant, "to make him the one from whom something is required" (*UDVS*, 273). This is what doubting God's love really wants. However, faith edifies dialectically by placing a requirement on the individual. Faith's requirement is to believe that God is love in everything even if one does not understand "how God's rule over a person is love" (*UDVS*, 273). Of course this is a challenge and a struggle, but when doubt inevitably appears it is consciousness of guilt that comes to the aid of faith. Kierkegaard writes of guilt, "One would suppose it to be a hostile power, but no, it specifically wants to help faith, help the believer by teaching him not to doubt God but himself" (*UDVS*, 273). Later in *For Self-*

[14] A contemporary example of this Hegelian interpretation is found in Slavoj Zizek's various engagements with theology. See, Slavoj Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute: or, Why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?* (London: Verso, 2000), 107, and *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2003), 136-137.

Examination (1851) Kierkegaard defines earnestness partially as a "kind of honest distrust of oneself, to treat oneself as a suspicious character" (*FSE*, 44). Consciousness of guilt before God not only "rescues God" as love, but it is also that very guilt which rescues the individual as creature. Consciousness of sin and guilt functions inwardly as religious self-critique. It is religious psychology's ability to tarry with the negative.

From the consciousness of sin and an understanding of oneself as existentially guilty attention is continually redirected back to the individual, who can *freely* choose despair or choose hope. If a person is always guilty before God then there is always a question put to the individual regarding what must be done. There must always be something to *do*. When we acknowledge our guilt before God then we know that there are always tasks before us and always hope (*UDVS*, 275). One such task is confession and one such hope is forgiveness. Viewed this way, the task and the hope remain subjective and inward.

Conversely, to be innocent or in the right before God (that is, to presume to be innocent) is to have nothing to do, because when one is innocent then one's task is compete, nothing else (ethically speaking) is required. Not even God can ask more of the innocent. And where there is no task there is no hope, instead there is hopelessness, since to be without hope is to presume to be without need of hope (*UDVS*, 276-277). It marks the end of striving, either as resignation or as proud affirmation of the state of things as they exist. That there is a human task, which is carried out in co-operation with God, is edifying. To external observers the tasks are a kind of burden. Kierkegaard's discourses in 'The Gospel of Sufferings' attempt to communicate how faith can transform a burden, or "life weariness" (*JP* VI, 6969),

into something edifying. Guilt and suffering, in confession, truly become edifying in the hope that is directed toward forgiveness and communion.

2.4. From Consciousness of Sin to Consciousness of Forgiveness

In another discourse from the same volume Kierkegaard likens sin to a heavy burden, which Christ takes away and "gives the consciousness of forgiveness instead" (*UDVS*, 246). Forgiveness replaces sin in confession. Even here a dialectic is at work; it is the dialectic between recollecting and forgetting. The power of confession is in recollecting one's sin. What we have been speaking about is how consciousness of sin draws attention to the individual, to the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity, and to the ethical task that guilt reminds one of. The power of forgiveness, on the other hand, is in forgetting the sin. It is a task for the confessor to remember that sin is forgotten in forgiveness: "Every time you recollect the forgiveness, [sin] is forgotten; but when you forget the forgiveness … then the forgiveness is wasted" (*UDVS*, 247). Kierkegaard wants his reader to consider how s/he relates to forgiveness. Consciousness of forgiveness is meant to draw attention to God. Sin and forgiveness are two elements that crystallise the God-relationship and the distinction between God and creature. Anti-Climacus writes,

> As sinner, man is separated from God by the most chasmic qualitative abyss. In turn, of course, God is separated from man by the same chasmic qualitative abyss when he forgives sins. If by some kind of reverse adjustment the divine could be shifted over to the human, there is one way in which man could never in all eternity come to be like God: in forgiving sins (*SUD*, 122).

Remembering that sin is paradoxically both a state and a position, we notice that humans separate themselves from God in sin, but God separates himself qualitatively by forgiveness. The separation is qualitative only; as we shall see God and humans

are drawn together in Divine love, from which comes forgiveness, communion, and genuine *human* freedom.

According to Kierkegaard, the only thing more potentially offensive than the doctrine of sin is the doctrine of forgiveness. A person can be offended by the idea of forgiveness in a number of ways. A person can deny the need for forgiveness, which amounts to denying that one is guilty before God or in need of God. Another form of offence is to imagine that sin is so pervasive and abhorrent that it *cannot* and *should not* be forgiven. Finally, a person can take offence at Christianity's audacious claim that a particular person in history is capable of forgiving sin. The offence is the border between faith and non-faith. On one side of this boarder the infinite qualitative gap between God and humanity is maintained and respected, while on the other side that division dissolves.

It is the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity that is *partially* revealed through guilt-consciousness and confessed before God. 'Partially' is stressed here since we also come to believe in this difference through consciousness of God's love. What the religious person learns to confess in the house of the Lord is not his guilt or his sin – except that becoming aware of guilt, and acknowledging guilt, orients us in faith toward forgiveness and toward our human tasks – what one learns to confess, in faith, is hope in the forgiveness of sin and the belief that God is love. In this way, confession is profession or proclamation.

It is important to bring all of this back to previous comments about decision. At the outset of this section on confession the example was made, with the help of erotic love, that one chooses to be the guilty party in order to save the love and the beloved as loveable. Then the decision was whether or not to believe that God is indeed love in everything. And even amidst the uncertainty of such a conclusion one could decide

to live *as if* God is love. But faith is described in the discourses as the step that shifts the landscape around it from a place of uncertainty to a place of faith's certainty. Yet that step in faith involves an essential decision - it is the decision to choose eternity in the world – or, being in the world, to choose the eternal. In 'Purity of Heart' Kierkegaard speaks of faith's decision to *exist with* the eternal. It is Kierkegaard's description of the decision that warrants our attention and prepares one to consider another movement, spatially, as it occurs in liturgy, and psychologically as it occurs in subjectivity.

> The journey of which we speak is not long, nor is your lot cast, unless you have already found the way out. It is only one step, one decisive step, and you have indeed emigrated, because the eternal is much nearer to you than any foreign country is to the emigrant, and yet the change, once you are there, is infinitely greater. So go with God to God. Continually take that one step more, that one step, which even the person who cannot move a limb can take, the one step that even the confined prisoner, even the chained prisoner whose foot is not free, can take – and in the decision you are with the good. No one, not even the greatest person who has ever lived, can do more than you (*UDVS*, 103-104).

That one step, which means to 'be in the decision,' and what Kierkegaard calls going with God to God, can also be applied to the liturgical movement of approaching the altar to receive communion. From a liturgical point of view the discourses invite the reader/hearer into the space of the church where they help to make one aware of what the (quiet) space offers, where they help to prepare for confession, and where they invite the individual to the front of the church where the altar is, to partake of the communion meal. The movement of entering a sacred space, preparing oneself for confession, and then arriving at the communion table at the front of a church is the spiritual practice that corresponds to the spiritual discipline of inward deepening, whereby the religious individual who, reflecting on what it means to exist before God, cultivates a God-relationship in subjectivity. Although existing before God, guilt-consciousness, and forgiveness are described as subjective qualifications, the

discourses demonstrate how those religious qualifications participate in a commonly recognizable series of acts, places, and objects. The Kierkegaardian motifs of hiddenness and incommunicability, which lend themselves to charges of escapism or social detachment, is offset by attention to the corporeal activities in liturgy that are performed in company with others. The sacrament of communion, for Kierkegaard, reminds individuals of their religious commitment to *life*.

All of this emphasis on movement can easily become confused with its Hegelian counterpart. The liturgical itinerary we have constructed on Kierkegaard's behalf does not exhibit the logic of development that would parallel Hegel's phenomenology. Communion is not the *sublation* of guilt-consciousness and forgiveness in Kierkegaard's discourses. Instead, religious practice and religious discipline require continual steps, repetition, renewed decisions, and repeated commitments – as the above quotation claims when it encourages the reader to continually take that one step more. Indeed, the liturgical moments and movements that Kierkegaard discusses are organized; they are not randomly enacted, but instead they follow a particular order. Kierkegaard draws attention to this himself:

> You are gathered here today to renew your pledge of faithfulness, but what path are you taking to your decision? It is through confession. Is this a detour? Why do you not go directly to the Communion table? Oh, even if you were not prescribed by sacred tradition, would not you yourself feel the need to go along this path to the Communion table! (*CD*, 287)

Kierkegaard acknowledges an appropriate path through confession to communion. If a person, in inwardness, developed the God-relationship as a direct movement from existing before God to communion with God, then that is precisely how the anthropological construction of a man-god (*á la* Feuerbach) can take hold. Without confession the infinite qualitative difference between God and creature easily disappears – then the intimate proximity becomes actual identity. As stated, in

confession the individual proclaims that God is distinct from humanity as the one who is love in everything and the one who truly forgives. Not only is confession an essential step for the religious encounter with God, rather than a detour, but it is also presented as a movement, or a decision, that cancels itself when the individual chooses to confess in preparation for communion.

> The confession does not want to burden you with the guilt of faithlessness; on the contrary, it wants to help you, through confession, to lay aside the burden. The confession does not want to make you confess; on the contrary it wants to unburden you through a confession; in the confessional there is no one who accuses you if you do not accuse yourself (*CD*, 287).

By confessing the burden of confession and guilt is removed. Quite significantly, the situation is not presented in this case as an antagonistic battle between God and creature. Rather, the individual accuses himself - he brings a case against himself. More accurately, the accusation is the confession that there is a relationship between qualitatively different parties.

Amidst the language of movement Kierkegaard also wants his reader/hearer to be cognizant of an important pause. The discourses themselves function as this brief halt in movement. In one communion discourse Kierkegaard writes, "Our address only wants to have you pause for a moment on the way to the Communion table" (*CD*, 271). But here again, the pause is for confession. A communion discourse, which is not a sermon, "wants to have you pause on the way to the Communion table so that through the speaker's voice you yourself confess privately and secretly before God" (*CD*, 271). The address itself, if appropriated by the individual, is also a repetition for subjectivity; it is another confession and another prayer of preparation.

Rhetorically and formally Kierkegaard demonstrates that going from confession to communion is not a movement that can be described as a progression of dialectical necessity; it is not treated by Kierkegaard as an example of the progress of reason in

the world. The movements always require a choice from the individual in inwardness. No one, neither priest nor peer, is pushing another along or dragging one through a series of movements or a series of psychological commitments. A person, then, is never finished with confession; she never, in a sense, progresses beyond that 'moment'. Or, alternatively, confession comes along with the individual to the Communion table, and in this way the confession is never left behind as a past moment. The dialectic between the burden and the unburdening is carried forth, both 'actually' in the liturgical procession and 'poetically' in Kierkegaard's discourse literature.

Chapter 3

In Church, On the Occasion of Communion

In *Christian Discourses* (1848) the communion discourses are appropriately placed at the end of the book after multiple reflections on various religious categories. These communion discourses cannot be confused with a theological excursus or doctrinal exposition of the sacrament. Instead, they more appropriately belong to the genre of a homily, but with the significant caveat that they are not delivered with the authority of ordination. Nevertheless, these discourses are intended to be read, if not actually during a communion service then with a particular liturgical moment in mind. At the Friday communion service a short reflection is read to the congregation, either by a layperson or clergy, directly before the sacrament is taken. Kierkegaard's communion discourses belong to that context. Formally, each of these discourses begins with a prayer, which is followed by the assigned gospel reading for the day. The discourse is a short reflection on how a given verse prepares the hearer for communion. Within the context and the genre of these writings Kierkegaard's language exhibits a confessional tenor that is otherwise seldom on display. Kierkegaard is certainly speaking here from within what he calls the religious category. He is communicating to people who genuinely claim to exist according to religious commitments. The task of these addresses, as Kierkegaard sees it, is not to explain what it means to become religious, but to communicate in a way that aids religious life, once it is chosen.

Another detail cannot escape our attention. Kierkegaard's reflections on communion pertain specifically to Friday services. He imagines he is addressing

individuals who possess a certain depth of religious subjectivity, and who have made the decision to enter church on a day of regular business in order to partake in communion. Those who fill the pews on Sundays out of social obligation and expectation do not typically attend Friday services. Kierkegaard writes in a discourse (read by him at a Friday service in Copenhagen's *Vor Frue Kirke*),[1]

> So it was not your duty to come here today; it was a need within you. It was no external summons that determined you; you yourself must have inwardly made the decision; no one could reproach you if you had not come. It is your own free choice to come; you did not do it because the others were doing it, because the others, after all, on this very day went each to his fields, to his business, to his work – but you came to God's house, to the Lord's table (*CD*, 270).

From a doctrinal standpoint nothing is added nor subtracted from communion on a Friday, and neither more nor less is required of the individual who receives communion, regardless of what day in the week the sacrament is administered. Kierkegaard is not suggesting that there is a change in God or in the gift being given, but he does draw attention to that which distinguishes sacrament from other events: there must be a *need* and a *choice* to encounter the divine. Keeping dialectically consistent, Kierkegaard's discourses demonstrate how human choice corresponds with divine choice. The choice to receive communion on Friday and the choice to offer the gift signals a genuine desire for human-divine kinship.

Kierkegaard illustrates this corresponding choice through desire and longing, insisting that each individual is prompted to communion by a longing and an invitation. In one place Kierkegaard recites from Luke, "I have *longed* with all my heart to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (*CD*, 251).[2] In another place he recites from Matthew, "*Come here to me*, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (*CD*, 262).[3] Each phrase, attributed to Christ, offers the hearer an

[1] The discourse was delivered by Kierkegaard in *Vor Freu Kirke*, Copenhagen, 1847 (*CD*, 392).
[2] See, Luke 22:15.
[3] See, Matthew 11:28.

encounter with the divine that expresses a familiarity and a promise of transformation. The longing attributed to God is matched by a longing within every individual.[4] Yet, despite the decision and the longing for an encounter between the human and the divine, it is the nature of this encounter that is notoriously peculiar. We are told that what makes God's gifts unique is not that "it is God who gives them but because God gives himself in these gifts" (*CD*, 253).[5] This aspect of communion radically intensifies the qualification of existing before God.

In the first chapter of this section the reader/speaker of the discourse became an object before God; s/he became the object of God's gaze. Then, in confession before God, s/he becomes the recipient of forgiveness. If, in faith, a person determines that God is indeed love in everything and is not offended at the possibility of forgiveness, then the response to the gaze is changed. Then, Podmore explains, "the glance of God does not forbid the gaze of the sinner; instead the gaze of God actually encourages the human being to look to God in reciprocity."[6] Communion stages this reciprocity. Humans are invited to look to God and meet God there.

Now, at the communion table God chooses to become the object, and the participant becomes the recipient of God. As the individual chooses to move to the altar so too does God appear to 'move.' That God becomes the object of communion represents, in our analogy, how he moves from the audience to centre-stage. Here is

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[4] In a passage that speaks of a person's longing for communion Kierkegaard writes, "So also with longing. A person can ignore its call; he can change it into an impulse of the moment … he can resist it …But if you accept it with gratitude as a gift of God, it will indeed become a blessing to you … therefore never let the holy longing return empty-handed when it wants to visit you; even if it sometimes seems to you that by following it you would return empty-handed … So, then, longing awakened your soul. Even if it was inexplicable, inasmuch as it is indeed from God, who in it is drawing you" (*CD*, 254).

[5] Jean-Luc Marion's conversation between metaphysics and phenomenology makes much of the theological notion that God' ipseity is given being, or being-given, is "the being-given par excellence … the guiding thread of donation itself." His word, *L'étant-abandonné* carries the meaning of 'abandoned' and 'given' together. This resonates with the image of Christ as abandoned on the cross and the image of God giving himself to humanity, which carries over into communion. See, Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 588.

[6] Podmore, *Self Before God*, 159.

an apparent vulnerability that cannot be discounted: God places himself centre-stage, "on the straight line of choice" (*UDVS*, 206), which means that he can also be denied or ignored. In the discourses this movement, or this *kenosis*, applies a heightened intensity to the edifying dialectic that takes place in the individual. Rather than weakening God or diminishing God, *choice* and *freedom* comes to represent the essential characteristic of the human condition. It is a characteristic that Kierkegaard entreats his reader to accept as the highest blessing and the highest joy. If in confession the individual must come to a decision about who God is, and Communion confronts the individual with freely choosing to receive God as gift, then communion, as the liturgical culmination of spiritual inwardness, also requires the individual to make a decision regarding what it means to be a human being – to be a creature that is given the choice of a God-relationship.

3.1. The Gift of Choice

Let us consider the matter of our humanity as it pertains to this question of choice. Part Two of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* contains a series of three discourses with the section title: 'What we Learn from the Lilies of the Field and from the Birds of the Air.' In these discourses our humanity becomes the task that every individual can, with some difficulty, choose for herself and himself. We learn to be *contented* with being a human being (*UDVS*, 159), how *glorious* it is to be a human being (*UDVS*, 183), and the *happiness* that is promised being a human being (*UDVS*, 201). However, being contented or being happy in the spiritual existential sense that Kierkegaard is concerned with is determined by what we choose for ourselves.

Kierkegaard bases this entire section of discourses on the biblical passage found in Matthew, 6:24-34. In the third discourse he takes as his starting point, words

attributed to Christ, "no one can serve two masters," "you cannot serve God and mammon" (*UDVS*, 203). An either/or is established, with God on one side and "the world" on the other; there is only a choice between two, which biblically becomes a matter for either love or hate: "He must either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other" (*UDVS*, 205).[7] Kierkegaard's claim is that although this produces a "terrible struggle" within a person it is a "glorious treasure" to be granted the choice (*UDVS*, 205-206). The edifying is that the choice genuinely belongs to the individual; the terrifying is the infinite weight of the choice that is made. Kierkegaard explains,

> A choice, not between red and green, not between silver and gold – no, a choice between God and the world…Do you know any more overwhelming and humbling manifestation of God's complaisance and indulgence toward human beings than that in a sense he places himself on the straight line of choice with the world just in order that the human being can choose; that God, if language may be used this way, proposes [*frie*] to the human being (*UDVS*, 206).

Using the language of a proposal Kierkegaard ends this passage with another romantic image – it is as if God is courting the human being. However, this is not intended to flatter humanity, nor does Kierkegaard suggest that humans possess power over God. Instead the importance is placed on God presenting the choice and the individual who *must* bear the responsibility of choosing. The choice not to choose is, for Kierkegaard, identical with choosing the world. And to choose the world is to deny that God is love or to deny that "God" has any real bearing on existence. This scenario, this choice, provides no opportunity for evasion or deferral because it is, existentially and spiritually, an essential choice. Or, as the discourse reads, "it is God's presence in the choice that poses the choice between God and mammon" (*UDVS*, 207). It is a question put to individuals concerning what has authority in existence and where one's treasure is, where one's hope is.

[7] See, Matthew 6:24.

Kierkegaard applies some interesting logic to describe the relationship between the two options in the choice. He argues, if God is so lofty that he cannot be chosen then the choice itself is abolished. And if the choice is removed because God is removed from the choice "then mammon is not an option either" (*UDVS*, 207). In other words, for the existential choice to exist, to choose to become a self in relation to something chosen (*x* or *y*), to exist as a self before *x* or *y*, the self must make a determinate choice with respect to the nature of *x* **and** *y*. But the decision between *x* or *y* is not a decision between various items within the multiplicity of items (x, x_2, x_3, etc.); it is not, as Kierkegaard says, between red and green or silver and gold. The choice is between qualitatively different options: in philosophical language we might say it is a choice between transcendence and immanence, or, as Kierkegaard chooses, between God and mammon.

This has interesting implications for the existential struggle in atheism. Atheism does not make this choice, according to Kierkegaard's analysis. For the atheist there is no struggle between God and the world. For her the world is her horizon, with its hardships and its joys. The atheist, in Kierkegaard's scheme, does not *choose* the world since there is nothing 'over against' that which it can be chosen. Atheism is faced with a different but parallel qualitative choice: either nihilism or purposeful life. An anti-theist, however, also takes the choice between God and the world seriously.[8] She does acknowledge within herself the struggle to choose between God and the world, and she chooses the world. Choice is not abolished for the anti-theist because she takes the distinction seriously that gives rise to the choice. The anti-theist's

[8] An essay by Simon Podmore investigates the unlikely conceptual relationship between Kierkegaard and the French political thinker and anti-theist, Proudhon, which highlights the concept shared by both thinkers that 'God is man's adversary.' The essay analyses this notion, from Proudhon, that anti-theism is an existentially more tenable position than atheism, and stages a dialogue with Kierkegaard. See, Simon D. Podmore, 'Struggling with God: Kierkegaard/Proudhon' in *Acta Kierkegaardiana*, Vol. 2, Kierkegaard and Great Philosophers (Mexico City: Sociedad Iberoamericana de Estudios Kierkegaardianos, 2007), p. 90-103.

relationship to "God" is adversarial and she is passionately committed to the world. But even here it is God's presence in the choice that endows it with its radical severity (*UDVS*, 207).

From the religious view it must not be forgotten that God offers himself in the choice, and ultimately "God is present in the moment of choice, not in order to watch but in order to be chosen" (*UDVS*, 207). In this model God makes himself the object of our desire, or our neglect. However, Kierkegaard suggests that God's choice to 'lower himself' indicates his desire to be chosen. This, of course, is supposed to resonate with the religious individual who confesses an infinite qualitative gap between God and humanity. Becoming the object of choice, occupying centre stage, returns us to the Communion table.

3.2. Independence in Dependence

Before returning to the communion discourses there is another aspect of the choice to consider, and which impacts how Communion is received. What it means to choose God reveals something of what it is to be a human being, and what it is to be a human being, Kierkegaard insists, is learned from the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.[9] Choice has already been presented as essential, described as the "glorious perilousness" of the human condition (*UDVS*, 208). The decision, however difficult it is, only inaugurates the tasks of faith (though it does so each time the choice is made). This means that the choice to choose God requires that the individual seek God's 'kingdom' first rather than first seeking what occupies the cares of this world. In order

[9] Kierkegaard repeatedly draws his readers to biblical passages (Matthew 6: 24-34) that discuss the parable of the lilies and the birds. Kierkegaard's use of the lilies and the birds can be found in *UDVS*, *CD*, and the three devotional discourses published in *Without Authority*.

to convey what it means to seek God's kingdom first, Kierkegaard directs his reader to the lilies of the field and the birds of the air:

> Only when the human being, although he works and spins, is just like the lily, which does not work and spin, only when the human being, although he sows and reaps and gathers into barns, is just like the bird, which does not sow and reap and gather into barns – only then does he not serve mammon (*UDVS*, 208).

A common confusion regarding the lilies and the birds parable is the conclusion that human productive effort does not contribute to human well-being, that individuals and communities need not produce for themselves, but if they *only believe* then God will provide food, clothes, a home, and even sufficient 'disposable income.' Against this, Kierkegaard strives to demonstrate that the choice between God and mammon is not a choice between a religious otherworldly expectation and material productive living. It is not a choice between belief *or* material life. Belief does not produce what sowing and spinning produce, and productive labour does not produce what belief produces. The choice between God and mammon, between living as a 'pagan' or as the bird, is a choice between a belief that being is a gift or a belief in being as autonomy, self-production, and self-possession. If mammon is a signifier that refers to the logic and power of the things of this world (normally it is associated with money and wealth), then we can include autonomy and self-possession in its reference.

What is it about the lilies and the birds that they become indicative of choosing God? First, they do not choose – they cannot choose between God and mammon, as we do. Their lives quite simply belong to God: they are clothed, fed, housed, and even perish, by God. What human beings learn from the lilies and the birds is utter dependence. For Kierkegaard the bird, with its lightness, is a perfect symbol of dependence. The bird is not weighed down or pulled to the earth by its worries. Yet, the bird is also a common symbol of independence. There is the saying, 'free as a

bird.' The human also learns independence from the birds of the air. Kierkegaard writes, "To be dependent on one's treasure – that is dependence and hard and heavy slavery; to be dependent on God, completely dependent – that is independence" (*UDVS*, 181). Put into the context of human activity Kierkegaard formulates it like this:

> It is certainly praiseworthy and pleasing to God that a person sows and reaps and gathers into barns, that he works in order to obtain food; but if he wants to forget God and thinks he supports himself by his labors, then he has worry about making a living. If the wealthiest man who has ever lived forgets God and thinks he supports himself, he has worry about making a living…only that person is free who is contented with being a human being and thereby understands that the heavenly Father feeds him (*UDVS*, 177).

The message is, if we seek first the treasures of this world, or the stuff of our worries, we mortgage ourselves to them. If, being content to be a human being dependent on God, the human can trust in God then faith experiences dependence as independence and care. It is this possibility of being out on 70, 000 fathoms and remaining joyful (*SLW*, 477). In contrast to a natural dependence and freedom without choice (to not be conscious of the condition of dependence and freedom), the human creature who is naturally dependent and free can choose this dependence and freedom in the God-relationship. This produces the edifying dialectic in the joy and anxiety of being a human being:

> Yet the ability to have worry about making a living is a perfection and is simply suppression's expression for the loftiness of the human being, because just as high as God lifts up he also presses down just as low, but to be deeply pressed down therefore also means to be loftily lifted up. God lifted the human being high above the bird by means of the eternal in his consciousness; then in turn pressed him down, so to speak, below the bird by his acquaintance with care, the lowly, earthly care of which the bird is ignorant. Oh, how noble it seems for the bird not to have worry about making a living – and yet how much more glorious it is to be able to have it! (*UDVS*, 196)

Being content to be a human being involves taking joy in how one is dependent, in the necessities of one's existence and the fact that together humans must create a life in

this world. Human productive labour can (ought to) be a joy; human bodily life can (ought to) be a joy. Of course, human labour and bodily life can also be used as weapons against other humans, as instruments of exploitation and control. The joy and independence of dependence does not mean passive resignation of injustices toward oneself or others.[10] Instead, when some people become objects of exploitation and control then that is a sign others, the domineering ones, have chosen the self-serving and objectifying authority of *mammon*. These ones have collapsed the difference between God and creature, and thus declare themselves justified (innocent) and accountable to nothing beyond themselves (autonomous), their group, or their own decrees.

Instead of claiming autonomy and self-possession, the humans educated by the lilies of the field can say, "All that I am by being a human being – that is my clothing. I am responsible for none of it, but glorious it is" (*UDVS*, 191-192). Although Kierkegaard highlights a spiritual battle waging within the individual in the form of a choice between God and the world, he insists it is not a conflict between temporal material existence and some otherworldly spiritual existence. The only human struggles are within this temporal material world.

3.3. Communion, Life, and Love

Attention to this world returns us to the communion table where temporal life and eternal hope meet. Communion suggests that longing to be in fellowship with God, that going with God to God, involves a commitment to human existence. To illustrate this Kierkegaard asks his reader to consider the relationship between one still living

[10] This will be developed in Section III.

and one who is dead.[11] When someone close has died, Kierkegaard acknowledges that we may be filled with a longing to remember the deceased, and even visit the grave, but we know our "paths are essentially separated" (*CD*, 261). One belongs to the claims of life while the other belongs only to the grave. In this case, Kierkegaard says, longing for the deceased should not increase and occupy one's life – this would mean becoming a "co-tenant of the grave" (*CD*, 261). The religious practice of Communion, on the other hand, of longing for 'the Lord's supper,' exists on the basis that a person recollects one who is living, and therefore does not become a co-tenant of the grave. Here Kierkegaard's language is highly doctrinal, "You are really to live in and together with him [Christ]; he is to be and become your life, so that you do not live to yourself, no longer live yourself, but Christ lives in you" (*CD*, 261). The accent of religious commitment falls on life, albeit a life that is defined in Christological terms. It might seem that even this emphasis on life somehow evades, or neglects the kind of creaturely condition that life's claims have on us. In response to this a number of Kierkegaard's Communion discourses go out of their way to identify the divine-human solidarity established in Christ's humanity. Another volume of Communion discourses, published 1849, presents a triptych of three biblical figures: the High Priest, the Tax Collector, and the Woman Who Was a Sinner. In the reflection on the High Priest, Kierkegaard alerts his reader to God's ability, in Christ, to suffer the human condition. Christ is able to sympathise completely with the human being, having put himself in the human's place (*WA*, 116). For Kierkegaard, this is a reason to take the conditions of human life seriously, but in such a way that it bears on our relationship to the divine.

[11] This example is perhaps given ironically in order to push the comparison/difference between Christ and one who is dead.

When a person responds to the invitation to come to the Communion table and partakes in Communion, then movement and place are transformed into a question. What happens *there*, in that static space becomes internalized and transformed into something mobile. Immediately, the Communion table is the location of divine presence, and that is why the religious individual goes *there*. For Kierkegaard, there is no speaking 'about' Christ at Communion; "there he himself is present in person; there it is he who is speaking" (*CD*, 271). In addition to this dogmatic point Kierkegaard insists that it is Christ's voice we hear in place of the priest's when it is said, "This is my body" (*CD*, 271). However, what transpires is not some external magical phenomenon. The presence that Kierkegaard speaks of hangs on an '*if*.' The communion takes place *if* one believes that it is Christ's voice one is listening to when the priest speaks the mass. Inversely, if it is not Christ who is present for the individual, in faith, then that person is not at the Communion table (*CD*, 271). A person can be in church at the service, participate externally in the liturgy, but spiritually not be where they are. Therefore, "In a physical sense, one can point to the Communion table and say, 'There it is'; but, in the spiritual sense, it is actually *there* only if you hear *his* voice *there*" (*CD*, 271, emphasis in original).

The relationship between the external elements of Communion and the inward actuation of the rite is dialectical; inward spiritual deepening and external ritual give rise to each other. However, it is the inwardness that allows for sacramental versatility. In other words, it is possible for Communion to take place outside of the church building, away from the physical Communion table. This does not mean Kierkegaard is proposing that Mass can or should be performed in the city square or out in the park. His point is quite different. The person who receives Communion in faith does not remain at the Communion table, but returns to daily life. However,

when you leave the Communion table, "it is as if the Communion table followed you, for where he is, there is the Communion table – and when you follow him, he accompanies you" (*CD*, 273). The result of the liturgical process is that the liturgy carries on in the inwardness of an individual, and therefore it carries on outside of church. For this to be true Communion must also be a spiritual task for the individual. With this Kierkegaard sums up his analysis of Communion,

> The task is to remain at the Communion table when you leave the Communion table. Today everything else we said was only for the purpose of concentrating your attention on the Communion table. But when you leave here, remember that the event is not finished – oh no, it is just begun … the good work in you that God who began it will complete on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (*CD*, 274).

Thus, the liturgical practices of confession and communion extend into the individuals' broader social context.

Conclusion (Leaving the Sanctuary and Returning to the City)

From the phrase, which has been used above, 'go with God to God,' one can easily substitute Communion's benediction: Go with life (in)to life. Within the discourses of 1847 to 1849 Kierkegaard invites his reader to pause from the bustle and preoccupations of modern urban life, and go into the church where one can discover what it means to exist before God, and then, built up in inwardness, return to the life of society.

At work throughout this section is a theological formulation of the dialectic of difference as the basis of a human-divine encounter. The reader of the discourse is continually made aware of the intimacy of human kinship with God, and the reader is confronted with the infinite qualitative difference between humans and God. The internalizing of this dialectic in subjectivity is dramatized and actualized in the liturgical practices of prayer, confession, and communion. The upbuilding aspect of kinship and divine relation, and the oppositional aspect of the qualitative difference is

the spiritual groundwork that enables the individual to encounter society as one who is able to edify and be built up by others.

Introducing a Communion discourse published in 1850, Kierkegaard summarises the relationship of the liturgical process to the religious individual's absolute responsibility to the society of humans:

> Devout listener, at the Communion table the invitation is indeed given, "Come here, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." The single individual then responds to the invitation and goes to the Communion table. After that he turns back and leaves the Communion table. Then there are other words – they could be the inscription over the door of the church, on the inside, not to be read by those who are entering the church but only by those who are leaving the church – the words: One who is forgiven little loves little. The former words are the Holy Communion's invitation; the latter words are the Holy Communion's justification (*WA*, 169).

One cannot ignore in this passage the attention and detail with respect to particular locations within the church, with respect to particular moments and order of events, and how these spatial and tangible details directly relate to what is appropriated in inwardness. As the individual moves through invitation to justification she is conscious of a sacred relationship and from it the responsibility of a task.

The task, then, in order to give truth to the gift that is offered in Communion, is to go *out* of the church and *into* the city, and love much. To love, however, is not only a poetic endeavour – it is rigorous and dialectical. Now the dialectic of the edifying and the polemical find their outer expression in love for *the neighbour* and critique of *the public*. Love builds up, but it must also dig down and raze in order to build up. In the following section we consider how Kierkegaard positions this 'inner struggle' as an encounter with 'the world' in such a way that religious life remains committed to 'outer struggles' for social well-being.

Section III

The Edifying and the Polemical in the World

Encountering *the Public* and Encountering *the Neighbour*

> The truly Christian struggle always involves a double danger because there is a struggle in two places: first in the person's inner being, where he must struggle with himself, and then when he makes progress in this struggle, outside the person with the world (*WL*, 192).

Introduction

Having already explored some aspects of the edifying and the polemical in the psychological terrain of religious inwardness, we now (re)turn outward to consider the individual's religious encounters within the landscape of human society and culture – what Kierkegaard calls 'the world.' When we turn our attention outward to the social sphere a similar structure takes shape corresponding to the structure of the psychological polemic in the individual. Just as the individual who is conscious of existing before God is edified in strength and freedom to become a self in and through the process of confronting sin and dependence, so too do social relationships go through edification by another process of tearing apart, razing, and digging down in order to build up. Then the focus of the relation was subjective and it was *before God*, now the subjective relation is broadened to incorporate the full human temporal-social environment that includes others, maybe many others.

In *The Point of View* Kierkegaard insists his writing was intended to "shake off 'the crowd' in order to get hold of 'the individual,' religiously understood" (*PV*, 9). Kierkegaard claims that the ethical and religious task for people in the modern age involves of a movement "from the public to 'the single individual'" (*PV*, 10). The movement is also described as a movement *back* from the aesthetic sphere, where Kierkegaard believes the age resides, back from the speculative and systematic

approach to a religious approach (*PV*, 55, 78).[1] This formulation seems inherently anti-social but it is argued here that a defence of social life actually requires this movement in order that people remain *persons* in their social relationships.

One polemical encounter is the separation out of the crowd. In our analysis the individual comes into relief as an ethical and religious figure only to the extent that she is able to separate herself from the *crowd* in order to engage genuine social encounters with *persons*. This does not mean that the category of the individual represents a retreat into the self, cutting itself off from its history or its communities. And neither does the category of the individual assert an autonomous self whose existential task is unrestrained or unaccountable freedom. Instead, we will discover how 'the crowd' and 'the public' (and by implication for Kierkegaard, the *aesthetic* and *speculative* spheres) truly abstract from the concretions of actuality, from history, and from genuine social relationships. For Kierkegaard it is the abstract formation of mass identities through levelling that opposes sociality, not the category of the individual. As a result, another polemical encounter is the religious opposition to crowd-forming ideologies, which are essentially dehumanizing. But this opposition is also the edifying opportunity of religiousness.

Within the general topography of this study, which follows Kierkegaard's analysis of a removal from society in order to introduce the social through the category of the individual, this section examines the individual who steps out of the church and returns to the city or town, encountering '*a public*' and '*neighbours*.' A return to the space of the social after the turn inward is continually informed by the theology of confession and communion. However, in the midst of the city the dialectic now assumes a critical and communicative character. What one discovers in confession

[1] Adorno, in particular, draws attention to this backward movement, what he calls "the retrograde direction of his philosophy," as an example of what he sees as Kierkegaard's undeclared idealist conviction and disavowal of history. See, Adorno, *Kierkegaard*, 27.

and communion through upbuilding and opposition (the infinite qualitative gap between God and person, the intimate proximity between God and person, and the task of fostering genuine relationships between person and person) is externalized into a *critical* and *communicative* life. The religious person is not simply a critic and teacher; instead, she understands herself as one who is a learner and also in need of critique. Therefore this section contains an analysis of Kierkegaard's culture-critique, his religious corrective, and it considers a Kierkegaardian communicative praxis that maintains the edifying and polemical tension of religiousness.

Chapter 4

A Polemical Encounter with 'The Public': The Present Age and Kierkegaard's Critique of a Society without Persons

This chapter examines Kierkegaard's critique of the present age. The polemical encounter is expressed as a break from the levelling trend of the present age and a separation out of 'the crowd' or 'the public.' Here I present Kierkegaard's judgment that the present age is 'spiritless,' which means for him that it is in fact working against human social-spiritual emancipation and reconciliation. That is, for Kierkegaard the logic of levelling and the emergence of abstract identities such as 'a public' are alienating and demoralizing rather than equalizing or edifying. I argue in this chapter that whatever critical project we can uncover from Kierkegaard it cannot be divorced from the edifying task he locates in (Christian) religiousness, and that it is *religious life* which, for him, is truly polemical and world-changing, and not '*critique*' itself.[1] Here we are interested in an examination of the modern situation that Kierkegaard calls 'the present age,' against which religious individuals enter into a relationship of opposition. But the present age, as a modern age, is also the context in which individuals seek edification for the possibility of forming genuine social

[1] Although Kierkegaard's dialectical technique operates critically and the theoretical task he sets for himself involves a critical appraisal of his contemporary culture, it would be misleading to suggest that Kierkegaard's work is a deconstruction of culture and philosophy in the same critical style of Feuerbach, Marx, and much later, Derrida. Kierkegaard's project cannot be neatly identified with 'critique' in that sense. In recent decades, however, Kierkegaard has been read compatibly with Derrida, particularly with respect to Derrida's later writings on justice and ethics, but they are also often placed together as practitioners of a hermeneutics of suspicion. Mark Dooley and John D. Caputo both read Kierkegaard and Derrida compatibly, with respect to ethics and hermeneutics. See, Mark Dooley, *The Politics of Exodus: Søren Kierkegaard's Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), xiii, 18, and John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1987); For an analysis and overview of Derridean readings of Kierkegaard see, Steven Shakespeare, "Kierkegaard and Postmodernism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard* (Oxford: 2013), esp. pp. 469-477. On convergences and divergences between Kierkegaard and Marx see, Marsh, "Marx and Kierkegaard on Alienation," 165-174.

encounters among persons. Ambivalence toward the present age, expressed socially as opposition and opportunity, is the critical tension maintained by the edifying and the polemical aspects of religiousness.

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Kierkegaard's critical response to nineteenth-century European culture is woven throughout his entire literary output. No single text formulates the entirety of his diagnostic. Each of the pseudonymous books prior to 1847 pass judgement, in one literary manner or another, on the bourgeois rationality and domesticated religiosity that Kierkegaard associated with his Denmark.[2] That critique extends through all of his writing up to his death in 1855. Only two texts in Kierkegaard's authorship address 'the age' directly. In 1846 Kierkegaard presents an analysis of the contrasting character between an 'age of revolution' and the 'present age' in a review of Mlle. Thomasine Gyllembourg's novel *Two Ages*.[3] Kierkegaard's review, though prefaced by a note "that it exempts from reading those whose esthetic and critical discernment had been formed by reading newspapers" (*TA*, 5), is itself an aesthetic and critical piece in the style of journalistic review literature that would not be out of place today in the *London Review of Books*.[4] The other text is a compendium text of two short works, *For Self-Examination* and *Judge For Yourself!,*[5] which are given the subtitle 'recommended to the present age.' Their style and structure resembles the 'discourse'

[2] For an analysis of Kierkegaard's critique of bourgeois mores and the domesticity of religion see Crites, *Twilight of Christendom*, 4-15, 58-66.

[3] Kierkegaard's review was published in 1846 as a short book titled, *A Literary Review*. The Princeton edition cited here is titled *Two Ages* (*TA*).

[4] See also, Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*, 25-49.

[5] *For Self-Examination* was published in 1851 while *Judge for Yourself!* was published posthumously in 1876 as the 'second series' of *For Self-Examination,* despite both having been written at the same period. Kierkegaard's intention to publish the two series together in one text is documented in the journals and reprinted by Howard and Edna Hong in the supplementary material of *FSE*, 245-247.

genre of *Christian Discourses* and *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, only here the tenor is decidedly more polemical with respect to addressing the logic and ideology of the present age. These works can figuratively be regarded as a preface and conclusion to the period of Kierkegaard's authorship which I designate as his 'middle period' (1846-1852) between the 'aesthetic' authorship and the attack campaign. Our period is framed by a polemical appeal for broader social assessment, social engagement, and social imagination in the face of existing social dissolution and disintegration.

In *Two Ages* Kierkegaard presents a polemical critique of 'the present age' in comparison to an age of revolution.[6] This publication, following shortly after the *Postscript*, develops a description of society through the voice of the *critic*. As critic, his account avoids reliance on or commitment to specifically Christian qualifications and language. Concepts such as sin, the God-man, communion, salvation, etc. are mostly absent from this analysis. Where the religious is invoked in the critique it is religiousness in a broad sense. Where 'God' or 'the eternal' is named, their usage would baffle no philosopher or secular thinker, though one may dispute their function. Referring to *Two Ages*, Harvie Ferguson suggests Kierkegaard "addressed the experience of modernity on its own terms."[7] Kierkegaard does not offer his reader a proposal for a social arrangement that meets the theological requirements for the preparation of a *city of God*. The task is less positivistic, less ambitious. Instead, he simply wishes to contrast two distinct modes of social relationships available for the development of *the human city*.

[6] The revolutionary age to which Kierkegaard refers is the period immediately following the French Revolution of 1789. Although the *Literary Review* was composed prior to the political upheavals of 1848 Kierkegaard sensed that something significant was on the horizon, as did many of his contemporaries.

[7] Harvie Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1995), 67.

The Situation

In *For Self-Examination* Kierkegaard asks, "Where are we? What is the situation in Christendom? It is not difficult to say what the situation is; it is more difficult to change it" (*FSE*, 123). This situation, according to Kierkegaard, involves an enormous illusion that has taken hold of the age. There is general confusion about the categories in which one lives one's life, which also has a direct bearing on broader social identity and expression leading up to and following 1848. Jamie Turnbull identifies Kierkegaard's assessment of the age as "an attempt to become wholly objective, and a corresponding deficiency or lack of subjectivity and inwardness."[8] Thus the Kierkegaardian corrective is a strong defence of subjectivity. But this defence is not for him an opposition to social life.

Why, then, does the present age come under attack? Subjectivity, we know from Climacus and Anti-Climacus, is the category of spirit and spirit is a prerequisite of social life. Thus, Kierkegaard does join spiritual well-being with social well-being. As Turnbull states, what Kierkegaard objects to is a social model shifting from 'individual-society-divinity' to 'individual-society' or 'humanity-society.'[9] In the first model an individual relates to divinity through various social formations – kinship, friendship, cultural institutions, and religious institutions – but it is always the individual who can and must stand in relation to a divinity that is distinct from society. In the other two models divinity either disappears altogether or is absorbed into the concept of society. Now, the individual's highest relation is to society. In Kierkegaard's view this is evidence of a spiritual crisis. Religiously the consequence, Turnbull claims, is that the meaning of Christianity becomes "wholly public and

[8] Jamie Turnbull, "Kierkegaard's Religious, and Our Methodological, Crisis," in *Acta Kierkegaardiana, vol. 4: Kierkegaard and the Nineteenth Century Religious Crisis in Europe*, edited by roman Králik and Abrahim H. Khan, et al (Toronto: Kierkegaard Circle, Trinity College, 2009), 156.

[9] Turnbull, "Methodological Crisis," 160.

universal" – and therefore objective.[10] Subjectivity is introduced not to overcome secularization (the present age) and society *per se*, but to overcome what Kierkegaard sees as the secularization of Christianity itself and the objectification of persons into *a public*. Now I shall turn to Kierkegaard's critique of the mechanisms of social objectification and spiritlessness before presenting his edifying corrective.

4.1. Levelling

The world-historical aspect of levelling:

The present age is characterized by the principle of levelling. It is what Kierkegaard refers to as a negatively unifying force of the age (*TA*, 84). But he is actually more dialectical regarding his conclusions about levelling than some commentators acknowledge. In Kierkegaard's analysis levelling is a component of the present age that also affords the possibility of an edifying education in subjectivity and sociality despite its otherwise vitiating tendency. For now we will focus on Kierkegaard's critical stance toward the levelling of the present age.

Politically, levelling is associated with the historical process of equalizing social relations. Kierkegaard acknowledges that "the dialectic of the present age is oriented to equality" (*TA*, 84), and that the modern levelling tendency is expressed by 'numerous upheavals' and social transformations (*TA*, 90). Here he is referring to the significant shifts away from monarchical and feudal modes of social organization toward 'democratic' and 'liberalized' models of society in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. The 'age of revolution' and the 'present age' (which make up the 'two ages' of Kierkegaard's *Literary Review*) refer to a period in European history of real ideological and existential reorientation. Kierkegaard understood that his

[10] Turnbull, "Methodological Crisis," 161; Westphal, *Reason and Society*, 34-38.

Denmark was living out the twilight years of an absolute monarchy that had ruled from 1660 and that liberalization was the presiding motif of the times. Despite a general complacency with the government the Danish monarchy still felt obliged to concede to the liberalising trend. Finally, in the years of 1848 and 1849 with the threat of revolution looming, the king established an elected assembly that would form a new constitution leading to the existing bicameral constitutional monarchy of Denmark.[11]

Danes and Europeans cited such momentous transformations, along with the advancing momentum of the modern levelling tendency, as the inspiration that would engender further social revolutions. And yet Kierkegaard claims that none of these transformations was levelling "because none was sufficiently abstract but had a concretion of actuality" (*TA*, 90). Thus, Kierkegaard distinguishes the historical tendency toward equality between distinct parties (what he calls 'approximate levelling') from the levelling of the present age. The approximate levelling struggled after by particular professions, classes, or specific groups of people, "remains within the concretions of individuality," and therefore they do not submit to a total levelling tendency (*TA*, 90). It is not the power brokerage between particular concrete parties in history that draws Kierkegaard's foremost attention. Instead, Kierkegaard's criticism is directed at the ability of levelling to totalise social relationships and dissolve ethical-religious consciousness into generic forms of life.

Levelling as abstraction and a movement away from the Individual:

Kierkegaard fixes his attention on a different aspect of levelling than what has apparently been achieved by the concretions of individuality in the historical

[11] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 66-67. See also, *Section I* of this thesis.

orientation toward equality. As suspicious as Kierkegaard is of the actual incremental attainments toward this end his polemic is not directed first at the emerging forms of social organization or its structural engineering. Instead, Kierkegaard aims at a deeper conceptual source – an analysis of the mode of relations between persons when those relations are characterized by the principle of levelling. A scalar relationship is at work between levelling and personality whereby an increase in the scope of levelling corresponds directly to a decrease in the depth and authenticity of personality from the members of that society.[12]

While the approximate levelling maintains the essential aspect of optimal relationships, (total) levelling cancels relationship altogether. The key to this distinction is found in the concept presented here as 'concretions of individuality.' This is what guarantees for Kierkegaard the possibility of healthy social interaction. In his description of a passionate age (the 'age of revolution') Kierkegaard presents us with his basic (positive) theory of sociality:

> When individuals (each one individually) are essentially and passionately related to an idea and together are essentially related to the same idea, the relation is optimal and normative. Individually the relation separates them (each one has himself for himself), and ideally it unites them. Where there is essential inwardness, there is decent modesty between [person] and [person] that prevents crude aggressiveness … Thus the individuals never come too close to each other in the herd sense, simply because they are united on the basis of an ideal distance (*TA*, 62-63).

Approximate levelling maintains the individual's essential relation to an idea and forms association on the basis of an ideal separation between people, which demands that each person holds to the 'shared' ideal on one's own. This relation has a dialectical form: a particular ideal, or a cohesive set of ideals, attracts individuals and gives shape or form to a particular community or individuality (i.e. its concretion) that

[12] Anti-Climacus writes, "The more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he also has" (*SUD*, 29). By contrast levelling is said to produce the antithesis of will and personality – it produces "indolent laxity" and "sluggishness" (*TA*, 94).

is united around the idea. Alternatively, the formation can occur in another way: a group of individuals can articulate an ideal and they are joined in their constructive capacity to produce an orienting idea. In either case the individual must establish a decisive relation to the idea that unites one with others. Ideally, both modes of relation and formation are taking place in healthy sociality.

However, Kierkegaard sees another form of levelling winning popular imagination in the present age, a levelling that is not approximate but total, which is motivated by envy but presented as equality.[13] Levelling in the present age seeks a relation *en masse*. It represents the "ascendancy of the category 'generation' over the category 'individuality'" (*TA*, 84). Levelling is defined by Kierkegaard as the process of abstraction in the relation between persons. We are told that the "abstraction of leveling is related to a higher negativity: pure humanity" (*TA*, 87). This is a negative process since the abstraction of levelling is only possible when "the separateness of individual inwardness" is "omitted" from the relation (*TA*, 87). Levelling is "a principle that forms no personal, intimate relation to any particular individual, but only the relation of abstraction, which is the same for all" (*TA*, 88). Objectively, it is the process of removing distinction and particularity from a relation by identifying or creating a uniformed whole. Subjectively, levelling is the process of removing one's self from the relation in order to make way for the whole. At first sight, this appears to be a charitable and selfless gesture for the sake of broader social well-being and social cohesion. And although it appears that subsuming the individual into a broader and

[13] Robert Perkins notes how Kierkegaard depicts envy as a kind of selfishness that wants to "form the present and the future in its own image"; see Robert L. Perkins, "Envy as Personal Phenomenon and as Politics," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 123. Envy is antithetical to love, which wants to build up the 'other's own.' Thus, equality is constructive whereas levelling is vitiating. We shall consider this constructive element in *Section III*.

more expansive relation serves the betterment of society, Kierkegaard wagers that levelling actually threatens to accelerate its demise.

In *The Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus reminds his reader that the individual, the self that every human being is intended to become, is angular, "but that only means that it is to be ground into shape, not that it is to be ground down smooth" (*SUD*, 33). A smoothed-down human being is the subject of levelling who has lost the angularity and depth of oneself (or has willingly forfeited this depth) by "being completely finitized, by becoming a number instead of a self, just one more man, just one more repetition of this everlasting *Einerlei* [one and the same]" (*SUD*, 33). A society of such finitized creatures is a one-dimensional society since it is formed on the basis of clearing away subjective contours until an abstract common category appears -'pure humanity,' 'society, or 'a public.'[14] Once the age has succeeded at identifying and determining humans through the abstract category of the species, or 'pure humanity', then we no longer recognize ourselves as individual persons, and instead we become specimens that constitute a fraction (*PV*, 107).

4.2. 'The Crowd' and 'The Public'

Passion for an ideal, which is an essential characteristic of a revolutionary age and the 'approximate levelling' that sought to improve the lives of many, is overcome

[14] Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) developed the concept of one-dimensionality, yet its application is distinctly Kierkegaardian. In Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1964]), Kierkegaard's analysis of levelling is repeated and reformulated for a twentieth century diagnosis of European-American 'mass society.' Subjectivity is renamed "introspection," which, Marcuse writes, "implies the existence of an inner dimension distinguished from and even antagonistic to the external exigencies – an individual consciousness and an individual unconscious *apart* from public opinion and behavior. The idea of 'inner freedom' here has its reality: it designates the private space in which man may become and remain 'himself'" (12). But Marcuse warns that "this private space has been invaded and whittled down," that "mass production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual" and as a result there is "an immediate identification of the individual with his society, and through it, with society as a whole" (12). Identification with the whole society without an "inner dimension" (13) constitutes one-dimensionality for Marcuse and levelling for Kierkegaard.

(ethically and spiritually) by the totalizing character of levelling in the present age. Levelling in the present age takes the form of a political category that Kierkegaard identifies as 'a public', and which claims to represent the cohesive identity of a whole society. What arouses Kierkegaard's concern is not the size of modern society, not its massiveness, but that its principle of abstract relation makes an ethical claim to power and authority.

Although Kierkegaard describes the public as a monstrous nonentity, he does recognize that the concept of a modern public brings *something new* to history which does produce a real effect in human social life. The public presents new perceptions about 'authority' and 'governance' and 'veracity.' However, Kierkegaard believes the unintended consequence of a 'public' and the press, far from establishing political equality, is social-spiritual alienation (*TA*, 92).

Phantom Agents of One-Dimensional Society

a. The Public as Subject

A public in the modern sense that Kierkegaard speaks of is different from the *polis* in the ancient sense. Kierkegaard explains,

> The public is a concept that simply could not have appeared in antiquity, because the people were obliged to come forward *en mass in corpore* [as a whole] in the situation of action, were obliged to bear the responsibility for what was done by individuals in their midst, while in turn the individual was obliged to be present in person as the one specifically involved (*TA*, 91).

The ancient concept of a *polis* belongs to a situation in which everyone could be gathered together in one place, and where face-to-face accountings could be heard and deliberated. Gathering as a whole, which may have been possible in antiquity, is absolutely not possible for a modern urban public, nor is that its desire.[15] A modern

[15] In *The Secular City* (London: Pelican, 1968 [1965]) Harvey Cox reflects on the demands of urban life and speaks of a "need to develop a viable theology of anonymity" (61). But Cox is not

public is a completely dispersed phenomenon which comes together only in the abstract formulations of statistical tables, or in the pronouncements of media outlets and political speeches.

Integral to the ancient model, in Kierkegaard's estimation, is the principle that individuals of a *polis* step forward and present their own defence, their own opposition, their own position, and therefore, *their own self* before others. This situation involves what Kierkegaard calls "contemporaneity with actual persons, each of whom is someone," whereas a public "creates no situation and no community" since it is "made up of unsubstantial individuals who … never can be united in the simultaneity of any situation" (*TA*, 91,92). Contemporaneity and a personal approach to social interaction is mediated by that ideal distance referred to above, that subjectively passionate relation to an ideal, regardless if the ideals are the same or different.

Not only is a public incapable of creating community but it also represents for Kierkegaard the antithesis of community, due to how a public positions people in relation to each other. Thus the opposite of community is not individuality but "a public." The category of the individual is in fact an essential qualifying component of community, which is not found in a public. In a journal entry from 1850 Kierkegaard contrasts the two social formations:

> In the "public"… the single individual is nothing; there is no individual; the numerical is the constituting form and the law for the coming into existence [*Tilblivelse*] of a *generatio aequivoca*; detached from the "public" the single individual is nothing, and in the public he is, more basically understood, really nothing at all.
>
> In community [*Menighed*] the single individual [*den Enkelte*] *is*; the single individual is dialectically decisive as the presupposition for forming community, and in community the single individual is qualitatively something essential and can at any moment become higher than "community"… The

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contradicting Kierkegaard. He is considering how to be attentive to the personal space of individuals in an environment that makes it nearly impossible to avoid interaction.

> cohesiveness of community comes from each one's being a single individual, and then the idea; … "Community" is certainly more than a sum, but yet it is truly a sum of ones; the public is nonsense – a sum of negative ones, of ones who are not ones, who become ones through the sum instead of the sum becoming a sum of ones (*JP* III, 2952 [1850]).

For community to form individuals must also be formed, since they are community's dialectical elements. But where a public forms individuals must vanish.

What are the consequences that Kierkegaard sees in the development of a public as the dominant form of social relation? Kierkegaard predicts a rather nihilistic social outcome should individuality be omitted from the formation of sociality. He posits a hierarchy of disintegration if this process proceeds. The first level affects the relation to an idea - if people "relate to an idea merely *en masse* (consequently without the individual separation of inwardness), we get violence, anarchy, riotousness" (*TA*, 63). Relating to an idea *en masse* is the first step beyond approximate levelling and it is the formation of an abstract category that absorbs every identity (a crowd, or mob, or what Kierkegaard regards as 'a public'). Kierkegaard calls this "the tumultuous self-relating of the mass to an idea" (*TA*, 63). But there is a further danger that once the relation of the individual to the idea is removed, it is possible that *the idea* gets removed as well since there is no longer some*one* doing the relating to ensure that there is something to relate to. "Then people shove and press and rub against each other in pointless externality" (*TA*, 63). Life would resemble the blind activity of particles circling and bumping into each other in space, completely cut off from one another except when they collide. In that case there is no *relating* at all, only collisions.

When the personal path to an ideal is cut off or interrupted Kierkegaard maintains that people still cling together, but it is a coming together in a "frustrating and suspicious, aggressive, leveling reciprocity" (*TA*, 63). Whatever mediates the

interactions among people is entirely external to them, without the passion and appropriation required for a personal relation, and possibly without consciousness as well.

With respect to identity, a public's adherents claim it is an active whole that constitutes a kind of *subject*. It is a product of the modern conviction that "so and so many human beings uniformly make one individual" (*TA*, 85). Although a public is regarded by its advocates as a powerful new social body, as society's whole *self*, Kierkegaard claims that a public is in fact "a monstrous nonentity" (*TA*, 91). If it can be formalized as a whole [*in corpore*], Kierkegaard's 'public' is analogous to the uniform behaviour of a military *corps* (*TA*, 91).[16] In distinction from the individual of antiquity's *polis* "this corps can never be called up for inspection; indeed, it cannot even have so much as a single representative, because it is itself an abstraction" (*TA*, 91). Here a number of modern confusions take hold: that the public, representing the whole of society, is concrete, rational, endowed with will, capable of making decisions, capable of determining the *good* and the *true*, endows itself with authority and therefore is permitted to either eradicate or silence any opposing claim to authority. Kierkegaard fears that these philosophical and political confusions lead to ethical confusions.

In place of the image of a public as a rational and decisive 'subject' Kierkegaard substitutes a rabid irrational monster. A public and a crowd are floridly described as "a hundred-thousand-legged monster, [...] an irrational enormity, or an enormous irrationality, that nevertheless has physical force, the force of the shout and uproar" (*WA*, 229). Although they are appealing metaphors the subjective attributes assigned to a public are indeed confusions. Instead, the power of a crowd "cannot be defined

[16] Kierkegaard uses the English word 'Corps', linking it directly to the Latin word *corpore* (*SKS* 8, 87).

humanly but can be more accurately defined as the power of a machine," or as "horsepower" (*WA*, 229). Monster and machine, these are more appropriate metaphors to describe "a public." What is worse is that this monster takes on the "character of a concretion" (*TA*, 90), in the form of modern mass media (the daily press).

b. The Press, Anonymity, and Publicity ~ Communication of the Crowd

For Kierkegaard, the public and the press are co-emergent; they arrive on the historical scene together because they, in a sense, create each other. Kierkegaard writes, "only when there is no strong communal life …will the press create this abstraction 'the public,'" and "together with the passionless and reflectiveness of the age, the abstraction 'the press' (for a newspaper, a periodical, is not a political concretion and is an individual only in the abstract sense) gives rise to the abstraction's phantom, 'the public,' which is the real leveler" (*TA*, 91, 93). This passage reveals the dialectical relationship between the press, the public, and levelling: each are mutually strengthened or intensified through the other. A public represents the WHAT of the modern levelling identity and the press represents the HOW; the press is the communicating and unifying aspect of 'a public.'

What passes for public communication in a levelled one-dimensional society is anonymous chatter and publicity. Chatter refers to two distinct kinds of communication: 1. It involves a surfaced and indiscriminate appetite for "anything and everything," which includes incessant scrutiny of the banal, nullifying any distinction between the public and private in gossip and voyeurism (*TA*, 97, 100).[17] 2. Chatter impedes action and decisiveness, creating "a weakening effect on action by

[17] The power of the image was understood well before photography and film. The cartoon images of Kierkegaard in *The Corsair* had far more impact on his social status than the content of any review or critique of his work. See, *COR*, 109-137.

getting ahead of it," by simply speaking more and more, dissolving action into more and more spoken (or printed) deliberation (*TA*, 97).

Publicity refers to the extensity of circulation and communication. Kierkegaard holds these elements of mass communication partly responsible for the demoralization of the present age. He writes,

> The daily press, especially in minor affairs, is evil simply and solely through its power of circulation; in minor affairs it is a disproportionate means of communication and thus a kind of insanity which tends to make society into a madhouse … No, in and by itself circulation is the evil (*JP* II, 2173 [1854]).

Kierkegaard recognizes the power of circulation to foster hysteria, perhaps unintentionally, in a public. The hysteria or 'insanity' comes from excessively inflating the significance of the immediate and the apparent. "The daily press consists in its being calculated to make…the moment a thousand or ten thousand times more inflated and important than it already is" (*JP* II, 2157 [1848]). Kierkegaard identifies a paralysing tension: chatter indicates that nothing is of essential importance but defers decision and essentiality by constantly moving attention on to the next event or idea, whereas publicity and circulation hystericise every event and every moment into disproportionate importance. The emotions of those who make up 'the public' are therefore jockeyed back and forth between two poles of aloof distance and inflated significance.

A modern public arrives at a time when the urban *polis* is transforming into a *metropolis*. Technologization and rationalization of culture contribute to increasing industrial and social production. Indeed, growth, accumulation, acceleration, and extensity are defining signifiers for modernity. But for Kierkegaard the present age "gains in extensity what it loses in intensity" (*TA*, 97). Intensity is aligned with subjectivity, personality, inwardness, and depth, whereas extensity is associated with the totalizing and one-dimensional quality of levelling. Communication adopted for a

public age is oriented toward extensity. Kierkegaard does recognise the value and possibility available to modernity, insisting that extensity "may become the condition for a higher form [of social existence] if a corresponding intensity takes over what is extensively at its disposal" (*TA*, 97). Unfortunately, rather than witnessing how the extensity of knowledge, wealth, and creativity may serve to edify people, Kierkegaard concludes that the extensity of information, chatter, and publicity merely creates a culture of modern *noise*. In 1851 Kierkegaard repeats his analysis of public discourse in a passage that serves as a prophetic indictment of twenty-first century communications and media industries:[18]

> Everything is noisy; and just as strong drink is said to stir the blood, so everything in our day, even the most insignificant project, even the most empty communication, is designed merely to jolt the senses or to stir up the masses, the crowd, the public, noise! And man, this clever fellow, seems to have become sleepless in order to invent ever new instruments to increase noise, to spread noise and insignificance with the greatest possible haste and on the greatest possible scale… communication is indeed soon brought to its lowest point with regard to meaning, and simultaneously the means of communication are indeed brought to their highest with regard to speedy and overall circulation (*FSE*, 47-48).

In addition to the hysteria and manipulation induced by meaningless discourse Kierkegaard observes the psychotic human compulsion toward self-annihilation – ingeniously developing extensity at the expense of human intensity.

The self-destructive component of modern 'public' communication is its anonymity, which transforms people into consumers/observers of society, into "anonymous" participants. Kierkegaard understands anonymity as a secret desire of human beings to hide from themselves and others:

> It occurs to me that mankind would be mighty happy if it managed to find a way for everyone to be a virtuoso in ventriloquism - how satisfied we would be with anonymity! … Yes, school boys find great sport in being able to say something without the teacher's being able to discover who said it. Boyishness is related to

[18] Hubert Dreyfus considers this question in *On the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2009 [2001]). One chapter in particular focuses on Kierkegaard's analysis of the press and the present age in relation to our contemporary theoretical and social understanding of the Internet, especially pp, 73-89.

> the impersonal, and it is impersonality which pleases man – that is, personally being impersonal, being a person but without any danger or responsibility, being an ill-tempered, malicious person perhaps, venting all one's spite – but anonymously or by ventriloquism (*JP* III, 3224 [1854]).

A public, or the press, functions as the 'dummy' in the present age, the one to whom a voice is attributed. Anonymity associated with journalism is a reflection of the popular mode of communication and participation in a society that does not value the responsibility of inwardness and subjectivity. When Kierkegaard explains that people "write anonymously over their signature, yes, even speak anonymously" (*TA*, 103), he is claiming that anonymity is possible even when one *appears* to reveal oneself. From this conclusion Kierkegaard sketches a rather apocalyptic picture: "Eventually human speech will become just like the public: pure abstraction – there will no longer be someone who speaks, but an objective reflection will gradually deposit a kind of atmosphere, an abstract noise that will render human speech superfluous, just as machines make workers superfluous" (*TA*, 104). Therefore, as society becomes more abstract and totalizing social *discourse* becomes more alienating, garrulous, and manipulating.

Ethical concerns are never far from Kierkegaard's critical attention. His personal experience as the target of ridicule in the daily press crystalises his ethical criticism of journalism and what he calls the 'rabble-barbarism' of the crowd (*PV*, 64, 112). When anonymity and publicity are combined with the levelling spirit of the age the public and the crowd are born. A crowd is "formed by the participant's becoming a third party" (*TA*, 94). Becoming a 'third party' in relation to one's own actions and interactions with others is socially dangerous. Its danger is the security a public provides in anonymity, behind which there is no accountability and against which no *one* dares oppose.

4.3 The Conformity, Cruelty, and Tyranny of 'the public'

Kierkegaard's critique of the public is also a critique of political power and social manipulation in the years surrounding Denmark's transformation to a constitutional monarchy. If authority belonged to the sovereign monarch of the *Ancien Régime*, then authority appears to belong with the public in the newly emerging democratic States. Despite widely celebrated historical shifts in Europe toward new formations of society based on the principles of democratized government and liberalized economies, Kierkegaard's judgment is that the present age has politically undergone only cosmetic alterations.[19] Political dominance of the public is evidence of an illusion that freedom, equality, and fraternity are even remotely historically achieved or genuinely struggled after. But in Kierkegaard's time the crowd, or the public, is presented confidently as an authoritative and liberating agent.

> Most people believe that taking a stand against the crowd is utter nonsense, for the crowd, the majority, the public are, after all, the saving powers, those freedom-loving societies from which salvation shall issue – against kings and popes and public officials who want to tyrannize over us … This, you see, is the result of centuries of fighting against popes and kings and the powers that be and, on the other hand, regarding the people and the crowd as holy. They do not dream that historical categories change and that now the crowd is and will be the only tyrant and the root of corruption –but to the crowd, of course, this is the most incomprehensible of all. – The crowd is sick for power and considers itself forfeited against all reprisals, for how is it possible to get hold of the crowd (*JP* IV, 4118 [1847]).

Kierkegaard acknowledges the history that seeks to overcome the feudal and imperial power structures that his age calls tyrannical. There is no reason to imagine that Kierkegaard favours these outmoded tyrannical models of social and spiritual organization over a truly liberated modern model. But the age has not abolished

[19] Kierkegaard's assessment is even at odds with the various factions of Denmark's Christian leadership who for different reasons enthusiastically welcome the new state formation. See Backhouse, *Christian Nationalism*, chapters 2 and 3, specifically pp. 39-48, 78-90. Backhouse provides an analysis of two prominent Christian leaders in Denmark, H. L. Martensen (who Kierkegaard identifies with establishment and Enlightenment Christianity) and N. F. S. Grundtvig (who Kierkegaard identifies with populist-nationalist Christianity).

tyranny; it has only replaced the tyranny of a monarch with the possibility for the tyranny of a public.

With the emergence of the modern 'public' the individual learns that there is something greater to fear than death; one fears "reflection's judgment upon him, reflection's objection to his wanting to venture something as an individual" (*TA*, 85). Wanting to avoid public judgment and humiliation an individual finds it "too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man" (*SUD*, 34). Reticence over ethical-existential decision is imposed psychologically in the threat of being opposed by the prudent established opinion and authority of the mass.

Additionally, conformity has its reward. What Kierkegaard refers to as worldly sensible, and what Anti-Climacus frequently calls 'bourgeois-philistine mentality,' consists, in part, of the ability to avoid resistance and agitation in life's endeavours; it is the attempt to maximise material comfort and advantage for oneself (and one's associates) through minimal physical effort, minimal emotional commitment, and minimal social and economic cost. Thus, refraining from the task of becoming a self (in inwardness) is viewed as socially (and economically) prudent in the present age; the one who *loses herself* in this way "has gained an increasing capacity for going along superbly in business and social life, indeed, for making a great success in the world … [That person] is as smooth as a rolling stone, as *courant* [passable] as a circulating coin" (*SUD*, 34). Indeed, to be smooth and passable beyond suspicion, to be familiar – this is precisely what the conformist desires, so as not to bear the ridicule, judgment, and opposition of the public. Such opposition would presumably have disastrous social and economic results. Therefore the sagacious and prudent, in their conformity, "mortgage themselves to the world" (*SUD*, 35).

Criticism of the public appears at first to be evidence of Kierkegaard's mistrust of society, and therefore evidence of Kierkegaard's misanthropic and anti-social reputation. However, I suggest that Kierkegaard's suspicion of 'the public' is inescapably bound up with his critical appraisal of Denmark's nationalist opportunists. Although it is not possible to get hold of a crowd for any reprisal or accountability, Kierkegaard knows it is possible to leverage a public toward all kinds of ends. Thus, when "'the crowd' is everything, the only thing that matters is getting control of it, getting it on [one's] side. All things bow before this power" (*JP* III, 2933 [1848]). Politics, as Kierkegaard understands it, is solely the effort to command this power. He claims that politics carried out in the name of the public is actually at the expense of real communities and persons.

Against the prevailing opinion that venerates the public as a force for social progress, Kierkegaard favourably cites a phrase from St. Paul that "Only one reaches the goal" and then adds, "The crowd is untruth" (*PV*, 106). Although these phrases, as Kierkegaard understands them and uses them, pertain to spiritual and religious truth, to the attainment of what is existentially essential, it no doubt appears that these pronouncements support the concept of eminence proudly guarded by the *Ancien Régime*, which gives credence to the hero, the king, the lord, and an aristocratic paternalism that was used to legitimize the authority and guardianship of those few. The many are excluded from the prize that is exclusively won and guarded by the 'great' individualities. Kierkegaard imagines what a modern critic would say against this brand of conservatism: "How unreasonable that only one would reach the goal. After all, it is much more probable that several jointly reach the goal; and if we become many, then it becomes much more certain and also easier for each one individually" (PV, 106). This is the allure of a public – that strength and authority

comes from joining together, rather than the imposition of a single (or minority) will. And Kierkegaard himself is not entirely dismissive of that view. Throughout his writings Kierkegaard parenthetically acknowledges that the public or the crowd can effect positive material changes. He does not deny, "with regard to all temporal, earthly, worldly goals, the crowd can have its validity, even its validity as the decisive factor, that is, as the authority" (*PV*, 106). These cases are examples of *approximate* levelling mentioned above.

And yet a public remains an ambivalent force that cannot be relied on to attend to the needs of individuals. Precisely because the public does not afford a personal approach an individual's status within it is always tenuous, always uncertain. Although individuals desire to become a public because of the power it can wield *on their behalf*, that power can easily shift and a person, a class, a people, can come to bear the powerful scorn of a public. Since a public evades concretion and actual individuality, it also evades actual accountability, loyalty, and memory. "If someone adopts the opinion of the public today and tomorrow is hissed and booed, he is hissed and booed by the public" (TA, 92). Kierkegaard explains how a crowd, with the help of mass media, also exhibits an appetite for spectacle and cruelty. The public "seeks to be entertained and indulges in the notion that everything anyone does is done so that it may have something to gossip about" (*TA*, 94). In one instance Kierkegaard likens the press to a dog that the public keeps for its amusement (*TA*, 95). "The dog is goaded to attack … and then the fun begins" (*TA*, 95). With this analogy Kierkegaard imagines (and perhaps recalls from experience) how a public and the press avoid a personal and an ethical relationship to events. Once the 'dog' has done its damage "the public will be unrepentant, for it actually does not keep the dog, it merely *subscribes*; neither did it directly goad the dog to attack nor whistle it back" (*TA*, 95,

emphasis added). There is in fact no one who is responsible and no accountability since "the dog has no owner" (*TA*, 95). And finally, if the dog is apprehended and exterminated the public response would be: "we all wanted it done – even the subscribers" (*TA*, 95). From the other side the press provides the public with its spectacle by circulating *chatter*, which nullifies the distinction between public and private in "a private-public garrulousness, which is just about what the public is" (*TA*, 100). Kierkegaard's parable of the dog presents the press and the public as mutual enablers of the basest characteristics of modern impersonal society: sensationalism, acrimony, impunity, apathy, and cruelty.

Although Kierkegaard could not have imagined the human atrocities of the twentieth century (sanctioned by publics and carried out in the name of "the public" or "the nation"), he did see how a public can be mobilised against individuals or select people. When the crowd is truth, that is, when levelling and abstraction is truth, individuals are expendable.[20] For Kierkegaard the paradigm of his analysis is Christ's treatment by the crowd. He points to Christ's execution as a cowardly act that only a crowd is capable of. Spitting on Christ is something most individuals would not dare unless guarded by the anonymity of the crowd (*PV*, 108).

4.4 The Public as (*bourgeois*) Political Instrument

With Kierkegaard we ask: if concretions of individuality are replaced by abstraction, if persons are replaced by a crowd, then *who* or *what* governs? Who or what is

[20] T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer corroborate Kierkegaard's claims regarding the ethical catastrophe of levelling and the dissolution of the individual. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 2010 [1944]), they write, "The unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual: for individuality makes a mockery of the kind of society which would turn all individuals to the one collectivity … Abstraction, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects as did fate, the notion of which it rejects: it liquidates them" (13). Being an individual or being on the wrong side of the public in this period of fascisms and totalitarianisms meant suffering much worse than Kierkegaard's martyrdom of laughter.

governed? *Who* or *what* is endowed with authority (moral or punitive – for these are two sides of the same coin)?

Here is where Kierkegaard's critique of a public at the level of personal ethics can be broadened to include social structures. In his essay on Kierkegaard's critique of the state, Robert L. Perkins remarks, "government is impossible without authority, and if the whim of the crowd is authority, government is impossible in the final sense."[21] As a political authority the public is a fickle power that is paradoxically always the same: a public "can become the very opposite and it is still the same – a public" (*TA*, 92), since it is what it is only by being a sum total, and not by being particular. When the crowd is authority, then authority itself has also undergone levelling, which means it is diminished or disintegrated; then there really is no authority. When the crowd rules, then nobody rules and governing with authority becomes politically impossible.[22] Therefore, government established on the principle of the crowd or the public appears catastrophic, serving only abstract manufactured needs and desires. But of course power *does* reside somewhere and there *is* governing in a modern state. However, what Kierkegaard observes emerging as the dominant form of social organization is neither monarchical/absolutist nor communitarian – what emerges is a bureaucratic and party-political society, which Kierkegaard regards as steeped in a culture of 'reflection' that he characterises as 'bourgeois-philistine' (*JP* I, 219, 221 [1837]).[23]

The modern age presents a situation in which a public does not actually govern (for how can it?). And although it appears that society is represented in government through voting, according to Kierkegaard politics in the age of 'a public' really consists of wooing and manipulating the power of the crowd.

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[21] Perkins, "*Bourgeois* State*,"* 212.

[22] George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith: An Introduction to his Thought* (London: SPCK, 1997), 26.

[23] Section IV below contains an expanded analysis of "bourgeois-philistinism."

> This abstraction, whether it is called the public, or the majority, or the crowd, or, meaninglessly, the people, this abstraction is used politically for movement…This abstraction is the stake for which the political game is played…No, cards must be played for money, and the political game must be played for the crowd, to see who can get the most *à tout prix* [at any price] on his side, or the most who with their feet go over to his side (*WA*, 229-230).

The rhetoric of Denmark's cultural and political class, by way of the daily press, suggests that the new state is governed by popular rule when the public is deemed to be a legitimate social authority, but Kierkegaard dismisses these claims suggesting that politics of this kind is an exercise in mystification.[24] The crowd is actually not authority, or rather, its authority is illusory.

> With the cessation of the rational state, statecraft becomes a game. Everything revolves around getting shoes on the crowd, and then getting it on one's side, voting, making noise, carrying torches, and armed, regardless, altogether regardless, of whether it understands anything or not (*WA*, 231).[25]

Kierkegaard's disdain for (party) politics is evident in these comments about the game of modern statecraft. Since politics reveals itself to be a rather perverse relationship of seducing and manipulating the public through the press, Kierkegaard renounces both conservatives and liberals, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, "because they are all playing the same game."[26] The aim of 'politics' is not community – it is not edifying in Kierkegaard's estimation – but it is the pursuit of authority, power, and control for those few who are able to manage the public. Cutting behind the debates around old-versus-new structures and apparatus for government Kierkegaard moralises the entire endeavour,

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[24] Kierkegaard published a number of polemical articles in newspapers while he was a student, criticising liberal political movements as "a parody of the reforming endeavor" (*EPW*, 11). At the end of his career, after Denmark's so-called "revolution," Kierkegaard repeats this charge: "The evil in our time is precisely … this sham of wanting to reform without being willing to suffer and to make sacrifices … Now that all want to reform, there is an uproar as if it were in a public dance hall … which is why, instead of fear and trembling and much spiritual trial, there is: hurrah, bravo, applause, balloting, bumbling, hubbub, noise – and false alarm" (*FSE*, 213).

[25] In this quotation Kierkegaard associates 'rational state' with the outmoded form of absolutist government, whereas typically 'rational state' describes the new formation of European states explained in Hegelian terms, specifically from his *Philosophy of Right*.

[26] Bruce H. Kirmmse, "Kierkegaard and 1848," *History of European Ideas* 20 (1995): 172.

> What is destroying Denmark is neither the new nor the old government … What brought in a new government was not wisdom, patriotism, and the like but an expression of this demoralization. And what will overthrow the new government will again be envy, caprice, pettiness, and the like; it is not the noble, the good, that triumphs – no, it is the same demoralization, which has given itself a new shape (*JP* IV, 4149 [1848]).

Because Kierkegaard believes it is an appetite for power, envy, and opportunism that motivates politics he calls it an indulgence to want to rule in a secular way – that is, to aspire to tangible political power (*WA*, 215). Therefore, he claims that "no one basically has more contempt for what it is to be a human being than those who make a profession of standing at the head of the crowd" (*PV*, 108) – whether that one is the politician, the journalist, the professor, or the priest. Furthermore, the principle of 'the public' augments the mystification and deception involved in modern politicking: behind the façade of the public certain dominant interests, regardless of whether they are truly representative, can remain anonymous, allowing mystification to continue. This leads to confusion throughout society about where political authority actually resides.[27]

4.5 The Public as Idol

If the crowd represents authority, Kierkegaard interprets this religiously as a form of rebellion against God, and ultimately as a form of idolatry (*PV*, 122). As we have seen, a crowd or a public forms as a result of the levelling process, gathering people into an abstract whole by siphoning off particularity. This formation emboldens people. However, against the confidence of a public Kierkegaard claims the crowd is only a mirage of strength. The category 'public' makes "individuals conceited, since everyone can arrogate to himself this mammoth, compared to which the concretions

[27] Perkins, "*Bourgeois* State," 215.

of actuality seem paltry" (*TA*, 93). As a result, individuals "fancy themselves greater than kings" (*TA*, 93). A crowd, as Kierkegaard sees it, attributes to itself qualitative categories purely by virtue of being a quantitative category. Thus questions of quality, or *equality*, mischievously get transformed into a question of quantitative power, as though they are interchangeable (*TA*, 85, 92, 108).

In *The Point of View* all historical rebellions are attributed theologically to a primal anthropological motivation. Every rebellion in scholarship, science, society, and politics "is connected with and derived from this rebellion of the human race against God" (*PV*, 122). History is theologized. Here Kierkegaard does not separate the world-historical from sacred history. For him, the principle of association and the concept of a public, which embolden national and social movements in Golden Age Denmark against political tyranny, also seem to embolden humanity against God. It is Anti-Climacus, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, who directly confronts what he sees as the apostasy of the crowd: "Just as we have learned that in governments the masses intimidate the king and the newspapers intimidate the cabinet ministers, so we have finally discovered that the *summa summarum* [sum total] of all men intimidates God" (*SUD*, 118). Although the massification of society seems to correspond to the secularization of society, Kierkegaard actually pushes this conclusion much further.[28] As soon as people "are permitted to run together in what Aristotle calls the animal category – the crowd … then it does not take long before this abstraction *becomes God*" (*SUD*, 118, emphasis mine). It is human culture in its world-historical development that is made into the divine. This is how Kierkegaard sees the logic of the present age moving from a historical political principle to a spiritual confusion: from the historically emergent democratic principle, "obedience is given only to the

[28] Merlod Westphal explains that for Kierkegaard mass society is "the flipside of its secularization," Westphal, *Reason and Society*, 43; see also, 33.

one whom people themselves have established, somewhat as the idol worshiper idolizes and worships the god he himself has fashioned." But who is the one that the people have chosen? The public has elected itself, "that is, people obey themselves, people idolize themselves" (*WA*, 231). Ultimately the logic of the crowd is idolatrous.

Surprisingly, Kierkegaard locates the source of his society's confusion in Christianity itself (*SUD*, 117). Specifically, the Christian teaching of the incarnation seems to have been 'rationalized' out of its (offensive) Christian meaning into a more palatable humanistic meaning. The doctrine of the God-man has come to mean that *God* and *humanity* are the same (*SUD*, 118). Christianity's assertion that there is a qualitative difference between God and creature is "pantheistically abolished" in what Kierkegaard sees as the historical divinization of society (*SUD*, 117). A couple of parenthetical comments indicate that Kierkegaard has Hegel, Feuerbach, and D. F. Strauss in mind as the major proprietors of this sort of humanism (*SUD*, 180, fn. 63 and 66).[29]

Drawing direct attention to class consciousness and *bourgeois* paternalism Kierkegaard points out how limited, disingenuous, and self-serving the concept of a divinized 'humanity' really is when the concept is in the hands of its intellectual proponents:

> Of course, some of the philosophers who were involved in spreading the teaching about the predominance of the generation over the individual turn away in disgust when their teaching has so degenerated that the mob is the God-man. But these philosophers forget that it is still their doctrine; they ignore that it was not more true when the upper class accepted it, when the elite of the upper class or a select circle of philosophers was the incarnation (*SUD*, 118).

[29] Feuerbach is most explicit on this point. For him, "all the attributes which make God God, are attributes of the species…With Christianity God is nothing else than the immediate unity of species and individuality…God is the idea of the species as an individual…God is only man's intuition of his own nature," in Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2008 [1841]), 126-128.

Once again Kierkegaard's polemic is directed at those who presume to hold a position of cultural and national leadership, and who imagine that such social positioning also guarantees their ethical and spiritual leadership.[30]

Of course, the idolatry Kierkegaard speaks of is not restricted to the narrow interests of the intelligentsia – all of Denmark (and Europe) is implicated in the judgment. Anti-Climacus even imagines that Christendom has the 'brazenness' to blame God for his own demise in human history. After all, "it is God who devised the teaching about the God-man," therefore one can rightly say to God: "it is your fault. Why did you get so involved with man" (*SUD*, 118)? By involving himself with humanity so intimately and humanly God was forced, through human self-understanding, to acknowledge human independence (that is, their equality and authority) – in much the same way that kings are forced to establish an independent constitution when a population realizes its own power (*SUD*, 118). Ascendancy of the crowd corresponds for Kierkegaard to the descent of God (as qualitatively distinct), and therefore also the descent of an ethically and religiously qualified individual.

World-historically, then, the concept of the God-man comes to signify the ascension of 'humanity' over God, which either relegates God to the status of an historical artefact, or does away with God altogether, or collapses the qualitative difference between God and creature into a human-divine species. Against this social and ideological trend Kierkegaard offers the category of the individual as a social category that maintains the qualitative difference between God and creature. With this category Merold Westphal suggests Kierkegaard un-socializes the individual in order to un-deify society.[31]

[30] J. L. Heiberg and H. L. Martensen are likely the specific targets of this comment.
[31] Westphal, *Reason and Society*, 34.

4.6. Opposition

When society has fallen in love with itself, when 'the public' has become the normative criterion of identity and the governing principle of authority, when the crowd finally replaces God as lord, then the only possible opposition to its power and the only affirmation of spirit and community will come through the category of the individual. This is a principle guiding Kierkegaard's entire authorship. In a pamphlet dedicated to 'the single individual' Kierkegaard clearly states the significance of this category: "The single individual is the category through which, in a religious sense, the age, history, the human race must go" (*PV*, 118).

We have already been introduced to Kierkegaard's category of the individual, but now we will develop our analysis of this category as an edifying corrective to the crowd. In the process, a fully social understanding of Kierkegaard's 'Individual' will replace the still persistent misconception of a Kierkegaardian atomistic individualism.

Prior to the European events of 1848, likely between 1846 and 1847,[32] Kierkegaard writes, "In these times everything is politics," but that "the viewpoint of the religious is worlds apart from this" (*PV*, 103). The difference is attributed to the starting points and end points of each endeavour. "The political begins on earth in order to remain on earth, while the religious, taking its beginning from above, wants to transfigure and then to lift the earthly to heaven" (*PV*, 103). This appears to validate a materialist criticism of theology – that it is intellectually involved in Idealism and socially-practically involved in otherworldly mystification that estranges people from the consciousness of their real material conditions. However, I will argue in what follows that with Kierkegaard we discover an ethic and communicative praxis that springs

[32] In the first essay dedicated to "that Single Individual" Kierkegaard dates it to 1846 (*PV*, 105, fn. 112); the second essay, we are told, was written in 1847 (*PV*, 113, fn.118) but reworked in 1848 (*PV*, fn. 118-119); finally, Kierkegaard adds a short postscript to the two notes indicating that he revisited them in 1849 (*PV*, 124). With these dates in mind it is likely that the preface referred to was written in 1846 or 1847.

from genuine commitment to and concern for persons in their concrete existence. It is not only the materialist who takes the materiality and temporality of existence seriously. This 'Kierkegaardian' theology that we are exploring, which certainly has roots in a deeper theological tradition, can also speak to the hopes and fears of critical materialism, questions of debasement, enslavement, illusion, and liberation.

With respect to historical development Kierkegaard acknowledges an increased access to a sufficient amount of understanding and discussion throughout society. But something is missing from the discussion: "The demoralization of absolute monarchy and the decline of revolutionary periods have frequently been described, but the decline of an age devoid of passion is just as degenerate, even though less striking because of its ambiguity" (*TA*, 94). Political successes brought about through the principle of association and the defining concept of the public hides the true symptom of a crowd – existential malaise. *Passion*, whether through evidence of its absence or evidence of its abundance, is the clue to the existential well-being of a society or an *age*. Passion is evidence of *form*, of *culture*, of *propriety*, it is even evidence of *revelation*, and therefore it is also evidence of an amount of inwardness and existential interestedness that welcomes ethical-religious decision and appropriation (*TA*, 61-67). The absence of passion actually obfuscates the ethical status of a historical situation. Therefore, without being entirely dismissive of his historical context Kierkegaard adopts a sceptical stance:

> It is very doubtful, then, that the age will be saved by the idea of sociality, of association…In our age the principle of association (which at best can have validity with respect to material interest) is not affirmative but negative; it is an evasion, a dissipation, an illusion, whose dialectic is as follows: as it strengthens individuals, it vitiates them; it strengthens by numbers, by sticking together, but from the ethical point of view this is a weakening (*TA*, 106).

Kierkegaard's real political concern is political in the soft sense, having to do with how people relate to each other and organize their lives in distinction from

institutional formations. Party politics has, in Kierkegaard's mind, only succeeded at confusing religious concerns with political or national concerns. In the margin of a journal entry from 1848 Kierkegaard writes,

> Even now in 1848 … it does indeed look as if everything were politics, but it will no doubt appear that the catastrophe corresponds inversely to the Reformation: then everything appeared to be a religious movement and became politics; now everything appears to be politics but will become a religious movement (*JP* VI, 6255).

Kierkegaard's claim runs in a diametrically opposite trajectory to the more historically resonant claim of Karl Marx, who asserts that the demystification underway in philosophy, away from the religious and quasi-religious tendencies of metaphysics and idealism, give way to the demystification of human history and human life. For Marx the religious or quasi-religious motives observed in human life and history will be exposed (through the methodological operation of historical criticism) for what they truly are: material-temporal (political) antagonisms and material-temporal (political) ameliorations.[33]

Since Kierkegaard's judgment of the age is essentially that it lacks spirit, that the age is undergoing a crisis of existential and ethical-religious import, his corrective is at its core spiritual-existential rather than structural-political. But it must also be noted that a Kierkegaardian corrective to the modern forms of alienation and massification will not include a proposal for a return to any past idyll or previous order, and neither will his corrective allow an established order to feel secure with authority. Thus a Kierkegaardian social corrective oriented to the present and the future is also comfortably *modern*. Reflection and levelling, indicative of the modern age, are

[33] It was Marx's view in 1844 that the prevailing attitude (or world-view) of the present age remains *religious*, even among the critics of theology, and therefore the age is in need of a truly materialist critical politics. Religion, for Marx, is "the illusory Sun which revolves around man, so long as he does not revolve around himself. It is therefore the task of history, once the thither side of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of the hither side," *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

presented by Kierkegaard as historical developents in human education, making possible the realization and actualization of a genuine existential corrective.

4.7. Sociality Must Pass *through* Levelling

Thus far we have navigated Kierkegaard's critique of levelling in the present age as a force of dissolution which, leapfrogging over the ideal of political equality, arrives at a one-dimensional social landscape where adherence to abstract identities of 'a public' and 'Christendom' are normative, and where these abstractions can be mobilized against concretions of particularity by some undisclosed and anonymous authority. Yet, Kierkegaard's distaste for his age should not be explained as a conservative reactionary reflex, at least not in the sense of wanting to preserve or return to a previous idealized order. Kierkegaard's corrective to modern dissolution is not to be found in the reversal of levelling. Kierkegaard's critique of the present age looks forward while refusing any claim that the existing order represents the accomplishment of genuine sociality. But neither does Kierkegaard stand on the line, arm-in-arm with the political revolutionaries of his time. His corrective is also not of that sort, even though he places more hope in the passion of revolutionary spirit than the conciliatory and pacified spirit of the present age. The Kierkegaardian corrective to the present age does not stand behind levelling, prior to its initiative, but ahead of levelling, having come through it, educated by levelling to stand on the other side.

*

Turning to the present and the future:

Kierkegaard has been accused of presenting a response to his age that relies too heavily on a mythologized past, whether the mythological fodder for his critique is drawn from Nordic sources, ancient Greek sources, or a kind of Protestant

hagiography of reformation figures.[34] However, in *Two Ages* Kierkegaard clearly warns against the Romantic tendency to idolize and wish after the past.

> It will do no good to appeal to and summon a Holger Danske or a Martin Luther. Their age is past, and as a matter of fact it is indolence on the part of individuals to want such a one, it is a finite impatience that wants to have at cheap, second-hand prices the highest, which is dearly bought at first-hand (*TA*, 89).[35]

This also means that it will no longer do to defer to a leader or a great personality to win the highest on one's behalf – "the age of heroes is past" (*TA*, 87) – each one must struggle for the highest first-hand.

Although Kierkegaard frequently turns to Ancient Greece throughout *Two Ages* for examples of a time when relationships were supposedly qualified by more passion and earnestness than in the present age, he is careful not to venerate that period. The tactic of drawing on ancient Greece was used not too subtly in order to arouse a reinvigorated German nationalism, with Hegel as one of its sophisticated proponents. Robert Perkins puts it thus, "Hegel may write that the Greek 'had the picture of the state as a product of his own energies', but Kierkegaard remembers the death of Socrates. Also, as a supreme denial of the homogeneity of the individual and the public, Kierkegaard notes the death of Christ."[36] Whether the site is Athens or a nineteenth-century German federation or a constitutional monarchy on the horizon in Denmark, the individual and the state never comfortably relate to each other as a cohesive 'We that is I, and I that is We.'

Levelling has produced a new situation, a *modern* condition. The modern condition is oriented to equality and levelling has been its historical force (*TA*, 84). This orientation of equality has occasioned what Kierkegaard calls "the spontaneous combustion of the human race" with its principle of identity and unity being "pure

[34] For a version of this argument see Adorno's *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*.
[35] Holger Danske is a Danish folk hero (*TA*, fn. 172).
[36] Perkins, "*Bourgeois* State," 213.

humanity" (*TA*, 87). Yet Kierkegaard claims levelling has missed its mark. Instead of establishing concrete equality, levelling has been a force toward an abstract equality, which in actuality amounts only to deepening social and spiritual alienation (*TA*, 92).

However, the honest and sober conclusion is that levelling cannot be stopped; no individual and no assembly will be able to impede the abstraction of levelling (*TA*, 87). "Leveling must go on, it has to" (*TA*, 88), and it will, we are told, because it "will be kept going without interruption by its servants" (*TA*, 109). Nevertheless, Kierkegaard insists that the "abstract equality helps [the individual] to become wholly educated – if he does not perish" (*TA*, 92). Levelling provides an edifying opportunity. Extensity and reflection, characteristics that Kierkegaard associates with levelling in the present age, are also given a positive endorsement. Just as Kierkegaard believes the extensity of the age can become a social good if there is a corresponding development of human intensity, so too does he believe that the present age propensity for reflection allows a person to consider a "higher meaningfulness" than the externality and immediacy of an aesthetic life-view (*TA*, 96). It is in this modern situation that Kierkegaard sees the corrective potential for a genuine religious life and an emancipated social life. Kierkegaard does not place religious or mythological hope in the past, but is inspired by what is possible for every individual in the present age. Kierkegaard's attitude toward the present age is conditional; it depends on what people will make of the modern situation.

> The bleakness of antiquity was that the man of distinction was what *others could not be*; the inspiring aspect [of the modern era] will be that the person who has gained himself religiously is only what *all can be* (*TA*, 92).

Will people forfeit their self, or will people strive co-operatively to become a self in community with others? This is the question put to the age.

Levelling Revisited ~ an Education:

Levelling is historical and structural and therefore it pertains (abstractly) to the whole race, to the species. But if levelling is to have any existential impact, if it is to be of ethical-religious importance, then individuals must be able to develop through levelling. And indeed in the present age "leveling itself becomes the severe taskmaster who takes on the task of educating" (*TA*, 88). Furthermore, the person who is educated by levelling, who attains the highest in an ethical or spiritual sense, does not become a hero or a person of distinction – because that age is past. Instead, the one educated by levelling "only becomes an essentially human being in the full sense of equality." And this, Kierkegaard insists, "is the idea of religiousness" (*TA*, 88).

Levelling presents every person with the opportunity and the task of becoming the single individual that each is spiritually required to be. But it also allows, even encourages people to meld with the public and become a mass-creature. It is the category of the individual that qualifies levelling, that determines whether an informed, reflective, and empowered age "will act far more intensively in relation to the extensity at its disposal" (*TA*, 110). The education of levelling, we are told, is a rigorous examination (*TA*, 87). For some levelling "can be the point of departure for the highest life, especially for the individual who in honesty before God wills it – for [that one] it will be genuinely educative to live in an age of levelling." For others levelling is their selfish instrument for domination or control,

> If the individual is unwilling to learn to be satisfied with himself in the essentiality of the religious life before God, be satisfied with ruling over himself instead of over the world, … if he is unwilling to learn to be inspired by this as supreme because it expresses equality before God and equality with all [people], then he will not escape from reflection, then with all his endowments he may for one delusive moment believe that it is he who is doing the leveling, until he succumbs to the leveling (*TA*, 88-89).

Succumbing to levelling means wanting to achieve the highest at a removed distance and at a second-hand price. This attitude imagines that society mediates between an individual and the absolute, that society does for the individual what only individuals can do separately: come to ethical-religious decision and act accordingly. But in fact 'society' does not recognise an absolute apart from itself and it will not tolerate individuals who deviate from its authority. Levelling does away with both God and the individual and is left only with an abstraction of mass identity – a public, a species, pure humanity. It is the construction of mass identities and the desire to rule them that Kierkegaard identifies with 'the political.'

A choice emerges between the numerical and formal equality of the whole, the One-All, the public, which according to Kierkegaard is to "be lost in the dizziness of abstract infinity" or choose the concrete equality secured in the depth of particularity and a definite middle term in relationships between persons, which Kierkegaard claims is to "be saved infinitely in the essentiality of the religious life" (*TA*, 108). Levelling, like reflection, is a snare that can trap – but "in and through the inspired leap of religiousness the situation changes and it is the snare that catapults one into the embrace of the eternal" (*TA*, 89).

A final word needs to be said about Kierkegaard's use of language in *Two Ages* by which he describes the present age and the process of levelling. It may strike some as ironic (or simply frustrating) that in the midst of attacking abstraction Kierkegaard relies on very abstract language. There is clearly a layer of apocalyptic and prophetic language on these pages in a book we are told was composed in the voice of a 'critic' and not from the position of Christian 'ideality'. From this we can surmise that Kierkegaard simply could not withdraw his own religious commitments from the review; or we may choose to consider the possibility that 'the critic' and 'the prophet'

are conceptually and existentially aligned – in which case the language is true to form. What is religiously significant, and not regularly associated with Kierkegaard, is that the apocalyptic language is not future oriented but, like the prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures, it constitutes both *a judgment of and a vision for the present age*. I would not go so far as to claim a millenarian outlook for this text, but we can say that Kierkegaard presents a scenario in which there is *something that can (must) be done* in the world today, and that God is also engaged in that activity. In fact, Kierkegaard's portrait of modernity depicts a situation when "everything is ready" in the apocalyptic sense that the Kingdom, the eternal is at hand; when "the cruelty of abstraction exposes the vanity of the finite in itself;" when "the abyss of the infinite is opening up" and "the sharp scythe of leveling permits all, every single one, to leap over the blade;" and when every individual is invited to 'Leap' "into the embrace of God" (*TA*, 108).

Conclusion

Through the voice of a critic Kierkegaard polemically calls into question the present age excitement for levelling and mass identities. Levelling is exposed as one-dimensional but also manipulative and well suited to authoritarian power. When a promise of equality, liberation, and popular enfranchisement is critically exposed as exploitative and tyrannical the critics necessarily find themselves in a polemical relationship to the surrounding optimism and opportunism of the levellers. In *Two Ages* Kierkegaard confronts the extensity of the present age and calls for human investment of genuine subjective intensity. Developments in production and communication technologies, in reconfiguring mass identity, all of these so-called modern developments make up the extensity of the age. According to Kierkegaard,

and I would add – according to a religious critique, these developments and this extensity are not themselves the sign of *good* social life. Kierkegaard has shown how the present age can dissolve ethical a spiritual life in objectivity and abstraction. This dissolution is, for Kierkegaard, a move in the direction of rationally and mechanistically liquidating persons. His culture critique argues that a religious crisis and a social crisis are two sides of the same coin. Religiously, the fate of humanity and God are conjoined (by God) so that an attempt to complete the *death of God* results in the death of *the human* as a creature who exists before God, and humanity indeed becomes an animal species, a mass creature.

The extensity of the present age is not a good in itself but only an *opportunity* for new ways of living together. Thus Kierkegaard's short critique ends with an acknowledgement of a spiritual and ethical possibility and an invitation to an active life of genuine engagement. The question readers of *Two Ages* are left with is: how to act far more intensively in relation to the extensity at our disposal? An intensive task is ethical-religious for Kierkegaard and must involve the development of persons in subjectivity. In the following chapter we consider Kierkegaard's religious corrective to the levelling tendency of the present age in the religious category of the eternal. Through this category subjectivity and divinity are preserved in their difference, and with this category Kierkegaard presents the edifying project of constructing a society of persons.

Chapter 5

An Edifying Corrective to the 'Spiritlessness' of the Age: The Eternal

Introduction:

Although it appears to many of Kierkegaard's contemporaries that the nineteenth century is developing toward more egalitarian and horizontal forms of social identity through levelling, Kierkegaard argues that levelling in fact impedes this endeavour and actually obscures the real formation of more totalizing identities and dehumanising power structures. Philosophically, levelling corresponds to the speculative unity of Subject and Object, whereby subjectivity is subsumed into and wholly determined by the objective (external) realm of nature (species) and culture (nation/public). Theologically, this amounts to identifying God with 'the world' or 'humanity' or 'the state,' collapsing the qualitative difference. Into this environment the category of the individual enters as Kierkegaard's social-spiritual corrective. With this category the necessary axial relationships become possible: there is the 'verticality' of inwardness that breaks up the crowd and resists groupthink, and the 'horizontality' of dependence and responsibility that engenders relationship and communication.

But by what power, or by what quality is a person able to coordinate the necessary movement along the axis between inwardness and outward social relationship? Kierkegaard suggests that a religious commitment to exist with 'the eternal' protects against levelling and is at the core of a theological attempt to communicate an edifying social corrective that, through preserving God's qualitative difference, allows for genuine *human* self-realization and emancipation.

The eternal is Kierkegaard's theological concept that he uses to explain the spiritual aspect of a human being, which coordinates the inward and the outward activity through a dialectic that Kierkegaard calls "redoubling" [*Fordobelse*]. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard writes,

> When, however, the eternal is in a human being, this eternal redoubles in him in such a way that every moment it is in him, it is in him in a double mode: in an outward direction and in an inward direction back into itself, but in such a way that this is one and the same, since otherwise it is not a redoubling (*WL*, 280).

The eternal is the dialectical hinge that turns the individual inward where one is instructed to encounter the divine in its transcendence but also its intimacy, and it turns the individual outward where one is instructed to encounter humanity and the human social tasks that belong to one who exists historically. Without the eternal in Kierkegaard's scheme the category of the individual is not a religious category, but also without the eternal the individual can indeed fall prey to levelling, to *individualism*, heroic *decisionism*, or the aloof pathology of the 'bourgeois *intérieur.*'[1] Yet through the eternal the human receives a constructive relationship to history and to others.

First we shall consider Kierkegaard's appeal to the eternal as external and transcendent, which interrupts the triumphalism and fatalism of world-historical development (i.e., the rationalisation of history). Next, we examine how the eternal operates vertically from its transcendence to the intimacy of human inwardness. Third, we shall examine how the eternal orients human productive and affective attention to this world, and thereby transforming the human relation to temporality and history. Finally, we will examine how the eternal, once it becomes a historical

[1] Adorno, *Kierkegaard,* 40-46. In Adorno's analysis the interior of a bourgeois apartment, often described by Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, functions as a determining metaphor for Kierkegaard's subjective thinker. Adorno writes, "the intérieur is the incarnate imago of Kierkegaard's philosophical 'point': everything truly external has shrunken to the point. The same spacelessness can be recognized in the structure of his philosophy" (44). This chapter insists, contra Adorno, that the eternal grounds individuals qualitatively in history and temporality (spatiality and relationality).

task and a human task, how it also simultaneously demands an ethical and communicative activity.

Although this study focuses on an analysis of Kierkegaard's texts between 1846 and 1852, I also argue for a reading of continuity within Kierkegaard's corpus while highlighting specific points where concepts seem to undergo significant change. The concept of the eternal is one such concept that Kierkegaard affords great importance throughout his entire writing career. It is a concept that, like the category of the individual, stands behind much of Kierkegaard's thinking, and therefore as we consider the edifying role of the eternal in Kierkegaard's post-1846 authorship we will also engage in some detail with selections from Kierkegaard's earlier authorship.

5.1. The Changing Seas Below and the Starry Heavens Above

In a preface to one of the notes dedicated to the single individual Kierkegaard briefly summarizes his suspicion of political attempts to genuinely edify and think through "to the ultimate consequences of this idea: human-equality, human-likeness" (*PV*, 103). What is it that the present age is missing in its social renovation? What is absent from levelling that pulls it toward abstraction and dissolution rather than equality? In that same introduction Kierkegaard adds that the "misfortune of our age is precisely that it has become merely time *itself*, temporality" (*PV*, 104). As a response he offers a solution that seems to come from a completely different direction: he claims that what the *times* need for genuine social transformation is *eternity*. The modern approach to history and human life, Kierkegaard suggests, does not want to hear about eternity but instead makes the eternal "utterly superfluous by means of a contrived imitation" (*PV*, 104). Kierkegaard is expressing his suspicion of a political situation

which imagines that the (Hegelian) historical development of a state and social-political apparatus are adequate substitutes for the eternal – as a means of guaranteeing the transcendent identity of subject and object, posterity, and a universal social ethic (*Sittlichkeit*).

Through a series of letters exchanged between Kierkegaard and his acquaintance J. L. A. Kolderup-Rosenvinge, composed in 1848, the two men discuss their perspectives on the changing political landscape of Europe and Denmark. Kierkegaard interprets the whole European situation as a vortex [*Hvirvel*] (*LD*, 260), based on what he sees as a confused understanding of movement and a confused relation to so-called world-historical development.

> What does a vortex seek? – A fixed point where it can stop…But the person who, while wishing to stop, fails to find a fixed point – that person who in other words wants to stop by means of the moved or the moving only enlarges the vortex…Most people believe that so long as one has a fixed point *to which* one wants to get, then motion is no vortex. But this is a misunderstanding. It all depends on having a fixed point *from which to set out*. Stopping is not possible at a point *ahead*, but at a point *behind*. That is, stopping is in the motion, consolidating the motion (*LD*, 260-262).

Movement and change are not themselves the problem that human social history is facing. We have already noted that Kierkegaard is not interested in struggling against historical movement in order to preserve an established order or golden age. Revolutionary spirit and revolutionary acts do receive positive treatment from Kierkegaard (*TA*, 61-68) and are not condemned unless, as Bruce Kirmmse notes, revolutionary change "tempts us to forget that we are rooted in the Unconditioned, i.e. that we have a fixed point in our very origin, and not some imagined fixed point which is our intended destination."[2] So the dispute about what consolidates motion in movement, 'the point *from which*', becomes a dispute about a relation to an unconditioned; and a dispute about the direction a generation is moving socio-

[2] Kirmmse, "Kierkegaard and 1848," 171-172.

politically becomes for Kierkegaard a dispute about the spiritual source of any movement.

In an essay examining Kierkegaard's responses to 1848 Bruce Kirmmse explains what appears to Kierkegaard as a confusion of the political and the religious: "*Qualitatively* the human race had erred in claiming *unconditional power* for human social and political institutions rather than relying on the *Unconditioned*, i.e. God."[3] On Kierkegaard's behalf Kirmmse clearly identifies the unconditioned with God. Strictly speaking the identification is no mistake since Kierkegaard is certainly proposing a *religious* alternative to the political desires of the age. However, at this juncture, and in the context of Kierkegaard's address above, 'the Unconditioned' should not be over-determined, too positively identified, and certainly not identified with Christian institutions. For Kierkegaard, relying on the unconditioned does not mean relying on a monarchy or priesthood – those figures who have historically claimed to represent the Unconditioned in the world. Therefore an alternative to the politics of the present age is certainly not going to be found in the formation of a 'Christian state' or any official collaboration between state apparatus and God – that is not what Kierkegaard has in mind by suggesting reliance on the unconditioned, on God. Such a 'theo-political' arrangement was precisely the occasion for Kierkegaard's final political attack campaign, which is also hinted at in much of his earlier authorship.[4]

While Kierkegaard insists that abandoning a relation to the unconditional is to live spiritlessly, he acknowledges that many people in modernity have reached a kind of historical maturity with respect to the unconditional. Here Kierkegaard does acknowledge historical development corresponding to human maturity. Many have

[3] Ibid., 169.
[4] See Backhouse, *Christian Nationalism* (Oxford: 2011).

"outgrown the childishness that another human being is the one who represents the unconditional for them" (*PV*, 20) – and this is the engine of ensuing historical-political shifts in nineteenth-century Europe. But that only means "one can all the less do without it [the unconditional]. Thus the single individual must personally relate himself to the unconditional" (*PV*, 20). That relationship, for Kierkegaard, is 'religiousness' in the *modern* sense – that the unconditional or the absolute cannot be mediated on one's behalf in the forms of history, institution, constitution, or (human) representative. Instead, each must cultivate this relation *for oneself*, but certainly not *by oneself*.

Failure or refusal to acknowledge this aspect of the modern situation is, for Kierkegaard, the catastrophe of the present age. Of course Kierkegaard accuses Danish (Hegelian) theology of failing to concede historical mediation to personal relation as the operation of religiousness. When the absolute is mediated historically or representatively then, as Westphal puts it, "salvation is identified with socialization."[5] Such confusion abounds in an age for which "everything is politics" (*PV*, 103). Thus, in his letter to Kolderup-Rosenvinge Kierkegaard can claim,

> As so strangely happened once with the Reformation, which appeared to be a religious movement but turned out to be a political one – in the same way, the movement of our time, which appears to be purely political, will turn out suddenly to be religious or the need for religion (*LD*, 262).

Although the Reformation appeared to be a struggle over orthodoxy and the way Christians come into communion with their God, both personally and corporately, it actually produced numerous political battles over authority and control on social, economic, and cultural levels. Likewise the world-historical shifts of 1848 appear to be solely a struggle for the democratization of social, economic, and cultural control, but will in fact demonstrate the need for 'religious' transformation, i.e. inwardness

[5] Westphal, *Reason and Society*, 36.

and subjectivity. Why the need for religious transformation? Because, according to Kierkegaard, the world-historical view actually reveals itself to be a kind of pseudo-religious philosophy.[6] World-historical political movements (and their guiding philosophies) are made 'religious' when they make themselves a vehicle of human salvation. With Kierkegaard we may invert the Marxian phrase – all that is holy is profaned – and claim instead, the profane makes itself holy through the world-historical. Kierkegaard recognises what the age demands – it demands equality and reconciliation between different identities and interests. But the age imagines it can discover its goal through a dialectical synthesis of concepts in history expressed concretely in a rational state (Hegel), or perhaps as a historical resolution of antagonisms among social classes (Marx). Kierkegaard interjects that each of these passes over developing a genuinely ethical-religious character within individuals. Historically the dialectic (of alienation and reconciliation) is objective and takes place outside individuals. Religiously the dialectic is *also* essentially at work in individuals.

Without the (religious) dialectic of inwardness, human life risks total absorption into the flux of history and abstract identities. In an earlier piece of writing Kierkegaard constructs an analogy that helps to explain his understanding of the modern situation and the need for an unconditioned. He writes,

> When the sailor is out on the ocean, when everything is changing all around him, when the waves are born and die, he does not stare down into the waves, because they are changing. He looks up at the stars. Why? Because they are faithful; they have the same location now that they had for our ancestors and will have for generations to come. By what means does he conquer the changeable? By the eternal. By the eternal, one can conquer the future, because the eternal is the ground of the future, and therefore through it the future can be fathomed (*EUD*, 19 [1843]).

[6] Kierkegaard refers to speculative thought, Hegel's philosophy, and the world-historical as pantheism (*CUP*, 122; *PV*, 122-123; *JP* II, 2004 [1847]; *SUD*, 117). What makes the world-historical "pseudo-religious" is that it presents itself as objective descriptive knowledge when it is actually motivated by teleology and reconciliation.

Theologically the unconditioned is God, as Kirmmse states. But in another important sense, yet still speaking theologically, the unconditioned is for us simply *the eternal*. When Kierkegaard states that the viewpoint of the religious and the political are 'worlds apart' it is reference to the eternal that marks the difference (*PV*, 103). The sailor who stares down into the waves 'because they are changing' and tries to navigate according to the changing sea operates according to "the political" (numerical and temporal authority). On the other hand, the sailor who turns away from the tumultuous waves in order to be guided by the stars displays religiousness.[7] What the age possesses is change and movement, even development, and this is the political for Kierkegaard. But what the age lacks is eternity, and that is the spiritual crisis. This spiritual crisis that Kierkegaard identifies with his age is also what he deems to be the source of its social crisis. Surprisingly, if we follow Kierkegaard, a social corrective to the present age of levelling requires a religious, rather than political, transformation.

Thus far, I have presented Kierkegaard's description of the eternal as that which stands outside the flux and contingencies of temporality, and as that which resists absorption into speculative or historical synthesis. As such, the eternal appears, however faintly at this point, as an orienteering mark for individuals, and which ensures that persons are also not completely absorbed into the world-historical process. What has yet to be explained is how the eternal forms the core of Kierkegaard's edifying praxis. For this Kierkegaard brings the eternal inward into the individual person so it is not mistakenly conceived of as a distant thing or place.

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[7] Below I will explain the nuance Kierkegaard adds to the notion of turning away from and turning toward the eternal.

Initially the eternal is isolating, but this is also for Kierkegaard the beginning of the edifying. "Eternity disperses the crowd by giving each person separately an infinite weight by making him heavy – as the single individual" (*UDVS*, 134). This represents a fundamental distinction between temporality and the eternal: "here in temporality…here number tempts, here counting is tempting, to count oneself along in the crowd" (*UDVS*, 133). Because weight signifies gravity and density we understand that the individual is endowed with dimensionality through the eternal that differentiates her from *the others* in a levelled crowd. But how else is one to understand this weight of the eternal? Kierkegaard also presents the weight of eternity as conscience. Eternity, we are told, "takes hold of each one separately with the strong arm of conscience, encircles him as the single individual, sets him apart with his conscience" (*UDVS*, 133). Although the eternal indicates a reference to transcendence it is also presented as an orientation to transcendence in inwardness – in conscience. By relating eternity to conscience Kierkegaard connects the eternal to the intimate space of psychological interiority. In fact, here Kierkegaard presses up next to the mystical.

> But in eternity the conscience is the only voice heard. It must be heard by the single individual, because the single individual has become the eternal echo of this voice. It must be heard; there is no place to escape it, because in the infinite there is no place; the individual himself is the place. It must be heard; the individual looks around in vain for the crowd (*UDVS*, 129).

Since eternally there is no crowd, there is also not the protection of a majority voice. One cannot arrogate to oneself a majority. Instead, conscience is the eternal solitary place where a person is confronted with herself and her own echoing voice of conscience.

However, Kierkegaard's association of the eternal with conscience can be misleading. The isolation and individuation of conscience can be confused for

autonomy and self-sufficiency. Kierkegaard's treatment of the 'eternal' in this 1847 discourse bears some affinity to Kant's "moral law within." At the conclusion to the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant offers his account of what gives humans cause for awe and wonder:

> Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above and the moral law within*. I have not to search for them and conjecture them as though they were veiled in darkness or were in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them directly with the consciousness of my existence.[8]

Both thinkers approach the ethical from the inside out, from a personal point of view of individuals endowed with freedom. And, as we have seen, conscience is a human characteristic that both draw attention to as that which allows people to judge their own lives against their ideal, their *absolute*. Although there are interesting possibilities for drawing connections between Kierkegaard and Kant with respect to ethics, the two thinkers diverge significantly on their approach to the religious, and therefore also the eternal. For Kant religious concerns come into view only once questions of practical reason are revealed (by reason) to be a matter of morality in order to achieve the *summum bonum*, or what Kant calls the 'kingdom of ends'. He regards the moral imperative as a law produced and established through the autonomy of human reason. Religious categories on offer by Kant such as 'God' and 'immortality' are postulated in order to achieve the moral ends of practical reason; they are postulates *for* reason – they are the result of a constructive reasoning process and they are primarily functional.

For Kant, then, conscience means that we have established a law unto ourselves, autonomously, for the sake of achieving our moral ideal. But for Kierkegaard such autonomous production is illusion. For him the eternal is neither postulated nor

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by T. K. Abbott (New York: Prometheus Books, 1996 [1787]), 191.

derived as part of a practical (moral) intellectual construction, but it is *given* to creatures. Kierkegaard does not present a philosophical argument for the eternal. Rather, his claim that the human is constituted in part by the eternal is derived dogmatically from Christian doctrine. Introducing the occasion of a discourse in *UDVS* Kierkegaard gives scriptural support to his claim citing Ecclesiastes 3:11, "God has made everything beautiful in its time; he has also put eternity into the heart of human beings" (*UDVS*, 11). The same is true for a 'moral law', which for Kierkegaard is expressed in the divine command to love.[9] The relationship between eternity and conscience receive their clarification. Conscience, as a question of spirit, does not situate the individual alone with herself, as we first imagined; conscience places the individual eternally before another and is faced with a question. The question that eternity asks of conscience is,

> Are you now living in such a way that you are aware as a single individual, that in every relationship in which you relate yourself outwardly you are aware that you are also relating yourself to yourself as a single individual, that even in the relationships we human beings so beautifully call the most intimate you recollect that you have an even more intimate relationship, the relationship in which you as a single individual relate yourself to yourself before God? (*UDVS*, 129)

This quotation generates two avenues for explication, one having to do with how a person answers the question, and another having to do with the nature of the relationship between the eternal and conscience. Beginning with the second problem we acknowledge that there is a dialectic at work. The eternal is at once transcendent, completely apart from the change and flux of the world, like a star above the sea, but the eternal is also quite close and available to the intimacy of the human heart in conscience, before God in inwardness. Therefore the eternal is not a matter for determination or control, and it is *in* the human being, which means it is a matter of

[9] In the next chapter we will explore Kierkegaard's treatment of love.

spirit and freedom. Now to the other response concerning how a person answers the question of conscience. A person can only ask and answer this question apart from the crowd. No public, not even public reason or law, no class, no national identity, and no race can ask or answer this question on one's behalf. The infinite weight of the eternal that isolates the individual in this way resists the levelling temptation to shirk the question and defer it to an abstraction. But neither does the eternal abolish those corporate identities and relationships, and neither do we deny that these identities and relationships exercise significant power and meaning; it simply means that a person will not be absorbed into them without remainder, that a person will not *spiritually* be subordinated by them.

Connecting the eternal to conscience highlights a moral component, but we are still a long way from establishing the social benefit of the eternal. The point about conscience for Kierkegaard is that the eternal should be removed from philosophical debates about metaphysics or system and returned to the nature of human creatures where he believes the eternal theologically belongs. Kierkegaard regularly explains the eternal constituent in humans from psychological categories. In such cases 'the eternal' corresponds to spirit and freedom, and the psychological categories that are consequences of these: anxiety, despair, joy, and hope.

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The two pseudonymous texts dedicated to an exposition of the human condition (*The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849)) present the human as a psychological creature whose consciousness consists of a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. This synthesis is regularly listed together with other similar disjunctions. In *The Concept of Anxiety* we are told that a person is a synthesis of

psyche and body, but that one is *also* a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal (*CA*, 85). Likewise, we read in *The Sickness Unto Death* that a person is a synthesis of the infinite and finite, of freedom and necessity, as well as the temporal and the eternal (*SUD*, 13). For both pseudonyms the synthesis of body/psyche or finite/infinite is held together by a third term – *spirit* – which is a self-reflexive relating that relates to itself as the specific dyadic synthesis (finite/infinite, body/psyche) (*CA*, 85; *SUD*, 13). For Kierkegaard it is spirit that truly marks a person *as a person*. Spirit, is a kind of relation and this kind of relation is what Kierkegaard calls 'the self'. He determines that the self is a relation that could not have established itself, but instead is established by another and relates "to that which established the entire relation" (*SUD*, 13).[10] When the relation is constituted by a third factor (spirit or self) there exists the possibility of either misrelation or right-relation in the relation between the two aspects of the synthesis, and in the relation between the self and that which constitutes the relation. This possibility of misrelation or right relation is itself the very condition of psychology and theology, and as such it is the possibility of anxiety, despair, joy and hope, faith and sin. And yet, that spirit belongs to every person means for Kierkegaard that a person is also related to the eternal in temporality, which is the place of the process of becoming. Now we turn to consider how the eternal is related to temporality and how it orients a person to this world.

[10] Much of *SUD* is a response to what Kierkegaard sees in German Idealism as a philosophy of self-production in immanence. For the relation to establish itself one aspect of the synthesis would have to be absolutised or deemed originary: either the finite occasions the infinite and ultimately holds the infinite within proper restraint or the infinite occasions the finite in the same way. But for Anti-Climacus these options give way to different forms of despair.

5.2. Eternity's temporal situation

To choose to exist with the eternal, to go with God to God, as Kierkegaard says (*UDVS*, 104), is not an escapist decision away from the commitments and requirements of actuality. It is the decision of faith to exist in the world in a particular way. Escapism is the judgment Kierkegaard places on Idealism and Romanticism, even deterministic Naturalism, since each of these attempts to overcome or subordinate either necessity or possibility (*SUD*). A person does not renounce the finite in order to gain the infinite. This argument can be found as early as *Fear and Trembling*. With his re-imagination of Abraham Kierkegaard proposes that faith, closely associated with 'the eternal', 'the infinite', 'the absurd', involves true commitment to this world. Johannes de Silentio reports that people of faith are "solid all the way through" (*FT*, 39), they belong entirely to finitude and the world, they attend their jobs and churches, go for walks, and smoke their pipes (*FT*, 39-40). And yet "no heavenly gaze or any sign of the incommensurable betrays [them]" (*FT*, 39).

> He knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, and yet the finite tastes just as good to him as to one who never knew anything higher, because his remaining in finitude would have no trace of a timorous, anxious routine, and yet he has this security that makes him delight in it as if finitude were the surest thing of all…He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it, and no one ever suspects anything else (*FT*, 40-41).

For the person of faith the movement of infinity[11] is a double movement and a continual movement that gains finitude in its fullness while letting go of finitude as ultimate – and this gaining and letting go is invisible; the finite historical life of one who chooses the eternal, who makes the movement of infinity in faith (who relates passionately to a possibility that is not actual or calculable), appears no different

[11] This is a term that vanishes from Kierkegaard's texts and is replaced after 1846 by the idea of existing with or in the eternal.

(from an external and comparative view) than anyone else. Kierkegaard's theological trope of the incognito and the invisible ones, which are prominent after 1846, and which will be treated in more detail below, is sampled here in *Fear and Trembling*.

Another point to consider is how choosing the eternal involves delight in finitude. For the person who has chosen to exist with the eternal finitude does not have a bitter taste, but it tastes just as good as it does for anyone else. She "finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything," and she does it "with an assiduousness that marks the worldly man who is attached to such things" (*FT*, 39). Existing with the eternal then does not involve an ascetic renunciation of the body, of natural material need, nor does it involve a monastic separation from the social complexity of interactions with people and institutions of diverse interests. In other words, "temporality, finitude – that is what it is all about" (*FT*, 49). Being in the eternal *fills* life lived finitely in the concrete occasions of daily life; or as Haufniensis puts it in *The Concept of Anxiety*, "the eternal is the present, and the present is full" (*CA*, 86). According to Haufniensis this in fact forms an essential aspect of Christian faith:

> The pivotal concept in Christianity, that which made all things new, is the fullness of time, but the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past (*CA*, 90).

Such an apex of temporality has already been introduced in this study in the context of communion and expressed through the concept of contemporaneity with Christ at the altar.[12] Temporality, then, is the place that commands our attention and our activity, but it is the eternal that qualifies such attention and activity.

Therefore it is with a proper conception of the eternal, with a dialectical experience of oneself as composed of the temporal and eternal that an existential task can be

[12] See Section II, 'On the occasion of communion'

viewed as realistic. This is because Kierkegaard believes eternity binds us to temporality and to each other more completely than nature and thought are able to.

5.3. The 'moment' and History

Temporality, we learn naturally and without controversy, is inevitable alteration and succession; it is the law of time as chronology (*chronos*); it is formally expressed as past, present, and future. And yet, temporality's intuitive expression (as past, present, and future) and undeniable actuality is fraught with fissure, opposition, and incommensurability. "The temporal has three periods and therefore does not ever actually exist completely or exist completely in any of them," whereas "the eternal *is*" (*WL*, 280). Kierkegaard's '*is*' is not static, but it is also not temporal in the sense of *chronos* or sequence. Rather, the eternal *is* in a double sense of absolute difference and pure duration.[13]

Temporality, we are told, "futilely wants to make itself important, counts the moments, counts and adds…Eternity is the very opposite…it is the opposite of the whole of temporality, and with all the powers of eternity it resists temporality's becoming more" (*CD*, 98). Therefore, in the relation of the temporal and the eternal the eternal is dominant and "does not want to have its time but wants to make time *its own* and then permits the temporal also to have its time" (*UDVS*, 11). Louis Dupré explains that the opposition between the temporal and the eternal is not equal like the opposition between the finite and the infinite. Thus,

[13] Karl Barth also defines God's eternity as "pure duration," the "simultaneous occasion as beginning, middle and end," that is "without separation, distance and contradiction," in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II.I, The Doctrine of God* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004 [1957]), 608.

> The synthesis with the eternal is lopsided from the start: the temporal owes its own content to its opposite, and the eternal preserves its transcendence even after having posited its temporal counterpart.[14]

Temporality and eternity are absolutely distinct; they are nevertheless related, but unevenly. The eternal is neither an aspect of temporality as infinite succession, nor is it simply the annihilation of time, but it holds all of temporality within itself.[15] Infinite extension of time would not bring temporality closer to the eternal, because even with the seeming infinite extension of time there remains, as Barth puts it, "the separation and distance and contradiction which mark it as time and distinguish it from eternity *as the creature from the Creator*."[16] A qualitative difference stands between the temporal and the eternal, which corresponds to the qualitative difference between God and creature that underpins one aspect of the dialectic in our theological investigation. However, between the temporal and the eternal is not such an insurmountable distance or broad ditch as one imagines – there is a point of contact, and the human being affords such contact.[17] Eternity, in the sense discussed above, is the eternity belonging to God. But we must not forget that for Kierkegaard the eternal is also a qualification of spirit that belongs properly to every person.

The other sense in which the eternal *is* (as duration) comes through Kierkegaard's concepts of contemporaneity (*Samtidighed*) and the moment (*Øieblikket*). In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard writes, "only the eternal can be and become and remain

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[14] Louis Dupré, "Of Time and Eternity in Kierkegaard's Concept of Anxiety," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (1984): 174.

[15] Barth, *Doctrine of God*, 623.

[16] Ibid., 608, emphasis added.

[17] The question of a "point of contact" became the crux of a theological debate between E. Brunner and K. Barth. Brunner maintained a point of contact between the acts of God and the efforts of humanity whereas Barth opposed this position. See, John W. Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 129-130, 149-162. While Kierkegaard certainly emphasises the qualitative difference between God and creature, while he maintains, as Barth would later, that there is no human theory that resolves the theological 'riddles' or paradoxes of the God-man, eternity, death-into-life, etc., he also affirms an active proximity established between humanity and God, and this includes a human capability to relate to that divinity apart from fixed doctrinal or dogmatic claims and, as we shall see, apart from the Church.

contemporary with every age; by contrast, temporality divides within itself, and the present cannot become contemporary with the future, or the future with the past, or the past with the present" (*WL*, 31-32). The eternal is Kierkegaard's sublimating category: through it the different periods of temporality are held together in their difference and yet what is produced is a new 'unity', a new situation – the moment.[18] It is the coincidence of the eternal in time that Kierkegaard, via Vigilius Haufniensis (1844), calls *Øieblikket* ('the moment').[19] If "time and eternity touch each other, then it must be in time, and now we have come to the moment" (*CA*, 87). Time without eternity is the sheer flux of sequence where 'moments' are completely cut off from each other because they have no way to relate to each other; it is temporality as divisibility whereby the momentary "signifies the present as that which has no past and no future," and therefore for Haufniensis it is an example of the "imperfection of sensuous life" (*CA*, 87). If, however, time is touched by the eternal then this also signifies the present as that which has no past and no future. But in this case Haufniensis insists that "this is the perfection of the eternal" (*CA*, 87) because now the moment is a qualitative category which directs the other elements (past and future) through itself rather than being indifferent to them. The moment which belongs to a concept of sensuous life has neither duration nor depth; it is fleeting; it is a boundary

[18] I use "sublimate" cautiously here, knowing that Kierkegaard is suspicious of attempts to apply Hegel's methodological concept to religious categories. And yet it is precisely this notion of overcoming difference in a unity which preserves the difference that describes what the eternal is doing through *the moment*.

[19] Stephen Backhouse (*Christian Nationalism*, Oxford: 2011) provides excellent analysis of the philosophical role *Øieblikket* occupies in Kierkegaard's work (see chapter 4). Backhouse explains that although the etymology of *Øieblikket* may suggest a 'glance of the eye' he believes it is more appropriate to translate *Øieblikket* as a 'moment of vision' (93-94). This translation retains two aspects of the concept that Kierkegaard uses. Backhouse identifies a mathematical usage – indicative of an emphasis on 'moment' or an atom of eternity (94-95). But the moment of vision also carries existential significance; it is active and has to do with appropriation, with an attitudinal shift, with a 'surge of feeling' (95). When I speak of 'the moment' I am also implying a meaning similar to Backhouse's 'moment of vision'.

(*CA*, 91). But the moment (*Øieblikket*) as eternal brings us back to the concept of the fullness of time.

Haufniensis actually advances a bold set of claims. Time without the eternal is meaningless in the same way that time has no self-reflective meaning for nature.[20] While this may not be radical in light of the Kantian critique, which locates time in human perception,[21] the following conclusions warrant attention:

> Only with the moment does history begin…The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time. As a result, the above-mentioned division acquires its significance: the present time, the past time, the future time (*CA*, 89).

With the eternal temporality becomes historical through the moment as event. The moment, as history producing, does not occur by accident or necessity as a chronological or natural unfolding; the eternal moment (*Øieblikket*) of which we are speaking can only be intentional and activated; it is creational. The moment, then, is not merely a boundary or dividing line, but it takes on the significance of an activity for subjectivity.[22] Moments are interjections into temporality as *chronos*. The moment is enacted, and therefore it can be decisive and saturated with meaning (whether joy, hope, anxiety or despair). Now we have come to the historical in a religious sense,

[20] In *Christian Discourses* Kierkegaard notes how the bird does not worry about tomorrow in part because for the bird there is no 'tomorrow', there is not even 'today', and this is because the bird is not defined as spirit and does not exist with the eternal as a human can (*CD*, 70-72).

[21] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. James W. Ellington, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001 [1783]), xi, 25-25.

[22] Although it is beyond the scope of this project to do so, I think, there is certainly an opportunity for Kierkegaard to converse with Alain Badiou. Although Badiou avowedly rejects theology and any transcendence that is not transcendence-in-immanence (*Ethics*, 25), they do share an attitude toward the production of truth and fidelity to a *decidedly* extraordinary event. Badiou's *event* and Kierkegaard's *Øieblikket*, at least on the surface, bear affinity to each other. For an overview of the possible areas of convergence see, Michael O'Neill Burns, "Alain Badiou: Thinking the Subject after the Death of God," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Social-Political Thought*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, edited by Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 41-52. See also, Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, translated by Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 40-56, and *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

which depends on both divine activity (transcendence) and human activity in relation to the divine.

With *Øieblikket* Kierkegaard hopes to separate time from the eternal. Just as it is possible to confuse the infinite with the eternal, so is it possible to confuse time itself with the eternal or the *Absolute*. Highlighting Kierkegaard's warning against the 'eternalization' of time, Dupré notes how Kierkegaard,

> Ridicules the idea of attaching to each moment an eternal significance *in its own right*. This, in fact, amounts to a simple divinization of time, which in the end abolishes the genuinely temporal. True eternity always retains a certain resistance to time, however much it permeates it.[23]

For Kierkegaard it is the "certain resistance to time" as eternity's true transcendence that prevents temporality's becoming something more, becoming itself divine.

The hinge in all of this has been that eternity not only touches time, but that it constantly pervades time. How does the eternal pervade time? On one side of this answer is God and on the other side stands the human being. *Øieblikket*, as event, is a point of contact. A moment should not be thought of as an atom of time, but is more appropriately understood as an atom of eternity (*CA*, 88). Without explicitly stating it Kierkegaard is presenting what belongs to the doctrine of revelation. Now another category imposes itself on temporality other than *chronos*, and that is the other Greek word for "time": *kairos*. This word indicates, as Tillich suggests, a qualitative readiness – the time is right, or has been made right for an event.[24] In any religion where revelation informs part of the religious cosmology history is not solely beholden to temporality's *chronos*, to flux or sequentialism – instead, *kairos* plays a

[23] Dupré, "Time and Eternity," 172.

[24] Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, edited by Carl E. Braaten (London: SCM Press, 1968), 1.

decisive role.[25] Through the moment the eternal and the historical become the existential concern (both productive and communicative) of humans. How the eternal touches temporality is expressed in the domain of humanity, but not humanity in general (as species), not history in general (as chronology); instead, the eternal is an edifying task in the domain of human history through the category of the individual.

The implications for humanity are that we ought not rely on a dream of world-historical necessity for an ultimate teleological consummation of the fissures between subject and object, finitude and infinitude, past, present and future; we should not expect redemption through the sheer unfolding of time. In other words, the good and the true (for philosophy) and redemption (for theology) are not functions of an immanent mechanism – the achievement of history as *chronos* – but instead these can belong to the world through 'the moment' as eternal, as *kairos*, in human activity.

5.4. Eternity's 'double direction' ~ the eternal task *today*

The weight of Kierkegaard's communication certainly falls on the side of human endeavour. Far less frequently does he venture to expound upon divine activity. But the two sides may in fact come together in some way that still does not obscure the difference. Kierkegaard is most forthcoming regarding the human endeavour to exist with the eternal, and how this is a social endeavour, in three religious texts signed in his own name. They are: *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847), *Works of Love* (1847), and *Christian Discourses* (1848). The publication dates indicate that the background to these texts is formed by the social developments leading to and including the transition in Denmark to a constitutional monarchy in 1849. Although

[25] Kierkegaard does not explicitly use this term and only rarely does 'revelation' enter into his communication. However, I claim that Kierkegaard's concept of the moment bears the theological marks of a *qualitative*, messianic, and revelatory intrusion/interruption into temporality. Hence *kairos*.

the discourse genre of these texts is markedly different from the critical and polemical *Two Ages* and *The Pont of View*, the edifying communication can also be read as a religious response to present age worldliness (or what is the same for Kierkegaard – spiritlessness).

Kierkegaard begins *Christian Discourses* with a discussion of what he calls the 'cares of the pagans', identifying them with a logic that inhabits the world without reference to transcendence, God, or to the eternal. "Pagan" represents autonomy, self-creation, and self-reliance. In the discourse titled "the care of self-torment" Kierkegaard finds the source of his reflection in the gospel message – 'therefore do not worry about tomorrow' (*CD*, 70). But, worry for tomorrow seems deeply rooted in what it means to be human; we are creatures that relate to a future that is precarious and fragile because it is both certain and uncertain. We can be pretty certain the tomorrow will come, so some preparation is necessary, but we cannot be certain what tomorrow will bring. Thus, reflecting with scripture on the human worry about tomorrow allows Kierkegaard to reformulate the moment (*Øieblikket*) as a concrete religious task of *today*. Kierkegaard writes,

> All earthly and worldly care is basically for the next day. The earthly and worldly care was made possible precisely by this, that the human being was compounded of the temporal and the eternal, became a self, but in becoming a self, the next day came into existence for him. And basically this is where the battle is fought (*CD*, 71).

For the self, dialectically defined, the 'next day' is the source of anxiety; it is the future that "lies so dark before us" (*CD*, 73), and this is the occasion for either fear or hope.[26] Typically the gospel passage that Kierkegaard is reflecting on gets interpreted as speaking to the anxiety associated with maintaining a livelihood. But Kierkegaard insists this is a misunderstanding. The concern about livelihood rests, so to speak, on

[26] Vigilius Haufniensis, in *CA*, links anxiety to possibility and the future when he writes, "anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility (*CA*, 42).

a basic existential concern for the 'next day', which at its core is anxiety or worry about temporality.

> And yet the whole thing is only one battle, the battle of the next day…because it was and is there that the greatest and most decisive battle is fought – there temporality and eternity are decided (*CD*, 71-72).

The problem of the next day as possibility/necessity, as freedom/necessity, forces a question regarding how one orients oneself to temporality. The religious task is to position oneself *eternally* within this temporality, and the battle is to relieve anxiety through an annihilation of the anxious "next day," while remaining honest with respect to one's temporality and the demands of necessity. Here, Haufniensis's *Øieblikket*, as eternity's moment, meets what Kierkegaard explains in *Christian Discourses* as the eternal task of *today*.

What could it humanly mean to be rid of this care of the next day? When the care of the next day is removed then, "either you are dying or you are one who by dying to temporality grasped the eternal, either you are one who is actually dying or one who is *really* living" (*CD*, 72). Dying to temporality means something like renouncing the temporal (and the material) as ultimate, but not renouncing their necessity and possibility. To be fully living in the religious sense that Kierkegaard speaks of is to live in such a way that temporality's flux is not the ultimate horizon of human life.

In order to be "really living" a person's existence must operate in the moment (*Øieblikket*), through what is called a 'double direction': this involves relating to possibility and a future, while also having one's life firmly grounded in the tasks of today (temporality).

Another nautical metaphor is employed by Kierkegaard to illuminate how the eternal orients a person to the task of living today.

> The one who rows a boat turns his back to the goal toward which he is working. So it is with the next day. When, with the help of the eternal, a person lives

> absorbed in today, he turns his back to the next day. The more he is eternally absorbed in today, the more decisively he turns his back to the next day; then he does not see it at all (*CD*, 73).

With this analogy the concept of the moment can be adjusted to include movement and its intentional activity. Religiously, attention must always remain on the task in hand, on life lived historically and materially, which is in front of us. What is behind us over our shoulders is not the past when we are oriented to the eternal, but it is our future, it is the next day. "Faith turns its back to the eternal expressly in order to have it entirely with it today" (*CD*, 74). Kierkegaard is suggesting, figuratively of course, that the religious person walk forward through life facing backwards. Now we can say that Kierkegaard does recommend a "backward" movement,[27] but its attention is on this day today, and its direction is future oriented.

There is an appropriate and inappropriate positioning with respect to the eternal. Inappropriate positioning involves a religious danger (one that Kierkegaard identifies with the religious enthusiast's infatuation with eternity and the Romantic infatuation with the infinite). Facing the eternal such that one's back is to today means getting absorbed into the infinite and an imaginary future. Those who Kierkegaard associates philosophically with the Romantics, or religiously with an enthusiast, are furthest from the eternal since they turn their backs on today. For such persons the next day is like a fantasy; it "becomes a monstrous confused figure" and the eternal becomes a vertiginous lure into the infinite.

In *The Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus explains this in terms of a misrelation in the self between its finite and infinite aspects. Anti-Climacus is aware of the dizzying power of the 'infinitely possible' to lure individuals away from actuality,

[27] Adorno, *Kierkegaard*, 27.

which is how Kierkegaard interprets the Romanticism and Idealism of his age, and that religiousness itself can also succumb to this danger. Religious infinity "may so sweep a man off his feet that his state is simply an intoxication" (*SUD*, 32) – an opiate! – which, as Dupré states, "may carry the religious person away from himself and his earthly task into an attitude of mystical indifference toward the finite."[28] Religiousness does indeed fall prey to mystification, as does Romanticism and Idealism if, with an eye on the eternal and one's back to today, the individual imagines possibility can overcome necessity.[29] Of course, in this case one's eye is not actually on the eternal, but instead confuses the infinite for the eternal.

The task before every human being is to take the self's "possibility back into necessity" (*SUD*, 37). According to Anti-Climacus every self is "just as possible as it is necessary" (*SUD*, 35). It is the necessary insofar as it is *this* self – as a particular biological creature, a creature situated in a certain historical-cultural-geographic location not of its own making. The self is possibility "insofar as it has the task of becoming itself" (*SUD*, 35). What gives the self its *eternal* character is its ability to manoeuvre this predicament of necessity and possibility and its ability to choose to relate to that which stands outside the structure of finitude, temporality, and necessity.[30] Anti-Climacus claims that possibility flounders if the self imagines that it can move away from necessity since the self is never removed from its biology or its history, nor does it arrive anywhere else apart from these (*SUD*, 36). Although *becoming*, we are told, is a movement away from necessity, what it means "to become oneself is a movement *in* that place," in necessity (*SUD*, 36. Emphasis added).

[28] Dupré, "Time and Eternity," 165.

[29] Recall that for Anti-Climacus actuality is the coincidence of possibility and necessity (*SUD*, 36), which means that both components must remain in relation even if they are in tension.

[30] Even unsuccessful manoeuvring leading to despair and anxiety is evidence, for Kierkegaard, of the eternal character of humanity.

The eternal orients and facilitates this movement; the manoeuvre of eternity is the ability (negatively) to avoid volleying back and forth between the dualities of finitude and the infinite, the necessary and the possible; it (positively) allows for the possibility of holding the dualities together through human action in temporality. This is what allows Dupré to say of Kierkegaard that "for him the ultimate category of selfhood is not infinite *possibility*, that is, indefinite openness, but *eternity*," and that "Kierkegaard perceived the uniqueness of 'the eternal', where Schelling…failed to grasp fully the distinctness of the eternal from the infinitely possible."[31] The difference between the infinitely open and an eternal self is that an eternal self is not paralysed or distracted by the abyss of possibility; instead the eternal self is anchored by the concreteness of the moment, and therefore oriented to the tasks of today.

There are two concepts that Kierkegaard employs to explain what it means to exist for today, and which provides additional qualification of the moment (*Øieblikket*) as activity of the eternal; they are: contemporaneity (*Samtidighed*) and enduring continuance (*Bestandighed*). These two concepts, which correspond to *Øieblikket*, bring the eternal into the realm of praxis so that the eternal becomes a task through them. These tasks, as religious tasks, are also in fact social ethical tasks.

Contemporaneity in Kierkegaard's writings is most often associated with Christology and applies to the unique relational predicament that exists for a person of faith *vis-à-vis* Christ. Particularly in *Practice in Christianity* Anti-Climacus demonstrates how the vast historical distance between the life of Christ and a modern person does nothing to mitigate the offence of who Christ claims to be or what he claims to do (*PC*, 26-66). And neither does the historical distance make the task of

[31] Dupré, "Time and Eternity," 168.

following or 'imitating' Christ any less dangerous or difficult. Therefore, a modern person who claims to live religiously by faith in the God-man exists in a situation contemporary with one who existed in the first century, face-to-face with the God-man.[32]

In other texts after 1846 contemporaneity refers to one's self-relation. (*CD*, 74; *FSE*, 104). To be contemporary in this sense means to be near to oneself in terms of self-knowledge and self-actualization (*FSE*, 104); it is to see through the forms of alienation and mystification that Kierkegaard attributes to despair, melancholy, and the aesthetic existence. However, Kierkegaard suspects it is rare to find people who are contemporary with themselves. Instead, it is far more common that people are trying to exist "apocalyptically, in theatrical illusions, hundreds of thousands of miles ahead of themselves, or several generations ahead of themselves" (*CD*, 74). To live ahead of oneself, to dwell in the 'care of the next day', is presented by Kierkegaard as a state like intoxication, rather than an example of a sober attitude toward the demands of existence. Alternatively, what the contemporaneous one generates is edifying since that person generates the substance of today. Kierkegaard writes,

> To be totally contemporary with oneself today with the help of the eternal is also the most formative and generative…This contemporaneity today is the very task… When it is worked out, it is faith…Therefore when the Christian works and when he prays, he speaks only for today: he prays for the daily bread *today*, for blessing upon his work *today*, to escape evil's snare *today*, to come closer to God's kingdom *today* (*CD*, 74-75).

Contemporaneity with the eternal and with oneself in temporality is for Kierkegaard the proper basis of any activity. Contemporaneity involves a peculiar kind of activity for this *today*: it cannot be static, but neither is it fleeting. Therefore the structure of

[32] The Christological significance of contemporaneity will be discussed in further detail in the following section as it pertains to imitation and communication.

the moment includes a further active qualification that corresponds to contemporaneity: enduring continuance [*Bestandighed*].[33] Kierkegaard writes,

> Whatever has undergone no change certainly has existence [*Bestaaen*], but it does not have enduring continuance [Bestandighed]; insofar as it has existence, it is; but insofar as it has not gained enduring continuance amid change it cannot become contemporary with itself and in that case is either happily ignorant of this misrelation or is disposed to sadness (*WL*, 31).

The eternal enters temporality in an action that is qualified by duration. In *Christian Discourses* Kierkegaard provides his reader with an illustration that demonstrates how all of these concepts (the eternal, contemporaneity, and enduring continuance) come together in human activity.

> The youth *says what is true*, but the old man has verified it, *has made true* that which is indeed eternally true. This is the only difference, something that has been overlooked in these times, in which people with all this demonstrating and demonstrating have completely forgotten that the highest a person is capable of is to make [*gjøre*] an eternal truth true, to make it true that it is true – by doing [*gjøre*] it, by being oneself the demonstration (*SKS* 10, 110 / *CD*, 98).

Thus, the eternal is not some*thing* or some*where*, but it is more appropriately a some*how*. To make an eternal truth true by being oneself the demonstration is one way of explaining what Johannes Climacus means in *Concluding Postscript* when he refers to Christianity as an existence-communication (*CUP*, 73-75, 357-358). *Praxis*, this some*how* of communicating truth by being the demonstration, is the ability to communicate the eternal (inner) in temporality (the outer) without collapsing the difference in a dream of objectivity and direct communication. Furthermore, for Kierkegaard, the ability to make an eternal truth true belongs to the essential character of what it means to exist as humans.

[33] The translation 'enduring continuance' accounts for play between the words *Bestandig* (unceasing, perpetual) and *Bestaa* (exist, endure), but it can also be closely associated with Kierkegaard's concept of *repetition*. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Haufniensis devotes a lengthy footnote (*CA*, 17-19) explaining repetition in *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*. Haufniensis states, "eternity is the true repetition" (*CA*, 18).

In the following chapters we will consider the activity of this existence-communication that allows a person to be the demonstration of the eternal in existence. Now let us turn our attention to yet another perspective shift that is at work when the eternal is registered in a person's life.

5.5. Eternity's 'double direction' ~ the eternal task of the future

Turning our attention to *Works of Love*, and in particular the work of love that is to hope all things, the eternal is expressed as a relation to possibility, and to possibility as future.

> To hope relates to the future, to possibility, which in turn, unlike actuality, is always a duality, the possibility…of good or evil. The eternal *is*, but when the eternal touches the temporal or is in the temporal, they do not meet each other in the *present*, because in that case the present would itself be the eternal…Therefore, when the eternal is in the temporal, it is in the future…or possibility (*WL*, 249).

Kierkegaard now seems to contradict Haufniensis's claims in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) that 'the present is the eternal' (*CA*, 86) and the moment is the eternal, which "signifies the present as that which has no past and no future" (*CA*, 87). Furthermore, this passage from *Works of Love* (1847) appears to complicate the emphasis placed on *today* that we discussed in *Christian Discourses* (1848). But are these accounts of the eternal contradictory? Has the role, or the expression of the eternal undergone a complete alteration in the course of Kierkegaard's authorship? I suggest that the answer to both of these questions is 'No'. There is in fact significant continuity, particularly through the existential and religious categories of the moment, contemporaneity, and enduring continuance. The task of our analysis here is to demonstrate how Kierkegaard's understanding of the eternal contributes to a socially active and edifying character.

There is a difference between Kierkegaard's comments of 1847 and the claims of Haufniensis in 1844, yet it is a difference in the approach to the eternal that is being communicated. Haufniensis is offering an ontological and metaphysical description as part of his 'deliberation on the dogmatic issue' at hand. He is stating something about the nature of reality as he understands it philosophically. However, the task as he sees it is to demonstrate how such ontology is at work psychologically and existentially in the lived reality of humans – thus, we are presented with *Øieblikket*, 'the moment' as human activity. Yet the eternal also gets related to the future in *The Concept of Anxiety*. According to Haufniensis for the more immediate or innocent consciousness "the eternal first signifies the future" or "the future is the incognito in which the eternal…preserves its association with time" (*CA*, 89). To identify the eternal with the future is, for Haufniensis, a naïve misconstrual of the concept. What this means for Haufniensis is that "the future in turn is the eternal's (freedom's) possibility in the individuality expressed as anxiety" (*CA*, 91). Freedom is identified with the eternal, and the bond that identifies the two is possibility. "The possible corresponds exactly to the future. For freedom, the possible is the future, and the future is for time the possible" (*CA*, 91). The moment, as we have seen, holds the key to his presentation of the eternal. However, what Haufniensis fails to formulate, being not himself an emissary of the religious view, is the operative category of hope. Were he to consider this category the future may not be framed negatively as anxiety.

Possibility and its relation to a future is precisely where Kierkegaard picks up the discussion of the eternal as a task in *Works of Love*, a task of hope that is at the core of any edifying social activity. Hope relates to the future, to possibility, in a way other than as anxiety. For the one who hopes the future remains only possibility and it

remains always a duality, that is, as the possibility of good or evil. To relate to the duality equally is to *expect* (*WL*, 249), which is a relation to sheer possibility that Kierkegaard insists cannot be maintained except as indifference to the future (*WL*, 250). In fact Kierkegaard regards such a position of indifference as disingenuous. Instead an person makes a decision with respect to the possibility of the future. "To relate oneself expectantly to the possibility of the good is to *hope*, which for that very reason cannot be any temporal expectancy but is an eternal hope" (*WL*, 249). Alternatively, the one who relates expectantly to the possibility of evil is one who *fears* (*WL*, 249). The anxiety that Haufniensis speaks of pertains to the consciousness that is burdened by the choice when confronted with the unassailable uncertainty and possibility of the future. No theory, not even the calculus of probability can mitigate the possible when the question is a question of the advent of *the good*. Hence anxiety, then fear or hope.

However, we have to ask why the possibility of the good *cannot* be a temporal expectancy? The answer is found in the difference between hope and a wish, but also in the definition of the good itself. A wish, a want, or a longing indicates preference for one thing or another, one state or another (security, health, etc.). A wish signifies a "person's relationship to the possibility of multiplicity" (*WL*, 250), to this thing or that or another. Temporality also corresponds to multiplicity. Kierkegaard therefore reinforces a strong dichotomy: temporality is legion, the eternal *is* (one).

We are reminded of the other book of edifying discourses published in the same year as *Works of Love* that opens with 'The Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing' – that is, the Good. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard writes, "hope is to expect the possibility of the good, but the possibility of the good is the eternal" (*WL*, 250). Hope can only be a relation to the possibility of the good, and not as a relative good, but as

an absolute good in its fullness. To expect the good in temporality is actually a longing for *a good*, a particular and exclusive good. Thus, the logic of expectancy in temporality is akin to an economic logic of possession and exchangeability. Hope for the good, in the eternal sense, resists such economic logic.

Still, the good and the eternal seem completely divorced from human experience and human action if an absolute good is unable to coincide with temporality. In spite of this we are told eternity is "the greatest task ever assigned to a human being" (*WL*, 252). However the eternal, it seems, is too grand; it is too much for finite humanity to harness. "If eternity were to assign the human being the task all at once and in its own language, without regard for his capacities and limited powers, the human being would have to despair" (*WL*, 252). Since the human being is "temporality's child" (*WL*, 252), as Kierkegaard declares, the eternal is a task that must make itself conducive to temporality, but in such a way that it does not become one thing among many, an object in multiplicity. Recalling the analogy of the rower helps to illuminate Kierkegaard's explanation of the eternal in *Works of Love*. The rower, we remember, has her back to the goal, the eternal, and her attention is on the task at hand – rowing, *this day*. But it must always be remembered that the rower is in motion toward her goal. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard explains how eternity makes itself a manageable goal for 'temporality's child', the human being, and keeps her in motion:

> But then this is the wondrous thing, that this the greatest of powers, eternity, can make itself so small that it is divisible in this way, which is eternally one, so that, taking upon itself the form of the future, the possible, with the help of hope it brings up temporality's child (the human being), teaches him to hope (to hope is itself the instruction, is the relation to the eternal)…The eternal, in the proper sense, continually assigns in possibility just a small part at a time. By means of the possible, eternity is continually *near* enough to be available and yet *distant enough* to keep the human being in motion forward toward the eternal, to keep him going, going forward. This is how eternity lures and draws a person, in

> possibility, from the cradle to the grave – provided he chooses to hope (*WL*, 252-253).

This passage brings together the double direction of the eternal in the human work of hope. Eternity's availability, its nearness, corresponds to contemporaneity in the moment (*Øieblikket*), and the direction of focus and perspective on *this day*. The distance of the eternal has two meanings: it signifies the future as open and unfinished, which should imply to the human that a human being is also an open and 'unfinished' creature, that the task of becoming oneself still lies before each and every living person. This keeps the person in motion as the rower is in motion; it keeps a person restless in a generative sense, reluctant to claim the victory for oneself of having arrived at one's goal. It also suggests that the horizon of possibility for the human is not confined to the limits and necessities of a given day or even restricted to the abstract process of unfolding history, whether we are speaking of natural or social history. And the distance of the eternal also signifies its real transcendence, which also implies its freedom from human containment, possession, and technical manipulation.

The passage above also returns the concept of the eternal back to our dialectic of the edifying and polemical. The nearness is edifying: it draws close, affirms and validates, and is constructive. The distance is polemical: abetting pride, abetting domestication, authority, and righteousness. The luring quality of the eternal is its dialectical dynamic. "To lure is continually to be just as *near* as *distant*; in this way the one who hopes is always kept hoping, hoping all things, is kept in the hope for the eternal, which in temporality is the possible" (*WL*, 253).

In light of comments made in *Works of Love* and *Christian Discourses* the concept of *Øieblikket*, which Haufniensis presents in *The Concept of Anxiety*, becomes religiously refined after 1846. When Haufniensis writes, "The moment is that

ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other" (*CA*, 89), we can now add hope to that ambiguity. Religiously, the moment remains ambiguous insofar as it escapes full *parousia*, in terms of a desire for direct measurement or location, and insofar as it escapes closure. However, hope qualifies that ambiguity so that the moment can be *the moment* "whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time" (*CA*, 89). And it is the relation to the eternal in hope that makes the moment a productive and generative activity, rather than succumbing to the anxiety of temporality, whether as anxiety about the possible or worry for the next day.

Anxiety is socially stifling; one in anxiety can neither edify another nor oneself. But for the ones who lovingly hope the situation is eternally changed. Hope in the moment as eternal is what protects it from becoming merely the momentary or the sudden, but hope is also, with love, what makes the moment an *eternal* human task directed outwardly as social concern and social production, because the time of our concern is eternally this day *today*.

5.6. Eternity's 'Double Mode'

The double direction that has its pivotal axis in the moment, of being lured into the eternal, into the possible, and being oriented to today in temporality, not only locates the human religious task in this world, but it also activates that task. The eternal intensifies time, filling it with eternal significance and endurance. But this relation to time, we have seen, is not passive; in the moment and through the category of the individual the eternal is event and history producing. Kierkegaard insists that no deepening of inwardness, no refinement of the vertical relationship between the self and the eternal can be genuine if there is not also a corresponding outward and

horizontal communication and encounter. This returns us to a passage from *Works of Love*, cited at the beginning of this chapter, that explains the eternal in a person as a redoubling process,

> When, however, the eternal is in a human being, this eternal redoubles in him in such a way that every moment it is in him, it is in him in a double mode: in an outward direction and in an inward direction back into itself, but in such a way that this is one and the same, since otherwise it is not a redoubling (*WL*, 280).

What all of this directionality gets at is how the eternal anchors the human tasks of hope and love, which are the necessary elements of any edifying project. When eternity is presented in the form of hope, that is, eternal hope for the good, then this means hoping has an ethical goal and an ethical imperative. Eternity's lure in the moment, to be kept hoping for the possibility of the good, is also a work of love directed at others.

> But *lovingly* to hope all things signifies the relationship of the loving one to other people, so in relation to them, hoping for them, he continually holds possibility open with an infinite partiality for the possibility of the good. That is, he lovingly hopes that at every moment there is possibility, the possibility of the good for the other person (*WL*, 253).

And,

> No one can hope unless he is also loving; he cannot hope for himself without also being loving, because the good has an infinite connectedness; but if he is loving, he also hopes for others. In the same degree to which he hopes for others, he hopes for himself, because in the very same degree to which he hopes for others, he is one who loves … because this is the infinitely accurate, the eternal like for like that is in everything eternal (*WL*, 255).

Conclusion:

In this chapter we have seen that for Kierkegaard the eternal operates as the dialectical hinge that connects individuals' religious inwardness to their intensive and meaningful acts outwardly; it joins transcendence to immanence without blurring the difference, but ultimately the eternal always serves to locate an individual historically

through the existential categories of the moment and contemporaneity. Not only does the eternal direct every human to commit to the world, to this day every day, but the eternal commitment to the world in the activity of the moment (*Øieblikket*) involves the production of history as a human and divine task, and therefore the task acquires its ethical and social character: hope for the good expressed in works of love.

Chapter 6

Edifying Practice I:

The Works of Love and Encountering Neighbours

Introduction

Kierkegaard claims that religious life consists of a struggle in two places: inwardly with God and conscience, and outwardly with the world. Early on Kierkegaard wrote that fear and trembling in Christian life "is what the oscillating *balance wheel* is to the clock" – it prevents a standstill of faith and the absorption of subjectivity into objectivity – but it is not Christianity's *primus motor*, for that is love (*JP* III, 2383). We have seen that Communion's gift and its commission is love; and what it means to exist with the eternal, to exist with eternal intensiveness in life is to actively hope and love.

This chapter explores what inwardly accompanies the outward works of love so that the social activity of religious individuals can be true works of love and not works of selfish self-love. In this chapter love is introduced as a divine gift and the round of all that is edifying, while the Christian belief that love is commanded keeps love polemical and critical even as it edifies. Here, the neighbour is introduced as the category that ethically and spiritually links every person to each other through God as middle term. Regarding oneself and others as *the neighbour* is Kierkegaard's foundation for life together beyond the levelling politics of the present age.

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Kierkegaard published two books in 1847: *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (March 1847) and *Works of Love* (September 1847). Both are signed in his own name and both identify the single individual as the intended recipient of the work, as the figure who is to earnestly reflect on the discourses and deliberations, and for whom appropriation alone is possible. But Kierkegaard insists that *Works of Love* is unique amidst the genre of discourses since it communicates more forcefully an imperative. Here, he writes, the deliberations are "not about *love* but about *works of love*" (*WL*, 3). Praxis receives its accent. And yet the book can certainly not be confused with a manifesto that advances a particular social program. Kierkegaard is aware that this will not satisfy those striving on behalf of a specific political movement or struggle. A year earlier (1846) he wrote in an unpublished note that "an impatient politician who hastily glances at these pages will certainly find only little for his upbuilding" (*PV*, 103). But he also insists that if such a sceptic takes the time s/he will discover that his presentation of the religious "is the transfigured rendition of what a politician…has thought in his most blissful moment" (*PV*, 103). It is Kierkegaard's conviction that the benefit of his project to communicate the religious significance of *the individual* is intrinsically *social*.

Famously, Theodor Adorno is one such politically concerned critic who is deeply suspicious of the social consequences that, he believes, result from Kierkegaard's religious logic. In fact, it is to *Works of Love* that Adorno turns in order to demonstrate that "the forces of annihilation are scarcely tamed" in Kierkegaard's doctrine of love, which he judges to be "socially conformist and ready to lend its arm to oppression and misanthropy."[1] According to Adorno, Kierkegaardian love remains

[1] Theodore Adorno, "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," *Studies in Philosophy and social Science* 8 (1939): 417, 421. Later Levinas would echo Adorno's concern, only without reference to *Works of Love*. Levinas aligns Kierkegaard with Nietzsche's 'philosophizing with a hammer' and notices how Kierkegaardian thought, "associated with the most unscrupulous and cynical forms of

"a matter of pure inwardness"[2] that is unable to become concretised or particularised in any real situation – despite Kierkegaard's claims to the contrary. Adorno claims to see right through Kierkegaard's 'verbose' proclamations[3] and states, "A doctrine of love which calls itself practical cannot be severed from social insight. Such an insight is denied to Kierkegaard."[4] Adorno's Kierkegaard may know something of the intricacies of human psychology but his sociological insights are said to be grossly inadequate. Evidently Kierkegaard was familiar with this kind of suspicion. As we saw earlier, Kierkegaard suspects that people think he knows nothing about sociality. But, in that journal entry, he determines to respond.

> When I have first presented one aspect clearly and sharply, then the other affirms itself even more strongly. Now I have my theme of the next book. It will be called: Works of Love (*JP* V, 5972 [1847]).

Sociality, then, is supposedly allowed to 'affirm itself even more strongly' once the other aspect – the category of the individual – has been presented clearly and sharply. It is true that religious existence and its category of the individual corresponds to inwardness and it follows the movement that Kierkegaard describes as, "*from* the public to 'the single individual'" (*PV*, 10). But the writings of this period also signal another movement: *away from* the self-sufficiency of *Romantic* or *Idealist* inwardness (Adorno's *intérieur*) *toward* an existence of social engagement. *Works of Love* now appears, I argue, as part of the religious movement *from* the individual *to* an affirmation of a sociality that is communicative, critical, and edifying. What follows here is not a wholesale defence of Kierkegaard's concept of love, rather, I am arguing that *Works of Love* provides an important theological resource to meet the challenge

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action, could now be taken seriously as a kind of justification for violence and terror;" See Levinas, "Existence and Ethics," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, eds. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 31.

[2] Adorno, "Doctrine of Love," 415.

[3] Ibid., 414-415.

[4] Ibid., 421.

of contemporary politics that structures belonging around relationships of utility, kinship or preference.[5] Love is both the polemical challenge to that kind of politics and it is the edifying ingredient for the possibility of an undefined and open polis.[6]

6.1. The Ground of Love

Love, for Kierkegaard, is first a *gift*;[7] it has its source apart from ourselves. Kierkegaard does not equivocate on this point. "It is God who has placed love in the human being, and it is God who in every case will determine what is love" (*WL*, 126).[8] In a rare occurrence of Trinitarian theology Kierkegaard opens his *Works of Love* with a prayer that names God, Christ, and Spirit as the source and being of love, thereby anchoring his presentation of love to the religious categories of creation, gift, and revelation rather than the categories of reason or nature.

> How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you God of Love, source of all love in heaven and on earth; you who spared nothing but in love gave everything; you who are love, so that one who loves is what he is only by being in you! How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you who revealed what love is, you our Savior and Redeemer, who gave yourself in order to save all. How could one speak properly of love if you were forgotten, you Spirit of love, who take nothing of your own but remind us of that love-sacrifice, remind the believer to love as he is loved and his neighbor as himself! (*WL*, 3-4)

Nowhere in *Works of Love*, or in other texts of this period, does Kierkegaard present a philosophical argument for establishing God as the basis for love; neither theodicy

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[5] Two formidable critical analyses of *Works of Love* are, Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[6] See, Graham M. Smith, "Kierkegaard from the Point of View of the Political," *History of European Ideas* 31 (2005): 45.

[7] The centrality of gift in Kierkegaard's understanding of divine love is a guiding theme in Ferreira's commentary on *Works of Love*; see, Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 17-19, 151.

[8] On the divine establishment of love in *Works of Love*, see also, Krishek, *Faith and Love*, 110. This is important to Krishek's analysis because God-given love, or God as love, is what Krishek suggests 'Kjerlighed' *is*. It is "the hidden power of love," "the fundamental love," "love itself" (111), and therefore it is different from the manifestations of love, which make up the works of love. This provides Krishek with the basis for the argument that neighbourly love and other loves are not so far apart (in their works) as Kierkegaard claims.

nor apologetics is his concern. Instead, as we have already discovered in "the gospel of sufferings," determining whether God is or is not love is strictly a question for faith – not propositional logic. But here in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard approaches the question from a different angle. He takes the motto for the second series of deliberations from 1 Corinthians 8:1, 'But love builds up' (*WL*, 209). The question now is: what does it mean to say love builds up, and how is this upbuilding to be done? To build up is "to erect something from the ground up" (*WL*, 211) and therefore we are led to consider the ground upon which love can build.

Kierkegaard insists that to build love up must mean either that the loving one implants love in another person's heart, or "it must mean that the one who loves presupposes that love is in the other person's heart," that by loving one "presupposes its presence in the ground" (*WL*, 216). Asking whether a person can implant love in another's heart Kierkegaard responds negatively, remarking that it is "inconceivable" between human beings (*WL*, 216). Rather, "it is God, the Creator, who must implant love in each human being, he who himself is Love" (*WL*, 216). Therefore the ground of love is love – God – and the building to be erected upon the ground is love, and the activity of building is love. Hence, Kierkegaard admits, "In this way the task is circumscribed" (*WL*, 215).

What may appear to some as at best tautological and at worst as nonsensical in fact concisely demarcates the ethical and attitudinal dimension of Kierkegaard's edifying practice. It means that love is not something that is entirely constructed or negotiated on human terms; it means that humans, by being asked to look beyond themselves for the source of love, should not confuse love with their own propensity for control and their own edifices of autonomous production. "Thus it is specifically unloving and not at all upbuilding if someone arrogantly deludes himself into believing that he wants

and is able to create love in another person" (*WL*, 216). For such an attempt is related more closely to the exercise of control than a work of love (*WL*, 217).

Kierkegaard's Christian position maintains that since God is necessarily implicated in love, "we should learn from God what love is. He is indeed the one who first loved us – and thus is our first teacher, who by loving us taught us to love so that we could love him" (*JP* III, 2407; *WL*, 418). This claim implicates God's participation in our loving activity, or rather proposes that our works of love are what involve us in God's loving work. But how can love be learned from God? Certainly for Kierkegaard Christ is the recognizable material (incarnate) life that *is* the demonstration (*WL*, 109-110). And yet, oddly, Christology receives relatively little attention in *Works of Love*. But *Works of Love* also suggests that one cannot learn God's love in private reflection or meditation of God. Here Kierkegaard more explicitly pushes his 'subjectively existing individual' beyond its (supposedly exclusive) vertical dyadic God-relationship and demonstrates the impossibility of establishing that relationship directly, and the impossibility of knowing God's love without communicative encounters with others.[9]

However, by insisting that love is anchored in God Kierkegaard hopes to recalibrate human relationship and human self-love. Kierkegaard suspects that "the merely human view of love can never go beyond mutuality: the lover is the beloved, and the beloved is the lover," whereas "the love-relationship requires threeness: the lover, the beloved, the love – but the love is God" (*WL*, 121). We should not overlook the place of sin in Kierkegaard's anthropology, which goes some way to explaining a basic theological suspicion of human ("natural") love. Sin is implicit in Kierkegaard's

[9] See, Michael J. Matthis, "The Social in Kierkegaard's Concept of the Individual," *Philosophy Today* 23, no. ¼ (1979): 78.

treatment of 'natural man' and 'worldliness.'[10] John Elrod aligns Kierkegaard's 'natural man' with the Hobbsian motif: in its natural state, by which people are motivated toward one or another end, humanity is selfish and will even "cling" to this selfishness.[11]

If love has its foundation in the *human creature* then Kierkegaard believes the highest judgment of what loving is comes from the participants' definition, "what they want to require of each other, and their mutual judgement" (*WL*, 112). While love must certainly be mutual, involving mutual understanding and consent, it is not enclosed in "a marital, a friendly, a merely human agreement, a coterie of people" (*WL*, 112). On these terms love would rarely surpass the discriminate, exclusive, and self-beneficial. Indeed, some might argue that what is good and true in love is its exclusive and discriminating quality – otherwise we are left with a generalised affect. But Kierkegaard insists that love, in its religious sense, collides with these coteries of love since it is not a love that is held in common, judged, and determined on human terms. Love, being sourced elsewhere than 'the world' is not beholden to sin, rather it is sin's corrective. Yet Kierkegaard is also not advocating "a morbid hatred of the world" (*WL*, 193) with its social joys, pleasures, and authentic accomplishments[12] - only that the God-relationship is "supposed to permeate everything" (*WL*, 122).

Therefore Kierkegaard emphasises the "threeness" of the loving dynamic, which is the key to his theological explanation of love and relationship: "*Worldly wisdom is of the opinion that love is a relationship between persons; Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: a person-God-a person, that is, that God is the middle term*" (*WL*, 106-107). The religious view is that this formula opens people to social possibilities beyond the brokerage of preferences and reciprocity. Socially, it means,

[10] Evans, *Ethic of Love*, 163.
[11] Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom*, 91.
[12] Evans, *Ethic of Love*, 167.

as Rowan Williams suggests, "what constitutes our belonging together, morally and spiritually, is our corporate relation to God," that we are bound by "something external to human community itself, the regard of God upon us."[13] Yet, for Kierkegaard the middle term also indicates the equality of separation that prevents running together in the herd sense.

The qualitative distinction between God and creature and the intimate proximity between God and creature produces an analogous gap between person and person. Here is another way of stating the ideal distance between persons that Kierkegaard refers to in *Two Ages* (*TA*, 62; *JP* IV, 4110). God's proximity to every person triangulates all relationships, affecting my proximity to every other person. The possibility of a God-relationship changes the dynamic of every other relationship. For those who are conscious of a God-relationship another person can never become instrument for their own ends.[14] The God-relationship institutes a unique human relationship and it gives that relationship a name that is different from the other mediated relationships to which we belong (such as species, nation, race, kin, gender, class, etc.). The name of this proximity is the relationship of *the neighbour*.[15]

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[13] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 212.

[14] Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom*, 92.

[15] Twentieth-century phenomenological ethics of the *Other*, led by Levinas and later Derrida, has initiated ample and on-going comparisons between Kierkegaard's ethics of love in the neighbour and the Levinasian *Other*. My intention here is neither to rehearse those debates nor settle them; I simply acknowledge Levinas as an important interlocutor for Kierkegaardian ethical investigations. As Claudia Welz directly states, "Lévinas' relation to Kierkegaard was ambiguous"[Claudia Welz, "Kierkegaard and Phenomenology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard* (2013), 452]. Despite his protestations that Kierkegaard leaves ethics in favour of a radically private religion, they actually come closest to each other in their ethics of neighbour/other: they both insist that God's non-presence "makes human beings become present for each other, doing to each other directly what God can do only indirectly" (Welz, 452). Additionally, Levinas agrees with Kierkegaard that humans' ultimate ethical responsibility "cannot have begun in my commitment, my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom" [Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998 [1981]), 10]. See also, Merold Westphal, "The Many Faces of Levinas as a Reader of Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, eds. J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 21-40.

In Kierkegaard's scheme the neighbour relationship is the guarantee of equality among persons:

> Love for the neighbor is therefore the eternal equality in loving, but the eternal equality is the opposite of preference. This needs no elaborate development. Equality is simply not to make distinctions, and eternal equality is unconditionally not to make the slightest distinction…Preference, on the other hand, is to make distinctions; passionate preference is unqualifiedly to make distinctions (*WL*, 58).

From a religious point of view the category of the neighbour implies that no person can be considered or related to as someone somehow separated from that divine kinship (*WL*, 69). This proximity or kinship is another way of expressing what Kierkegaard means by the human situation of existing before God. Therefore a person "is your neighbor on the basis of equality with you before God, but unconditionally every person has this equality and has it unconditionally" (*WL*, 60). The neighbour relationship is an ethical relationship of conscience and spirit because through it one acknowledges that in all one's dealings with others one is also dealing with the possibility of a God-relationship and God as middle term. This voids any "claim" one may purport to have on another, but it also guarantees one's responsibility to build up the neighbour's own distinctiveness, which is that distinctive possibility of existing before God.[16]

6.2. Encountering Neighbours

Kierkegaard insists that Christianity's task is "humanity's likeness to God" (*WL*, 62). Of course the ambiguity of this calling can have dangerous consequences. Does humanity become like God by asserting self-sufficient autonomy or authority, by becoming the arbiter of the good or by becoming a technological master of matter?

[16] A section is dedicated to 'edifying distinctiveness' in the next chapter.

No, these are the distorted fantasies of a humanity that believes likeness to God means likeness in power – *power over* all things, even power over people. Instead we are reminded "we can be like God only in loving, just as we also…can only be *God's co-workers – in love*" (*WL*, 63). What transforms a rather poetic and appealing suggestion into a rigorous life of activity is the kind of love that Kierkegaard speaks of.[17] "Insofar as you love the beloved, you are not like God, because for God there is no preference…Insofar as you love your friend, you are not like God, because for God there is no distinction. But when you love the neighbor, then you are like God" (*WL*, 63). But who is the neighbour, and how does one properly love when loving the neighbour? In the first series of *Works of Love* we are given a triptych of deliberations that examine, with slightly different emphases, the gospel command 'You shall love.'[18] In addition to these is another deliberation found in the first series titled, 'Our Duty to Love the People We See.' Each of these is a reflection on the religious duty to love the neighbour.

Who is the Neighbour?

[17] *Elskov* and *Kærlighed* are Danish words for love, and in most instances are interchangeable. Kierkegaard, however, clearly divides them; *Elskov* signifies what he calls 'worldly' love: this is preferential love of family or group, erotic love, taste, desire, attraction, and love in reciprocity. *Kærlighed* represents the religious conception of love, theologically associated with *agape*, and which forms the basis of Kierkegaard's understanding of 'Christian love' or 'neighbour love'. Kierkegaard's presentation of works of love correspond to *Kærlighed* and we are warned in the first discourse not to confuse *Elskov* with *Kærlighed*.

> For example, when a person makes the mistake of calling something love [*Kjerlighed*] that actually is self-love [*Selvkjerlighed*], when he loudly protests that he cannot live without the beloved [*Elskede*] but does not want to hear anything about the task and requirement of love [*Kjerlighed*] to deny oneself and to give up this self-love of erotic love [*Elskovens Selvkjerlighed*]. Or when a person makes the mistake of giving the name of love [*Kjerlighed*] to what is weak compliance…or self-seeking connections…or the appearances of the moment, or temporal relations (*SKS* 9, 15 / *WL*, 7).

[18] These deliberations make up Section II of the First Series. II A is titled 'You *Shall* Love', emphasising the command *shall*; II B is titled 'You Shall Love *the Neighbor*', placing the emphasis on whom one is to love; and II C is titled '*You* Shall Love the Neighbor', which emphasises who the love command is addressed to.

Confusion can set in when Kierkegaard states that the neighbour is "a purely spiritual specification" (*WL*, 57). Not only does this specification sound somewhat abstract, it also raises a concern that the neighbour is reduced to a psychological problem of Kierkegaardian interiority. However, for Kierkegaard the relationships that appear to have a definite object (erotic love has the beloved and friendship has the friend, etc.) turn out to be examples of an interior form of self-love if "the neighbour" is omitted. He writes, "In the beloved and the friend, it of course is not the neighbor who is loved, but the *other I*, or the first *I* once again, but more intensely" (*WL*, 57). Preferential love follows an inconspicuous route to love of self: since everyone knows that self-love is reprehensible "it does not really manifest itself until the other *I* is found and the one *I* and the *other I* in this alliance find the strength for the self-esteem of self-love" (*WL*, 57). The logic of preferential love [*Elskov*] leads me to myself in an encompassing unity whereby all parties become merged into one *I*, which "selfishly cuts itself off from everyone else" (*WL*, 56). We have already seen how the crowd becomes the extreme and absurd expression of this alliance in self-love.

Kierkegaard observes a delusion and deception in the human heart that shows its propensity to validate self-love in alliances of preference and distinction, and then celebrate these exclusive (and self-affirming) alliances as *love*:

> The distinction the world makes is namely this: if someone wants to be self-loving all by himself, which, however, is rarely seen, the world calls this self-love, but if he, self-loving, wants to hold together in self-love with some other self-loving people, particularly with many other self-loving people, then the world calls this love… What the world honors and loves under the name of love is an alliance in self-love (*WL*, 119).

Love is regarded here as a matter of utility and contract, requiring sacrifice only to the extent that a person must "sacrifice a portion of his own self-love in order to hold together in the united self-love" of the selected alliance (*WL*, 119). In such a scheme the self's loving activity is ultimately a preservation exercise; the self (or selves)

refuses to risk itself in love, but finds it more beneficial and secure to hold together with other self-loving people in self-love. This love, Kierkegaard insists, has not yet found its true object (*WL*, 121).

Kierkegaard maintains that neighbourly love is part of "Christianity's intention to wrest self-love away from us human beings" (*WL*, 17), to break open the closed alliances in self-love. However this, I suggest, should be read in connection with Kierkegaard's religious suspicion of a particularly modern view of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Self-love is not rejected outright. We must keep in mind that the passage Kierkegaard uses for his deliberations contains three related parts that are given alternating emphasis: you shall love / the neighbour / as yourself. Kierkegaard reminds us that there is a kind of self-love implicit in the command to love the neighbour. The question is how to love the other and oneself in a truly edifying way.

Kierkegaard offers this adaptation of the law: "You shall love yourself in the same way as you love your neighbor when you love him as yourself" (*WL*, 23). Apart from the circularity of Kierkegaard's language we can anticipate a further criticism of his revision since it seems that self-love remains unchanged by Kierkegaard's formula. His version begins and ends with self-love. Yet Kierkegaard claims that a truly edifying love and truly edifying activity must involve both self and neighbour; one cannot hope to love the neighbour without loving oneself properly and one cannot hope to love oneself without loving the neighbour properly. There must also be actual encounters with others and not merely psychological seductions or courtships as in *Repetition*, *Either/Or*, and *Stages on Life's Way*. Indeed, Kierkegaard says, "To love yourself in the right way and to love the neighbor correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing" (*WL*, 22). Yet the question continues to demand clarification.

Who is the Neighbour?

This question, when put to Christ, provoked the parable popularly known as 'the Good Samaritan.' When Christ returns the question to the inquirer and the Pharisee answers that the neighbour is the one who showed mercy on the assaulted man, Kierkegaard adds his own explanation. The Pharisee was compelled to answer as he did because of the way the question was put to him (Which of these three seems to you to have been the neighbour to the man who had fallen among robbers?). Christ does not ask if the assaulted man was a neighbour to the other travellers, but which traveller was a neighbour to the assaulted man. Kierkegaard writes,

> The one to whom I have a duty is my neighbor, and when I fulfill my duty I show that I am a neighbor. Christ does not speak about knowing the neighbor but about becoming a neighbor oneself, about showing oneself to be a neighbor just as the Samaritan showed it by his mercy. By this he did not show that the assaulted man was his neighbor but that he was a neighbor of the one assaulted (*WL*, 22).

When it is a duty to "love your neighbour as yourself" then the first and only thing one can be sure of is that one must be the neighbour oneself. To regard another person as an object of love based on custom, attraction, civil law, or utilitarian calculations is perfectly reasonable for a natural view of love, but in the case of the Samaritan neighbourly love is demonstrated by attentiveness to the direct needs of another. Neither law, attraction, nor cost-benefit calculation obliged the Samaritan to attend to the stranger.

Despite a correct response from the Pharisee in the gospel narrative there remains confusion regarding who one's neighbour is, since the criteria is often sought in the 'other.' And Kierkegaard attributes this confusion, in part, to the interference and pervasiveness of preferential love celebrated by the poets and the philosophers.

> If someone goes out into the world to try to find the beloved or the friend, he can go a long way – and go in vain, can wander the world around – and in vain. But Christianity is never responsible for having a person go even a single step in vain, because when you open the door that you shut in order to pray to God and go out the very first person you meet is the neighbour, whom you *shall* love (*WL*, 51).

There can be no choosing or discerning, philosophising or ruminating; the philosopher and poet cannot discover the neighbour by "talking continually about how the object of love must be so it can be loveworthy" (*WL*, 159), and thereby identify the neighbour, since any attempt "to make an exception of a single person whom one does not wish to love" contravenes the religious law to love one's neighbour (*WL*, 49).

Kierkegaard clarifies the matter linguistically: the Danish word for 'neighbour' [*Næste*] shares its root with the Danish word for 'near' and 'nearest' [*Nærmeste*] (*WL*, 21). From this Kierkegaard suggests, "the neighbor is the person who is nearer to you than anyone else," and who is indeed just as near to you as you are to yourself so that "the concept 'neighbor' is actually the redoubling of your own self," which is implied in the final copula of 'You shall love the neighbour *as yourself*' (*WL*, 21). Kierkegaard acknowledges that 'the neighbour' is aligned to the philosophical category of 'the other' insofar as the neighbour is "a multiplicity" and means "all people" (*WL*, 21). However this only suggests that it is a universally applicable category. Furthermore, the neighbour, as indicating one who is near, would seem to coincide with and affirm preferential love since the beloved, the family, the friend (even the citizen), are all people who are decisively nearest to oneself. But this is not what Kierkegaard has in mind by highlighting nearness. Whereas preferential love is regarded by Kierkegaard as a misguided or aberrant form of self-love because the objects of preference "more or less hold together with the self-love in one" (*WL*, 23), to love the neighbour means "to love the whole human race, all people, even the

enemy, and not to make exceptions, neither of preference nor of aversion" (*WL*, 19). And yet, neighbourly love is not meant as love for humanity in the abstract, as a whole; it means loving the actual persons we see. Thus, I am a neighbour to whomever I encounter, wherever I may be; historical or biological identities cannot interfere with my identity as *neighbour* because that identity is based on my obligation before God. Since discovering the neighbour is neither a matter of knowledge or discernment it is impossible to mistake the neighbour, to not recognise the neighbour as soon as s/he is seen. And yet in order to see the neighbour one must become blind to human dissimilarity.

Neighbourly Love is Blind

According to Kierkegaard love for the neighbour is blind, but in a very different sense from that celebrated by "poets." Common wisdom holds that once the lover finds the beloved, the object of his or her love, *then* the lover becomes "blind from love, blind to every defect, to every imperfection in the beloved, blind to everything else but this beloved – yet not blind to this one's being the one and only in the whole world" (*WL*, 68). Kierkegaard inverts the phrase celebrated by poets that true love is blind. For the poet love involves first seeing, taking a careful look at who one might love, and then when the beloved is found blindness sets in, shutting out anything that might take attention away from the love of that one person. Alternatively, neighbourly love is first blind. The neighbour is found not by taking a close hard look, but by closing one's eyes. "In other words, when you shut your eyes, you do not see the dissimilarities of earthly life" (*WL*, 68) and, as a result, "love for the neighbor makes a person blind in the deepest and noblest and most blessed sense of the word, so that he blindly loves every human being as the lover loves the beloved" (*WL*, 69).

Kierkegaard also formulates this question of the neighbour's equality in terms of sight, as we have seen, which speaks to the dialectical character of this concept. In the discourse 'Our Duty to Love the People We See' Kierkegaard remarks that when it is a duty to love the people we see "*the task is not to find the lovable object, but the task is to find the once given object – lovable*" (*WL*, 159). Both of these cases testify that equality of 'the neighbour' stands beneath the dissimilarities of our external existence, which hangs like a garment loosely on a person (*WL*, 88). Forcing the point Kierkegaard writes,

> In being king, beggar, rich man, poor man, male, female, etc., we are not like each other – therein we are indeed different. But in being the neighbor we are all unconditionally like each other. Dissimilarity is temporality's method of confusing that marks every human being differently, but the neighbor is eternity's mark – on every human being. Take many sheets of paper, write something different on each one; then no one will be like another. But then again take each single sheet; do not let yourself be confused by the diverse inscriptions, hold it up to the light, and you will see a common watermark on all of them. In the same way the neighbour is the common watermark, but you see it only by means of eternity's light when it shines through the dissimilarity (*WL*, 89).

A superficial reading of this passage might find evidence of a Kierkegaardian essentialism, arguing that the analogy of a watermark represents that aspect of the human which is its *essence*; it may appear as though Kierkegaard is describing some*thing* in persons that make them equal, whether metaphysical (soul/consciousness) or biological (common genetic makeup), irrespective of the layers of difference surrounding it. But that is precisely what Kierkegaard is not suggesting. The neighbour appears only in the light of one's *relationship of obligation* to others – not as an object of comparison and similarity. It is this relationship of obligation that shows through the dissimilarity or temporal existence. This, at once, secures the radical equality of humanity in the human-divine kinship and the equality of the task in the Law to love.

Every person, regardless of circumstance, is equally *obliged* and equally *able* to fulfil the moral Law to "love your neighbour as yourself." Equality, then, is a purely ethical-religious matter for Kierkegaard, based on a position of ultimate responsibility, accountability, and dependence. Nobody is exempt from the task. According to Kierkegaard, this differentiates a 'worldly' conception of equality from his 'Christian' conception of equality.

> Alas, in the world there is incessantly the pressing question about what this one can do, what that one can do, and what that one cannot do; eternity, which speaks of the highest, calmly assumes that every person can do it and therefore asks only if he did it (*WL*, 79).

Religiously, the ethical task before everyone is equally rigorous. It is not more difficult for the poor and disadvantaged to fulfil the highest and it is not any easier for the privileged; temporal and material dissimilarity simply does not impact upon such capability. This helps us to understand what Kierkegaard means when he says Christianity "teaches that everyone is to *lift himself up above* earthly dissimilarity…even if it is the king, he is to *lift himself up* above the difference of loftiness, and the beggar is to *lift himself up* above the difference of lowliness" (*WL*, 72). We should not mistake this for legitimising the social differences mentioned. By lifting oneself up above the difference each person acknowledges that the difference is without essential merit, that it is baseless. To lift oneself up above the difference of dissimilarity also indicates that human equality requires living *as equal*, that equality is not 'a given' of our biological creaturely lives but must be struggled for in lived expression. By claiming that equality is a spiritual category in connection with "the neighbour" Kierkegaard ensures that equality is active and belongs to an existential mode (rather than a natural or metaphysical category).

With Open Eyes to Love the Neighbour We See

While Kierkegaard wants to draw attention away from discussions of preference and distinction for how we determine love, he still insists that neighbourly love [*Kjerlighed*] must not be directed at an abstract or 'object-less' *other*. The universality of love means that it is universally particular; love is to be universally involved with each person in particular. Although Kierkegaard does associate the neighbour with what the philosophers call 'the other' it is important that we clarify how Kierkegaard's doctrine of love requires concrete encounters with people.

Discourse II C[19] and discourse IV[20] converges on this premise: to love the neighbour is to actually attend to the people we see. Kierkegaard claims there is a deception at work in human culture and human psychology, which is a deception of seeing and recognizing, and which is exposed at the point of action. He claims that everyone, even the child, understands the highest, ethically speaking, and that people even understand basically who the neighbour is. Yet what separates the edifying from the harmful or apathetic is whether this understanding is close at hand or at a distance. Kierkegaard writes,

> At the distance of a quiet hour from life's confusion, the child, the simplest person, and the wisest understand… what every person should do. But when in the confusion of life there are only questions of what *he* should do, then it perhaps becomes manifest that this understanding was at a distance – indeed, it was at the distance of humanity from him (*WL*, 79).

To be distant from humanity is to remove oneself from the requirement to ethically engage with people and to substitute those 'risky' encounters with the safety of thought experiments and reflective conversations. Alternatively, when the reality of humanity is close at hand, and not at the distance of reflection and formulation, then we are ethically confronted with the manifold contours and crevasses of human distinctiveness. A dialectic of understanding-recognition-distance-action is set up as

[19] '*You* shall Love the Neighbor' (*WL*, 61-90).
[20] 'Our Duty to Love the People We See' (*WL*, 154-174).

follows, "the measure of a person's disposition is this: how far is he from what he understands to what he does, how great is the distance between his understanding and his actions" (*WL*, 78). The question is developed dialectically:

> At a distance all recognize the neighbor… But at a distance the neighbor is a figment of the imagination – he who by being close at hand, the first and the best, is indeed unconditionally every human being. At a distance the neighbor is a shadow that walks past everyone's thoughts… but that the person who actually walked by at the same moment was the neighbor – this he perhaps does not discover. At a distance everyone recognizes the neighbor, and yet it is impossible to see him at a distance; if you do not see him so close at hand that before God you unconditionally see him in every human being, you do not see him at all (WL, 79-80).

To recognise or understand who is the neighbour is really not to see since, for Kierkegaard, seeing the neighbour is only evinced by action. Rather, what one sees in the form of argumentation or speculation is not actuality, but something more like a mirage. Kierkegaard suggests that to see a mirage and not to see are in fact the same thing. "Take the mirage away, then you see nothing… but take away the seeing, then you see the mirage" (*WL*, 162). In either case actuality is obscured from view.

Kierkegaard's dialectic of the seen and the unseen is complicated by the religious element of his analysis. Is God not *the* unseen in the most absolute and unqualified sense? In the case of God it is inevitable that the form of love will be to love the unseen. However, the only demonstration that a person loves the unseen God is to love the neighbours she in fact does see. Kierkegaard insists that the reverse cannot be true: one cannot demonstrate love for the unseen God by neglecting the people one sees - such an attitude only reveals that the person has a deluded conception of God (*WL*, 160). Contrary to the view that God selfishly demands our adoration, which turns our eyes away from the needs of actuality, Kierkegaard reminds his reader that,

> God does not have a share in existence in such a way that he asks for his share for himself; he asks for everything, but as you bring it to him you immediately receive… a notice designating where it should be delivered further (*WL*, 161).

Action and attention are always deflected in the direction of other people. And, alarmingly, we are directed to people who may not be the ones of our choosing, and may even be repulsive to us (*WL*, 371-373). Various "defects," "imperfections," and "weaknesses" may deter us from the preferential love of friendship and lovers but that only reveals the limit and weakness of those loves as, at root, self-love. Instead, neighbourly love must find "the un-lovable object lovable" (*WL*, 374). The beautiful can easily be a mirage for us; the beautiful can confuse us into not recognizing the neighbour because the beautiful is "the immediate and direct object of immediate love, the choice of inclination and passion," and which requires no law to garner love.[21] If friends and lovers, who are objects of passion and inclination, come to constitute the entire field of those we see as neighbours then we are seeing the mirage.

If an 'un-lovable object' still seems to hover in abstraction then Kierkegaard reminds his reader that,

> When it is a duty to love the people we see, *then in loving the actual individual person it is important that one does not substitute an imaginary idea of how we think or could wish that this person should be.* The one who does this does not love the person he sees but again something unseen, his own idea or something similar (*WL*, 164).

The emphasis here is intended to unite neighbourly love with an earnest appreciation for the actual persons we encounter together in daily life, inclusive of complexity and variation. It is an aberrant form of love that substitutes an imaginary idea of how people should be (what is lovable or what is un-lovable, etc.) in place of the actual people we are. Yet this is the common mistake. Too often people "go on talking continually about how the object of love must be so it can be loveworthy, instead of talking about how love must be so it can be love" (*WL*, 159). Thus, in order to take the particularity of people seriously we must not demand that they conform to some

[21] By beautiful we do not only mean aesthetically or physically attractive, but we are including anything that is pleasant, agreeable, and attractive in the broadest and most universal sense.

ideal of what a lovable object should be, nor should we attempt to mould another person into such an idealized object. The duty to love is not circumscribed by loving perfections and condemning imperfections (*WL*, 173), rather the task is "*to find the once given or chosen object – lovable, and to be able to continue to find him lovable no matter how he is changed*" (*WL*, 159). This does not mean that we are already complete, sufficient persons who do not need to be challenged. Rather, we are creatures in a process of becoming, beholden to human social and psychological frailties, beholden to sin and finitude, and therefore each is engaged in a personal and corporate process of self-development. Neighbourly love means that love's object cannot be abstracted and considered objectively apart from the people we see. The existence and particularity of the people we see determines and qualifies what *shall* be loved. It means that no case can be presented which would exclude any person from being the neighbour whom you shall love.

The neighbour, then, is not 'pure humanity', or the unknown or simply the 'different,' and neither is the neighbour another '*I*'; instead, the neighbour is to be encountered as the first 'you' (*WL*, 57). With this in mind we may now reconsider some of the problems confronting Kierkegaard's dismissal of preferential love, and which impact our dearest relationships of friends, family, and lovers. The friend and the lover return now as neighbours, as the people we see, as another *you* rather than another *I*. We are reassured that neighbourly love "does not want to abolish drives or inclination" that attract us to friends and lovers, only that it wants "to make infinity's change in the inner being" (*WL*, 139). Kierkegaard acknowledges that Christianity itself has presented the misunderstanding that religiousness is "indifference to friendship, to the family relationships," and our broader social connections (*WL*, 114). However, the duty to love means that one may inhabit these and various relationships

in a more deliberative way. From the religious point of view one ought to be concerned with every particular relationship one enters, yet "simply and solely in a spiritual way" (*WL*, 144). Since religiously a person "belongs first and foremost to God before he belongs to any relationship," that makes the relationship a matter of conscience before God (*WL*, 140). The neighbour relationship neither sanctifies nor condemns any particular external or historical form of relationship. What matters from a religious point of view is whether or not the neighbour or God is the middle term in a relationship.

Taking erotic love as the example here we can see that loving the neighbour does not mean neglecting human inclination and desire. Rather, erotic love [*Elskov*] learns to love from neighbourly love [*Kjerlighed*] (WL, 61-62).

> Your wife must first and foremost be to you your neighbor; that she is your wife is then a more precise specification of your particular relationship to each other. But what is the eternal foundation must also be the foundation of every expression of the particular.

And,

> The wife and the friend are not loved in the same way, nor the friend and the neighbor, but this is not an essential dissimilarity, because the fundamental similarity is implicit in the category "neighbor." The category "neighbor" is like the category "human being" (*WL*, 141).

Through examining the particularity and concreteness of the neighbour we are ethically returned to the universal category – the human being. But we cannot confuse this universal for an abstract object-less notion of pure humanity as a whole. Neither can we imagine or fantasise that the neighbour is for us another *I*. Rather, the logic of neighbourly love [*Kjerlighed*], which "cannot make me one with the neighbor in a united self" (*WL*, 56), leads me away from myself in self-denial and self-sacrificing love toward other persons whom I simply cannot regard as another *I* because we are

essentially separated by an ideal distance maintained by a middle term (God or the neighbour, or the ideal).

In neighbourly love we are introduced to the first and every '*you*.' This '*you*' is the dialectical corrective to the '*I*' in preferential love. The movement from *I* to *you* signifies maturity in Kierkegaard's scheme but it is also the basis of an edifying practice, of a social practice that resists lapsing into (selfish) self-love and resists absorbing others – even oneself – into a selfish *I*. "The sign of maturity and the devotion of the eternal is to will to understand that this *I* has no significance unless it becomes the *you* to whom eternity incessantly speaks and says: you shall" (*WL*, 90). This '*you*' can be no imaginary figure; it refers to the ones whom you meet, whom you see, whom you shall love as the neighbour. But of course 'you' is also you yourself. Addressing his readers directly Kierkegaard demonstrates the redoubled reference of 'you': "O my listener, it is not *you* to whom *I* am speaking; it is *I* to whom eternity says: *You* shall" (*WL*, 90).

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This chapter has considered how the religious person approaches love inwardly as self-denial in order to become the neighbour to others, and to regard every other person as *the neighbour*. Of course this inwardness is not one-sided. And that is the common misconception of Kierkegaard's discourses on love. *Outwardly* neighbourly love will be expressed as self-sacrificing unselfishness (*WL*, 374). As I will show, this self-sacrificing unselfishness is neither quietist nor a passive resignation of an existing order. In the next chapter we shall see the activist dimension of love, how it is communicative and enabling. If this chapter represents the attitudinal practice for upbuilding, of becoming a neighbour and regarding others as neighbours, then the

next chapter represents the outward activity of upbuilding, of *neighbourliness* for the construction of an open society of persons.

Chapter 7

Edifying Practice II:

Building Up a Diverse Society of Persons

Introduction:

This chapter addresses some of the criticisms against Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* and it will demonstrate that love for the neighbour, if it is to actually be love, must be *active* and genuinely edifying. Therefore attention will be given to the outward expressions of the dialectic of love. What love *edifies* in others is their own distinctiveness, which Kierkegaard differentiates from distinctions and dissimilarity. Here we will also examine how neighbourly love stands in *polemical* opposition all forms of sociality that are consciously or unconsciously based on domineering relationships and self-serving alliances. Instead we shall see how the works of love are essentially liberating practices that struggle to produce open societies of communicating individuals.

7.1. Platitudes or Politics

Perhaps the greatest problem confronting the theologian who wishes to find a basis for socially edifying practice in the writings of Kierkegaard is the issue with externality and his treatment of the dissimilarity of earthly life. In addition to Adorno, Marcuse and, more recently, Mark C. Taylor are also among those who conclude that

Kierkegaard sacrifices the external social world for the isolation of spiritual inwardness.[1] Peter George does not deny that Kierkegaard has much to offer contemporary social thought but he insists that *Works of Love* is not the text that helps us toward that end.[2] Instead, he is sensitive to a weakness in Kierkegaard scholarship that tries too hard to refute the anti-social label so persistently attached to Kierkegaard. "A desperate attempt to find sociality everywhere," George tells us, "reveals a lack of confidence in the social viewpoint and a need to clutch at straws."[3] With this warning in mind let us draw attention to some passages in *Works of Love* that fuels the criticism of social theorists, and which should not go unmentioned here.

Repeatedly, in discourse II C (*You* Shall Love the Neighbor), Kierkegaard differentiates his Christian conception of equality and his Christian conception of neighbourly love from attempts to make any change in externality, and which strive to overcome the dissimilarity of temporality and finitude. We read, "Love your Savior and you have everything both in life and in death, and then let the dissimilarities be there; they do not matter either way" (*WL*, 69); "Christianity, then, does not want to take away the dissimilarity, neither of high rank nor of lowliness" (*WL*, 71); it "does not divisively take sides with any single one" (*WL*, 70, 71); Christianity "allows all the dissimilarities to stand but teaches the equality of eternity" (*WL*, 72); and we are told that the person who loves the neighbour "lets every dissimilarity of earthly life stand and be regarded as it should and ought to be regarded here in this life," which also means that if something "is denied to you, then you should still rejoice that it is granted to [your neighbour]" (*WL*, 84). Christianity, we are told, "teaches that everyone is to *lift himself up* above earthly dissimilarity…even if it is the king, he is

[1] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 263-264; Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, 180.

[2] Peter George directly states his position in the title of his essay, "Something Anti-Social about *Works of Love*'" in *Kierkegaard: the Self in Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 70-81.

[3] George, "Anti-Social," 70.

to *lift himself up* above the difference of loftiness, and the beggar is to *lift himself up* above the difference of lowliness" (*WL*, 72). The kind of equality gained by a king lowering himself and a beggar raising himself to the same appearance Kierkegaard calls worldly similarity, but not Christian equality. However, each is equally obliged to love the neighbour, which means loving each other as neighbour despite their dissimilarity.

What, then, does neighbourly love do to the social position of these two figures? How does a relationship of neighbourliness affect the temporal-material dissimilarities that exist between the king and the beggar, dissimilarities of power, economic freedom and self-determination, freedom of movement and access to space, social opportunity through access to education, nutrition, health services, leisure time, and creative community activity? Kierkegaard's answer in this discourse is "Christianity allows all the dissimilarities of earthly life to stand, but this equality in lifting oneself up above the dissimilarities of earthly life is contained in the love commandment, in loving the neighbor" (*WL*, 72). In order to achieve the kind of religious equality that bypasses dissimilarity Kierkegaard forces equality into the hidden recesses of inwardness where, as his critics fear, it can too easily become reduced to an abstraction with no effect or consequence in actuality. It seems that Kierkegaard has even followed the bait and bitten at the hook of his critics:

> Christianity turns our attention completely away from the external, turns it inward, and makes every one of your relationships to other people a God-relationship (*WL*, 376).

And,

> In the Christian sense, you have nothing at all to do with what others do unto you – it does not concern you. …You have to do only with what you do unto others, or how you take what others do unto you. The direction is inward; essentially you have to do only with yourself before God. This world of inwardness, this rendition of what other people call actuality, this is actuality. The Christian like for like [equality] belongs to this world of inwardness. It

> turns itself away and will turn you away from externality (but without taking you out of the world), will turn you upward or inward (*WL*, 384).

In these passages Kierkegaard resists the dialectical impulse that formally unites the inner and the outer. The result can seem catastrophic. From these passages Kierkegaard does not appear to understand how damaging real 'external' masculinist chauvinism is to human gender, and by extension to society; he does not appear to understand how physically damaging, how socially damaging, and how spiritually damaging poverty and power is for humans.

If the basis of equality and loving activity leads to the kind of quietist resignation and inward repose Kierkegaard seems to recommend has he actually presented us with anything worthy of the name 'works of love'? Is Kierkegaard's edifying practice either blind to social inequity or apathetic toward struggles for social justice? One could be forgiven for thinking so.

In his *Becoming a Self*, Merold Westphal rhetorically presents questions that could reasonably be put to Kierkegaard by critics who are motivated by the political urgency of an existing situation. He writes,

> Our Marxist observer might still ask whether the works of love are not still restricted to the private sphere, even if they are visible. The question would be *do the perpetrators and beneficiaries of unjust social systems have anything to fear from works of love?* Is not private charity more an asset than a threat to such systems?[4]

At first the answer appears to be an obvious 'No' – the existing order of power and belonging has nothing at all to fear from works of love or Christian conscience, since the old more or less remains the same and change in the 'exterior' world is purportedly spiritually unnecessary. The king remains secure in his kingship and the beggar remains confined to his begging – but if they 'love' each other inwardly then, according to Kierkegaard, is the highest being achieved? The worker remains

[4] Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, 197, emphasis mine.

confined to her wages and the owner continues to profit, increasing returns on his capital through low costs (wages) and high rent on property – but, if they love each other inwardly as neighbours, then is the highest being achieved? And, finally, a man remains a master and a woman remains the servant in kinship, society, and marriage relationships – but if all love each other inwardly in conscience as neighbours then is the highest being achieved?

These examples appear to demonstrate Marx's thesis exactly – that religion is "the *illusory* happiness of the people."[5] Has Kierkegaard's ethic of love offered anything more for the 'charwoman', or women in general, than to prescribe them their 'opium' in the form of religious inwardness, thereby affirming that "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances"?[6] Is he acknowledging that religion actually presents no viable challenge to oppressive circumstances or to a world that revels in those circumstances?

I suggest that Kierkegaard's presentation of religious inwardness does not result in the quietist resignation that is content with its 'opium.' Such resignation cannot satisfy us if we are to take seriously the theological premise that our social relationships must correspond to the neighbour relationship with God as middle term (that there is an essential qualitative difference between God and creature and the intimate proximity of God and creature) – and *this* is Kierkegaard's most forceful theological argument in the period between 1846 and 1852.

[5] Karl Marx, "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction" [1844], in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, second edition, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.

[6] Marx**,** *Selected Writings*, 72.

7.2. Love is Action

We have seen passages in *Works of Love* which appear to corroborate the critic's thesis that Kierkegaardian religiousness dismisses the external. Nevertheless, such strategies and such readings fail to grant Kierkegaard the dialectical nuance his 'redoubled' existence-category warrants.[7] Indeed, Kierkegaard provides his readers with various warnings in *Works of Love* against the traps of an inclosing reserve[8] or complacency associated with inwardness that is not dialectically redoubled in outward existence. Clearly, then, we need to examine Kierkegaard's call for an active life of edifying relationships more closely.

*

There are two aberrations of love that, Kierkegaard believes, have been shoehorned into the concept of love by human beings in order to avoid the difficulty and vulnerability involved in having to love actively and therefore unselfishly: they are the notions of love *dwelling* on itself and *promising* love. Through a refutation of these aberrations Kierkegaard demonstrates that love is truly love only in its outward activity toward others.

A love that does not go out of itself but dwells within itself is out of its element. Such love is a form of self-love that safely avoids the activity of loving other people. Kierkegaard's pseudonyms provide vivid examples of love that dwells on itself in this way: the young man who interests Constantin in *Repetition*, Johannes the 'Seducer' of *Either/Or*, and Quidam of the imaginary construction in *Stages on Life's Way*. Each of these characters are consumed by an internal question of how to love their beloved

[7] Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom*, 131.

[8] Kierkegaard discusses inclosing reserve in detail in *The Concept of Anxiety*, but it is a concept that also reappears in our selected time period under a category of despair (*SUD*, 63-64).

ideally, which involves agonizing and conflicted accounts of breaking off engagements for secretive and deceptive reasons so as to 'protect' the love of the beloved (the 'young man' and Quidam), or recording the excitement and passion involved in a romantic pursuit (the Seducer).

Despite their repeated insistence that they are devoted to their beloved all we get from them is their own tedious reflection on their own love, their own dilemmas, their own project and purpose. Some of their reflections even resemble a tendency toward the psychotic. Their love is a love that only dwells on itself. And what does dwelling on itself mean? Kierkegaard's answer is that "It means that love itself becomes an object" (*WL*, 182). Objects are good for observation: they are identifiable by their determined boundaries; they are able to be isolated in time and space; they can be scrutinized and manipulated with technical ingenuity; objects submit to measurement and comparison. In short, objects correspond to finitude. In Kierkegaard's broader intellectual scheme he would say that objects belong to the WHAT of existence, whereas love, corresponding to infinitude and the eternal, belongs to the HOW of existence.

As love dwells on itself it exists only for reflection, but it also then ceases to be what it is, that is, it fails to do what it ought to *do* - love. Kierkegaard offers an illustration that helps to explain the abstract problem that worries him when love becomes the object of itself,

> Think of an arrow flying, as is said, with the speed of an arrow. Imagine that it for an instant has an impulse to want to dwell on itself, perhaps in order to see how far it has come, or how high it is soaring above the earth, or how its speed compares with the speed of another arrow that is also flying with the speed of an arrow – in that same second the arrow falls to the ground (*WL*, 182).

Kierkegaard describes the moment when the arrow 'wants' to dwell on itself as "a selfish moment, a moment that wants to be *for itself*" (*WL*, 183).

The pseudonymous characters mentioned above love in such a way that their 'love' dwells on itself. Through recollecting their own love, their own ideal, and their own desires, their love has become ossified, or like an object that fall out of the air. Furthermore, each of these characters demonstrates that when love itself becomes the object their beloved is also reduced to an *object* but not the true recipient of their love. Only once do we read a word in response from the women in these narratives, otherwise they are robbed of the opportunity to speak by the reflective dwelling of these young men;[9] not once do we witness a dialogue or exchange between the lovers, because the men prefer to save the ideal (or construct it) within themselves rather than risk it in the actuality of an encounter with another human being. Their understanding of love is ultimately presented as despairing rather than loving. It is true that these characters are active, but their activity is busyness, which is not to be confused with works of love.

The second aberration of love is the promise of love. Or rather, love is not a promise.[10] Kierkegaard points to the gospel parable of a man who owns a vineyard and asks his two sons to go into the vineyard to work for the day (Matthew 21:28-37). The first son refuses his father's request with a straightforward 'no', but after some time 'repents' and does go into the vineyard to work. The second son answers his father with 'I will, sir,' but actually did not go into the vineyard. The question that the parable formulates is, 'which of the two did the will of his father?' One is expected to recognise that the son who reneged on his promise did not do his father's will while the son who initially expressed defiance does in fact do his father's will precisely because action is the only determining factor. Kierkegaard, however, wants his reader to consider the 'yes-brother' more closely because in him we discover how we

[9] The Seducer's Diary begins with three short letters by Cordelia to Johannes. Subsequently, Cordelia is represented through Johannes reflections (*EO*, 312-313).

[10] See Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 65-70.

deceive ourselves out of love and out of 'fulfilling the Law'. Kierkegaard writes, "The yes-brother is not represented as someone who *was* a deceiver when he said yes but as someone who *became* a deceiver because he did not keep his promise" (*WL*, 93). This distinction is very important. We are not given to understand that the yes-brother was deceiving his father when he said yes or that his intention all along was not to work in the vineyard. Rather, the yes-brother's 'yes' was genuine and properly motivated. Everything changes and he becomes a deceiver when his 'yes' becomes a 'no' in action.

There is another important lesson from the yes-brother that pertains to the question of action: promises are traps. What sets the trap is the ease of a promise and a promise's deception that something concrete has been achieved simply by promising, as if one had already done what was promised, "as if the promise itself were something meritorious" (*WL*, 93). The difference between the person who says yes and the person who says no becomes apparent on the basis of this perceived achievement. The person who says no is not more admirable because she is wiser and more practical. Hers is not a strategy of setting low expectations whereby any action at all exceeds expectation and then is rewarded as meritorious. Instead, the 'no' is an awakening word, which means for Kierkegaard "repentance is usually not far away" (*WL*, 93). The defiance and negation in the '*no*' is not celebrated (at least by Kierkegaard), but it is true and honest because "a no does not hide anything" (*WL*, 94). The son who said no is directly confronted with his own position and subsequent action or non-action, whereas the promise of the yes-brother is "sleep inducing" (*WL*, 93), allowing him to live in the dreamy delusion that the good has been done, at least in part, that the Law is fulfilled, that he has loved through the promise. Thus the

lesson we are to learn from the parable is "how dangerous it is to say, 'I will, sir'" (*WL*, 95).

> See, this is why it is very important for a person in all his relationships … that undivided attention must be concentrated immediately upon the essential and the decisive. So it must also be with love, lest it be permitted at any moment to seem other than it is, or lest even a deceptive appearance establish itself and become a trap, lest love begin to take its time, in flattering delusion to entertain itself with itself, but instead it is immediately under way with the task and is constrained to understand that every previous moment is a wasted moment and more than just wasted time, that any other expression of love is procrastination and regression (*WL*, 95).

The flourish of Kierkegaard's language highlights the very danger of moments wasted to prolixity and reflection. We are reminded again and again that our reading of Kierkegaard's words does not amount to works of love. If we take Kierkegaard at his word, those words are actually procrastinations. Any expression of love that is not "sheer action" is a procrastination and regression (*WL*, 99).

If the activity of love is also conceived of as a task like the task of becoming a self or the task of the eternal in 'the moment', then it means that love cannot be regarded as in any way accomplished. Love always remains a task before me – there is always something that must be done.[11] Another task (to love) immediately presents itself so that the loving person "is occupied *at the speed of action*"[12] with the loving task (*WL*, 188 / *SKS* 9, 188).

As we saw previously, the task of love corresponds to hope as that which lures us into the future for the possibility of the good. Love and hope are the redoubled expressions of the eternal through the category of the individual directed outward toward others. However, love and hope for the good reminds us that our activities of repetition are shared activities that involve honest encounters with others.

[11] In *UDVS* hope also produces such a perpetual imperative (*UDVS*, 275-277).
[12] The Danish reads, "*i Handlingens Fart*" (*SKS* 9, 188).

Just as the eternal requires individuals to direct their attention to this day so also the duty to love requires individuals to "gain actuality and truth by finding and remaining in the world of actuality as a task assigned to one" (*WL*, 161). Religiousness directs all of our attention, all our thinking, and all our activity "down from heaven to earth" (*WL*, 173), contradicting a materialist refrain that religion inevitably turns away from this world toward its desired, but illusory, other world.

In chapter five we discovered how 'the moment' becomes the locus of action whereby the eternal meets temporality; now, to be occupied at the speed of action, in Kierkegaardian terms, means to be involved in intentional repetitions of the moment (*Øieblikket*). In *Works of Love* temporality and eternity are connected by love (*WL*, 6), which means that the religious activity of the moment is qualified as loving activity. Furthermore, the redoubling activity of the eternal in a person through the moment coincides with Kierkegaard's religious understanding of love's own redoubling activity:

> What love does, that it is; what it is, that it does – at one and the same moment. At the same moment it goes out of itself (the outward direction), it is in itself (the inward direction); and at the same moment it is in itself, it goes out of itself in such a way that this outward going and this returning…are simultaneously one and the same (*WL*, 280).

Love must go out of itself; the Kierkegaardian individual does not have a private love affair with her or himself. Neither should religious love be confused with a kind of spiritual ecstasy or love affair with the divine. The edifying is edifying only as activity directed toward others. All of its expressions are turned "outward toward people" (*WL*, 189). A love that goes out of itself is a productive force; it lures [*lokker*] the good forth out of others (*WL*, 217 / *SKS* 9, 220). Building up, or 'upbuilding'

[*opbyggelse*] is the activity of what Kierkegaard calls 'loving forth' [*opelsker*] (*WL*, 217 / *SKS* 9, 220).[13]

7.3. From Distinctions to Distinctiveness

Neighbourly love is established not on the basis of dissimilarity or distinctions and preferences, but on the basis of God as middle term in every relationship. However, when it is time to actually love the real neighbour we see (and we know that that time is always now), then what we are required to love is the distinctiveness of the other person. What is distinctiveness? Ferreira suggests Kierkegaard's use of "distinctiveness" and "one's own" can be translated into the contemporary idiom of alterity and otherness.[14] Those terms are helpful for understanding the real inter-subjective predicament that people are somehow irreducibly *different* from each other. Yet, for Kierkegaard, distinctiveness is not simply a negation of identity; there is a dialectically affirming element that we encounter in others – and it is this element that we must actively look for, nurture, and constructively build up in others. In this way love of neighbour is not like love of humanity or species, or difference *qua* difference, because it is more concrete than those determinations.

How then does Kierkegaard explain distinctiveness? Distinctiveness is "God's gift by which he gives being to me, and indeed gives to all, gives being to all" (*WL*, 271). God gives "in such a way that the receiver acquires distinctiveness, that he who

[13] The Princeton edition translates *opelsker* as 'love forth', which is closer to the phrasing Kierkegaard uses in the following sentences with '*elskes frem*'. Assigning the Danish prefix '*op*' to the word for love, creating *opelsker*, seems to be Kierkegaard's way of uniting the activity of love with his familiar trope of 'upbuilding' – although a more literal translation of '*opelsker*' would be '*uploving*' I retain the Princeton translation rather than utilizing a neologism.

[14] Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 153. It is the phenomenological ethics of alterity encapsulated in the Levinasian and Derridean *Other* that is being referred to. See, Levinas, "Existence and Ethics," 26-38; Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), esp. chapters three and four. Also, Westphal, "Many Faces of Levinas," 21-40.

creates out of nothing yet creates distinctiveness, so that the creature in relation to God does not become nothing… but becomes a distinctive individuality" (*WL*, 271-272). This, according to Kierkegaard, is the miracle of being, which is related to his concept of freedom and the existential (ethical) task of self-choice.[15] Distinctiveness is how a person becomes a self, how s/he takes possibility back into necessity (*SUD*, 36-37). Perhaps just as important as *what* is given is the fact that something is *given*. That distinctiveness is related to a gift also brings the concept together with Kierkegaard's explanation of love's self-giving origin, the ground of love upon which all love builds up. Through an understanding of distinctiveness one learns how to love selflessly for edification.

To be (or become) a self 'before God', which we have identified as the religious basis of human equality and obligation, is also for Kierkegaard the origin of all distinctiveness (*WL*, 271). In this task of becoming a self *we* have a common middle term. Therefore a person who believes that s/he exists before God is also compelled by reason and required by conscience to believe in the distinctiveness of others. "To have distinctiveness is to believe in the distinctiveness of everyone else" (*WL*, 271). This is the point at which our social attention is directed to persons rather than demographics.

There is another aspect of distinctiveness that is accessible and understandable apart from religious terminology and Christian belief: our existential status, existing in a process of becoming, means that we are unfinished creatures and therefore to some extent we are a riddle to ourselves. Martin Matustik suggests, following Climacus, that to be a riddle means, "to embody a question about one's total claim to

[15] For an expanded account of Kierkegaardian 'self-choice' see George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Acumen: 2005), 90-99. In Kierkegaard's work the development of 'freedom' and 'self-choice' are established by Vigilius Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety* (1843) and Johannes Climacus' *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846).

living."[16] As we encounter others we can present ourselves in the honesty of our openness, as unfinished and a riddle to ourselves, and expect "to reach the other in the riddle" of their distinctiveness.[17] Distinctiveness, then, is also the basis of our responsibility and the model for our loving activity. If what it means to be a creature is to be endowed with the possibility of distinctiveness, which mirrors the possibility of a God-relationship, then that informs the aim of an edifying practice into an effort toward nurturing this distinctiveness. Likewise the human activity of love that does not seek "its own" participates in making room for the distinctiveness of others. By implication, seeking "one's own" makes no room for distinctiveness - shutting it out or smothering it.

As we are commanded to love our neighbour without preference or consideration for "distinctions," so are we instructed to truly love the "distinctiveness" of our neighbours. Here we have the thesis of Kierkegaard's fourth discourse of the second series of *Works of Love*, 'Love does not seek its own': "*The truly loving one does not love his own distinctiveness but, in contrast, loves every human being according to his distinctiveness; but 'his distinctiveness' is what for him is* ***his own****; that is, the loving one does not seek his own; quite the opposite, he loves what is the other's own*" (*WL*, 269). The command to love the neighbour, which first demands blindness to distinctions and dissimilarity, now "distinguishes itself in loving the diverse" (*WL*, 270).

Going forward socially Kierkegaard offers us two paths: either lovingly strive to edify and love other people's own distinctiveness, or follow the small-minded path of the domineering ones who seek *their own* exclusive benefit. Our choice is between a diverse, open, and mutually edifying society or a closed competitive society

[16] Matustik, *Postnational*, 174.
[17] Ibid., 176.

characterised by antagonism, resentment, and will to power. Kierkegaard adopts a more cynical view (or perhaps a more Reformed view) of the purely human propensity to faithlessly opt for the path where one seeks one's own – the path of what he calls small-mindedness. The social task of religiousness presented here is to humanly struggle for an open and edifying society. That struggle involves developing an oppositional (polemical) stance toward the logic of selfishness, possession, and domination while attending to the distinctiveness of others.

Kierkegaard regards difference and variation in humanity as a human good. Reminiscent of Anti-Climacus' comment that the self is intended to be ground into shape not ground down smooth (*SUD*, 33), and wary of a social tendency toward homogeneity in levelling, Kierkegaard again brings forward the ethical-religious commitment to the particular. A diversity of distinctiveness is welcomed because it testifies to the truth and authenticity of everyone's own distinctiveness before God. People who acknowledge distinctiveness have an attitude of openness toward others since they are aware of encountering distinctiveness in other people.

> For someone who has distinctiveness, no strange distinctiveness is a refutation but rather a confirmation or one more demonstration; it cannot disturb him to have it become manifest that everyone, as he believes, has distinctiveness (*WL*, 272).

To love the distinctiveness of others, to love the 'other's own', is to opt for and to work toward an open society of diversity where distinctiveness, rather than conformity, is celebrated. Therefore, "only true love loves every human being according to the person's distinctiveness" (*WL*, 270). By loving what is the other's own distinctiveness we demonstrate our own distinctiveness.

7.4. Opposing Small-mindedness and Domineering Ideologies

Often in Kierkegaard's writings we learn what is affirmed by exploring its negation. So too in this discourse we learn what it means that 'love does not seek its own' by examining the characteristics and results of an approach to the world that follows the axiom of "seeking one's own." Kierkegaard assigns the adherents of this venture the pejorative terms, "small-mindedness" and "domineering." These also operate within Kierkegaard's definition of *worldliness*, with its logic of immanence that is calibrated to the positive and apparent.

The main characteristic of a small-minded person is that he "has clung to a very specific shape and form that he calls his own; he seeks only that, can love only that" (*WL*, 272). As a result, small-minded and domineering people refuse to go out of themselves in order to genuinely love their neighbour. Instead small-mindedness is egotism that, when directed outward, ideologically displays absolutist, hegemonic, and colonial tendencies.

Kierkegaard relates the small-minded obsession with 'one's own' to the domineering form of a tyrant. A domineering person,

> Seeks his own so that wherever he points he can say: See, it is my image, it is my idea, it is my will. Whether the rigid and domineering person is assigned a large sphere of activity or a small one, whether he is a tyrant in an empire or a domestic tyrant in a little attic room essentially makes no difference; the nature is the same (*WL*, 270).

One can easily recognise the idolatrous component that wants to fashion a world in its own image. Here we have the precise antithesis to love and the edifying. Instead of working to make room for the distinctiveness that is a genuine creative gift from God, small-mindedness hopes to transform all that is into a form that resembles itself, or is at least agreeable to it. For this reason Kierkegaard insists a domineering person cannot create but either transforms (*WL*, 270) or displaces everything (*WL*, 272). A

domineering person lacks "the pliability to comprehend others" and instead demands, "everyone be transformed in his image" (*WL*, 270). When small-mindedness encounters a form that is not congruous with its own, it meets this distinctiveness with contempt (*WL*, 271).

Whereas distinctiveness is evidence of the good and the true for (Kierkegaardian) ethical-religious individuals, small-mindedness sees distinctiveness as a refutation (*WL*, 272) of 'one's own', and therefore it is regarded as an obstacle to be either transformed or expunged. Kierkegaard psychologises the xenophobia and chauvinism of small-mindedness when it is confronted with the diversity of human distinctiveness:

> [Small-mindedness] feels a clammy, uncomfortable anxiety upon seeing an unfamiliar distinctiveness, and nothing is more important to it than to get rid of it. Small-mindedness demands of God, as it were, that every such distinctiveness be destroyed so that small-mindedness will be shown to be in the right and God to be a jealous God – jealous for small-mindedness (WL, 272-273).

Because small-mindedness does not truly believe in its (or anybody's) distinctiveness it is suspicious and insecure amidst difference, which easily results in violence of sectarianism, sexism, racism, nationalism, and the destructive operations of empire. Although small-mindedness expresses itself in spectacles of violence and power, Kierkegaard exposes the true weakness that defines it. "One sees in its glance how basically unsure it is of itself deep down, and therefore how sneakily and also how rapaciously it lies in wait for its prey" (*WL*, 273). Today this is recognisable in certain outlets of journalism and politics which seem to relish the moment critical attention can be brought on a given minority group or to a particular race and religion "in order that it may become apparent [to the 'public'] that small-mindedness is right" (*WL*, 273), that further punitive measures must be in place to protect 'one's own' against the *other*.

It would be a mistake to think that Kierkegaard is speaking only of individuals with respect to small-mindedness. He wants his reader to be aware of how this can become formalised into a social pathology. When "small-mindedness holds together with small-mindedness" it forms an alliance that praises itself as the "highest love," true loyalty, and "honest harmony" (*WL*, 272). This can become structured into various political and social institutions. Kierkegaard singles out religion as one specific example. The many Christians of Kierkegaard's Danish 'Christendom' are not exempt from the anti-social behaviour of small-mindedness. An ideology of seeking one's own is "more pernicious when to boot it claims God in support of its jumbling together so that small-mindedness presumably must be the sole object of God's love" (*WL*, 272). Kierkegaard accuses a certain religious mentality of domesticating God, of enlisting God in 'one's own' alliance. And this is irreligiously used to assert oneself, to demand that one's own image and worldview is normative so that it becomes the criterion by which all others are measured and judged. In the attempt of small-mindedness to demonstrate that it is in the right it distorts God (*WL*, 271) and makes the divine into a jealous God (*WL*, 273).

Yet Kierkegaard realizes that small-mindedness exhibits the far more subtle psychology which also, at times, represents a belief that it serves the good. There exists a genuine conviction, a *liberal* conviction, that its "invention is the truth, so that it is even honest friendship and genuine sympathy to want to muddle and mess everyone into a likeness to oneself" (*WL*, 273). No doubt the Danish supporters of their international colonizing efforts of the time, in the East and West Indies, reflected this attitude.[18] Colonialism in particular is always justified (by its adherents) as a

[18] In *A Vexing Gadfly: The Late Kierkegaard on Economic Matters* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009) Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez considers Demark's involvement in colonial enterprise including the slave trade. He argues that such politics is also within the remit of Kierkegaard's religious appraisal of 'Christendom' (187-199).

philanthropic enterprise to civilise, enlighten, or liberate a society by transforming it into something that resembles the coloniser. Thus Kierkegaard notices how a proliferation of "hearty platitudes and assurances" accompanies small-mindedness (*WL*, 273). Today, when small-mindedness of this sort is far from extinct, it seems entirely inescapable that every existing community submit to the logic and apparatus of highly financialised global-market capitalism. This (dissimilarity), we are told, will produce abundant human prosperity, if properly administered. But, consciously or otherwise, the philanthropic narrative of small-mindedness (the colonizer) is disingenuous. The only real motivation for the activity of small-mindedness is selfish self-love "in order to get rid of everything else but its own" (*WL*, 273) or to simply *increase* its own.

The main point, according to Kierkegaard, is that none of this amounts to love, nor is it edifying. A society that operates according to the law of seeking one's own is closed, small-minded and domineering, and utterly irreligious in a Christian sense. Any social endeavour initiated along the lines of this mode of thought is guaranteed to produce human catastrophe in one form or another. The inhumanity of it consists "in independently wanting to deny kinship with all people, with unconditionally every person" (*WL*, 74). Such a denial of kinship is manifest in a society's class divisions and the 'glass ceilings' restricting certain people from participating fully in the social, political, spiritual, and economic life of that society. Kierkegaard notices how, despite the historical passing of feudalism, social hierarchy and class chauvinism remain essentially unchanged, and "this distinguished corruption will teach the distinguished person that he exists only for the distinguished, that he is to live only in the alliance of their circles, that he must not exist for other people, just as they must not exist for him" (*WL*, 75). The logic of this character, consciously or unconsciously,

is motivated by a selfish desire "to crush the other person's distinctiveness or torment it to death" (*WL*, 271). This demonstrates that the small-minded person does not see the neighbour or distinctiveness at all. Small-mindedness sees only what it perceives as competing and threatening dissimilarity. Therefore, small-mindedness and domineering ideology are forms of bondage to a particular dissimilarity; they are a negation – the denial of distinctiveness. But the negation of this negation, the negation of small-mindedness, is liberation, which is precisely the work of love. Against a perverted equality of homogeneity or an equality only within alliances of 'one's own', Kierkegaard's religious concept of love promotes an equality of genuine diversity and distinctiveness. The promotion of this distinctiveness and equality in neighbourly love is a communicative exercise, and therefore it is an existential project rather than a legislative one.

7.5. The Work of Love is a Communicative Practice

If, as Kierkegaard claims, there is no definitive list of actions we can point to unambiguously as works of love (*WL*, 13), and if love must go out of itself toward others at the 'speed of action', then the question is, *how* does love in fact love? How indeed? If love is not to be approached objectively as an object of study for a speculative *thinker*, but subjectively as an existential concern of persons endowed with subjectivity and who exist in the process of becoming, then the issue of love also becomes a question of communication. This question concerning the communication of love gets to the heart of what it means to *edify*: *how* to build up others and *how* one is built up.

To begin answering this it is necessary to return to the turning point in Kierkegaard's authorship and the year where our study began: 1846. There, in the

Concluding Unscientific Postscript Johannes Climacus identifies an essential difference between the objective thinker and the subjectively existing individual. The latter, Climacus tells us, is "aware of the dialectic of communication," which takes into consideration what he calls the 'double-reflection' [*Dobbelt-Reflexionen*] of a subjectively existing person (*SKS* 7, 73-74 / *CUP*, 72-73). From double-reflection Climacus leads his reader to a communicative concept of personhood, and from Climacean communication we are able to give shape to the communicative aim of works of love.

Double reflection is a technical term Kierkegaard uses to describe the process a person undergoes when making the transition from an aesthetic existence to ethical-religious existence, which takes seriously the process of subjectively relating to an absolute idea in inwardness. Merold Westphal describes the first reflection as a "double movement from particularity to universality and from thought to word."[19] The movement from particularity to universality is what Climacus calls thinking the universal (*CUP*, 73), which is the scientific and philosophical impulse to comprehend in terms of concepts, to regard the world in terms of objects for understanding. The second movement of the first reflection involves the *expression* of thinking the universal in word, which in *form* belongs to direct communication.[20] Climacus acknowledges that universality can be communicated in language and people can understand one another when they speak with each other. Direct communication is associated with the communication of knowledge and it is perfectly legitimate when the issue is a matter of objectivity (*CUP*, 76).

But there are very important questions for humans that presumably are not within the domain of objectivity. Certainly for Climacus the task of becoming ethical or

[19] Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, 64.
[20] Ibid., 63-64; *CUP*, 76.

religious falls outside the objective domain of a knowledge exchange. Turning from the objective domain of direct communication Climacus presents his reader with a series of suppositions:

> Suppose that someone wanted to communicate that the truth is not the truth but that the way is the truth, that is, that the truth is only in the becoming, the process of appropriation, that consequently there is no result (*CUP*, 78).

And, "suppose someone wanted to communicate that all receiving is a producing," and "suppose someone wanted to communicate the conviction that a person's God-relationship is a secret" (*CUP*, 78). Direct communication is ill equipped for these communicative tasks since their truth does not consist of 'information bits', fixed, finished, and objective, which can be deposited in the intellect "and then processed in the usual way as my instincts and habits, inclinations and drives, dictate."[21] This is when the second reflection of double-reflection enters into the task of existence and appropriation is the crucial element.

Now emphasis shifts from expressing the universal in word to a consideration of receiving the understanding. First reflection is in the form of speaker (expression), while second reflection is in the form of listener (reception).[22] A doubly reflected person continues to think the universal, but in such a way that s/he is "existing in this thinking, as acquiring this [the universal] in […] inwardness" (*CUP*, 73). Double reflection produces a contradiction for the subjectively existing individual: Such a person "simultaneously wants to keep his thinking in the inwardness of his subjective existence and yet wants to communicate himself" (*CUP*, 73). This cannot be done directly because of the incommensurability, at least in Climacus' estimation, of the inner and the outer, the objective and the subjective. Therefore, "wherever the subjective is of importance in knowledge and appropriation is therefore the main

[21] Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, 64.
[22] Ibid., 64.

point, communication is a work of art" (*CUP*, 79). Why is it a work of art and not a science? Communication is a work of art when its object for consideration is a matter of HOW rather than a question of WHAT. Communication is a work of art because it must exist with or remain with that contradiction of existence in inwardness. The dilemma is how to preserve the universal, (or the absolute, or the idea) which is chosen in inwardness – and which is essentially a secret that is incommensurate with publicly accessible objective knowledge since it is in a process of becoming and therefore unfinished – and yet still be able to express the truth of one's existence.[23] A subjectively existing person may want to communicate herself despite the dilemma posed by double reflection, but to do this requires a mode of existence that Kierkegaard designates as indirect communication or existence-communication.

What easily gets overlooked in Climacus' analysis is the social purpose of indirect communication. Indirect communication is not meant to preserve or protect the subjective individual *from others*, but instead it is a way of engaging with others that respects subjectivity. As Pia Søltoft explains, the communicator "hides himself, so the communicated information cannot simply be mimicked" and "so the recipient will think of the act or the ability as his own work."[24] Climacus does not celebrate Garcin's sardonic aphorism, in Sartre's *No Exit*, that "Hell is – other people!"[25] It seems that way when we read of the isolation produced by inwardness (*CUP*, 73) and the warning that "subjective individuals must be held devoutly apart from one another and must not run coagulatingly [*løbe skjørnende*] together in objectivity" (*SKS* 7, 79 /

[23] Communicating the truth *of* one's existence should not be confused with communicating the truth *that* one exists. This example clarifies the difference between direct and indirect communication. To express the truth that one exists can be done directly, whereas the truth of one's existence requires indirect communication.

[24] Pia Søltoft, "To Let Oneself be Upbuilt," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, eds., Heiko Schulz, Jon Stewart, and Karl Verstrynge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 20.

[25] Sartre, Jean Paul. *No Exit*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage, 1955 [1944]), 47.

CUP, 79). Such passages speak to Climacus' insistence that the inner is not reducible to the outer, nor is the individual reducible to a social or historical whole. Instead, "The secret of communication specifically hinges on *setting the other free*, and for that very reason he must not communicate himself directly; indeed, it is even irreligious to do so" (*CUP*, 74, emphasis mine). Here we find our connection to love that goes out of itself.

Love that goes out of itself is a form of communication that is indirect, and to communicate love involves a desire and a hope to set the other free. It is irreligious to want to communicate religiousness and subjectivity directly because that is a betrayal of the difficulty implicit in double-reflection. Likewise, where the kind of knowledge at issue is a matter of appropriation, as it is for religious and ethical truth, i.e. subjective truth, direct communication avoids the process of appropriation (the HOW of existence) by skipping over it and celebrating only the result (the WHAT of information knowledge). For Climacus communication has a double function: (a) it must be a way of expressing in existence the truth of one's subjectivity without objectifying inwardness, and (b) it must work for the (existential/spiritual) emancipation of others.

Freedom, in Kierkegaard's work, is the task associated with becoming a self. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard writes, "It is every human being's destiny to become free, independent, oneself" (*WL*, 278); Anti-Climacus tells us in *SUD*, "Every human being is primitively intended to be a self, destined to become himself, and as such every self certainly is angular, but that only means that it is to ground into shape, not that it is to be ground down smooth" (*SUD*, 33); And Climacus insists that "Every human being must be assumed to possess essentially what belongs essentially to being a human being" and therefore the task is to "transform [oneself] into an instrument that clearly

and definitely expresses in existence the essentially human" (*CUP*, 356). Here is where the existential task of becoming a self requires the principled inclusion of works of love as a communicative practice that sets others free in their distinctiveness.

The analysis of Climacus does not take us far enough in that direction – he only points the way forward. In *Works of Love* we find a transition, or rather an oscillation, between spiritual discipline (developing a right relation and right attitude within oneself before God) and a social discipline (developing a right relation to others before God). Through the dialectic of communication we discover that freedom is not a solitary endeavour. From the journal entry of the same year that *Works of Love* was published, we read that a communicator is not a master-teacher but an apprentice, that the communication must express that the recipient has the highest (the ethical and religious) within herself or himself – that s/he 'knows' it, and the receiver can never become an apprentice to the indirect communicator (*JP* 1, 649).

Two discourses in the second series of *Works of Love* provide us with a template for an emancipatory ethics; they are, discourse IV: 'Love Does Not Seek Its Own', and discourse VIII: 'The Victory of the Conciliatory Spirit in Love, Which Wins the One Overcome'. In discourse IV Kierkegaard presents the edifying as a correction to master-dependent relationships. Just as in a civic setting where there are 'masters' and 'dependents', "and we wish that everyone might at some time be in a position to become his own master", so too in spiritual matters the highest is to become one's own master (*WL*, 274). Echoing Climacus' comment about communication and freedom Kierkegaard writes here that love has the same end, "in love to help someone toward that, to become himself, free, independent, his own master, to help him stand

alone – that is the greatest beneficence" (*WL*, 274). Communication and love are united in setting the other free, in nurturing the capability for appropriation of the highest, ethically and religiously speaking. Furthermore, this spiritual emancipation is coeval with a social-material emancipation. Or, to attempt to orchestrate social emancipation without spiritual emancipation is no more and no less than levelling.

Climacus introduces us to the possibility that perhaps *the truth* is not the truth but the way is the truth, and now Kierkegaard asks his reader to bring that possibility forward with respect to social encounters and consider how we can communicate in such a way that sets the other free, to become her or his own master. This means that something must take place in individuals who hope to love whereby an understanding of the love commandment gets appropriated into action (existence-communication). "It means that the greatest beneficence is specifically *the way* in which the one and only true beneficence is done" (*WL*, 274). The way is this: people who edify, the ones who communicate indirectly, who are themselves the demonstration, must make themselves "unnoticed so that the [ones] helped [do] not become dependent upon [them] – by owing to [them] the greatest beneficence" (*WL*, 274). If in our encounters with others we wish to retain our signature, to demonstrate that it is *we* who have helped, influenced, or sustained the other, then we are not edifying and we are not loving because we are still, in a sense, seeking our own (reward, admiration, happiness, etc.). To 'seek one's own' in love is a form of selfish self-love (*WL*, 264). But, we are told, it is different with ones who love because love does not seek its own; it seeks the other's own distinctiveness (*WL*, 269).

The concept of the 'unnoticed' ones can be found in various texts throughout our period of study and it comes to occupy a significant component in Kierkegaard's understanding of the optimum for religious life in modernity. In *Practice in*

Christianity (1850), which will be discussed in the following section, we meet the 'unnoticed' in the concept of *incognito*, of which Christ is the paradigm (*PC*, 127-136). In *Two Ages* (1846), which we have already discussed, Kierkegaard ends his polemic with a hopeful vision for a possible future. There he suggests that the truly edifying ones, the people of true excellence and leadership, those who will be educated by levelling rather than succumbing to it, "will be without authority… Like plainclothes policemen, they will be *unrecognizable*, concealing their respective distinctions and giving support only negatively" - that is, indirectly (*TA*, 107); they will not "dare give direct help, speak plainly, teach openly, assume decisive leadership of the crowd" (*TA*, 108), but they will have the double task that they "are obliged to keep working – and at the same time work to conceal their working" (*TA*, 109). But why is the unrecognizable, incognito, unnoticeable character of indirect communication essential in Kierkegaard's hopeful response to levelling, and why is it essential to the edifying practice of works of love? The answer has to do with a religious corrective to the asymmetry of power exhibited in human relations, spiritual or material.

Kierkegaard reflects on what happens if we draw attention to ourselves in our loving activity. What happens to the edifying prospect of setting the other free to become his or her own master? Kierkegaard warns that I am not edifying if I say "This person is standing by himself through my help" because what I am really saying in this case is, "He stands simply and solely through my help" (*WL*, 274). Of course it is true that we do not come to ourselves, or reach the highest in the Kierkegaardian sense of becoming subjectively existing individuals by ourselves and through our own refinement – presumably this is why we need the works of love. Kierkegaard's pedagogy is different from the Romantic project of personal refinement, or *Bildung*,

insofar as Kierkegaard acknowledges essential human dependence. Instead, the highest possibility for edification is contained in this: "to stand by oneself – through another's help" (*WL*, 275). Everything hinges, dialectically, on the dash [*Tankestreg*, thought-line (*WL*, 275)] in this construction.

Making use of a grammatical device Kierkegaard is able to express how a social-spiritual contradiction is "surmounted" (*WL*, 275). The contradiction is that one stands *on one's own* yet *through another*'s help. It is the dash inserted into the copula which religiously makes sense of this predicament, and it instructs people in how to communicate the edifying in their existence. Religiously, the help is "hidden behind the dash" (*WL*, 275). Hiding the help also implies that there is a kind of deception involved in Kierkegaard's edifying practice. Some commentators have questioned the ethical claims of Kierkegaard's philosophy on the very premise that his entire ethics and vision for inter-subjectivity is conducted on the basis of deceiving the other into truth.[26] Typically deception is regarded as distinctly unethical because it suggests dishonesty and concealment, which places one party in 'the know' and another party in ignorance. Such a situation does not reflect honouring the other or setting the other free; rather it reflects an asymmetrical relationship where domination and pride are almost inevitable. However, Kierkegaard turns the problem around. To help people in such a way that reminds them that it is I who have helped is really to deceive a person regarding the source of edification (*WL*, 274).

Without the dash that Kierkegaard speaks of there is a danger for humiliation and domination in relationships between people. Both of these can occur quite accidentally, and therefore spiritual vigilance is required. In relationships between people someone can be selfish even when he imagines he is being unselfish. To help

[26] Joakim Garff, "The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, edited by Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 87-88; See also *PV*, 53-56.

another openly and directly draws attention to the helper. Kierkegaard notices how an unloving and selfish person draws attention to his 'help' "so that wherever he points he can say: See, it is my image, it is my idea, it is my will" (*WL*, 270). The countless hospital wards, charitable foundations, scholarship programs, and public buildings named after their benefactors all testify to this very human desire for controlled intervention and recognition. Rarely is this motivated by maliciousness and it is often people whom the world designates 'good' who find themselves in this category. We may even recognise ourselves in this description of courting recognition. However, when emphasis is placed on the help and the helper it is difficult to avoid the pride that grows in the one who 'helps' the other. Now a more destructive motivation can persist. A person can come to imagine that she or he has ownership of the good and the help when the focus is on his or her helping activity. People such as this confuse love with a demand; such a person in fact "demands his own from everyone, wants everyone to be transformed in his own image, to be trimmed according to his pattern for a human being" (*WL*, 270). This is revealed as a characteristic of small-mindedness.

Those who refuse to go out of themselves to honestly encounter others are small-minded. "The small-minded person has clung to a very specific shape and form that he calls his own; he seeks only that, can love only that" (*WL*, 272). As a result, the 'love' or 'help' from a small-minded person is really a humiliation because it is a form of domination and a demand to submit to the image of the small-minded one; it is the aberration of love that is not cognizant of the *dash*.

Alternatively, in the case of love's deception, which hides the help behind the dash, Kierkegaard insists that the asymmetry is replaced by equality. But is this only an equality of appearance? Kierkegaard insists that it is not, and that is because of an

understanding of where the true mastery and genuine help comes from. Therefore, "in order to take away the humiliating and the insulting, the one who loves introduces something higher between himself and the [other] one and in that way removes himself" (*WL*, 339). Kierkegaard calls this selfless act 'conciliatory spirit.' Conciliatory spirit is cognizant of the dash, of something higher that stands between one person and another when the task is to build each other up. Likewise, the ones who lovingly help in such a way that the help is hidden behind the dash, so to speak, do not focus on their help but only see the other standing independently, freely (*WL*, 275). Both the helper and the one helped see the same thing, their attention is on the same thing, and their goal is the same: that a person/oneself is becoming free to be a person, to stand on one's own – (*through another's help*).

The goal of love that does not 'seek its own' advantage is to give "in such a way that the gift looks as if it were the recipient's own" (*WL*, 274). But this can only be done if the giver retreats and attention is directed to the gift and the recipient. Consistent with his entire authorship Kierkegaard's model for this kind of ethical strategy in *Works of Love* is Socrates (*WL*, 276). Socrates understood that if another is truly to be helped to become a self ethically and religiously then "the helper must be able to make himself anonymous, must magnanimously will to annihilate himself" (*WL*, 276). Following Socrates we are encouraged to become, in a spiritual sense, a midwife in our relationships with others, anonymously enabling the good and the true to come out of the other as their own. The Socratic midwife, also referred to by Kierkegaard as the maieutic method, lures the good forth out of another.

However, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between how a Socrates might approach the *dash* in 'This person is standing by himself – through my help' and how a loving person in the religious sense would approach the dash. The distinction is

between an ethical self-awareness and religious self-awareness. In Kierkegaard's narrative a smile appears on the face of the ethicist (the Socratic) when the dash follows the saying that this person stands on her own. The Socratic 'smile' that comes along with the dash is not malicious or selfish, but it is an acknowledgement that knows what one has done for another – that one has performed the greatest beneficence. And the smile indicates that there is "still the self-consciousness of ingenuity" (*WL*, 277). Religiously, the dash is placed there to prevent the 'helper' from indebting the other to the helper, preventing pride of ingenuity, and it prevents the other from becoming dependent on the helper because ultimately the help is not sourced in the helper. When a religious person says to herself 'Now the individual is standing by himself – through my help',

> There is no self-satisfaction in the last phrase, because the loving one has understood that essentially every human being indeed stands by himself – through God's help – and that the loving one's self-annihilation is really only in order not to hinder the other person's God-relationship, so that all the loving one's help infinitely vanishes in the God-relationship (*WL*, 278).

The basis of the edifying practice that encourages a person to become his or her own master, and which prevents one from assuming authority or mastery over the other is the presence of a third party in an edifying relationship. What the dash represents is possibility for God to enter in as middle term. We are reminded of the formula introduced earlier, "The love-relationship requires threeness: the lover, the beloved, the love – but the love is God." And now we add what follows, "Therefore, to love another person is to help that person to love God, and to be loved is to be helped" (*WL*, 121). We should note that Kierkegaard also invites a less dogmatic, even secularly palatable approach to this formulation. "This third party, what thinkers would call the idea, is the true, the good, or more accurately, the God-relationship… With the aid of the third that the loving one has introduced between them, they are

both humbled" (*WL*, 339-340). Both parties, the loving one and the one helped, are humbled before *the good*, not one before the other, and both are edified by the good – through another's help.

As with the discussion of human labour in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, where humans learn from the bird of the air that in working humans do not support themselves, that working is also to work together with God as God's co-workers (*UDVS*, 199), so also in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard reminds his reader that the edifying activity of good works cannot simply be accredited to humans as their own "meritoriousness." In a journal entry from 1847 Kierkegaard reconsiders the Reformation question concerning good works and faith. The problem invites a dialectic: "Good works in the sense of meritoriousness are naturally an abomination to God." Humans neither earn their own salvation nor do they build the *Kingdom of God* with their own hands according to their own plans. "Yet good works are required of a human being." As we have seen, humans are to exist together actively as neighbours of one another. Therefore, Kierkegaard claims that good works "should be served in humility, in faith." That means recognising our good works is like

> A child's giving his parents a present, purchased, however, with what the child has received from his parents; all the pretentiousness that otherwise is associated with giving a present disappears since the child received from the parents the gift that he gives to the parents (*JP* II, 1121 [1847]).

A person who helps 'behind the dash' is one who understands a gift in this way. S/he is one who has faith that it is in fact God who gives what is being given in the help.

When we read of the willingness to be 'shoved aside' and of self-annihilation (*WL*, 278) for the neighbour, we should not confuse this with promoting a self-loathing destructiveness that allows one to lose *spirit*, to give up the self, to allow another to become one's master and thereby become transformed into an object rather than a person. What it means to "completely squander" one's life "on the existence of the

other" (*WL*, 279) has nothing to do with letting another have power or mastery over oneself. Instead when a third party is involved in the religious sense of the God-relationship, then these phrases serve for upbuilding and affirmation insofar as there is full acknowledgment that the power, authority, admiration, and responsibility for the good rests not with the loving ones, but with the third party – God. Any person, association, or institution that demands adherence to itself as identifiable with God's authority comes under scrutiny and opposition.

Power and authority is refracted away from the one who loves in order that domination and subjugation do not enter the relationship between persons. To choose to exist for others in this way, to pack one's "whole life into a dash" is what Kierkegaard means by becoming God's co-worker (*WL*, 279). For this reason a person will allow herself to become "completely and wholly transformed into simply being an active power in the hands of God" (*WL*, 279). Amazingly, what one discovers by working for the good in others, by communicating indirectly and loving what is the other's own distinctiveness in order to set the other free, is that "they in a certain sense were already" free – their own master (*WL*, 279).

The dash, in the discussion above, signifies in one instance an object, a WHAT, which is recognised as God or the good. But this object is such that its manifestation and its truth can only be apprehended indirectly. Therefore the dash also signifies a mode of existing, a HOW, which is the form of communicating for upbuilding. For indirect communication "The object, as was shown, is not a knowledge but an art, a realization" (*JP* 1, 649 [1847]).

> 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. Consequently the receiver can never become an apprentice [to the indirect

> communicator], for he already knows; nor can he buy in on the communicator, for ethically this is an atrocity (*JP* 1, 649 [1847]).

Kierkegaard's entire enterprise of works of love is not for reflection or meditation but for action. To take the concepts of "edifying" and "the neighbour" seriously in the religious sense outlined here, requires earnest encounters and social interactions with others. Kierkegaard may frustrate hopes for a theory of communication or a constructive proposal for social discourse because he refuses to instruct us on what to say or not to say, what is publicly and privately licit or illicit, etc. Other philosophers may compete for what is public reason. Kierkegaard asks only that we consider HOW we communicate and HOW we exist in relation to others if we hope to free our neighbours and become free ourselves.

7.6. Toward An Open Communicative Community of Individuals[27]

We have already encountered Kierkegaard's suspicion of the belief that the age will be saved by sociality. Yet in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard acknowledges how deeply the need for companionship is rooted in human nature (*WL*, 154-155), placing that need, as is commonly done, in the Genesis creation myth where the human was immediately confronted with a desire for equal association (neither beast nor nature serve as adequate company for human creatures). Kierkegaard's use of the Danish *Selskab*, which allows for a fruitful ambiguity and affinity between 'companionship' and 'society', provides an edifying corrective to his critical comments in *Two Ages*. He writes,

> In the busy, swarming multitude, in which society [*Selskab*] is both too much and too little, people become tired of association [*Selskab*]; but the cure is not to make the discovery that God's idea [of human sociality] was wrong, no, the cure is just to learn entirely again from the beginning what was first intended, to

[27] Martin Matustik utilises the lexicon and tradition of Critical Theory for his appraisal and analysis of Kierkegaardian sociology. It is from him that I derive the term 'communicative community' (Matustik, *Postnational*, xi, 44, 151-184).

> understand oneself [*at forstaae sig selv*] in longing for company [*Selskab*] (*SKS* 9, 155-156, my translation).

Society, association, companionship are no longer denigrated as the result of dissolution, rather they are associated with our most primal character, our *species being*. What is at issue is a matter of right relation or misrelation. The sociality of levelling brings misrelation while the sociality of neighbourly love builds up right-relation between persons. Throughout *Works of Love* a polemical critique of modern levelling meets an edifying practice that seeks genuine encounters with others in the hope of being able to mutually build up the distinctiveness of each person.

Now a question remains regarding the possibility of an edifying community. Must Kierkegaardian edifying practice be restricted to private practices of charity and 'good deeds' as isolated acts among individuals who otherwise have nothing to do with each other, or does Kierkegaard consider the possibility for collective life? I answer that a Kierkegaardian existence consisting of an edifying and polemical mode works for a communal life of genuinely existing individuals. An edifying practice that combines neighbourly love (and its communicative ethic of building up the diverse distinctiveness of others) with a polemical practice of opposition to the xenophobic politics of a closed society (which schizophrenically demands a levelled homogeneity and possessive egoism) is also already engaged in building-up communities.

Kierkegaard's social scepticism is based on his interpretation of the relationship between the individual and the race (species). In *Two Ages* (1846) we encountered Kierkegaard's misgivings about conceptualising 'the social' in terms of a movement from the individual to the species, from the particular to the universal. These misgivings persist throughout our period of study and remain a tenet in his social critique.

> The error lies mainly in this, that the universal, which Hegelianism considers

> the truth (and the single individual to be the truth by being swallowed up in it) is an abstraction—the state, etc. … How frequently have I sworn that Hegel basically regards men, paganly, as an animal-race endowed with reason. In an animal-race "the single individual" is always lower than "race." The human race always has the remarkable character that, just because every individual is created in the image of God, the "single individual" is higher than the "race"… And *here* is where the battle must really be fought. (*JP* II, 1614 [1850]).

And again,

> The human race in contrast to the animal species is characterized by the fact that the single individual [*den Enkelte*] is higher than the race. Whereas the overlapping factor in regard to particular animal copies or specimens [*Exemplarer*] is the race, here the single individual, that is, every individual, when he in truth is the single individual, is the overlapping factor. The race is a binding together on a lower level (*JP* II, 2024 [1850]).

Humanity is distinguished from other species "by the fact that the individual, the single individual, is more than the species" (*SUD*, 121). Ironically, in the name of *Humanity* (species) a truly social project is being sacrificed in favour of identities and abstractions that resembles the animal category of the herd. What protects the human from "being completely finitized, by becoming a number instead of a self" (*SUD*, 33), is the category of the individual. Hence Kierkegaard declares, "The single individual is the category through which, in a religious sense, the age, history, the human race must go" (*PV*, 118). However, there is something that may emerge on the other side of the single individual (*PV*, 10) – this is where Kierkegaard's hope for human sociality lies. A critical but edifying social life must be forged on this *other side* of the category of the individual.

Hidden within the girth of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* we find a footnote acknowledging an exception to Kierkegaard's formula that the individual is higher than the species:

> Only in the final qualification of the religious, the paradoxical-religious, does the race become higher, but then only by virtue of the paradox; and in order to become aware of the paradox one must have the qualification of the religious in between, that the individual is higher than the species … (*CUP*, 554).

Considering this passage Matustik asks, "Is there a Kierkegaardian community which is 'higher' than the individual?"[28] Matustik acknowledges that he does not follow Kierkegaard through to the paradoxical-religiousness of Christianity, but instead remains within the Climacean ethical-religious category. To have the religious in between is, in Climacus' terms, to relate oneself with subjective pathos to an absolute good. In truth Kierkegaard considers two possibilities for healthy sociality: collective life that is existentially qualified in a secular ethical-religious mode can simply be called *community* while for paradoxical-religious faith community can become *congregation*.[29] When Kierkegaard considers the possibility of forming a genuine congregation in the religious sense, he insists, "this is a concept that lies on the other side of *the single individual*" (*PV*, 10). Although 'congregation' and 'community' are not equivalent concepts for Kierkegaard, both require the category of the individual as its guarantee. Kierkegaard's community ideal stands on the other side of the single individual but his sociality neither opposes nor absorbs the individual; his is a sociality that builds up individuals.

In a journal entry dated 1846 Kierkegaard sketches some elements for a dialectic of community:

> (1) The individuals who relate to each other in the relation are individually inferior to the relation.
>
> Just as the separate members of the body are inferior to the body; the particular heavenly bodies in the solar system.
>
> (2) The individuals who relate to each other in the relation are individually equal in relation to the relation.
>
> Just as in earthly love each one is a separate entity, but the need for the relationship is the same for both.
>
> (3) The individuals who relate themselves to each other in the relation are

[28] Matustik, *Postnational*, 166.

[29] Congregation is a problematic term in Kierkegaard's usage. The final section of this thesis discusses this problem and the possibility Kierkegaard presents for religious life together.

individually superior to the relation.

> As in the highest form of religion. The individual is primarily related to God and then to the community, but this primary relation is the highest, yet he does not neglect the second … The task is not to move from the individual to the race but from the individual through the race to achieve the individual (*JP* IV, 4110 [1846]).

Only formulation (3) presents a situation where community is a possibility, where community is a task, and where community is, in a sense, already at work in individuals. In Kierkegaard's scheme people only truly become *individuals* in social life. The ideal that Kierkegaard believes we ought to strive for is a community of individuals that produces individuals who produce community. Kierkegaard does not oppose the individual to community, but as we have seen he opposes the individual to 'the race' or 'the public'. From a Kierkegaardian standpoint the antithesis of community is not the individual but 'the crowd', 'the public', or the species, and it is the *Individual* who stands on the side of community.

Conclusion

This chapter developed a Kierkegaardian basis for edifying activity and social encounters between persons. When the religiousness that is developed in inwardness is turned outward, as it must, it encounters the present age society in the form of a critique and polemic against selfish small-mindedness, but religiousness also encounters others as neighbours and works to communicate freedom in such a way that each person is able to become a distinctive person.

We have considered here (1) that the source of this project, religiously, is love as it is determined by and identified with God. (2) Our relationship to others and ourselves is qualified by the category of the neighbour, to whom we have an absolute obligation, who is not another 'I' but the first and every 'you', every person we see,

whether “friend” or “enemy.” (3) Love is essentially action and it is only in its element when it goes out of itself and is directed toward others in loving activity. (4) An edifying practice is a communicative practice and the communication consists in such a way as to remove the authorial voice of the communicator; it is the indirect communication of love that allows the other to come into his or her own without being mastered or subjugated. Where the edifying is at issue everyone is an apprentice of God.

The following section returns the edifying and polemical aspects of religiousness inward again (yet not just within a single person), but now we ask how the edifying and the polemical life is communicated through an encounter with the Church. The self-critique of a person who exists before God, which we followed in the second section of this dissertation, and the culture critique of section three gets applied to the Church and ‘Christendom’ in section four. The dual struggle of religiousness (struggling inwardly with God and conscience and outwardly with the world) becomes, in modernity, a struggle within Christianity itself, which Kierkegaard articulates as a religious struggle against Christendom and any established order that tends toward self-deification. That is religiousness’ polemical encounter with the Church. However, we shall conclude with a consideration of the edifying opportunity that Kierkegaard affords to Christianity and the Church *without Christendom*.

Section IV

The Edifying and the Polemical in the Church

Encountering *Christendom* and Encountering *Disciples*

Introduction

Section II considered how the edifying and the polemical aspects of religious existence function inwardly in the individual. There the dialectic was explored liturgically through confession and communion: confession corresponds to the polemical and communion corresponds to the edifying in the religious life of an individual. The dialectic operates in order to facilitate an encounter with God, such that the individual understands the infinite qualitative difference between God and humans *and* the intimate proximity between God and humans. Fear and trembling and the divine gift of life are mutually intensified in the God-relationship, producing depth of spirit.

In *Section III* the edifying and the polemical depth of spirit is turned outward toward society and history, first in the form of social critique then in the form of a constructive approach to social life. Individuals who encounter God in inwardness also encounter others as neighbours, and by encountering others as neighbours individuals discover their real human vocation before God. Religious life, it becomes clear, cannot be removed from the social life of neighbourliness. The absolute difference between God and creature and the intimate proximity between God and creature becomes the orienting principle implicated in all social encounters. Polemically, it means the qualitative difference places a question mark beside every human historical claim to power, authority, and triumphant self-assurance; it warns against relationships of domination, subjugation, and disenfranchisement; it is what Karl Barth refers to as the divine NO.[1] From the edifying, it means the intimate proximity demands at once the affirmation of human diversity and universal human

[1] Barth, *Romans*, 111, 114, 123, 125.

solidarity in spirit and hope; it is God's YES to life, which humans are invited to share in as co-workers.

Section IV considers how Kierkegaard applies the edifying and the polemical dialectic of religiousness to the question of the *Church* and ongoing attempts at *Christendom*. This section consolidates the theoretical structure of the edifying and the polemical that we followed in the previous two sections. Now we ask how the divine NO and YES is communicated to the Church and by the Church. Although Kierkegaard is not commonly regarded for his ecclesiology, I claim the edifying and the polemical come together cohesively in a religious life characterised by "militant" faith and through his understanding of what it means to be a member of the "Church militant." With this concept the categories of *edifying* and *polemical* find their social significance: the Church militant strives to be a community of individuals who exist "without authority," committed to works of love and the imitation of Christ, communicating indirectly for upbuilding an open society of persons.

Chapter 8

The Church and Christendom: Kierkegaard's Polemical Stance Prior to the 1855 Attack Campaign

It is well known that Kierkegaard's final year was engrossed in a public pamphleteering campaign against the Danish "People's Church" [*Folkekirken*] in particular, and against the establishment of a Danish civic religion (Christendom) in general. By the end his break with the church was so decisive that when Kierkegaard lay dying in the hospital October 1855 he refused communion from clergy, claiming that he would not receive the sacrament from a paid official of the state and that he would only receive it from a layperson.[1] As a result Kierkegaard died without the Christian rite.

How the final attack fits conceptually and tactically into Kierkegaard's authorship is disputed among commentators. Some interpret the attack as an episode consistent with Kierkegaard's theological and social analysis prior to 1852.[2] They read the attack as the logical conclusion to Kierkegaard's cultural critique and political radicalisation from 1848 onwards. For them *The Moment* represents a clear break from Kierkegaard's previous forms of communication but it remains a logical conclusion to his thought, given the social context.[3] However, I resist the notion that Kierkegaard's

[1] Garff, *SAK*, 788-789.

[2] Bruce Kirmmse argues this position. He writes, the attack "was not an aberration. It was the culmination of an anti-clerical – and, indeed, antiecclesial – tendency that had developed over a considerable period." See, Kirmmse, "The Thunderstorm: Kierkegaard's Ecclesiology," *Faith and Philosophy*, 17, no. 1 (2000): 87.

[3] Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez makes this argument in *A Vexing Gadfly*. There he identifies three periods of Kierkegaard's development toward increasing radical ideas and practices, they are: (a) 1846-1848, (b) 1848-1852, and (c) 1855.

final year represents the culmination of his thought and warn against putting too strong an emphasis on that period, that it would be a mistake to read Kierkegaard's corpus through the lens of the attack campaign.

What is indisputable is the fact that by 1855 Søren Kierkegaard held a very low view of the Danish People's Church, the bureaucratisation of Danish clergy, and the idea of a Danish (or even European) cultural Christianity. So low did Kierkegaard regard the state of affairs that he proclaimed attending public worship in Christendom actually incurs guilt, is tantamount to sin (*M*, 131).

This chapter examines Kierkegaard's polemical critique of a Christianity that forfeits its own polemical character in an attempt to identify itself as an established order. Whereas his culture-critique of 1846 singled out the press and politicians as 'servants of levelling,' after 1848, when his attention is on the religious establishment, the agents who level Christianity are the professors and the priests. This chapter explores Kierkegaard's critique of their ideology of power and glory and the intellectual distance from Christianity's existential requirements. By the end of the chapter I will show that the religious error of Christendom is that it lacks confession and fear and trembling, which guarantees God's difference and the spirit of the human creature. This critique, far from standing as Kierkegaard's last word on Church, coincides with an edifying presentation of religious life together and broader communities in secular life together.

8.1. The Church and the Problem of Extensity: Christendom

A number of journal entries reveal that Kierkegaard's ecclesiastical comments are not simply misgivings about The Danish People's Church, but he has serious concerns regarding modern applications of the doctrine of the Church itself. The Danish

People's Church represents for Kierkegaard a paradigm of the Christian misapplication of ecclesiology. Drawing attention to the Augsburg Confession of 1530, the source of Lutheran doctrine, Kierkegaard finds an opportunity to reiterate his characteristic distinction between the HOW of faith and the WHAT of doctrine.

> The definition of "Church" found in the Augsburg Confession, that it is the communion [*Samfund*] of saints where the word is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered, this quite correctly (that is, not correctly) grasped only the two points about doctrine and sacraments and has overlooked the first, the communion of saints (in which there is the qualification in the direction of the existential [*Existentielle*]). Thus the Church is made into a communion of indifferent existences [*Existentser*] (or where the existential is a matter of indifference)—but the "doctrine" is correct and the sacraments are rightly administered. This is really paganism (*JP* I, 600 [1851]).[4]

When the existential is neglected in religion then what remains is an administration of various bureaucratic procedures and ritualistic practices, which is what Kierkegaard associates with paganism. Employing the language of earlier pseudonyms, we could say that for Kierkegaard the Church has been made into an *aesthetic* institution – a matter of externals, objective knowledge, and rites – whereas the *ethical-religious* category (existential) has been diminished or removed.

Notably, the Augsburg Confession has a response prepared for the very misapplication that Kierkegaard announces. In the 1531 "Apology of the Augsburg Confession" its authors insist, "The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however, but it is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts."[5] By calling attention to the Augsburg Confession Kierkegaard raises the accusation that his modern Lutheran church is falling prey to the same errors that instigated early reformation movements.

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[4] See Article VII of the Augsburg Confession in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1959 [1580]), 32.

[5] Ibid., 169.

Proclaiming to the practitioners of a Lutheran Church in Denmark that it has deviated from Luther to such an extent that Luther himself would not acknowledge it as reformational is surely polemical (*FSE*, 193). Yet, it is hard not to recognise Kierkegaard's affinity to a passage in *The Book of Concord* such as this:

> We see the infinite dangers that threaten the church with ruin. There is an infinite number of ungodly within the church who oppress it. The church will abide nevertheless… The Creed offers us these consolations that we may not despair but may know all this. It says "the church catholic" lest we take it to mean an outward government of certain nations… If we were to define the church as only an outward organization … then men would not understand that the kingdom of Christ is the righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit but would think of it only as the outward observance of certain devotions and rituals.[6]

Like the authors of the Apology, Kierkegaard calls attention to the danger of the church from within, warning against a merely extensive church and the (potential) superficiality of rite.

Kierkegaard's journal entry, alongside *The Book of Concord*, indicates that he is aware of the reformatory character of his message to the Danish People's Church. However, when such a message is received as a polemic, as it inevitably would be in Denmark, then its character exceeds the reformatory and becomes revolutionary. It is in this light that we must read Kierkegaard's declaration that the Church and Christianity "has reached the point where it must be said: So now I am going to begin all over again from the beginning" (*FSE*, 130).

A few years later, in a journal entry dated 1854, shortly before Kierkegaard began publishing his anti-clerical attack in *Fædrelandet*, he expresses what he regards as a fundamental problem within the Christian formation of the Church, a problem that is rooted not in nineteenth-century theology, nor the Lutheran theology of the Augsburg Confession, not even in Constantine's marriage of Christianity and empire. Rather, it

[6] Ibid., 169-170.

is a problem that Kierkegaard locates at the biblical event of Pentecost. He gives this journal entry the title, *An Alarming Note*. He writes, "Those three thousand who were added *en masse* to the congregation on Pentecost—is there not something dubious here at the very beginning" (*JP* II, 2056 [1854]). Kierkegaard wonders if the apostles should have had "misgivings" about that event. He accuses the apostles of becoming enamored with their own results, forgetting that Christianity is imitation. Kierkegaard claims if the apostles had acknowledged that "true imitation [*Efterfølgelsen*] is Christianity, such an enormous conquest as three thousand at one time will not do" (*JP* II, 2056 [1854]). Kierkegaard actually appears to blame the apostles for misunderstanding the core of a 'Christian' message.

Kierkegaard even suggests a heretical strand of belief stemming directly from the doctrine of the Church. With the doctrine of the Church "we have produced a lower state of religion, 'national religion and a national God'" (JP II, 2045 [1852]). Kierkegaard notices how ideologies of extensity and nationhood collide and form the "confusion that whole states, countries, nations, kingdoms are Christian" (*JP* II, 2056 [1854]).[7] And therefore he warns, "We have not paid close enough attention to the sense in which the Church is formed of single individuals," and as a result, "the Church is the chosen people just as the Jews were. But this is Judaism, not Christianity, for a Christian cannot be born—no, the individual becomes a Christian; Christianity is related to the single individual understood as spirit" (*JP* II, 2045

[7] Kierkegaard would certainly have been aware of the Danish missionary endeavours operating in their colonies since the eighteenth century (particularly in Greenland, Lapland, and the West Indies). See, Barnett, *Pietism and Holiness*, 38, 42. Colonialism is another expression of the political-economic and cultural-religious character of Christendom. Although Kierkegaard does not specifically critique colonialism, Pérez-Álvarez argues for an implicit Kierkegaardian critique of cultural and economic expansionist ideologies. See, Pérez-Álvarez, *A Vexing Gadfly* (Pickwick: 2009).

[1852]).[8] In Kierkegaard's view the Church has allowed Christianity to become what it is not – a matter of heredity and national identity.

Is the situation even worse than suspected? Are Kierkegaard's misgivings about the narrative of mass conversion in Acts actually misgivings about the very notion of church and protestations about Christianity itself?[9] Kierkegaard certainly harbors misgivings about the institutional and ideological formation of *the Church* in the nineteenth century. And for this reason he believes it is necessary to reintroduce Christianity to Christendom (*PV*, 42, 123-124). Kierkegaard also acknowledges that the social, political, and spiritual dilemmas he draws attention to in the nineteenth century actually have their roots in a biblical tension. This Christian tension consists of "a curious meeting of two thoughts" (*JP* II, 2056 [1854]): (1) "In Christ Christianity has the orientation of intensity," which Kierkegaard associates with the single individual (*JP* II, 2056 [1854]); and (2) "The apostles' task seems to be oriented toward extensity, the more extensity the better," which Kierkegaard associates with the Church or "congregation" [*Menighed*] (*JP* II, 2056 [1854]). Christ corresponds to intensity while Church corresponds to extensity. Intensity and extensity relate to each other negatively "to the degree that intensity is accentuated, extensity is diminished" (*JP* II, 2056 [1854]). It seems, for Kierkegaard, that Christ and the Church work at cross-purposes or work against each other. Kierkegaard uncovers what he believes is another paradox at the heart of Christian proclamation: the apostles were meant to spread broadly (extensity) true Christianity (intensity). By Kierkegaard's own estimation this is a humanly irresolvable task. However, he is not

[8] Regardless of Kierkegaard's reductionist interpretation of Jewish identity, the question is whether the doctrine of the Church tends toward professing a *national*, *ethnic*, or *mass* relation to God over an individual existential relation to God.

[9] Bruce Kirmmse does conclude that Kierkegaard's Christianity is, in the last analysis, anti-ecclesial. See, Kirmmse, "'But I am almost never understood…' Or, Who Killed Søren Kierkegaard?", in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*, edited by George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 178.

interested in resolving the problem of how the apostles ought to proceed; he is concerned with his own historical situation, with what has become of the *congregation*, the *Church*, since that event of Pentecost.

The principle of extensity leads, in Kierkegaard's view, to the illusion of a Church triumphant [*en triumpherende Kirke*] (*PC*, 211 / *SKS* 12, 207). Kierkegaard's judgment of this vision for the Church is that it is "the ruination of Christianity" (*JP* II, 2056 [1854]) because it "deludes itself into thinking it is to be triumphant here in this world," which also means "it has confused itself with the world" (*PC*, 201). A Church triumphant is an illusion, according to Kierkegaard, because it represents a misunderstanding of what it means to express Christianity in the world.

After 1849 Kierkegaard increasingly addresses the misunderstanding of Christendom in terms of homogeneity or heterogeneity with worldliness. As his rhetoric becomes increasingly polemical it also becomes increasingly divisive. "Christianity" and "the world" are presented as completely antithetical (*PC*, 223-224; *FSE*, 96-98). It is easy to interpret Kierkegaard's polemic as an either/or decision between the secular or the religious, when in fact the decision he proposes is between preserving the difference between secular/sacred or assimilating one into the other. Denmark's Christendom, which Kierkegaard takes to be an example of a Hegelian 'rational state', is an attempt at the latter. As Eric S. Nelson states, Kierkegaard does not eliminate either, but instead he resists "the violent integration of the multiplicity of ethical life into one 'objective spirit.'"[10] In *For Self-Examination!* Kierkegaard declares that this state of Christianity is "an impenetrable ambiguity" where the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, have been made to "blend in such a way that it is impossible to say which is which" (*FSE*, 123, 128). Confluence and

[10] Eric S. Nelson, "Religious Crisis, Ethical Life, and Kierkegaard's Critique of Christendom," in *Acta Kierkegaardiana: Kierkegaard and the Nineteenth Century Religious Crisis in Europe*, Vol. 4 (Toronto: Kierkegaard Circle, Trinity College, 2009), 180.

totalisation of the religious and the secular is philosophically achieved in Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, but for Kierkegaard this means that redemptive faith confuses itself with "calculative sagacity and the exercise of worldly dominion,"[11] which is not redemptive but domineering.

Kierkegaard interprets his Danish situation as the betrayal of Christianity by substituting redemptive religion for a Danish *Volksreligion*.[12] When "the outer and the inner had become entirely commensurable" then "the inner [has] dropped out" (*PC*, 89). And this "congruity" is the sign that "an established order is in the process of deifying itself" (*PC*, 89). For Anti-Climacus a clear trajectory is set: "The deification of the established order is the secularization of everything" (*PC*, 91). Although Anti-Climacus acknowledges that a secular order is entirely appropriate for secular matters, it is clear to him that "the relationship with God is also secularized" (PC, 91). God is secularized when God is concretely determined by "the outer," identified by the customs and practices of a rational state. Thus, an established order is deified *as* authority, which "wants to be a totality that recognizes nothing above itself" (*PC*, 91). The question for the church is, will it try to serve two masters, which of course it cannot do, and therefore which master will it actually serve, God or mammon, God or the world?

8.2. Kierkegaard's Polemic Against Religious Agents of Levelling

Kierkegaard characterizes the establishment Christianity of his age as bourgeois-philistinism [*Spidsborgerlighed*], which he explains is an attempt to "accommodate oneself to presumed Christianity in such a way that one is really abolishing

[11] Nelson, "Religious Crisis," 171, 173.
[12] See S. Crites' discussion of Hegel's interpretation of Christianity and Lutheranism, Crites, *Twilight of Christendom*, 41-57.

Christianity" (*FSE*, 200). In Kierkegaard's view the Christianity of bourgeois-philistinism comfortably passes over several essential Christian qualifications: imitation of Christ, dying to the world, a need for grace, and the intensity of faith in subjectivity (fear and trembling). Instead, their criterion for being and becoming Christian involves little more than social integration, refinement, and respectability. Thus Kierkegaard presents bourgeois-philistinism as basically, "being like everybody else" (*FSE*, 200). A conformist ethic lies behind the pretence of social harmony.

Anti-Climacus imagines a conversation between the established order and an individual. The established order says, "Why… do you want to torture and torment yourself with the enormous criterion of ideality; turn to the established order, join the established order, here is the criterion" (*PC*, 90). The established order demands homogeneity and the religiosity of bourgeois-philistinism is happy to accommodate. It insists on,

> A Christianity that can be brought into harmony with all the rest of our life, corresponding to the change that has occurred in the human race through increasing enlightenment and culture and liberation from all unworthy pressures, or at least in what amounts to the main stem of the human race – the cultured public (*FSE*, 155).

Much earlier Johannes Climacus satirizes the Danish cultural collaboration between a bourgeois ethic and Christian nationalism,

> No, if someone were to say, plainly and simply … that it was not quite right for him to call himself a Christian, … people would give him an angry look and say, "it is really boring of this fellow to make so much ado about nothing; why can't he be like the rest of us who are all Christians…" … If he were married his wife would tell him, "Hubby, darling, where did you ever pick up such a notion? How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish aren't you? Doesn't the geography book say that the predominant religion in Denmark is Lutheran-Christian? …Don't you tend to your work in the office as a good civil servant; aren't you a good subject in a Christian nation, in a Lutheran Christian state? So of course you are a Christian" (*CUP*, 50-51).

Climacus describes Christendom in terms of *Volksreligion*, which is really an affirmation of Danish bourgeois life.[13] However, after 1848 Kierkegaard intentionally, and more frequently, employs a class-conscious descriptor for the religious crisis of his age. His point is the bourgeois-philistine religiosity of a Church triumphant, which aligns itself patriotically with a nation-state and an Enlightenment narrative of world-historical development, would be unrecognisable to the young churches of the first and second centuries, when the church was militant (*PC*, 216-217). Then "a Christian was recognizable by the opposition one suffered" at the instruction of official authority, but in the Church triumphant a Christian "was recognizable by the honor and esteem one enjoyed" (*PC*, 217). Not only has nineteenth century Danish Christianity been brought into harmony with world-historical development, but it has also become synonymous with status, advantage, and political power.[14] Thus Anti-Climacus claims, without controversy, in the present age "it pays most to be a Christian and the only thing that does not pay is not to be a Christian" (*PC*, 214). Kierkegaard repeats Anti-Climacus's concern a in a journal entry only a year later.

> Once the objection against Christianity … was that it was unpatriotic, a danger to the state, revolutionary—and now Christianity has become patriotism and a state church. Once the objection against Christianity … was that it was antihuman—and now Christianity has become humanity. Once Christianity was an offense to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, and now it is—culture (*JP* IV, 4209 [1851]).

To emphasize how far apart Christendom is from its abased origins, Anti-Climacus sardonically writes, "if Christ came to the world now he would first become a professor and would steadily advance" in his respected theological career (*PC*, 89).

[13] Nelson identifies this as irreligious religiosity, which Kierkegaard deems to be spiritually worse than either paganism or a kind of religious irreligiousness – both of which are earnest life-views; see, Nelson, "Religious Crisis," 182.

[14] By 1855, in the midst of his attack campaign, Kierkegaard draws critical attention to instances when the Danish People's Church authorised police force against religious minorities (*M*, 21, 158-259, 207).

Kierkegaard's comments are poignant, but are they unfair? Does Christianity's established position mean that it has abandoned its core principles or simply that it can become a desired and honoured way of life for a certain majority? Kierkegaard insists the former is true.

In *Armed Neutrality* (1849)[15] he declares that Christendom is, *ipso facto*, unchristian. When the established order is "the true arena for religiousness" it "gives all Christian qualifications an unchristian, conciliatory perspective" within history (*PV*, 130). Instead, the Christian perspective "is polemical within or away from finitude toward the eternal" (*PV*, 130). It is Kierkegaard's conviction that the polemical character of Christianity is for all times and all places, and that it does not merely belong to a distant past when historically contingent circumstances demanded that it be polemical. But what has become of the polemical stance within or away from finitude? Christendom itself is the sign that the Church has forgotten or abandoned its militant character. And if this militant character is abandoned then the social character is also undermined. The absence of a church militant means there is an absence of a Christian edifying and polemical response to a deified established order, since a Church triumphant is a complicit defender of an established order. Between 1848 and 1852 Kierkegaard localises his polemic, placing blame squarely with the bourgeois-philistine religion of the priests and professors, who undermine a Church *militant* [*stridende Kirke*] and substitute a Church *triumphant* [*triumpherende Kirke*].

[15] Published posthumously in 1880.

8.2.1. The Professor

Kierkegaard reminds his readers that "Christianity came into the world without professors," but he provocatively adds that the professor is particularly "qualified to smuggle Christianity out of the world" because s/he "shifts the whole viewpoint of Christianity" (*FSE*, 195) toward truth as knowledge (truth as *results*, doctrine, etc.) and historical achievement. As a result of "continual didacticizing," Anti-Climacus notices how "all the expressions [of Christianity] are formed according the view that truth is cognition, knowledge," whereas he believes genuine Christianity is expressed "according to the view that truth is a being" (*PC*, 206). Anti-Climacus revisits the distinction between objective and subjective truth that Johannes Climacus discusses in *Postscript* (*CUP*, 189-204). Anti-Climacus also asks how a person relates to truth, how one comes to truth:

> Is truth such that in relation to it one may suppose that a person can appropriate it summarily with the help of another? Summarily, that is, without willing oneself to be developed in like manner, to be tried, to battle, to suffer as did the one who acquired the truth for him? (*PC*, 202-203)

Anti-Climacus's theological path through these questions leads him to ask, "In what sense was Christ the truth" (*PC*, 203)? Anti-Climacus's strategy is to place the question of Christianity's truth directly in the person of Christ.[16] Like Pilot, who asks Christ what truth is, Kierkegaard suggests that speculative scholars simply do not have eyes to see the truth (of Christianity) because they are searching for a *theory* or *system* that can be known and comprehended. They are looking for truth in the idiom of doctrine, which can stand alone apart from every individual.

In direct contrast to the objective authority of scientific scholarship Kierkegaard exclaims, Christ "did not come to the world in order to bring a doctrine, he did not try

[16] By contrast, Hegel interprets 'the truth' of Christianity from the results of its history, how it has become objectively concrete in (European) history, giving rise to a 'Protestant culture' that surpasses 'Protestant religion'; see, Crites, *Twilight of Christendom*, 48-50.

by way of reasons to prevail upon anyone to accept the doctrine, nor did he try to authenticate it by proofs" (*FSE*, 191) as the professors and apologists do. Instead, Christ's "teaching was really his life, his existence" (*FSE*, 191). Here is the Christological meaning of Anti-Climacus's comment that truth is a being. Or, as Anti-Climacus puts it, "truth in the sense in which Christ is the truth is not a sum of statements, not a definition etc., but a life," which means that "Christianly understood, truth is obviously not to know the truth but to be the truth" (*PC*, 205). The professors' desire for results, resolutions, and conclusions puts them at odds with Christianity's proclamation that the truth is the way (*PC*, 207).

When truth is regarded as results then the way drops out. Anti-Climacus illustrates this point by considering the scientific result of the invention of gunpowder:

> Someone invents something – gunpowder, for example. He, the inventor, has perhaps spent many, many years of his life pondering and devising; many before him have perhaps spent a long time in like manner, but in vain. Now he has succeeded, now gunpowder is invented. At the very same moment the way almost entirely drops out… That for which he has used twenty years, someone else can now learn in half an hour with the help of his instruction… The twenty years stand in an altogether accidental relation to the invention (*PC*, 207).

A successor to the inventor is not required to follow the way of the inventor to his discovery but already has the result that the inventor has provided. In other words, a solution is available and it is no longer necessary for anybody to struggle with the problem.

Anti-Climacus admits that Christendom would also be correct to think this way if Christ, like a scientist, "had made a discovery or thought out something that had perhaps cost him indescribable intellectual effort but also … could become a result" (*PC*, 210). In that case generations could "celebrate triumphally" (*PC*, 210) the result of Christ's genius without having to reckon with his life. This is exactly what Anti-Climacus accuses the professors and the priests of doing with Christian doctrine in

Christendom. Professorial explication of Christianity is full of what Anti-Climacus calls "world-historical cheating," and sermons are "about what happened after Christ's death, how he triumphed and his teachings triumphantly conquered the world" (*PC*, 107). When sermons "could more appropriately end with 'Hurrah' than 'Amen' … no wonder the majority are eager to be along when it is a matter of nothing more than celebrating and riding in the parade" (*PC*, 107). Anti-Climacus describes the illusion of a Church triumphant as a religion that confidently identifies itself as heir to Christ's triumphant result.

And here it seems a deep soteriological mystery is lost on Kierkegaard. Does not the "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" of Easter proclaim something that impacts all of history and all of creation? Does that event not invite all of creation, in a profound and radical way, into a renewed relationship with (resurrected) life? Has Kierkegaard hastily overlooked *grace*?

Kierkegaard does not discount that Easter is a true gift of grace and that it attests to the belief that with God all things are possible. But, as Douglas John Hall explains, Kierkegaard "could not accept a 'Christian society' that received the Solution without exposure to the Problem."[17] Grace is the solution to the problem of sin and human/divine alienation, but where is the confession of sin in the Church triumphant? Where is the confession of the qualitative difference between God and creature heard among an established order that claims to be itself the resolution of the inner and the outer? What is lacking in Christendom is the restlessness of spirit that understands the need for grace and the enduring requirement that accompanies grace. In another important sense, that we shall see in the following chapter, the gift of grace is not a

[17] Douglas John Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross* (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 2001), 128.

result but it is ongoing, which means that it cannot become a human instrument or possession like other results of knowledge.

How does this relate to "the professor"? The achievement of the professor, with the sensibleness and objectivity of the age, creates a safe distance between the requirement of Christianity in action and the understanding of Christianity in knowledge. That distance is created by the production of a system of knowledge containing an immense body of criticism. Kierkegaard compares Christendom to a child who "puts a napkin or more under his pants when he is going to get a licking" (*FSE*, 35). In a similar fashion, "interpretation and scholarly research" are shoved between the biblical requirement and oneself (*FSE*, 35). From this Kierkegaard notices how the error emerges,

> Criticism itself becomes such a prolix literature that it is impossible to maintain an overview of the criticism: everything is interpretation – but no one read the decree in such a way that he complied with it. And not only this, that everything became interpretation – no, they also shifted the view of what earnestness is and made busyness with interpretations into real earnestness (*FSE*, 33-34).

For the bourgeois-philistine religion of modern Christendom, taking faith seriously has come to mean scholarship, analysis, and interpretation. Truth as the way and truth as results are merged in an objective pursuit of a comprehensive system of knowledge or doctrine. Yet Kierkegaard hopes to preserve a distinction between thinking *about* Christianity and existing *Christianly*. Both are important, but thinking about Christianity cannot be a substitution for the existential requirement of faith. In a journal entry, dated 1849, Kierkegaard explains,

> Christianity is an existence-communication [Existents-Meddelelse] and not a doctrine, as Christianity has un-Christianly and meaninglessly been made to be, so that the question in relation to a doctrine is simply: Is my interpretation of the doctrine true, the true interpretation, or not, like, for example, an interpretation of Plato's philosophy (*JP* VI, 6528 [1849]).

The "professors," the "scientific-scholarly" theologians are accused of transforming Christianity's works of love into intellectual exercises and sensibleness. Therefore, they have confused right knowledge with the achievement of ethical action.

8.2.2. The Priests and Pastors

> But it is actual existence that preaches – all that with the mouth and the arms is no good (*FSE*, 189).

Between 1848 and 1850 Kierkegaard presents the clergy of established Christendom as willing collaborators with Denmark's affluent echelon, which he believes makes them an obstruction to genuine Christian witness. Much of the sharpness directed at clergy in *The Moment* is already present in *For Self-Examination* and *Judge For Yourself!* (1851-1852). Not only are the priests and professors foils for Kierkegaard's presentation of bourgeois-philistinism in Christendom, but as Joel D. S. Rasmussen notes, Kierkegaard's comments at that time include a "thinly-veiled satire … on the burghers of Copenhagen and their Bishop Jakob Peter Mynster."[18] However, beyond the scope of a biographical feud between Kierkegaard and the bishop we find a more broadly applicable critique of two characteristics belonging to the Church triumphant: against the criterion of *imitation* clergy (and the Church) are asked to account for, or confess to, (a) the scaled-down domesticated Christianity and (b) the gentrified economism of Christendom.

Spiritlessness and bourgeois-philistinism, we have seen, is "to have changed the criterion by leaving out the ideals" (*FSE*, 199). And what is the criterion? Kierkegaard provides a number of examples of what the criterion or requirement of faith is. He insists Christianity "wants only disciples. The disciple is the criterion," and therefore

[18] Joel D. S. Rasmussen, "Thomas à Kempis: *Devotio Moderna* and Kierkegaard's Critique of 'Bourgeois-Philistinism'" in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4, edited by Jon Stewart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 292. H. L. Martensen, professor of theology in Copenhagen and Myster's successor to the bishopric is also implicated in Kierkegaard's criticism.

"imitation and Christ as the prototype must be affirmed" (*FSE*, 199). In *For Self-Examination* Kierkegaard describes the requirement as follows: "your life should express works as strenuously as possible; then one thing more is required – that you humble yourself and confess: But my being saved is nevertheless grace" (*FSE*, 17). There is even a personal admission from Kierkegaard regarding the difficulty of the requirement. To be an imitator and "to suffer for the doctrine" fills him with anxiety. However, he cannot "conceal that this is Christianity's requirement" (*FSE*, 197). Yet from a human allergic reaction to Christianity's demand for discipleship, clergy have concealed and thus altered the requirement.

Scaling down the requirement in the Church triumphant is explained by analogy. Kierkegaard imagines a classroom of a hundred pupils of the same age who are supposed to learn the same things and have the same requirement. Pupil number seventy is far down in the class. Kierkegaard asks, "what if the other thirty pupils from number seventy had the idea that they might be allowed to form a class by themselves. If so, then number seventy would become number one in the class" (*FSE*, 199). In this case the criterion is not changed based on a higher ideal (that kind of change would not alarm Kierkegaard), but rather it is changed "in accord with how we human beings who now live here in this place happen to be" (*FSE*, 199). But this kind of spiritual gerrymandering only hides the true situation: the "false self-satisfaction" (*FSE*, 199) of a scaled down requirement really produces "a *wohfeil* [cheap] edition of what it is to be a Christian" (*FSE*, 189).[19] What Kierkegaard describes is a criterion of the status quo. Thus Christianity's ideal is made into a conformist oscillation that "depends upon the people among whom one lives" (*FSE*,

[19] From this and other passages by Kierkegaard we can trace the conceptual origins of Bonhoeffer's notion of 'cheap grace' and 'costly grace.' See, Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 35-47.

200). Kierkegaard then applies his analogy of the classroom directly to the priestly class of Copenhagen.

> Let us imagine a Christian city. Christianly speaking, the criterion is the disciple, the imitator. But in that place there is, to be sure, no one who can stand up under the criterion. There is however, Pastor Jensen, for example. He is a gifted, sagacious man, and there is much good to be said of him. So let us make him number one and adapt ourselves accordingly; it is the sensible thing to do, for then one can still become something in the world … Blast the ideals! If we have to take them along, no one can feel like living. And what does Mr. Jensen think? … [H]e thinks that he can appropriately provide the criterion and model [*Mynster*], that these exaggerated requirements are fantasies. And so the game of Christianity is played in that city (*FSE*, 200).

Pastor Jensen of this story lives in contrast to the *disciple* and the *prototype*. Commenting on this passage Rasmussen points out that rather than a life of imitation "Pastor Jensen" and his adherents "seek 'life's amenities' and the status in the 'social game' that attends 'good taste and culture.'"[20] Worldly sensibleness and Christianity have reached an understanding that the requirement of imitation should be modified, and therefore the clergy and public "seek the fault in the requirement and themselves become the claimants who demand the requirement be changed" into something more sensible, practical, and advantageous (*FSE*, 157).

8.3. Against Mercantile Christianity

By 1850 Kierkegaard's use of "secular" and "worldly" can be more directly associated with a political and economic culture that is characteristically bourgeois.[21] It becomes increasingly apparent to Kierkegaard that the religion of Christendom includes affluence and wealth in its theology of glory.

[20] Rasmussen, "Thomas à Kempis," 293.

[21] See, for example, Pérez-Álvarez (2009), Kirmmse (1995), Matustik (1993), Westphal (1987), and Perkins (1984).

Kierkegaard reads the signs of his times and concludes that his present age has given itself over entirely to money. He notices an intimate connection between the kind of knowledge sought after in the present age (the scientific-scholarly knowledge of "the professor") and the pursuit of wealth. The "natural-scientific, statistical knowledge about the human moral state as a natural product" is easily convertible into "the stock exchange rate, the market price" (*FSE*, 157). Objective knowledge as "results" is operational and convertible into gains or losses. What disturbs Kierkegaard is the opportunism evident in the use of this kind of instrumental and operational knowledge. Possession of this information means that one is "able both to protect oneself against and to make use of people, to score a success, to win advantages in this world … with a kind of – scientific – good conscience" (*FSE*, 157). All of this knowledge is really in the service of accumulating wealth and influence, and being able to prudently and practically justify that pursuit, however dubious.

> To make much money, even if it were by selling human beings, this is earnestness. To make a lot of money by contemptible slander – this is earnestness. To proclaim some truth – provided one also makes much money [from it] … this is earnestness… This is how we are brought up; from earliest childhood we are disciplined in the ungodly worship of money (*WL*, 320).

Where does Christianity stand with regard to all of this? Kierkegaard recalls that a pagan emperor "said that one should not sniff at money." However, he claims Christianity "teaches quite rightly to sniff at money. It teaches that money in itself smells bad" (*WL*, 321). In *Judge For Yourself!* he explains that a thief and the one robbed, although they disagree about who possesses the money, they both agree on the high importance of possessing money. Christ, on the other hand, is said to upset even this mediation. "He did not steal the rich man's money" – that would mean he agrees money is a great good – "no, but he took the idea away from the possession of money" (*FSE*, 177). Yet Kierkegaard fears the Church and its priests are more aligned

with the pagan emperor, agreeing that money is not to be sniffed at, rather than a Christian rejection of *mammon*.

Denmark's official establishment of the Church in 1849 meant that clergy became civil servants under the auspices of the *Kultusminister*.[22] This made explicit what was implicitly the state of affairs in modern Christendom: "in a completely secular manner the proclaiming of Christianity has become just like any other secular career and occupation" (*FSE*, 126). In other words, the secularization of the church is most evident to Kierkegaard not by one or another moral position it purports to defend, but by its adoption of a mercantile structure for the proclamation of Christianity. Thus, a church is secularized when it uncritically adopts and affirms the economic values of a predominantly bourgeois culture (whether a particular church community can be classified as "bourgeois" or not), thereby implicitly baptising careerism, wealth, and power.

At the height of his polemical pamphleteering campaign in 1855 Kierkegaard latches onto what he sees as the industrialisation and commercialisation of the Church. Money even comes to mediate a person's relationship to the sacred.

> First money, and then you can have your child baptized; first money, and then earth will be thrown on your coffin and there will be a funeral oration according to the fixed rate … first money, and then virtue, then the kingdom of God, and the latter finally comes last to such a degree that it does not come at all, and the whole thing remains with the first: money (*M*, 235-236).

Drawing attention to the biblical command to "seek first the kingdom of God," Kierkegaard exclaims that a bourgeois-philistine priest's "entire practice thus becomes a continual carrying out of this: first the things of this earth and then – the kingdom of God" (*M*, 235). These accusations were already rehearsed in *Judge For*

[22] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard*, 76.

Yourself! where he remarks that the Church is "secularly organized, secularly normalized, [and] secularly guaranteed" (*FSE*, 133).

Repeatedly Kierkegaard refers to the modern priesthood as "a livelihood, a lucrative, good livelihood, for a man with a family, the rank of a councillor, and advancement" (*FSE*, 131). Such a livelihood is placed in polemical contrast to the "*witnesses to the truth*, who, instead of having profit … from this doctrine, sacrificed and sacrificed everything for this doctrine" (*FSE*, 129).[23] What happened was,

> Secular sagacity hit upon the idea of turning the lives of those witnesses, their suffering and blood, into money or into honor and prestige; … the proclaimers turned the suffering of the dead to their own advantage. They succeeded far too well … And the sagacious became more and ever more sly in inventing new and ever more ingenious new forms of deceit that spare [the proclaimers] suffering and let [them] deftly have pecuniary advantage plus honor and esteem (*FSE*, 129-130).

Perhaps Kierkegaard is overcome by a cynicism that impedes any attention to nuance. One might wonder whether Kierkegaard demands that clergy take a vow of poverty. Although Kierkegaard believes that "proclaiming Christianity in poverty … is undeniably most preferred by Christianity" (*FSE*, 126), he understands that a priest is "a human being who needs something to live on" (*FSE*, 126). Nor does Kierkegaard think, "it is illicit to work for a living" (*FSE*, 124). The real issue is earnestness with respect to one's material life, the imitation of Christ, and Christian proclamation. Kierkegaard's emphasis is on the proclamation, not the salary. As a demonstration, he even castigates as "rubbish" those congregations that "wish to economize on their pastors, pinch off their salaries" (*FSE*, 128). The important question is, what is the proclamation and how is it being proclaimed?

[23] The phrase "witness to the truth" was applied to Bishop Mynster in the eulogy presented by H. L. Martensen. This accolade, being applied to someone who Kierkegaard regarded as the paradigm of bourgeois-philistinism is the spark that ignited Kierkegaard's anti-ecclesial/anti-clerical polemic; see, Garff, *SAK*, 729.

We are returned to the issue raised by Anti-Climacus and whether Christianity is rightly regarded as a truth in terms of results (doctrine) or a truth in terms of a way (existence-communication). When Christianity is made objective, a doctrine of scientific-scholarly achievement, then it does not matter "whether it is also my livelihood, my career, whether one person does it gratis, another for money … whether one person does it in voluntary poverty and another in a prospering business," since the doctrine remains the same, unchanged (*FSE*, 127-128). But right here Kierkegaard detects the slight of hand that actually draws attention away from a person's existence. The illusion is that it remains the same doctrine in any case. "In one case, the proclamation is the doctrine, the same doctrine that is the truth and in the proclamation becomes the truth; in the other case, the proclamation makes this same doctrine a lie – thus the doctrine does not actually remain the same" (*FSE*, 128). It is only possible that the doctrine, the proclamation, and its truth merge in a life – a human life must bring them together. For that, truth must be regarded as *a way*, not *a result*.

Another consequence of placing emphasis on an objective doctrine is that through its objectivity the doctrine becomes a commodity or a brand that people can attach themselves to or trade indifferently. Kierkegaard likens sermons to commercial pitches: What's presented is "the gentle comfort of eternity," "life's greatest conveniences and pleasures," that Christianity will "mitigate sorrows and … give joys their proper flavor" (*FSE*, 132). For the sake of appeal to the broadest consumer base *imitation of Christ* or being *witnesses to the truth* and *dying to the world* are left out of the proclamation, or at least they are toned down. "But to sell Christianity as comfort in this way without life commitment … is doing business with Christianity," making it "commensurate with buying and selling" (*FSE*, 132). Mercantile Christianity of this

sort belongs to Anti-Climacus's description of a Church triumphant, which imagines it can buy and sell the triumph of eternity in this world (*PC*, 211).

8.4. Proclamation and Witness

What becomes increasingly apparent to Kierkegaard is a radical discrepancy between the life of "the proclaimer" and the content of the proclamation. He frames the dilemma for the clergy in terms of a tension between *living off* the doctrine and the Christian proclamation that emphasises *dying to* the world. These are presented as incompatible modes of living *in* the world, which, when combined, demonstrate hypocrisy. When the priest tells the congregation that they must die to the world and then insists that a good salary is required in order to proclaim the message – *die to the world*, then "the proclamation contradicts itself" (*FSE*, 131, 132). Why should the congregation die to the world while the priests "make an ostentatious display in the world" (*FSE*, 168)? Why indeed. And herein lies the problem: both congregation and clergy secretly agree that Christianity's message is either too lofty for real human ability or too solemn for modern sensibilities, and therefore attempts are made to scale down, rationalise, and historicise Christianity's requirement.

Modern congregations, Kierkegaard claims, want to be assured that Christianity will not "stand in the way of completely conforming to the nature of the world by using every sagacious way to guarantee the greatest possible earthly advantage," and that even this can be combined with being "an earnest Christian" (*FSE*, 189). However, the priest rebuts: "We also preach that one should live according to [the doctrine]" (*FSE*, 132). Kierkegaard responds that this should not satisfy his readers because ultimately it is empty. "What one's life proclaims is a hundred thousand times more powerfully effective than what one's mouth proclaims" (*FSE*, 132). What

the establishment priest's life proclaims is that Christianity is a way of "possessing various and sundry worldly goods" (*FSE*, 134). Of course a modern congregation is also wise and very easily can see through the deception or the contradiction. Yet it is in everybody's interest to not to bring it to light, since that would only demand action and a change in the existing order. In a journal entry from 1852 Kierkegaard believes that both laity and clergy of establishment Christianity

> Find it of utmost importance that there be no movement whatsoever on the religious. As soon as "the spirit" begins to move, existence [Tilværelsen] becomes so uneasy that a person cannot pull himself together and make a career in the world. Therefore it is very important that everything stay the same, that the religious should be appropriated from the previous generation exactly as it was, at most with only a few minor modifications (*JP* I, 1000 [1852]).

Kierkegaard's concerns are indeed structural. The matter of a priest's livelihood is implicated in the existing social order. Furthermore, if true religiousness were to be awakened in the congregations and seminaries, if status, power, and wealth were regarded as spiritually and socially suspicious, then ganuine reformations or revolutions could occur. Instead, everybody in the church knows that what is professed "during a quiet hour on Sunday does not alter the actual state of affairs on Monday" (*FSE*, 189). And this is not because what is preached is not true, but it is because too few *live their lives as if it was true*; only too few are willing to make true the truth they profess. That is why "one single act done in true self-denial and renunciation of the world is infinitely more awakening" and a true witness of Christianity than the existence of thousands of clergy (*FSE*, 124).

For Kierkegaard there are ways out of this dilemma. The problem is really a matter of earnestness. Therefore he calls for an admission that the Christianity proclaimed in Christendom is not really the biblical Christianity of *imitation* or *dying to* the world (*FSE*, 124-126, 128-129, 133). From here two options arise:

> Either a strenuous life, strenuous in self-denial and renunciation, made strenuous by witnessing in *actuality* to the truth … or the more lenient forms, that a pastor's life is no more strenuous than anyone else's (*FSE*, 128).

Some paragraphs later Kierkegaard repeats himself with slightly varying emphasis on attachment to material possessions,

> *Either* there is an actual renunciation of the things of this world in order, with sacrifice and suffering, to proclaim Christianity … *or* one secures the temporal things of this world but then makes the confession that this proclamation is not really Christianity (*FSE*, 135, emphasis in original).

In this case Kierkegaard makes an important concession that also applies to each of his readers. He says that no one has the right to demand another, even of a priest, that s/he live a life of renunciation, suffering, and sacrifice. People have the right only to require it of themselves. Alternatively, he reminds us that "we human beings have the right to require the second of one another," that an earnest confession is made with respect to imitation and dying to the world (*FSE*, 135). Where such admission is made, where there is clarity rather than ambiguity with respect to one's living on the one side and the gospel requirement on the other side, where there is such earnestness no harm is done (*FSE*, 124).

Human wiliness is blamed for discovering a psychological way to avoid the earnestness that Kierkegaard believes is necessary. Over the course of Christendom's emergence the laity and the clergy "continued the calm acquisition and possession of the things of this world," while assuring themselves with this: "If it were required of me, I would be willing to forsake everything, sacrifice everything, for the sake of Christianity" (*FSE*, 135). Therefore, in order to strike his point as forcefully as he can Kierkegaard employs metaphors loaded with financial language – for the benefit of his business-savvy audience – calling for an end to a time of assurances. As far as Kierkegaard is concerned, "the working capital has been used up" (FSE, 130),

> This assurance fund, this capital that a bank must possess in order to be a bank and that Christendom's bank possessed, this has been used up, ladies and gentlemen! Instead of being able to draw upon the bank, we must first form a new bank with what is the real capital here: actions, character-actions (*FSE*, 136).

Conclusion

As the religion of bourgeois-philistinism, which Kierkegaard demonstrates through "the professor" and "the priest", Christianity expresses itself in the form of a Church triumphant. Such a Church has confused the political and the religious, the historical and the eternal, by imagining that its extensity, its affluence, and its philosophical explication amounts to a demonstration of Christianity's truth or victory in this world. Truthfully, this Church has only demonstrated its homogeneity with worldly structures of power and belonging, and that it is a coalition party *of* the world.

In the next chapter we investigate the concept of the Church militant [*stridende Kirke*] as a corrective to the lackadaisical and opportunistic religion of bourgeois-philistinism. We will also identify Kierkegaard's religious category of 'militant' as the category that unifies the edifying and the polemical in active life.

Chapter 9

Where the Polemical Meets the Edifying: Becoming a Church Militant

In the previous chapter we considered Kierkegaard's polemical opposition to what he calls establishment Christianity or the Church triumphant. There we identified a number of characteristics of the Church triumphant, which Kierkegaard draws attention to in order to demonstrate how Christendom undermines what he considers to be the activity and life of the true Church and genuine Christianity. These characteristics include: (a) the *extensity* and national-cultural identity of establishment Christianity that is commensurate with the levelling tendency of the age; (b) Christendom and Christian identity (as well as salvation) is regarded as a *world-historical* achievement (results); (c) Christianity has become an objective *doctrine* and system of knowledge (results) that is a matter of comprehension and refinement; and finally, (d) the characteristic of a Church that institutionally collaborates with and participates in the predominant ideology of power, authority, and affluence. What these characteristics achieve is a Christianity and a modern church synonymous with "worldliness." In response to the establishment Christianity of a Church triumphant Kierkegaard offers the Church militant, which comes through a religious life of discipleship.

For the remaining chapters the task is to examine what it means to be a member of a Church *militant*, how those individuals relate to a broader community of existentially communicating individuals in works of love, and why members of a Church militant will continue striving to form *actual* religious communities and churches in this world.

Kierkegaard's polemical confrontation with the Church triumphant also consists of presenting it with a corrective, what he believes is "the ideal picture of a Christian" so it can again "appear as a task, beckoning" (*PV*, 130). There are categories that Kierkegaard insists are essential for what it means to be or become a genuine Christian and a true church in modernity: *imitation* (*efterfølgelse*) and *contemporaneity* (*Samtidighed*). Each of these spiritual categories, which pertain to the God-relationship, guarantees an essential difference between Christianity and worldliness when these categories are awakened in individuals, making them *militant*. However, the establishment Christianities of post-Enlightenment Christendom (Kierkegaard's Denmark) substituted imitation for comprehension while contemporaneity and offence are replaced with world-historical development and direct recognizability.

An established Church under the illusion of a Church triumphant replaces struggle with victory, humility with authority, and opposition with power. Here we encounter Kierkegaard's corrective to the Church triumphant, which involves the task of expressing Christianity as a Church militant. Now we consider that a Church militant is expressed as a faith of intensity and truth as the way, whereby contemporaneity and imitation of Christ leads to a social existence that is "without authority" but devoted to genuine communicative encounters with others.

9.1 From Extensity to Intensity: The Church militant and the Category of the Individual

In *Practice in Christianity* we are first introduced to the Church triumphant [*triumpherende Kirke*] and the Church militant [*stridende Kirke*]. When Anti-Climacus insists twice that a Church triumphant and a Church militant resemble each

other no more than a square resembles a circle (*PC*, 212, 218) we understand that the difference is essential. The difference is not between this or that historical form of Church, neither is it a question of Church or no Church,[1] but rather it is a difference of the very mode of Christian existence in the world. "The Church militant is in the process of becoming, whereas an *established* Christendom *is*, is not becoming" (*PC*, 211).[2] The Church triumphant is in the mode of *being* – what is complete and at rest – while the Church militant is in the mode of *becoming* – what is incomplete and at unrest (*PC*, 223). This difference can also be expressed as the difference between a Christianity of extensity and historical achievement whereby persons are absorbed into a mass identity of established customs and structures that mediate relationships (what *is*), and a Christianity of intensity, inwardness, and continual active striving for subjectively genuine forms of expression and inter-personal relationships (what is in a process of *becoming*).

Establishment Christianity "assumes that the time of struggling is over" (*PC*, 211), by religiously relating to Christ "on high," which is really to "anticipate eternity" and "introduce the triumph into temporality" (*PC*, 209, 211). But here is precisely where the Church and Christianity cease to be a Church and instead resort to the strategy of "*imperium*."[3] A Church triumphant resembles the logic of *imperium* insofar as it "is always understood [as] a Church that wants to be the Church triumphant here in this world" (*PC*, 209). Like any established order, establishment Christianity "wants to settle down" and claim that "there is total peace and security," that it has "achieved

[1] I will ultimately reject Kirmmse's ultimatum between Kierkegaard's supposed Christianity without a Church and a churchly Christianity, and yet I hope that my conclusion remains faithful to Kirmmse's advocacy of a Kierkegaardian community that remains radically undefined and *militant*; Kirmmse, "Who Killed Søren Kierkegaard," 190.

[2] "Den stridende Kirke er i Vorden, en *bestaaende* Christenhed *er,* vorder ikke" (*SKS* 12, 207).

[3] I refer to Rowan Williams' use of this term, defining it as "the ability to dictate the conditions of life for others" and "attempts to leave no one … untouched by its authority," in "'Kingdom' and Empire: A Biblical Orientation" *Soma: Theology and Globalization* (2011): 1.

the highest" (*PC*, 88). Of course the achievement of such so-called peace and security is won only by an established order that "recognizes nothing above itself but has every individual under it and judges every individual who subordinates himself to the established order" (*PC*, 91). Such a demonstration of power and coercion strikes Kierkegaard as antithetical to the Christian proclamation and requirement. For Anti-Climacus, where the Church claims to be victorious in the world it is actually "not the Church that has been victorious but the world" (*PC*, 223), with its logic of command, prestige, and visible authority in the form of coercive and constraining power.

When Anti-Climacus says establishment Christianity has taken the Church of Christ in vain (*PC*, 209) he refers to the mistaken notion that the historical accident of living after Christ, after centuries of world-historical development, in any way confers upon the church a share in Christ's eternal achievement which would "introduce the triumph into temporality" (*PC*, 211). As beings who exist in temporality "we can truthfully speak only of a militant Church" (*PC*, 209), which can "endure [*bestaa*] only by struggling [*at stride*]" (*PC*, 212).[4] Therefore, Anti-Climacus unequivocally states, "the Church triumphant and established Christendom are untruth, are the worst tragedy that can befall the Church," whereas "only the Church militant is truth, or the truth is that as long as the Church endures in this world it is the militant Church" (*PC*, 232). That means, "there is room for [the church] only if it will struggle and by struggling make room for itself" (*PC*, 201). If the church must struggle to make room for itself, it must make room for itself *in the world*. The question is how to exist in the world in accordance with the Church militant, and without resorting to the irreligious temptation to establish a Church triumphant.

[4] Kierkegaard's use of his Danish language provides added nuance to these passages, which is lost in English. The word for "endure" [*bestaae*] is related to his word for an "established Church" [*bestaaende Kirke*]. Similarly, to "struggle" [*at stride*] is related to "militant Church" [*stridende Kirke*] (*SKS* 12, 208).

In anticipation of what will follow here, a partial answer is that the Church militant does not represent a competing power or authority in the world; it does not regard itself as an alternative administration or regime. Its activity in the world is "without authority." Now let us consider the nature of the "struggle" and Anti-Climacus's distinction between an extensive religion (Christendom) and an intensive faith (a Church militant).

Anti-Climacus's notion of a church that struggles in the process of becoming is directly linked to Kierkegaard's more familiar application of these terms to the category of the individual. He writes,

> The term "the single individual" corresponds to struggling – that is, when it is struggling in the spiritual and Christian sense, not in the physical sense of engaging in a pitched battle … Christianly, struggling is always done by single individuals, because spirit is precisely this, that everyone is an individual before God (*PC*, 223).

Kierkegaard's readers will not be surprised by a connection between struggling, becoming, and the category of the individual. However, now, notions such as "struggle" and "becoming," which belong properly to individuals, are directed at the church and Christendom. Fear and trembling, which is normally applied to individuals, now gets directed at the established order, *via* the individual.

> Every human being is to live in fear and trembling, and likewise no established order is to be exempted from fear and trembling. Fear and trembling signify that we are in a process of becoming; and every single individual, likewise the generation, is and should be aware of being in the process of becoming. And fear and trembling signify that there is a God – something every human being and every established order ought not to forget for a moment (*PC*, 88). [5]

The irritant to an established order including an establishment Christianity is the God-relationship. It is not surprising that establishment Christianity actually discourages a genuine God-relationship, and "will not put up with consisting of something as loose as a collection of millions of individuals, each of whom has his relationship with

[5] Merold Westphal claims this is "Kierkegaard's politics in a nutshell," see, Westphal, *Reason and Society*, 33.

God" (*PC*, 91). The persistence of this spiritual struggle resists "idolizing tradition, authority, or …imperial ambitions for a world order," as Matustik says.[6] Fear and trembling has that intimate understanding with human frailty that gives rise to the "existential tendency" to doubt any "utopian belief in final solutions or the end of history."[7] Thus, Anti-Climacus claims the God-relationship makes an individual into "a spy" who is willing to inform on the established order, and who is willing to be persecuted and to suffer in the process (*PC*, 91). Therefore the God-relationship is "precisely what keeps every established order in suspense" (*PC*, 91). Where the Church tends toward an established order Christianity undermines itself – but the God-relationship intervenes and "uses the single individual to prod the established order out of self-complacency" (*PC*, 90), just as the eternal intervenes to subvert the leveling tendency of the present age. Let us take a closer look at the character of the 'militant'.

9.2 From truth as results to truth as the way: Becoming militant

Kierkegaard gives us different pseudonymous explanations of truth from the speculative, philosophic, scientific approaches. When Johannes Climacus famously announces that truth is subjectivity he proceeds to differentiate a Christian relation to existence from an objective and scientific relation to existence.[8] Considered empirically, truth is "the agreement of thinking with being" (*CUP*, 189), where thinking (theory) must conform to being. Viewed idealistically, or speculatively, truth is "the agreement of being with thinking" (*CUP*, 189), where being is determined by

[6] Matustik, *Postnational*, 211.
[7] Jonathan Judaken, introduction to *Situating Existentialism: Key Texts in Context*, eds., Jonathan Judaken and Robert Bernasconi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 8.
[8] See *CUP*, 189-251.

thinking. Anti-Climacus takes a more direct approach against the speculative claim to truth. He says, "The being of truth is not the direct redoubling of being in relation to thinking, which gives only thought-being," and which "guarantees validity to thinking, that what is thought … has validity" (*PC*, 205). Anti-Climacus robs philosophers of their comfortable notion that thinking is doing, that to know what is true is just as *good* as existing truthfully. But whether truth is regarded empirically or speculatively, Climacus notices that "scrupulous attention" is given "to what is understood by being" (*CUP*, 189). Philosophically then, truth is a matter of objectivity. If WHAT one relates to is *true*, a true object or a true representation of existence as an object, then one is in truth (*CUP*, 199). Alternatively, the question of truth can be approached subjectively. In this case, Climacus remarks, "if only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he were in this way to relate himself to untruth" (*CUP*, 199). The WHAT that a person relates to plays a secondary role to the truth of the subjective relation, which is HOW a person relates to something or someone. What this means is that "*objectively the emphasis is on* ***what***" a person relates to, while "*subjectively the emphasis is on* ***how***" a person relates to something (*CUP*, 202). Climacus and Anti-Climacus insist that if Christianity offers anything either polemical or edifying for humans it pertains to a notion of truth as subjectivity and truth as *a way*.

We are returned to that biblical scene that Anti-Climacus relates, when Pilate asks, what is truth? But we have already seen that there is a difference between objective and subjective truth, between truth as results and truth as the way. When Anti-Climacus asks, "In what sense was Christ the truth?" he answers, "Christ is the truth in the sense that to be the truth is the only true explanation of what truth is" (*PC*, 203, 205). Explicit reference is made to the claim that Christ is the *truth*, the *way*, and the

life (*PC*, 207).[9] Of course humans should recognise that they cannot *be* the truth in the way that Christ claims to *be* the truth. We are the kind of creature that "relates … to the truth only very imperfectly" (*PC*, 197). But that is not diminution, for the emphasis is on relating to truth. Anti-Climacus says, "when the truth is the way, being the truth is a life" (PC, 207); we are told that this is most properly the case with Christ, who is the truth and the way. However, if truth is regarded as a way then we do not relate to something external, outside of ourselves. Instead we come to regard truth as intimately accessible to us from within. "Only then do I in truth know the truth, when it becomes a life in me" (*PC*, 206). A theology of communion is based on this idea. Thus, "Christ compares truth to food and appropriating it to eating, for just as, physically, food by being appropriated … becomes the life sustenance, so also, spiritually, truth is both the giver of life and the sustenance of life, is life" (*PC*, 206). Where religiousness is concerned and truth is approached religiously the task is to bring the matter as close to one's life, to one's lived existence, as possible.

To relate oneself to truth, in this sense, does not mean to know something about Christianity, to think about it or observe it as a world-historical phenomenon (*PC*, 95-96; *FSE*, 191), nor is it to have inherited something from history (*PC*, 210), but it means that one's life must be the demonstration of the truth it proclaims. Anti-Climacus provides an existential explanation of being in truth in relation to Christ's truth:

> The being of truth is the redoubling of truth within yourself, within me, within him, that your life, my life, his life expresses the truth approximately in the striving for it, that your life, my life, his life is approximately the being of the truth in the striving for it, just as the truth was in Christ a *life*, for he was the truth (*PC*, 205).

[9] John, 14: 6.

Here we have a working definition of what Kierkegaard means by existence-communication in earlier works. *But this procedure of truth is also the character of a militant in the religious sense.* Aside from being a concise presentation of the possibility for human and divine communion, this passage also signals a warning. If Christianity's truth is a redoubling in this way, then "in relation to acquiring it from generation to generation there is no essential abridgement, so that every generation and everyone in the generation must essentially begin from the beginning" (*PC*, 203). In short, if the truth is the way then "*the way cannot be shortened*" (*PC*, 207, emphasis mine) so that the progress or history external to one cannot be said to have accomplished what each individual must do inwardly: engage in the project of self-choice, which grapples with the question of existing before God or a determining idea.

The Church cannot presume to "start making capital of Christianity in world history" and simply present it as "a development within the category of the human race" (*PC*, 221). This has important implications for how we relate to Christ, to the proclamation that God became human, lived, was executed, and ascended. The proximity between God and creature, and the human propensity for truth as redoubling does not eliminate "the God-man's essential heterogeneity to any other single human being," or "also to the whole human race" (*PC*, 221). That means even if Christianity relates to the eternal (for that is a relationship the God-man facilitates), to Christ's ascension "on high," our "life here on earth … is a time of testing for every single individual" (*PC*, 221). Struggling and testing only become apparent for individuals who, in faith, are confronted with the question of imitation of the prototype, for those who strive to exist contemporaneously before Christ as prototype.

Therefore, when truth is conceived of as the way, it unites truth and the human good in action.

The move from extensity to intensity and from truth as results to truth as the way forms an existential blueprint for a Church militant. Now we turn our attention to the constructive components of contemporaneity and imitation – what we can figuratively call the mobile architecture of a Church militant – which link the edifying and the polemical question of the Church to the broader social questions we explored through the works of love.

9.3 Contemporaneity and the Imitation of Christ

Contemporaneity [*Samtidighed*] appears in the opening "Invocation" of *Practice in Christianity*. With this concept Anti-Climacus sets the parameters for his confrontation with Christendom.[10] Although centuries separate Kierkegaard's present age from Christ's life on earth he insists that that event, unlike others, must not pass into the "oblivion" of history (*PC*, 9). Instead,

> As long as there is a believer, this person, in order to have become that, must … be just as contemporary with Christ's presence as his contemporaries were. This contemporaneity is the condition of faith, and, more sharply defined, it is faith (*PC*, 9).

Contemporaneity poses a religious challenge to the modern "historical" individual. On the one hand Anti-Climacus polemically disparages historical knowledge, claiming, "a historical Christianity is nonsense and un-Christian muddled thinking" (*PC*, 64). Referring to Christ, Anti-Climacus argues, "He is not and does not want to be for anyone the person one has come to know something about incidentally from history," because he claims, "we can learn nothing from history about him inasmuch

[10] Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, 348-349.

as there is nothing at all that can be 'known' about him" (*PC*, 23). What can be assembled together from history is a character "that is different from what he is" or claims to be – the God-man (*PC*, 26).

Conversely, the task of contemporaneity in faith demands attention to the historicity of Christ, with the actuality of his life-circumstance and context. Anti-Climacus reconstructs a contextual sketch of Christ's earthly existence (*PC*, 36-62). It is important to Anti-Climacus that Christ is understood historically as "the lowly, destitute man with twelve poor disciples from the commonest class of people, … in the company of only sinners, tax collectors, lepers, and madmen" (*PC*, 37), and readers are reminded of his humble birth and family origin (*PC*, 40). Therefore Anti-Climacus acknowledges the claim "that God has lived here on earth as an individual human being is infinitely extraordinary" (*PC*, 31), which means that Christ's historicity becomes a matter of sacred importance and scrutiny. What appears as a contradiction in Kierkegaard's thought between an elevation and diminution of the historical actually serves to demonstrate the paradox central to Christian faith – Christianity's teaching concerning the God-man.

Kierkegaard's pseudonym judges between what he regards as a correct and a misguided approach to history. The world-historical and the scientific historical approach (when it is in the service of theology) focuses on the results of Christ's life in Scripture and subsequent history to conclude: "ergo he was God" (*PC*, 29), while his social position and context is "placed in an accidental position to him," and it interprets his life as the life of an extraordinary human (*PC*, 34-35). The problem that Kierkegaard sees is that with this kind of historical approach one comes to know "something about [Christ] that is different from what he is" (*PC*, 26), which is that he is a paradox and therefore an object of faith.

Kierkegaard's pseudonym of the *Postscript* insists that modern individuals acknowledge the gravity of this idea: "The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, … indistinguishable from another human being" (*CUP*, 210). This absurdity is the sign of offence (*PC*, 23, 81-144), which is also biblically expressed in Pauline literature as *proskomma* (obstacle or offence) or *skandalon* (offence).[11] The Pauline claim that Christ is a stumbling block to every religious expectation of who God is and foolishness to 'secular' rational expectations of what authority should be is applicable to all people at all times.[12]

To the question of whether it can be demonstrated from history that Christ was God, Anti-Climacus answers definitively with the negative.

> Can any more foolish contradiction be imagined than this, to want to **demonstrate** … that an individual human being is God? That an individual human being is God, that is, claims to be God, is indeed the offense … But what is the offense, that which offends? That which conflicts with all (human) reason. And it is that which one wants to demonstrate! But to "demonstrate" is, after all, to make something into the rational-actual that it is. Can one, then, make that which conflicts with all reason into the actual-rational? Certainly not, unless one wants to contradict oneself (*PC*, 26).

But for Kierkegaard this tension between historical inadequacy and historical necessity is not a sign that Christianity must either be rejected or that it must be logically and dialectically resolved. Rather, the inability of history to establish an "ergo," and the paradoxical nature of the God-man signals a point where decision is required: one must choose either offence or faith. And this is really the difference between the historical and contemporaneity, the eternal, and faith. Contemporaneity

[11] Leo Stan, "Modernity and Christian Offensiveness: An Ongoing Scandal," In *Acta Kierkegaardiana, Vol. 4: Kierkegaard and the Nineteenth Century Religious Crisis in Europe*, edited by Roman Králik and Abrahim H. Khan, et al (Toronto: Kierkegaard Circle, Trinity College and Sala: Kierkegaard Society of Slovakia, 2009). Stan's essay provides a developed analysis of the concept of offence in Kierkegaard's thought, relating it to biblical theology and Kierkegaard's own assessment of his contemporary social context.

[12] 1 Corinthians, 23.

relates to truth as subjectivity and truth as the way, whereas history and world-historical development relates to truth as objectivity.

Kierkegaard does, however, acknowledge the important distinction between history and fantasy. "History is what *actually* happened, whereas poetry is the possible, the imagined, the poeticized" (*PC*, 63-64). However there remains a problem on the side of the historical, which is, what "has actually happened (the past) is still not … the actual" (*PC*, 64). What is missing is appropriation; this is how Anti-Climacus brings together truth as inwardness, the God-man, and contemporaneity in such a way that transforms the historical into a task.

> The qualification that is lacking – which is the qualification of truth (as inwardness) and of all religiousness – **for you**. The past is not actuality – for me. Only the contemporary is actuality for me. That with which you are living simultaneously is actuality – for you. Thus every human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living – and then with one more, with Christ's life upon earth, the sacred history, stands alone by itself, outside history (*PC*, 64).

This contemporaneity of history coincides with Haufniensis's description of *Øieblikket* and our discussion of the eternal task. Contemporaneity, as a condition of faith, bears on how we actively orient ourselves *in history* and engage *a history* in daily life.

But contemporaneity also means that one is continually confronted with the same question Christ's contemporaries faced – to have faith or be offended? It means that neither historical development nor scholarship can resolve the direct question of faith; history and scholarship cannot mitigate the offence of Christ. Now, if Christianity is a truth in terms of *a way*, and if the situation of *contemporaneity* brings with it an encounter with the offensive, then the question is what form of life results in a response of faith *vis-à-vis* the God-man.

*

In an opening prayer to a segment of *Practice in Christianity* Anti-Climacus offers words of awakening, which distinguish the admiring complacency of a Church triumphant from the activity of a militant Church. He writes,

> Lord Jesus Christ, you did not come to the world to be served and thus not to be admired either … You yourself were the Way and the Life – and you have asked only for *imitators* [*Efterfølgere*]. If we have dozed off … wake us up, rescue us from this error of wanting to admire or adoringly admire you instead of wanting to follow you and be like [*ligne*] you (*PC*, 233).

On another occasion Kierkegaard insists that Christ "wants only disciples. The *disciple* is the criterion" (*FSE*, 199), and that means everyone individually "must be measured [inwardly] by the prototype, by the ideal," regardless of the historical period one belongs to (*FSE*, 198). Contemporaneity is about proximity to one's ideal, to the truth as a way, while imitation is about action. However, from the Christian point of view these cannot be separated. Their conjoined expression in the life of individuals makes up the edifying and polemical character of religious life and what I am calling the Church militant.

The earnestness that comes from willing to have one's life correspond to an ideal and that comes with fear and trembling is what Kierkegaard calls becoming sober. But sobriety is not a matter of personal enlightenment or clarity. Rather, it is "*to come so close to oneself in one's understanding, in one's knowing, that all one's understanding becomes action*" (*FSE*, 115).

A transition to outward activity and expression of faith has already been presented in *Works of Love*. Now, between 1850 and 1852 when Kierkegaard confronts the institution of the Danish Church more directly, imitation of Christ becomes the expressed paradigm for our initiatives in works of love.[13] Reacting to

[13] Joel Rasmussen notices that the centrality of *imitatio* for this period of Kierkegaard's writing coincides with the publication of a new Danish version of Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*

what Kierkegaard perceives as the smug complacency of establishment Christianity, Anti-Climacus warns against letting Christianity become "something one supposedly should only have hidden in one's innermost being – perhaps so well concealed that it is not there at all" (*PC*, 197). Thus "imitation must be affirmed" (*FSE*, 190, 196, 198, 199), and works are "drawn forward a little" in contrast to faith or grace (*FSE*, 24). However, Kierkegaard insists that imitation is not set against faith, but rather it coaxes faith out of the silence and hiddenness of inwardness in order to prevent faith and grace "from becoming a camouflage even for [the] refined worldliness" (*FSE*, 24) of priests, professors, and a cultured public.

Imitation shocks the triumphant demeanour of bourgeois-philistine Christians, who "applied *grace* in such a way that they freed themselves from works" (*FSE*, 17).[14] By contrast, imitation of Christ gives rise to the maxim we read earlier: "your life should express works as strenuously as possible; then one thing more is required – that you humble yourself and confess: But my being saved is nevertheless grace" (*FSE*, 17). This maxim produces a dialectical process in the individual that Rasmussen identifies as "oscillating between the demand for imitation and the forgiveness of sins," whereby "the tension between the *attempt* to imitate Christ and one's *inability* to imitate Christ preserves the doctrine of grace from being cheapened."[15] Imitation, while preserving an inner need for grace, breaks up the conformity of bourgeois-philistinism – for which, being like *all the others* forms its highest ideal and the social-ethical criterion of Christendom.

(Rasmussen, "Thomas à Kempis," 289). In Thomas à Kempis Kierkegaard may have rediscovered a vocabulary appropriate for his own communication of a reinvigorated Christian existence based on "a neglected criterion for authentic Christian discipleship" (Rasmussen, "Thomas à Kempis," 291).

[14] Nietzsche, often mistakenly regarded as more radical, closely echoes his criticisms of Christendom, writing, "Every practice at every moment … that people *act* on is anti-Christian these days … in spite of this they are not ashamed to call themselves Christians! … only the *practice* of Christianity is really Christian, *living* like the man who died on the cross," F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35.

[15] Rasmussen, "Thomas à Kempis," 295.

Kierkegaard also recognizes that the false externality of a Church triumphant, with the extensity and pretence of "Christian nations," will dissolve if imitation is affirmed since imitation means readiness for persecution and willingness to suffer. Kierkegaard makes calculated use of the Danish language for conveying his theology of *imitatio*. In Danish "imitation" [*Efterfølgelse*] is linked to the verb, "to follow" [*følge efter*], and both of these resemble the Danish word for "persecution" [*Forfølgelse*]. Kierkegaard deliberately brings these words together in order to show by their likeness that they must be thought together conceptually (*FSE*, 67). This is what Kierkegaard believes must be brought to the attention of Christianity in the twilight of Christendom: to follow and to imitate Christ means to align oneself with the Christ who was persecuted and then allow oneself also to be "marked by persecution" (*FSE*, 67).

The difference between a Church triumphant and a Church militant hinges on this question of imitation. Indeed, Kierkegaard declares, "here is where it is really decided whether or not one is willing to accept Christianity" (*FSE*, 188). If emphasis is placed on imitation then "the fewer the Christians," but "if there is a scaling down on this point" then Christendom increases in extensity (*FSE*, 188), becoming more and more homogeneous with whatever forms the dominant ideology, to which the clergy profitably subscribe in order to maintain Christianity's amicable relationship with an existing order.

The character of the prototype that is to be imitated is essential for understanding the social implications of Kierkegaard's theology. Which "Christ" is the prototype? Is it the victorious Christ who has conquered worldliness and death and ascended into heaven, or is it the lowly man of abased origins, belonging to a modest class in a colonized nation, ultimately rejected by his religious community, and executed by the

will of the public and the established order? Kierkegaard insists a religious life can only be militant, that is, edifying and polemical, if it identifies with Christ in his lowliness as the *abased one* (*PC*, 182). To align oneself with the exalted and triumphant Christ, and to align oneself with the spiritual comfort of this triumph is certainly universally attractive, but it obscures the task of religiousness, cheapening grace, and skipping over the actuality of existence; it is to associate oneself with power and right when one properly belongs to a life of striving and fear and trembling. Thus, Christ is the prototype of faith in his abasement.

One objection will be that Kierkegaard places undue emphasis on the Good Friday segment of the narrative to the neglect of Easter Sunday. Kierkegaard anticipates this and does not deny that, "the Ascension certainly must be discussed, and that Christ is the way" (*FSE*, 65). But Kierkegaard asks that we remain *human* regarding our situation and our task. That also means being honest about what the way involves. Kierkegaard reminds us that "the way is narrow until the end," and "the way ends on the cross and in the grave" (*FSE*, 65).

To leave the matter there would make Good Friday's forsakenness and despair conclusive. And then it is only a short step to a Nietzschean dismissal that the whole thing ends in a pitiful defeat of life. But the ascension is certainly not to be dismissed theologically, only that it is to be treated properly. Kierkegaard's theology suggests that the ascension operates differently for us creatures than it does for Christ. And this difference points to a unique task (which we may call *political*) for humans.

Here is how Kierkegaard describes the ascension pertaining to Christ:

> He ascends into heaven; no one else has ever been victorious in such a way! A cloud took him away from their eyes; no triumphant one has ever been lifted up from the earth in such a way! … He sits at the right hand of power – consequently his triumph does not end with the Ascension? No, it begins with it; no one else has ever triumphed in this way! … his triumph does not end with

> his taking the place at the Almighty's right hand? No, that was merely the end of the beginning: O eternal conqueror! (*FSE*, 66)

What the ascension means for Christ is that "he begins a second time from on high" (*PC*, 182). Christianity's soteriology and messianic hope of reconciliation has its source in this belief of a second beginning, which Anti-Climacus explains means that Christ's "only concern now is to draw people to himself" (*PC*, 182). Now Anti-Climacus asks where we begin. "Can we therefore also begin with loftiness; that is, because he inherited loftiness, can we therefore also take it in advance" (*PC*, 182)? No. Disciples and imitators must begin where Christ first began, in lowliness and abasement (*PC*, 182). A life lived according to truth as the way acknowledges that "temporality in its entirety" is "suffering and abasement;" triumph and loftiness is appropriate only for eternity (*PC*, 182). The entirety of temporality is a time of (spiritual) testing. "To be a human being, to live here in this world, is to be tested; life is an *Examen* [examination]" (*PC*, 183). Refinement, culture, education, or history cannot help one in life to progress beyond testing to loftiness. No one perfects his or her life into ascension.[16] Neither professor, nor priest, nor the generation can boast of participating in true (spiritual) loftiness.

Christ's *earthly* life is the model: "he ended as he began; born in poverty as if he were scarcely a human being … he ended as if he were scarcely a human being, with that ignominious death, crucified like a criminal – and only then did he ascend on high" (*PC*, 182). Notice that Kierkegaard places the ascension behind "the dash." This is reminiscent of *Works of Love*, where we discover the work of love that helps a person to stand on his own – through the help of another. Here is the reason for Christ's appearance of lowliness and abasement. The prototype, Anti-Climacus

[16] Rasmussen points out how Kierkegaard's notion of spiritual trial differentiates his notion of progress, which recognizes one's distance from the ideal, from the Wesleyan process of "going on to perfection" (Rasmussen, "Thomas à Kempis," 295).

explains, "must in one sense be behind people, propelling forward, while in another sense he stands ahead, beckoning" (*PC*, 238). This dialectical relationship relates to indirect communication, to Christ's incognito, which makes him a sign of contradiction, the offence, *and the object of faith* (*PC*, 123-144). In the same way that the eternal is infinitely close and infinitely far, luring us in hope into our future, so too is Christ, the eternal one, is "infinitely close in abasement and lowliness, and yet infinitely distant in loftiness" (*PC*, 238) in order that everyone be included in the task to strive for the ideal,[17] and in order that the task always remains before one. Therefore, Christ's loftiness must be indirect because it is "the very negation of worldly and earthly loftiness," whereas his lowliness is directly communicated because "direct lowliness … is precisely the way … that makes sure that loftiness is not taken in vain" (*PC*, 238).

How then does ascension function for humans in temporality? The ascension can operate for humans as an object of inquiry, a thought problem – this is what Kierkegaard regards as the professorial-scholarly trap. From here one can shrink away from the thought of it in despair or design bold proofs to convince oneself, or one can simply acknowledge its position in the doctrine is sound. But Kierkegaard suggests that it should not be thought about. That is, one should not "sit in idleness keeping company with reasons and doubt" (*FSE*, 68). Approached objectively for thought the ascension is an objective uncertainty (though to many it is certainly absurd), which gives rise to the choice between faith and offense. However, here Kierkegaard does not simply assign "ascension" to the category of faith, nor does he hope to protect it from criticism and doubt. His point is not that Christians ought to ignore the difficulty but that they ought to *live* in such a way that ascension is necessary, that it becomes

[17] Anti-Climacus explains life's task: "The earnestness of life is to *will* to be, to *will* to express the perfection (ideality) in the dailyness of actuality" (*PC*, 190).

such a necessary component of their life that "faith pushes through to the ascension" (*FSE*, 69). Thus Kierkegaard can claim, "those whose lives are marked by *imitation* have not doubted the Ascension" (*FSE*, 68), since the ascension is a call to action and a necessary corollary of a certain kind of active life.

Kierkegaard recounts how the life of the early followers of Christ was comprised of "agonizing suffering," "opposition, scorn and ridicule and ribald laughter and bloody cruelty at the hands of the people" (*FSE*, 69). This life of imitation and conviction in Christ's ascension brought forth the need which needs the ascension. Thus Kierkegaard offers a dialectical and somewhat humanist theology of the ascension:

> So it always is with need in a human being; out the eater comes something to eat; where there is need, it itself produces, as it were, that which it needs. And the imitators truly needed his Ascension in order to endure the life they were leading – and therefore it is certain (*FSE*, 69).

Kierkegaard is not presenting a historical materialist account of the social emergence of a key Christian doctrine. His concern is not descriptive but existential. From a religious point of view the ascension is a necessary corollary to a particular kind of life of action – one that we have been discussing here as edifying and polemical. Additionally Kierkegaard indicates how certainty about the ascension can be existentially verified and doubt overcome. Doubt, according to Kierkegaard, is the evidence that "I have coddled myself with respect to imitation" (*FSE*, 69), but if I "venture out in the direction of imitation – then certitude about the Ascension will promptly come" (*FSE*, 70). The matter is a question of action, not belief or proofs. Or rather, belief follows action that is entered into through faith.

Whatever ascension is for the creature it "is not a continuation of what went before" (*FSE*, 65), which means it signals a truly radical break with an existing order of life that is subject to the present bonds of power and belonging. Kierkegaard does

not allow anything, even if it is the loftiness of the eternal or the ascension, to distract us from what these must mean for us at the centre of our temporal existence.

We have been considering Kierkegaard's corrective to the establishment Christianity of Christendom. The corrective is to become and remain a Christian as a member of a Church militant (*PC*, 196). We have encountered the move from a religion of extensity to intensity, from the levelling project of a national and cultural identity to an ethical-religious project of a God-relationship. Against the bourgeois-philistinism of "the professors" and "the priests" a militant faith substitutes truth as *results* for truth that is *the way*; a Christianity that is marked by contemporaneity and imitation opposes religious ideologies of historical achievement and conquest.

There is another aspect in the character of the Church militant that needs to be addressed, and which has to do with authority and communication of the ideal. The Church militant also marks a departure from a culturally chosen Christianity that is directly aligned with visible power and affluence. By contrast, a person in the character of the Church militant, who embodies the edifying and polemical aspects of faith, chooses to exist religiously without authority and "incognito." To exist without authority, we shall see, is not passive or quietist; rather, the Christian encounter with authority and power remains firmly polemical. This connects the Church militant in *Practice in Christianity* to the cultural critique of *Two Ages* and the ethical-religious critique of domineering self-love in *Works of Love*. Yet existing without authority also serves for upbuilding in the mode of the incognito. While incognito necessarily involves a kind of deception, what Kierkegaard presents is not a deception that wins an advantage or that serves to master another person. Instead the incognito is the appropriate existential form for indirect communication that strives to edify others in love and hopes also to be built up by others. This also connects the Church militant to

the edifying task that comes through levelling in *Two Ages* and the work of love that is to remain in love's debt, that does not seek "its own," and that looks for the victory of a conciliatory spirit.

9.4 Pastors, Disciples, and Martyrs:

An establishment Christianity of bourgeois-philistine professors and mercantile priests wants to begin where Christ begins a second time – on high. But this, we are told, is presumptuousness that takes Christ and grace in vain. The external difference between those who attach themselves to a vision of a Church triumphant and a Church militant is the difference between the authority of power and wealth that is visibly manifest in the worldly signs of established government, enterprise, and culture, and the authority of God that is depicted in the world as an irritant, as abject weakness or foolishness. The qualitative difference between a Church triumphant and a Church militant is that a Church triumphant abandons selfless love and is satisfied with alliances of self-love and structures of domineering self-interest. Members of the Church militant strive to remain true to the double danger of selfless love (*WL*, 194-195). Now we will consider how the task of becoming an "unrecognizable" Christian of the Church militant "without authority" corresponds to the critique of levelling and dehumanizing politics, while also returning the edifying task to works of love.

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Although Kierkegaard's analysis of Christianity between 1850 and 1852 is easily enlisted for anti-clerical campaigns, I suggest we read these texts not as an unconditional opposition to the idea of a priestly order and vocation, but rather advancing his opposition to a priestly *class* that is ideologically identical to their

bourgeois compatriots.[18] In fact, Kierkegaard interrupts his discussion of the clergy's livelihood to acknowledge the "venerable figures" among them, "who kept the resolve to proclaim Christianity in poverty and lowliness, the true proclamation" (*FSE*, 127). In relation to these ones Kierkegaard admits, "I stand far, far off, bowed in humility" (*FSE*, 127). This is a significant distinction that Kierkegaard makes. He affirms an apostolic priesthood of imitation and faith (not a genealogical priesthood of historically transmitted authority), a discipleship in contrast to what he sees as a mercantile, opportunist, burgher priesthood of the Church triumphant. Where true discipleship and imitation are expressed as the criterion a person can certainly remain in the clergy and pursue that vocation. But that person must also be willing to collide with the signs of a Church triumphant and the authority of an established order.

Thus Kierkegaard describes true disciples as *pastors*. He invokes the need for pastors to be a social corrective to leveling and establishment Christianity in two journal entries dated 1849. Here it is the pastors who are able to oppose the self-serving power and prestige of worldly authority; the pastor is the figure who holds the established order in suspense and can disrupt the leveling drive of nations and markets and doctrines, which would turn persons into alienated objects of manipulation or segmented alliances of selfishness. I cite Kierkegaard at length:

> It will also become apparent that what is needed is *pastors*. *There* is where the battle will be; if there is to be a genuine victory, it must come about through pastors. Neither soldiers nor police nor diplomats nor the political planners are capable of it. *Pastors* are what will be needed: pastors who, possessing the desirable scientific-scholarly education, yet in contrast to the scientific game of counting, are practiced in what could be called spiritual guerrilla skirmishing, in doing battle not so much with scientific-scholarly attacks and problems as with the human passions; pastors who are able to split up "the crowd" and turn it into

[18] Class-consciousness does not go unnoticed by Kierkegaard. A number of journal entries reveal his critical disgust with an established Christianity that offers only platitudes to the poor and vulnerable while clergy enjoy every luxury; he notices how clergy speak of the poor in a patronizing, paternalistic, or even judgmental manner, which he contrasts with Christianity's alignment with the poor, exploited, and powerless (*JP* III, 595; *JP* VI, 6787; *Pap*. X_3 A 135 n.d., 1850, translated by Pérez-Àlvarez in *A Vexing Gadfly* (Pickwick: 2009), 51-53).

> individuals; pastors who … would want anything but to dominate; pastors who … are powerfully eloquent but are no less powerful in keeping silent … pastors who know how to use authority through the art of making sacrifices; pastors who are brought up and educated and prepared to obey and to suffer, so they would be able to mitigate, admonish, build up, move, but also to constrain – not with force, anything but – no, constrain by their own obedience, and above all patiently to suffer the rudeness of the sick … For the generation is sick, spiritually, sick unto death. But just as a patient, when he himself is supposed to point to the area where he suffers, frequently points to an utterly wrong place, so also with the generation. It believes …that a new administration will help. But as a matter of fact it is the eternal that is needed … and the physician must … prescribe: the pastor (*JP* VI, 6256 [1849]).

This passage contains a number of important points to consider. First, the "pastors" in this context are completely laicised. It means that every individual who exists before God in fear and trembling can be "the pastor." Such a position would not be out of place in most Reformed and non-conformist theologies, but it does undermine the authority of an ordained order of Danish Lutheran priests (who, we recall, have become paid servants of the state).[19] Another claim of this passage is that "pastors" represent the practice of a non-political politics. They are contrasted with conventional political strategies for gaining power; they do not resort to authoritarian tactics of oppressive or punitive force in order to *establish* themselves; they do not seek to lead the crowd or to win the public by pandering or gerrymandering; they do not form a party because "pastors" do not present themselves as competing with other worldly claims to govern. Their activity can be called "non-political politics" where political acts are the consequence of attending first to the spiritual needs of persons rather than pursuing the goal of attaining control of an administration.[20]

[19] Kierkegaard also draws attention to Luther's indication that "every human being has a preacher within him" as conscience (*WA*, 182).

[20] I have already argued that Kierkegaard is non-dualist, which means that "spiritual needs" include a person's objective material needs. The contrast is not spiritual/material, rather it is a contrast between the personal (spirit, individual) and the impersonal (abstraction, species, the numerical, system).

9.5 Christianity Without Authority: Incognito and Unrecognizable

When Climacus insists that the religious incognito "consists in looking just like everyone else" (*CUP*, 410) and Kierkegaard remarks, "like plainclothes policemen, [the religious ones] will be *unrecognizable*" (*TA*, 107), these are comments about a relationship to authority and a strategy for social interaction. This social mode is a continuation of Kierkegaard's religiously grounded non-political politics, and it forms part of what it means to exist as a church militant. An incognito offers a different kind of authority, which poses a challenge to standard models of rule, and operates according to a different notion of *kingdom*.

Kierkegaard situates the incognito and unrecognizable ones in a broad account of social history and then contrasts this figure with the political solutions of the present age. We are told that the first form of rule the world saw was tyrannical rule, represented by kings, emperors, clerics, diplomats, and generals (*JP* III, 2649; *WA*, 214). Their representation of power and authority as eminence was *recognizable*, and they ordered society in relation to themselves (*TA*, 107). But Kierkegaard belongs to a generation that "has wanted to be emancipated and to revolt, has wanted to demolish authority" (*TA*, 107). The present age has discovered that, "In the relation between persons *qua* human beings, authority, if it exists, is something vanishing" (*WA*, 101). Agreeing with the modern trend, Kierkegaard claims in 1848, "every one of the older forms of tyranny will now be powerless" (*JP* IV, 4131). Yet Kierkegaard remains skeptical regarding the extent of the transformation and foresees a debilitating result. He writes, "Another form of tyranny is a corollary of equality—fear of people… Of all the tyrannies, it is the most dangerous, in part because it is not directly obvious and attention must be called to it." (*JP* IV, 4131). Now, in the modern era that has awakened the 'consciousness' of the fourth estate Kierkegaard insists, "no human

being will any longer be able to rule the generation," but also every attempt to govern, whether by representation, autocracy, or plutocracy, will be regarded as an "indulgence" since these remain examples of power as eminence and attempts to represent *recognizable* authority (*WA*, 214-215).

While Kierkegaard acknowledges that eminent authority is vanishing in relations between humans, he does not forget to remind readers that, "eternity abolishes all earthly authority" (*WA*, 101). Once authority as eminence is undermined by levelling and equality is the orienting principle then, Kierkegaard tells us, "governing can be done only divinely, religiously" (*WA*, 215). Any other attempt to rule will reveal its tendency toward tyranny since its essential operation is power as eminence.

Radical as these passages may appear Kierkegaard does not propose the abolition of governments, and neither is he espousing chiliastic hopes for the establishment of *the Kingdom* on earth (in Denmark). One should not misinterpret these statements as support for theocracy or church/state collaboration when Kierkegaard vehemently opposes the prospect of such arrangements. Despite inclusion of political language of 'rule' and 'governing' Kierkegaard's analysis does not amount to a theory of government - it is not a philosophy of right.[21] What Kierkegaard is calling for goes beyond substituting one government for another – he speaks of a complete revolution in the concepts themselves. What is needed are not new rulers, new authorities, or new governments – it is 'rule' and 'authority' and 'power' that require transformation. Such change requires a decisive transformation in religious practice too. Here is where the pastors, disciples, and imitators enter, but their existence is expressed in an indirect form.

[21] Kierkegaard, like other nineteenth century critics (Marx) views Hegel's political philosophy as misguided theology by placing *right* in the state: "the desperate attempt of the miscarried Hegelian ethics to make the state into the court of last resort of ethics" (*CUP*, 503 / *SKS* 7, 456).

Kierkegaard announces to the present age, "The following change will also occur": now the people of excellence will be 'without authority,' "like plainclothes policemen, they will be *unrecognizable*, concealing their respective distinctions and giving support only negatively," that is indirectly (*TA*, 107). Conversely, wanting to help directly amounts to a domineering demonstration of power, "thus preventing the highest development" (*TA*, 107). Instead,

> They are unrecognizable (without authority) because of their apprehension of the universal in equality before God, because of their acceptance of the responsibility for this at all times, and thus they are prevented from being caught off guard and becoming guilty of conduct inconsistent with their consistent intuition (*TA*, 107).

Pursuing the power and authority associated with political apparatus is deemed inconsistent with the task of religiousness. Now, ethically-religiously,

> Authority does not mean to be a king or to be an emperor or general, to have the power of arms, to be a bishop, or to be a policeman, but it means by a firm and conscious resolution to be willing to sacrifice everything, one's life, for one's cause; it means *to articulate a cause in such a way that a person is in identity with himself* about needing nothing and fearing nothing. This recklessness of infinity is authority (*JP* I, 183. Emphasis mine).

Authority is no longer *recognised* by title, uniform, office, or object. Neither is it represented by operational and technological wizardry. Instead, authority is expressed by the HOW of one's existence. Authority becomes something commensurate with 'integrity' and 'earnestness'.

Yet caution is warranted here. On its own the above passage affirms authority without recourse to transcendence. That definition above fits nicely with an Enlightenment and rationalist view of autonomy. But such autonomy will also appeal to a radically *unaccountable* adherence to one's cause, which is a trait of fundamentalism. Enlightenment autonomy and fundamentalist adherence both share a belief in the recognizablity of power and authority, and both calculate the success of a life-view by its possession of manifest power (whether scientific, political,

economic, judicial, etc.). Such desire or assurance of manifest power is contrary to Kierkegaard's understanding of religiousness. The danger for the unrecognizable ones is the risk of becoming "seduced into acquiring status and importance as authorities" (*TA*, 107), and who are tempted to make a demonstration of power. Therefore, the unrecognisable one's communicative and social tasks involve concealing their work (*TA*, 109).

If the old order was ruled by the *tyrant* then, Kierkegaard claims, the future will belong to the *martyr*, the unrecognizable ones (*TA*, 109; *JP* III, 2649 [1848]). To rule and to be a martyr mean something different for Kierkegaard than the typical understanding of these terms suggest. Religiously the task is to rule over oneself while political and worldly concerns are occupied with ruling over others, having a sphere of dominion (*TA*, 89).[22] What the tyrant and the martyr share is the power to constrain, but constraint exists for each of them in opposite directions. "The tyrant, with a craving for power, constrains by force; the martyr, personally unconditionally obedient to God, constrains by his own suffering" (*JP* III, 2649 [1848]). Tyranny wants to constrain externality. The martyr exercises constraint inwardly and refuses to equate power with an ability to constrain the world.

Since the process of levelling will be "kept going without interruption" (*TA*, 109) opposition to levelling must have a different form. If levelling were opposed directly then "it would be instantly obvious to a third party that the unrecognizable one was an authority" (*TA*, 109), that s/he was in fact recognizable as another competing ruling faction. Instead, Kierkegaard insists that the abstraction and alienation of levelling can only be opposed by a suffering act, which is also capable of passing judgment on the

[22] See also Kierkegaard's discussion of small-mindedness and the domineering person in *WL*, 270-271.

whole alienating structure of levelling (*TA*, 109) at work through the 'rational state.'[23] Kierkegaard's unrecognizable ones who suffer "under the weight of [their] responsibility" (*WA*, 231) experience in their unrecognizability the law of their existence, "which is not to rule, to guide, to lead, but in suffering to serve, to help indirectly" (*TA*, 109). Any other approach to social encounters, whether on a personal level or a structural level, would be "unfaithful to God" since it would be "assuming authority" (*TA*, 109) and domineering self-love.

Tyranny is also the name given to a structure that has "[*made*] *the others into a mass* and ruled over the mass" (*JP* III, 2649 [1848] emphasis mine.). By contrast, the martyr represents "the suffering single individual who in his love for mankind educates others" in ethical-religious subjectivity (*JP* III, 2649 [1848]). What this means for Kierkegaard is that to 'rule religiously' "is to be the suffering one" (*WA*, 215). Suffering, here, relates to religious incognito in the situation of levelling.

Caution is required here. We must not romanticise or belittle human suffering in the figure of the martyr. What Kierkegaard speaks of is not the physical or psychological hardship that a person endures from outside forces or manipulative people. Neither is the martyrdom that Kierkegaard speaks of associated with an attitude of stoic resignation. Kierkegaard's "*martyr of the future* (*the missionary*)" is different from the martyr of past eras "who required only the faith and courage to risk his life" (*JP* III, 2649 [1848]). The martyr does not simply accept her suffering courageously as her lot; she is not a passive victim. Instead, this martyr of the future "will be the self-determiner of the suffering" (*PV*, 281 / *JP* III, 2649 [1848]). In the same journal entry Kierkegaard provides a more elaborate description of the power and determination of the martyr:

[23] That Kierkegaard equates the (Hegelian) notion of a rational state with abstraction can be found here: (*WA*, 231).

> The martyr of the future will possess a superior reflection as a servant to determine freely … what kind of mistreatment and persecution he will suffer, whether he will fall or not, and if he will fall, the place where he will fall, so that he succeeds dialectically, in falling at the right place so that his death [or his suffering, or his action] *wounds the survivors in the right spot* (*JP* III, 2648 [1848], emphasis mine).

The figure of the martyr is transformed from victim of oppressive force into an activist agent that is able to strike at the right spot and able to speak truth to power, or confront power and authority with its true weakness and insubordination.

Rowan Williams also reflects on the theological question of power and authority and its relationship to the various authorities of the world. What he draws out of Scripture and theology (with particular reference to Augustine) is an attitude to power that we have been developing here. He suggests "the New Testament paradigm of *basileia*" (*sovereignty* or *kingdom*) can be explained in this way: "the giving away of power is the supreme manifestation of power, because it empowers the other, instead of revealing its own inner weakness by refusing to share it."[24] Kierkegaard's martyr of the future resembles this *kenotic* notion of sovereignty more than the conventional image of a martyr who is put to death. In fact, in 1847 Kierkegaard writes a pseudonymous essay titled, "Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?" in which he argues that no one has the right to incur the guilt of another by making another into your killer; only Christ has that right because he is also the one who is able to forgive and in forgiveness hide a multitude of sins.

Kierkegaard is aware that some will interpret the suffering acts of selflessness as evidence of defeat and absence of authority (*TA*, 109). Even other ethical-religious individuals will not be certain of the *martyr*, "because certainty could come only from him, and if he provides one single man with that directly, it means he is dismissed"

[24] Williams, "Kingdom and Empire," 3.

(*TA*, 109). This is how Kierkegaard's category of the martyr is related to his notion of the unrecognisable ones whose existence follows indirect communication.

Indirect communication has already been discussed in this study as the ethical mode of existence that serves for upbuilding and works of love. Here I will only briefly consider indirect communication in relation to unrecognizability and Christianity without authority. The purpose now is to connect the edifying and the polemical in the church (as the Church militant) with the edifying and the polemical in the world, which we explored through the works of love. The Church militant is the church that engages the world through works of love.

Apart from being the prototype for imitation Christ is also the paradigm of unrecognizability, the incognito *par excellence*. His incognito is distinct and essential by virtue of being the God-man. No one can repeat this incognito. What we can appropriate is the form of indirect communication that is expressed through Christ's essentially indirect existence (the incognito and the offence). Anti-Climacus explains that indirect communication can be produced in two ways: one way emphasises the communication and another emphasises the communicator (*PC*, 133-134). The latter pertains only to Christ as the communicator who is essential to the communication. Anti-Climacus defines indirect communication as an art and a redoubling (PC, 132), similarly to what we have read from Johannes Climacus. "The art consists in making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody, purely objective, and then continually placing the qualitative opposites in a unity" (*PC*, 133). Qualitative opposites can be as mundane as comedy and tragedy or as existentially significant as an aesthetic life or a religious life. The communication brings them together "in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot" (*PC*, 133). Therefore any interested person cannot rely on the communicator but instead "will have to untie the knot himself" (*PC*, 133).

This communication gives rise to capability and achievement corresponding to truth as the way.

Indirect communication always has the effect of drawing attention away from the communicator (except for Christ who also indirectly draws attention to himself) so that people are left with their own riddle of existence (*PC*, 141). Where the communication is edifying it turns the other person away from the communicator, turning him "inward in order to make him free" (*PC*, 142), not in order to lure the other to the communicator. This kind of communication has the opposite intention from that of the Seducer in *Either/Or*, whose design is to lure and possess others. Indirect communication, when it is edifying, is the work of love that does not seek its own, but rather hopes to build up the distinctiveness of the other.

But indirect communication also has its polemical consequence and this is where we return to the figure of the martyr. Martyrs deflect attention away from themselves to the agents of power and the 'servants of levelling.' Kierkegaard believes that through a suffering act the unrecognisable ones "will pass judgment on the instrument" of totalisation that is levelling and the worldly authority of an established order (*TA*, 109). But judgment also undergoes a dramatic reconceptualisation in order to guarantee that judgement also is without authority. The disciple does not presume to be the "knower of hearts," and does not wish to judge from authority either the inwardness or lived expression of another (*PC*, 220). Kierkegaard raises the question of judgment dialectically in *Works of Love*,

> Therefore to accuse another person before God is to accuse oneself, like for like… we are so willing to deceive ourselves into thinking that a person for his part should have a private relation to God…In your opinion, God should, so to speak, take your side, God and you together should turn against your enemy… But this is a misunderstanding… [I]f you address [God] in his capacity as judge, it does not help that you mean he is supposed to judge someone else, because you yourself have made him into your judge, and he is, like for like, simultaneously your judge – that is, he judges you also. But if you do not

> engage in accusing someone before God or in making God into a judge, then God is the gracious God (*WL*, 381).

When the question of judgment is raised the Christian is only concerned with her or himself in inwardness where the matter belongs before God. Every attempt to judge another is a judgment of oneself. To pass judgment on the servants of levelling, as Kierkegaard says in *Two Ages*, does indeed refer to an outward judgment. However, Christianly this expression of judgement is transformed into judgment as disclosure. Anti-Climacus says the Christian "does not judge a singe person, far from it, but many will disclose themselves by the way they judge him" (PC, 220). Anti-Climacus believes that a life of true *imitatio* will be the demonstration and the evidence that indicts the authority of the world as basically domineering and self-serving.

When we combine this Christian inversion of judgment with the indirect communication of works of love we discover the secret to Kierkegaard's theory of proclamation and witness in the world. The 'mutiny against God' that Kierkegaard associates with the modern belief in popular authority, based on self-legislative autonomous reason, is opposed "not by domineeringly wanting to compel others to obey God, but by being unconditionally obedient oneself, by unconditionally holding to the God-relationship and to God's requirement, and thereby expressing that as far as he is concerned God exists and is the only sovereign" (*WL*, 117).[25] Christian witness, as Kierkegaard describes it, is so far removed from the kinds of evangelism resembling the logic of *imperium*, that wants to set "the framework in which the possibilities for other people's futures are fixed,"[26] and that dreams of establishing a Church triumphant for Christendom. Alternatively, Anti-Climacus explains how true Christian witness leaves the possibilities open: "One presents faith … in such a way

[25] With passages such as these one is tempted to build a case against the strategy of Kierkegaard's final attack campaign and wonder if in 1855 he simply refused to heed his own advice regarding Christian proclamation and witness.

[26] Williams, "Kingdom and Empire," 1.

that the most orthodox sees it as a defense of the faith and the atheist sees it as an attack" (*PC*, 133). Why this ambiguity? Not because one can be ambivalent toward Christianity, but because if it is to be approached at all it is must not be received didactically; it must however emerge from a person "maieutically" as *the way*. And therefore the communicator must remain a zero, a non-person (in the sense of garnering attention), and unrecognizable so that the other is able to "untie the knot himself" (*PC*, 133).

Conclusion

The edifying and the polemical aspects of religiousness, when directed at the Church, have been presented as a critique of establishment Christianity and an affirmation of the Church militant. Between 1850 and 1852 Kierkegaard repeatedly calls attention to the crisis of Christendom and he directly confronts the established order with a reinvigorated Christianity of discipleship. From the establishment Christianity characterised by extensity, objectivity, historical achievement, and national custom, the corrective is presented as a faith of intensity, truth as the way, contemporaneity and imitation leading to a social existence without authority but devoted to genuine communicative encounters with others. Finally, throughout this section it has become clear that for Kierkegaard the critique of the Church is inseparable from the critique of levelling and the modern bourgeois order of society. Thus, his call for Christianity to express itself as the Church militant is inseparable from the broader task of producing an open society of communicating individuals based on the mutual source and goal of human freedom and love. What remains is to think through the edifying opportunity that is still available to a Church militant after Christendom. We have followed Kierkegaard this far through his religious response to the human spiritual

and social situation of the modern age, but there remains an open question regarding the continued role of the Church within his vision of Christianity without Christendom. The final chapter addresses that question in conversation with recent interpretations of Kierkegaard's ecclesiology.

Chapter 10

The Church Militant: Extramural and Intramural Christianity

Introduction

We have seen that the edifying and polemical expression of Christian witness strives for an open, critical, and emancipating society based on neighbourly love. Christendom, then, is not the goal of such striving. Instead Kierkegaard calls for a revitalisation of the Church militant, which relates to Christ in his abasement and which exists in the world "without authority," yet endures by struggling to make room for itself in the continual production of mutually edifying communities. But at most this describes a vision for the social activity of ethical-religious life. It is hardly an *ecclesiology*.

Where the edifying and the polemical are united in participation of a Church militant is there really a church or congregation to speak of? What we have described as Christian witness and a Church militant is so radically cut off from historic and existing organisations that it bears little resemblance to what is popularly and conventionally recognised as *church*. We shall not disagree. Certainly Kierkegaard's aim throughout his authorship is a construction of religious existence as it pertains to individuals and a critique of a socialised and acculturated Christian identity in modernity. With respect to uncovering a 'Kierkegaardian' ecclesiology I agree with Stephen Backhouse, "it is no failure to come up empty handed when the goods were intentionally withheld in the first place."[1] The lack of ecclesiology is no mere oversight on Kierkegaard's part. What is not there is perhaps not there for a reason.

[1] Backhouse, *Christian Nationalism*, 215.

And yet, typical of Kierkegaard, the negative provides us with some constructive possibilities.

In this chapter I examine the implications of a Church militant for contemporary re-thinking of ecclesiology without Christendom. I argue, in agreement with recent scholarship, that a Kierkegaardian Church militant corresponds to a mode of existence rather than any particular external instance of church. But I will also argue here that however radical and undefined the Church militant is, if individuals are to remain faithful together to the infinite qualitative difference between God and creature, and have faith in an intimate proximity between God and creature, then there is also a desire/need for shared occasions, places, and practices.

A number of recent studies have explored Kierkegaard's assessment of Church as a component in their broader assessment of his social and theological relevance. The present study situates itself in their company. In this subsection I will focus on the contributions from Stephen Backhouse, Bruce Kirmmse, George Pattison, and Michael Plekon.[2] Although I am in close agreement with these commentators I will diverge slightly from their interpretations, or rather, I aim to draw out another aspect of Kierkegaard's vision of religious life together that is not emphasised by these scholars. Toward that end I bring Kierkegaard into conversation with some other theologians of the twentieth Century.

[2] Other important resources include: George Connell and C. Stephen Evans, *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, ethics, and politics in Kierkegaard* (London: Humanities Press, 1992); Anders Holm, "Kierkegaard and the Church," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, edited by John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112-128.

10.1. Kierkegaard and Christianity Beyond Church

Stephen Backhouse, George Pattison, and Bruce Kirmmse each draw attention to that journal entry of 1854 concerned with Pentecost,[3] which demonstrates Kierkegaard's deep scepticism for the possibility of Church as an expression of authentic Christianity.[4] From this Kirmmse wonders if Kierkegaard's neglect of pneumatology and the corresponding denunciation of congregation means that he goes "further than is compatible with his own Christian standpoint."[5] In another essay Kirmmse explains, "Thus, Kierkegaard implies, salvation *is* in fact found outside the Church – and perhaps not within it, since the Church represents 'natural religion' and … not Christianity."[6] While Kirmmse wonders if Kierkegaard has finally compromised his own Christian standpoint, Plekon and Pattison ask us to consider Kierkegaard's polemic as calling for a transformed yet edifying vision for Christian life in modernity that is possible beyond the sites and practices of a Church that has become an institution of bourgeois-philistine religion.

Michael Plekon argues that Kierkegaard's vision for Christianity in the modern era is essentially an extramural activity. He writes, "For Kierkegaard, Christianity is more at home in the parlour, the marketplace and in the city street than in the 'quiet hours' of church worship or in academic theology."[7] However, Plekon believes the flipside of Kierkegaard's effort to "desacralise the 'Christendom' created by the secularised,

[3] See page 239 of this dissertation.

[4] Kirmmse, "Thunderstorm" 98; Backhouse, *Christian Nationalism*, 223; George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 202-203.

[5] Bruce H. Kirmmse, "Kierkegaard and MacIntyre: Possibilities for Dialogue," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, eds. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 206.

[6] Kirmmse, "Thunderstorm," 95.

[7] Plekon, "Church and Theology," 256.

'established' State Church," is that he "simultaneously resacralised the secular realm by presenting it as the place in which one follows Christ, the arena for the 'works of love.'"[8] Similarly, what Pattison regards as some of Kierkegaard's most significant and enduring contributions to the situation of Christianity, Church, and society in the present age, are proposals for a more vibrant extramural Christianity. He writes, "Kierkegaard problematized the identification of the Church as a legitimate form for the historic manifestation of Christianity."[9] Agreeing with Kirmmse's insistence that Christianity was absolutely central to Kierkegaard *and* he was also radically anti-Church leads Pattison to Kierkegaard's most radical legacy for modern Christianity, which is,

> The idea – perhaps the mere possibility of envisaging – a kind of Christianity that was able to dispense with the Church but to do so for quite different reasons and with quite different outcomes from the transformation of Christianity and the Church into one or another variant of a 'merely' human ethical community.[10]

In other words, rather than abolishing Christianity by abolishing the Church Kierkegaard hopes to reinvigorate Christianity by relativising the Church, by opposing the Church's desire to elect itself as *middle term* in the human-divine relationship and domesticate Christianity. Speaking of a person's relationship to a congregation Kierkegaard writes, "it is not the single individual's relationship to the community or congregation which determines his relationship to God, but his relationship to God which determines his relationship to the congregation" (*JP* I, 595). At issue is a question of authority, not mediation. The Church must not profess and confess *itself*; it is not to be 'believed in' as God is believed in.[11] When the Church demands adherence of this sort (that it is to be believed in) then we have a

[8] Plekon, "Church and Theology," 256.
[9] Pattison, *Nineteenth Century*, 202.
[10] Ibid., 203.
[11] Douglas John Hall, *Confessing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 33, 35.

crisis of faith because then the qualitative difference between God and creature has collapsed and the divine NO is not heard. It is to a Church such as this that Kierkegaard declares: "Here there is nothing to reform" (*M*, 39). It is clear that for Kierkegaard every existing church is a contingent rather than necessary expression of the *Church*. Or alternatively, as Pattison interprets him, "no actual Church can define or limit where the boundaries of Christian life are to be drawn."[12] Why it is so difficult to describe what a Church militant might look like is because it does not correspond to a WHAT of existence; it is not identified with systematic doctrine or this or that type of governing structure. Rather, the Church militant, as Kierkegaard presents it, belongs to the HOW of a religious life that is marked by the edifying and polemical dialectic we have been considering.

Kierkegaard's ecclesial concerns, while regarded by many as drastic, were immensely formative in the early theology of Karl Barth and Kierkegaard's consideration of an extramural Christianity was particularly influential on the late theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Barth, in his commentary on Paul's epistle to the Romans, echoes Kierkegaard's diagnosis of Christianity and the Church. He explains,

> The disease from which Joseph suffered now breaks out, not in the indifferent masses, but in those who are 'interested in religion'; not in the coarse-minded and disreputable, but in the clergy and their friends; not in the cinema, but in the Church; not in the godless professors of medicine, but in the doctors of the Theological Faculty.[13]

Therefore God is not to be found in these halls of "religious attainment," but rather God is to be found "on the plain where men suffer and sin."[14] Similarly, Bonhoeffer announces in his prison letters that "the Church stands not where human powers give out, on the borders, but in the centre of the village," and that what it means to be Christian in a "religionless and secular sense" requires not imagining the Church as

[12] Ibid.
[13] Barth, *Romans*, 174.
[14] Barth, *Romans*, 132.

separate and favoured, but "as wholly belonging to the world."[15] And the Church is not a healthy community where it "[forms] itself into a movement, an order, a society, a *collegium pietatis*," rather, it is healthy when it regards itself as Church in the broadest catholic sense.[16] Yet for Pattison, Kierkegaard's warning, which is repeated by Barth and Bonhoeffer, means that to aspire to authentic Christianity as Kierkegaard presents it requires having the courage of Dostoyevsky's Alyosha to leave the monastery and enter the 'secular city.'[17]

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Kierkegaard's insistence that there be a vibrant Christianity beyond the inherited or imperially won jurisdictions of the Church is intended to frustrate the claims of ultimacy and *Right* heralded by bourgeois-philistine Christendom. But Barth and Bonhoeffer both warn against an overvaluation of Kierkegaard's ecclesial attack. "To destroy temples is not better than to build them," Barth warns.[18] With Kierkegaardian dialectic Bonhoeffer writes, "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community," since "alone you stood before God."[19] But he also adds, "Let him who is not in community beware of being alone," because the divine call "was not meant for you alone," in community "you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray."[20]

Of course it is possible to leave *the monastery* and still participate in *the Church* in the secular city, if by "monastery" we mean a community that relates to (*its*) God within an enclosed environment and an enclosed set of practices, and by "Church" we

[15] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: Fontana Press, 1960 [first published in English by S. C. M. Press, 1953]), 92.
[16] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, translated by John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 37.
[17] Pattison, *Nineteenth Century*, 213.
[18] Barth, *Romans*, 136.
[19] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 77.
[20] Ibid.

mean an undefined community "which is being brought to live the representative life of Christ in the world."[21] Kierkegaard's militant faith, I believe, beckons Christianity in this direction.

There is still this matter of the possibility that something can be called a Christian community, and why such a community might be desirable and necessary to those who strive for a militant faith. Taking another look at Kierkegaard's critical concerns with the idea of "congregation" reveals where Kierkegaard does leave possibilities open for new or renewed ventures toward faithful corporate life of shared Christian faith.

10.2. The Congregation Revisited

We have seen that Kierkegaard challenges any notion of Church that positively claims to carry within its authority and its practices the eschatological promise of Christ on high, and that one is heir to that promise simply through association to the Church. Thus, Anti-Climacus removes the idea of a congregation [*Menighed*] from history and reserves it for eschatology. "To apply such a term as 'congregation'… to this life is really an impatient anticipation of the eternal" because "the congregation does not really come until eternity" (*PC*, 223). Such anticipation of the eternal begets false assurance in one's own ability and one's own vision of community. Kierkegaard believes this self-assurance connects "congregation" to "a public" to a "national church" to a "national God" to "Christendom." Attempts to realize a Church triumphant are what Bonhoeffer calls the "human wish dream," which he claims in concert with Kierkegaard, "must be banished if genuine community is to survive."[22]

[21] Hall, *Confessing the Faith*, 45.
[22] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 27.

Those whose dream wish is Christendom or a Church triumphant look in the world for evidence of *their* triumph, and act as if it is their dream that binds people together, their dream that can determine the borders of the community.[23]

Anti-Climacus believes "congregation" describes a situation when struggling, striving, and becoming is no longer necessary, when life is at rest. By contrast every existing individual remains in "unrest," in striving and becoming (*PC*, 223), and therefore such an individual can have nothing religiously to do with what is at rest. Reinforcing his eschatology Anti-Climacus insists, "this life is indeed a time of testing, of unrest, and therefore 'the congregation' does not belong in time but belongs first in eternity, where it is, at rest, the gathering of all the single individuals who endured in the struggle and passed the test" (*PC*, 223). Thus, Backhouse notes how, for Kierkegaard, "as soon as individual believers start to identify themselves in and as congregations, they cease to be the authentic Church."[24] Therefore Kierkegaard places a question mark beside the Church, turning it into a riddle that earnest Christians must work out for themselves *and* together.

But is this Kierkegaard's definitive word on congregations? We have considered the social dangers of a one-dimensional "public" but we have also considered the possibility for communities of right-relation, exhibiting intensity rather than being defined by extensity. Presumably there is possibility for a congregation of intensive relations that can hold the edifying and polemical together in fear and trembling and works of love?

Intensity returns our discussion to the category of the individual. Just as the individual stands on the same side as community in opposition to "the public" so does the individual stand on the same side as the congregation, properly understood. Or, as

[23] Ibid., 28.
[24] Backhouse, *Christian Nationalism*, 217.

Kierkegaard put it in his journal, "the religious 'community' or 'congregation' [*Menighed*], this is a concept which lies on the other side of 'the single individual.'" If the religious community is not a national or ethnic or bureaucratic association then the single individual "must have intervened with ethical decisiveness as the middle term in order to make sure that 'community' and 'congregation' are not taken in vain as synonymous with public, the crowd, etc." (*JP* I, 595 [1849-1850]). Backhouse recognizes that Kierkegaard offers us the possibility of social life on the other side of the individual – that is, with the category of the individual as its spiritual loci – but he deliberately decides not to name it "congregation" [*Menighed*], suggesting instead that it may resemble something "more like a Kierkegaardian 'neighbourhood.'"[25] Acknowledging the difficulty of assigning any positive determination to a Kierkegaardian form of sociality he admits that whatever Kierkegaard offers, it will be "radical, open-ended and tempestuous."[26] However, the Kierkegaardian neighborhood is more appropriately a model for the open society of communicating individuals that Kierkegaard's religious individuals constructively participate in than an alternative congregation.

It is the broader context of secularity that these individuals accept and affirm as the meeting-ground for mutually edifying encounters. Kierkegaard's edifying and communicative praxis, ironically, seems more easily applicable to secular social developments than religious ones. Pattison describes Kierkegaard's enduring contribution to Christianity in these terms:

> To accept the secularity of the contemporary world as the stage on which Christianity must today bear witness is not simply to accommodate ourselves to some so-called 'secularism' and still less to 'nihilism'. It is simply to think through what it means to have a faith that is grounded in the structure of created being and that comes to fruition in the individual's struggle to become the self

[25] Backhouse, *Christian Nationalism*, 218.
[26] Ibid.

> he or she truly is, and together with that, to start building a universal community grounded in mutual respect and love.[27]

I agree that this is faithful to Kierkegaard's theology of liberation, which keeps God and Christ as middle term when modernity elects other identities as middle term (nation, nature, class, doctrine, etc.), and it is faithful to his vision for a critical and edifying society of persons. But the "thinking through" of what it means to have faith must be able to take place in earnestness, to use Kierkegaard's term. Earnestness, Kierkegaard tells us, involves "precisely this kind of honest distrust of oneself, to treat oneself as a suspicious character" (*FSE*, 44). That means, to think through these questions alone is to treat oneself as a reliable character – it is not earnest. Where this earnest questioning is undertaken presumably it is undertaken together by individuals who are existentially invested in the question, in the context of "a shared acknowledgment of the worthwhileness of the question and of the mode – which might be called 'trustful interrogation' – in which it is explored."[28] Such "trustful interrogation" cannot be assumed in the context of secularity. There, questions of faith and the structure of created being could otherwise be disregarded with indifference or merely considered as historical-anthropological, or simply rebuked as infantile. What must remain open to religiousness is HOW to facilitate the social activity that involves thinking through faith.

What is paramount for Kierkegaard is that God remains the middle term in every relationship and that the Christian struggles to remain contemporary with Christ in imitation and abasement. That also suggests Kierkegaard is not interested in the abolition of one or another historic ecclesiastical *form*. Instead, much as the individual does not abandon the relationships of preference in neighbourly love, so also a person need not abandon a historically concrete form of Church – the task, if one chooses, is

[27] Pattison, *Nineteenth Century*, 213.
[28] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 144.

to make one's relationship to church a militant relationship, keeping God and the neighbour as middle term. Just as the God-relationship, in fear and trembling, puts every established order in suspense, so too does this relationship put every "church" in suspense. To relate oneself to a Church militant also means relating to past, present, and future instantiations of Church as provisional, as what, at best, remains "parenthetical in Christ's life" (*PC*, 202).

Instead, being a congregation "on the other side of the single individual" means that religious life together still involves the militant restlessness of faith "in fear and trembling and much spiritual trial" (*FSE*, 19), the consciousness of sin and absolute dependence, and that this is redoubled in works of love and hope to work for the distinctiveness of others. Yet I would like to suggest that the dialogue and trustful interrogation, and activity of a militant faith also involves gathering together for meaningful occasions and practices.

10.3. Confession and Communion Revisited

In my analysis I walk along with Bruce Kirmmse, George Pattison, Stephen Backhouse, and Michael Plekon; I agree that Kierkegaard offers an edifying possibility for sociality and religiousness within a broader context of "secularity." And I agree that Kierkegaard's polemical critique of mass identities and modern politics includes a radical challenge to the notion of Church. But I veer from these commentators slightly and suggest that Kierkegaard also establishes the basis for religious communities we might want to call *churches* and *congregations*, and which exists constructively *in* that broader society of neighbours. The basis for what I shall call a "Kierkegaardian ecclesiology" that still remains militant and open is found where this study begins – with confession and communion.

Although Backhouse acknowledges Kierkegaard's resistance to "congregation," he also recognises the existential need for sociable human encounters and distinctive communities. Whereas Kirmmse interprets Kierkegaard's later analysis as evidence that he decisively abandons church, Backhouse presents a possible opening for *ekklesia* – "The possibility of inter-personal social relations is only denied if we conceive of the Church as a crowd of 'people-like-us' who find strength in numbers."[29] Backhouse reminds us that for Kierkegaard becoming an authentic person takes place "via the indirect communication of another first-hand disciple." This means that for religious individuals "truly authentic existence is therefore predicated upon an encounter with other Christians, which implies a neighbourhood of believers."[30] I would add that encounters with others and a neighbourhood of believers should also involve participating together in meaningful intentional practices that, through symbol, analogy, and narrative, are true to the truth they profess.

At the very least, Kierkegaard imagines an occasion and a place where people gather to practice confession and communion, which is the basis of their edifying and polemical life-witness of Christianity. In *Christian Discourses* Kierkegaard makes this most explicit: "But you who are gathered [*Forsamlede*] here to take part in his holy supper, … or in any case you are indeed gathered here today to confess him, or by being gathered here today with the purpose of being gathered you do indeed confess him" (*CD*, 283 / *SKS* 10, 304). An assembly of persons who gather for the purpose of confessing who they believe God is and what they believe God does (that God is qualitatively different and that God is love), and who gather for the purpose of

[29] Backhouse, *Christian Nationalism*, 219.
[30] Ibid., 218.

partaking in Communion (which affirms the intimate and lasting proximity between God and creature) – this gathering can correctly be called a religious community.

Kierkegaard's emphasis on the gathering, even in the communion discourses, is quite rare. However, we must exercise caution since Kierkegaard refrains from describing these gatherings as "congregation," or even *church*. Certainly the implication, at least in these discourses of 1848, is that he is speaking of practices that remain within a particular tradition and liturgical setting, but linguistic considerations should also be noted. The word for a gathering or assembly [*Forsamling*] is linguistically closer to the word for community [*Samfund*] than "congregation" [*Menighed*]. Congregation retains its salvific and eschatological meaning for Kierkegaard, whereas gathering for confession and communion safeguards the spiritual category of the individual. "However many assembled there, indeed, even if all were assembled at the Communion table, there is no crowd at the Communion table" (*CD*, 272). Gathering for Communion means approaching Communion, and each other, as individuals and this marks the gathering as a community rather than a crowd.

Kierkegaard seems to present a "high" theology of Communion, referring to it, "in the strictest sense a holy act, a godly undertaking," and noting its normative status as a command – "you are to receive Holy Communion" (*CD*, 298). Furthermore, we have seen that Kierkegaard presents Communion not simply as gifts from God, but that "God gives himself in these gifts" (*CD*, 253), and referring specifically to Christ's presence in the blessing (*CD*, 300). Yet in another very important sense, which is integral to his reflections on the individual, Church, and society, Kierkegaard's Communion theology departs from orthodoxy. Certainly confession and Communion remain important parts of Christian expression in Kierkegaard's

theology even when conventions such as baptism, confirmation, and marriage are challenged or relativised. But where confession and Communion remain they remain as highly laicised activities.

In Communion the function of the priest or pastor becomes incidental to sacramental authenticity. Kierkegaard writes, "The pastor who is present at the Communion table is not able to communicate the blessing to you, nor is he able to support you" (*CD*, 300). Instead we are told, "only he who instituted this supper, only he can prepare it – because at the Communion table he is the blessing" (CD, 300). What is required for the blessing to be the blessing is not correctly spoken liturgy but faith, which is a possibility for every individual. Communion is laicised, insofar as what is sacramental belongs to the individual in the inwardness of faith and not according to the ability or office of a priesthood.

Although it is laicised Communion is not *liberalised*. That is, the Communion is not our own individual act and the reconciliation it offers is not an exercise of our own individual will. "The blessing is what God does … But at the Communion table Christ is the blessing. The divine work of reconciliation is Christ's work, and in it a human being can do only less than nothing" (*CD*, 299). The activity in Communion remains God's activity – that is what the Christian *confesses* in faith – which neither belongs to the exclusive profession of clergy or the ability and decision of an individual.

Of course Kierkegaard's Communion theology is not historically scandalous; what he says would not be entirely out of place in the various traditions of Reformed and non-conformist theologies. The task here is to consider how the edifying and polemical dialectic in religious life produces Kierkegaard's notion of a Church militant when the dialectic is directed at the Church.

If Communion and confession take place where individuals and Christ meet then that makes Christian church mobile and Christian community fluid. Kierkegaard differentiates Communion and therefore also a Church militant from the human religious impulse to secure, possess, and control the divine. The place where the offering is prepared, delivered, and received is,

> Neither on Moriah nor on Gerizim, nor any visible *there*, but that it is there where [God] is. If this were not so, then you of course would have to remain at the Communion table, take up residence there, never budge from the spot (*CD*, 274).

The reason why one does not remain at the alter, or why one "leaves the monastery" is not necessarily because one has lost faith in the offering of Communion, but one leaves because one has faith that "the event is not finished," that it has "just begun," that the task is "to remain at the Communion table when you leave the Communion table" (*CD*, 274). We have already been introduced to this task in Section II of this dissertation where confession and communion were first introduced. Now I am presenting it as that which persists of the Church when the Church is a militant Church. But confession and Communion are also what directs us away from an ossified Church and unflinchingly intramural associations toward open possibilities and "undefined new things."[31]

Remaining with the Communion table when you leave the Church does not mean becoming *enclosed* within yourself, cut off from the world; it means that you try to preserve communion "by more and more living yourself out of yourself and living yourself into him, in his love" (*WA*, 188). Recall the concluding remarks of Section II regarding Kierkegaard's suggestion for a sign above the door leaving the Church, which reads "One who is forgiven little loves little" (*WA*, 169). From this we

[31] This phrase is first used by Bruce Kirmmse and then it gets taken up and developed in Stephen Backhouse's constructive analysis of a Kierkegaardian vision for community. See, Kirmmse, "Thunderstorm," 88, and Backhouse, *Christian Nationalism*, 199.

understand that Communion is activated and made true in works of love. Church is the invitation to Communion but the works of love are Communion's justification. Without the works of love Communion and Church are profaned or vacuous. In this, Kierkegaard reveals his affinity to James's epistle and his distance from the Lutheran declaration of *Sola fide*.[32]

For Kierkegaard the point of confession and Communion is not to legitimise or sacralise any definitive ecclesiastical programme, any specific geographic locations, or any particular forms of association. The practices of confession and Communion are meant to reinvigorate people's spiritual life and redirect their attention and active efforts to the social-spiritual well-being of the towns, cities, and communities where they live.

While remaining radically open-ended with respect to form, Kierkegaard still envisions a scenario where confession and communion are shared, but shared in the ideal separation of subjectivity, which is precisely what confession and communion require. Such a scenario, I claim, approaches what a socially distinctive intramural (or *churchly*) expression of the edifying and the polemical aspect of religious life might involve. Confession and Communion, along with their edifying and polemical character, prevent Christians from abandoning church entirely: unless one is an heroic individual, or truly divine, one cannot keep oneself earnestly humble before God in confession or dependent upon God's gift of life and love in Communion without the inter-personal encounters that express these aspects in word and deed. Existing religiously as a member of the Church militant, as one who holds the edifying and the

[32] James's epistle seems particularly appropriate for Kierkegaard's critique of Danish cultural Christianity, specifically the passage that reads, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:14-17).

polemical together in works of love through imitation and contemporaneity, and who leaves a church in order to exist in 'the city' where one can love much, also involves the forgetfulness of self and the faith to make a space for people to gather where confession and Communion is offered.

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As we approach the conclusion of this study it is appropriate to recall its initiating concepts. We are reminded of Kierkegaard's basic theological premise, communicated by Johannes Climacus in the *Concluding Postscript*, "Precisely because there is the absolute difference between God and man, man expresses himself most perfectly when he absolutely expresses the difference" (*CUP*, 412-413). And Anti-Climacus, in 1849, notes that Christianity brings God and humans so close together that it easily becomes a point of confusion when the creatures imagine they *are* divine (*SUD*, 117-118). On other occasions Kierkegaard reflects on the theological position that it is not omnipotence and divine power that requires something of humans, but it is love that requires something of humans – it requires them to love much (*CD*, 128; *WA*, 137, 169). With a preface to his final two discourses of 1851 Kierkegaard declares his authorship finds "its decisive place of rest, at the foot of the altar" (*WA*, 165). In those discourses he hopes to reiterate "human equality [*Menneske-Lighed*] Christianly," that "unconditionally every human being, is equally close to God … is loved by him" (*WA*, 165). Theologically, then, humans learn what it is be human by facing the condition of existing as an individual alone before God in unique kinship with the divine, and simultaneously by facing the condition of existing before all others in mutual dependence of *given* life and mutually in need of and capable of genuinely edifying love.

Conclusion

If we consider the edifying and the polemical as Kierkegaard's dialectical framework for religious life, then Kierkegaardian faith assumes a 'militant' – that is, constructively restless – character; then, religiously speaking, human existential and social endeavours must involve the honesty of spiritual trial in inwardness (through confession and communion), and the rigor of openness, opposition, and sacrifice in outward works of love (through corporate confession and communion).

This study is primarily a textual analysis of Kierkegaard's authorship between 1846 and 1852, the period after *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and which culminates in *For Self-Examination.* I have argued that Kierkegaard turns his intellectual attention at this period to the question of what active religious life involves within the specific historical-political context that can be characterised as the twilight of Christendom or post-Christendom. Since, I believe, twenty-first century Christianity in Europe and North America remains within that social-spiritual context Kierkegaard continues to be a constructive resource for theologians grappling with the sociological questions of human life together.

My aim for this thesis was threefold:

1. My aim was to provide a theoretical framework for reading Kierkegaard's 'middle period' that demonstrates the coherence of this thought and its social concern. If we are looking for a socially constructive use for Kierkegaard's thought then I am arguing that the edifying and the polemical message in his theology must be read together since they operate together theologically; his 'social ethics' and his inwardly reflective pastoral discourses speak in one voice with his polemical critique of the

present age. Together the edifying and the polemical make up the life of a *militant* faith, which struggles spiritually and communicatively for an open society of persons, and which opposes the dehumanizing politics of levelling and sectarian alliances of self-love.

2. My theoretical framework, which reads the edifying and the polemical dialectically, coincides with Kierkegaard's dialectical theology. The edifying and polemical aspects of religiousness that Kierkegaard presents between 1847 and 1852 answers the riddle that Climacus gives us in the *Postscript*: "Precisely because there is the absolute difference between God and man, man expresses himself most perfectly when he expresses the difference" (*CUP*, 412-413). Religiously to express most perfectly what it is to be human is to learn (from the lilies of the field and the bird of the air) that human life, with its genuine freedom, is *given* life and *dependent* life. Additionally, to express what it is to be human means confessing the reality of sin and the possibility of forgiveness (see chapters 2 and 3), which is a possibility for God alone and not human ingenuity or historical development. What this means is authority and obedience are not for humans to claim for themselves, whether individually or corporately. That is the polemical nature of the God-relationship and it is the polemical source of our theological challenge to present age philosophies and ideologies that collapse the difference (see chapters 4 and 9).[1]

We also discover an answer to Anti-Climacus's statement that Christianity brings God and creature remarkably close together (*SUD*, 117). Another side of the spiritual struggle in religious individuals has to do with the faith that God is indeed love in everything, that God is in fact aligned with human existence, which is expressed liturgically and sacramentally in Communion (chapter 3). But, as we have seen,

[1] In fact, I would argue that Kierkegaard's entire dispute with Hegelianism can be understood in terms of maintaining God's qualitative difference (from History, Reason, or human Society), and therefore genuine human difference from divine authority and ability.

proximity to God also involves human activity and freedom. Because we are spiritual beings composed of the finite and infinite, freedom and necessity, the temporal and the eternal, we have the freedom and ability to actively love and hope, which invites people to be co-workers with God (chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8). Kierkegaard expresses the human capacity for this proximity in his concepts of contemporaneity and imitation. In these categories the eternal is directed through human historical and material life in works of love. Therefore, it is my position that the most fruitful appropriations of Kierkegaard's thought for theology will take into account his theology of difference and proximity. What we learn from Kierkegaard's dialectical theology is that a vigilant maintenance of this difference and proximity provides religious individuals with their social commission and their *militant* character.

3. In order to communicate what I believe to be Kierkegaard's commitment to the human needs and concerns of this world I have staged three *encounters* that situate his subjectively existing individual in concrete historical life: (a) the religious individual is engaged in an encounter with self-before-God in conscience. If that seems to be the very antithesis of a 'concrete' encounter then, following Kierkegaard, I have located that encounter in the ritual practices of confession and Communion, which take place in the space of the church. Those occasions, places, and practices intensify the dialectic between an individual and a community; every individual is necessarily alone before God in confession and at Communion, but they are also practices spoken and enacted in company. Furthermore, for Kierkegaard those practices form the theological basis of a person's social and ethical life; (b) there is an encounter with society, which Kierkegaard expresses as an encounter with the social categories of 'a public' and 'the neighbour'. While a public represents the leveling tendency toward objectified, disinterested life that is easily manipulated and exploited by authoritarian

and sectarian ideologies, the neighbour presents modernity with a social ideal to struggle for: an open society of subjectively invested individuals who form open-ended communities of mutual edification and trustful critique; (c) finally, I have staged a religious encounter with the Church. For our purposes here the investigation is specific to Kierkegaard's Danish context of the eighteen forties and eighteen fifties with the aim of considering how Christians may wish to re-imagine the role of Church in a (European-American) post-Christendom context. An encounter with the Church, with the professors and priests that constitute its intellectual and administrative authority, also presents us with an example and a resource for how Kierkegaard advises modern Christians to relate to other present-age institutions. This final encounter reveals how Kierkegaard's thought can help theologians address the complex situation of human interactions with and relationship to the religious, political, and economic institutions that mediate our relationships with each other, ourselves, and even with God. Christian witness at least partially involves questioning the authority and ultimacy of all ideologies and institutions without undermining the human need and desire for corporate life.

Where Further Work Remains

Where does a dissertation on the edifying and polemical aspects of Kierkegaard's Christian theology lead? Where does one go with a theology of encounter? If I were to extend this thesis or stage other 'encounters' I would consider how the edifying and polemical faith of a Church militant forges relationships of alliance (not excusive alliances of selfish self-love, but alliances of critical action for hope and love) with other religious and non-religious communities. Since Kierkegaardian opposition to Christendom includes opposition to *imperium*, and since his edifying project is

essentially a theology of hope and liberation this brings his critical theology naturally into conversation with other post-Hegelian critical schools, particularly those that trace their lineage to Marx. I am not suggesting that Kierkegaard and Marx are perfectly consonant, nor am I claiming that Kierkegaard is a 'leftist' thinker. His so-called 'politics' are far too ambiguous for such a claim. Instead, I am merely suggesting that such a conversation would be ethically and intellectually/critically fruitful, but also socially relevant. Indeed this has already begun. I have drawn attention to the essays of Merold Westphal, James L. Marsh, and Robert L. Perkins in this regard.[2] In addition to these commentators, Gregor Malantschuk's *The Controversial Kierkegaard* and Kresten Nordentoft's *Hvad Siger Brand-Majoren?* [What Does the Fire-Chief Say?] had already begun drawing comparisons between Kierkegaard and Marx. From here it is a short step to a consideration of the more existential currents in the Frankfurt School authors such as Adorno and Marcuse who acknowledge intellectual affinity to Kierkegaard, but also Walter Benjamin's theological reflections and Jürgen Habermas's more recent flirtation with the existential can prove fruitful. Again, there has been headway in this direction. Martin Matustik, Marcia Morgan, J. Michael Tilley, Alison Assiter, András Nagy, and Leo Stan are among the Kierkegaard scholars today who are engaging Kierkegaard's thought constructively with the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and other Marxian critical thinkers.

The present study cannot claim to situate itself clearly within this stream of Kierkegaard research since I do not bring forth a detailed analysis or comparison of Critical Theory here. However, my project does make a bid for further theological involvement and cooperation in the conversation between Kierkegaard and Critical

[2] See chapter 4.

Theory since I claim that the Kierkegaardian individual is existentially and spiritually invested in social critique but also human social wellbeing, that this commitment to the world is expressed religiously in the practices of confession and communion, and socially (non-confessionally, or as *invisible ones*) in works of love and acts of opposition 'without authority.' In fact this study opens up the possibility for another study that considers an interaction between Kierkegaardian theology and Critical Theory that is mediated through the Christian existentialism and social thought of Paul Tillich, whose personal relationship to the Frankfurt School cannot go unnoticed.

Although it is reckless to estimate the historical significance of our own present age (I am now thinking particularly of an *age* defined by a 'war on terror' and a global financial 'crisis' and the international activist responses to a world that increasingly appears to be managed by a bizarre compound of financialisation, militarisation, and securitisation) there is no doubt that a popular perception persists in Europe and North America that the existing order (however that may be defined) is both insufficient and unsustainable. Thus terms like 'systemic change' and 'revolution' get bandied about in the popular media and at academic conferences. In our present age Marx has re-emerged in the cultural imaginary, and now he is not so easily disregarded as a slayer of freedom bogeyman, but rather as a kind of vindicated prophet. Regardless of the similarities or differences between the revolutions in Europe in the eighteen forties and an "Arab Spring" or global syndications of "Occupy" or various indigenous movements like Canada's "Idle No More," people are asking the questions of how these times may or may not relate to Marx's context. But Kierkegaard also takes stock of an age of revolutions from a different vantage point. He also reads the signs of his times and concludes that although it looks as though everything is politics and a need for structural/technocratic ingenuity (the

realm of abstraction and the numerical/objective) it will turn out that what is needed is 'religious spirit' (the concrete and particular that *relates* to the universal). This thesis partially addresses how the edifying and polemical aspects of religiousness help to mediate individuals' relation to the universal, to history, through the *eternal*, *contemporaneity*, *offence*, and *imitation*. Still, there is more work to be done. A book-length study could investigate how Kierkegaard's understanding of the historical and the eternal gets translated into active social life. Building on Stephen Crites' *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History* and David Kangas' *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings*, one could develop this analysis of the historical and the eternal into a comparative analysis between Kierkegaard and Marx on the question of history, hope, and social action.

If Kierkegaard gets overlooked today because of a perceived blind-spot that makes him unable to account for human sociality, then this dissertation goes some way toward dispelling that perception. Yet there is also a more constructive and pro-active component to this thesis, which addresses a possible blind-spot in Marxian analysis, and that coincides with the existential and edifying element that must accompany *critique* if exploitation and domineering self-love is to be overcome and if emancipation and loving co-operation is to be worked for. As Kierkegaard writes in *The Book on Adler*, "Any reformation that is not aware that basically it is every individual who must be reformed is *eo ipso* an illusion" (*BA*, 158). So there is another opportunity that opens up after reading the edifying and the polemical as socially critical and socially constructive: not only is there a conversation to be had with twentieth century critical theory but there is also a conversation to be had with twentieth century existentialism that took on a particularly political character. I am thinking of the political existentialism of Franz Fanon, Richard Wright, Simone de

Beauvoir, J. P. Sartre, and Paul Tillich, to name only a few. Like Kierkegaard these authors attempt to successfully marry a culturally critical stance with an existential imperative to act on behalf of the liberation and preservation of human social-spiritual activity.

Theologically we can ask if the Kierkegaardian dialectical theology that I have presented here can breath new life into liberation theology for the twenty-first century. This is not to say that liberation theology is "dead," only that liberation theology has for a long time been closely associated with its Latin American Catholic origins and context in the twentieth century, and that when liberation theology comes to address contemporary social-spiritual questions Kierkegaard will be a welcome resource and interlocutor.

The militant faith which gives expression to the edifying and polemical life of religiousness is neither radically orthodox nor a domesticated liberal worldliness. A Church militant refuses to fall in love with itself or with an intellectual tradition that it claims as its exclusive possession; neither will a Church militant disavow the ontological difference and existential proximity between God and creature. The theological task, if we follow Kierkegaard, is not to construct a defense of Christianity against secularity, nor is it to struggle in the world of politics as a competing power with the aim of establishing a new *Christendom*. Instead, Christians of a militant faith continue to reckon with their own legacy of *Christendom*, and out of this effort comes the resources to oppose future dreams of *imperium* in all forms, whether religious, cultural, economic, or technological.

Therefore, thinking the edifying and the polemical together informs our encounter with God, with society, and with the Church. When encounters are shaped by the edifying and the polemical dialectic then their character is *militant*. But the militant is

not militaristic or fundamentalist. Inwardly it is honest enough to face critique and a need for grace and redemption. Outwardly, the militant ones oppose every human temptation toward self-deification and the authority that seeks to determine the conditions of life for others. Outwardly, the militant ones seek without authority to build up others and be built up by others in mutual edification.

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