

# On the (Dis)Continuity in Kierkegaard's Understanding of Faith

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Faith was not only the theme of Kierkegaard's life but also the systematic center of his thought. The theory of faith held by the mature Kierkegaard, whom we will here call "Kierkegaard the author," has important aspects and elements that are already prefigured in the journal entries and writings of his "*vita ante acta*"<sup>1</sup>—that is, of his earlier life "from childhood until I became an author"<sup>2</sup>—and which can be fully understood only against the backdrop of those early reflections.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite important moments of continuity between Kierkegaard the student and Kierkegaard the author, one major difference stands out. Whereas up through the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard understands and describes the relation between faith and reality as a positive one, in his later works a negative assessment of the relation of faith to reality grows more and more important, ultimately culminating in the demand for a world-renouncing imitation Christianity, i.e., a Christianity focused on the imitation [*Efterfølgelse*] of Christ.

In what follows, I would like to point out at least a few moments of continuity between the young Kierkegaard and the later Kierkegaard, in order to examine this fundamental change in terms of its background, along with the factors and circumstances conditioning it—and to highlight the role of Luther in this context.

<sup>1</sup> SKS 16, 58 / PV, 79.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See Gerhard Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit. Das Glaubensverständnis des jungen Kierkegaard und seine philosophisch-theologischen Voraussetzungen* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014) (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 30).

## I. MOMENTS OF CONTINUITY

Kierkegaard's development as a thinker is marked by a wide array of educational and discursive contexts. Both close involvement in his youth with other thinkers—some of whom were quite different in outlook—and engagement with certain contemporary philosophical-theological debates in his immediate environment had lasting influence on the development of his theory of faith. Kierkegaard's early journals and notebooks—to which he repeatedly returned, when preparing his later writings, in order to make the thoughts and considerations formulated there bear literary fruit—reveal multiple relations of reception, both on the level of terminology and/or on the level of thematic content.

That Kierkegaard engaged in the literary reception and reworking of earlier notes on faith in his work as an author up to the “turning point”<sup>4</sup> of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846) is particularly evident in the Climacus writings. Thus, for example, in the drafts of his treatment of “the absolute paradox” in the third chapter of *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and its subsequent Appendix,<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard makes explicit reference to his 1836 journal entries on Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788)<sup>6</sup> and his 1838 sketches for a piece on “Telegraph message from an effervescent to a clairvoyant about the relation between Christianity and philosophy.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, his critique of N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) in the *Postscript* is in broad and partly literal agreement with his 1835 notes on the latter's “church theory.”<sup>8</sup> Even though the immediate occasion for the project undertaken in Kierkegaard's Climacus writings was his reading of the *Christian Doctrine* [*Glaubenslehre*] of David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), including the account of the religious and historical philosophy of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) conveyed in that text,<sup>9</sup> the project's foundation had already been laid during Kierkegaard's years as a student.

Among the essential moments of continuity between the understanding of faith of Kierkegaard the student and that of Kierkegaard the author are,

<sup>4</sup> SKS 16, 11 / PV, 63.

<sup>5</sup> See Ms. 2 in SKS K4, 175, [1r] (KA, B pk. 14 læg 2; *Pap.* V B 6:1) as well as Ms. 4 in SKS K4, 175, [16r] (KA, B pk. 14 læg 2; not in *Pap.*).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., SKS 27, 149f., *Papir* 185 / JP 2, 1540.

<sup>7</sup> SKS 27, 213, *Papir* 259:1 / JP 3, 3266.

<sup>8</sup> SKS 27, 101–105, *Papir* 69 / JP 5, 5088.

<sup>9</sup> See Gerhard Schreiber, “On the Origins of Kierkegaard's Climacus Writings and Paradox Christology,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2017, 313–341.

to mention the most important ones: his interpretation of faith as neither a mediated (sublated) nor a reflexively mediable (sublatable), and hence special, form of immediacy;<sup>10</sup> his emphasis on the inwardness of faith, and on the indifference of this inwardness to its manifestation in external things; his characterization of faith as an *a priori* form of certainty; his development of the concept of faith along simultaneously apologetic and anti-speculative lines; and his accentuation of the subjective-personal aspect of the faith.<sup>11</sup> The last of these is already evident in the distinction that Kierkegaard draws—responding to an 1833 sermon by Grundtvig—between “immediate, spontaneous faith” and “an intensified faith”<sup>12</sup> that presupposes the individuating moment of personal decision; as well as in Kierkegaard’s presentation of an essential subjectivity that is indispensable for the individual’s faith, an account that derives from a critical encounter with Grundtvig’s so-called “ecclesiastical view” (1835),<sup>13</sup> and which is in keeping with the “theory of subjectivity”<sup>14</sup> that would later emerge in the *Postscript*.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, key elements of Kierkegaard the author’s theory of faith are already contained *in nuce*, or are applied implicitly, in the writings and journal entries of Kierkegaard the student. An example is the idea of the “leap” into faith that appears in notebook entry Not5:23 (1840),<sup>16</sup> when describing the transition from the consciousness of sin to the certainty of the forgiveness of sins, in the course of which a new quality is set.<sup>17</sup> This “free act,”<sup>18</sup> which is linked to the historical fact of the appearance of Christ, and

<sup>10</sup> See Heiko Schulz, “Second Immediacy. A Kierkegaardian Account of Faith,” in *Immediacy and Reflection in Kierkegaard’s Thought*, ed. by Paul Cruysberghs et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 71–86; Gerhard Schreiber, “Kierkegaard’s Account of Faith as ‘The New Immediacy,’” *Filozofia*, vol. 68, 2013, 27–37.

<sup>11</sup> See Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit*, 28–31, 46–53, 58–61, 97–102, 144–161, 216–220, 234–236, 320–335, 340–351.

<sup>12</sup> *SKS* 27, 34, Papir 5:1 / *JP* 5, 5056.

<sup>13</sup> For an account of the development of Grundtvig’s “ecclesiastical view” with regard to his idea of “the living word,” which underwent several modifications or enhancements, see the commentaries (to Kierkegaard’s journal entries NB15:53 and NB26:109) written by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn in *SKS* K23, 80f., and *SKS* K25, 118–120.

<sup>14</sup> *SKS* 7, 50 / *CUP* 1, 45; see also *SKS* 7, 57 f. / *CUP* 1, 53–54.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., *SKS* 27, 105, Papir 70 / *JP* 5, 5090 and *SKS* 27, 112, Papir 91 / *JP* 1, 578.

<sup>16</sup> *SKS* 19, 185f., Not5:23 / *KJN* 3, 181f.

<sup>17</sup> On Kierkegaard’s concept of the leap see Gerhard Schreiber, “Leap,” in *Kierkegaard’s Concepts*, ed. by Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald and Jon Stewart, Tome IV (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014) (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 15), 71–78.

<sup>18</sup> *SKS* 19, 186, Not5:23 / *KJN* 3, 182.

which appears “impossible” and “incomprehensible” to human wisdom and understanding, confronts human beings in the ethical-religious demand “Thou shalt,” as it is described in entry HH:25 (1840–41),<sup>19</sup> and which acquired decisive importance for Kierkegaard’s understanding of faith in his later works.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the peculiar perception that is ascribed to faith in Kierkegaard’s first book *From the Papers of One Still Living* (1838) can be interpreted as a prefiguration of the notion of the “autopsy of faith,” which designates a specific perception of faith that is paradoxically transformative.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the notebook entry Not7:22 (1840)<sup>22</sup> contains an early hint of the *pistological* paradox;<sup>23</sup> whereas traces are entirely lacking of the *Christological* paradox of incarnation in the young Kierkegaard, as is evident in the juxtaposition of Socrates and Christ in the first part of Kierkegaard’s dissertation *On the Concept of Irony* (1841).<sup>24</sup>

Conversely, important aspects of Kierkegaard the author’s theory of faith can only be fully understood as responses to his own early reflections. For example, the key to Kierkegaard’s criticisms of the understanding of faith as “the immediate,” which Kierkegaard uses as a negative foil for his own position in many of his pseudonymous writings without identifying the objects of his critique, is to see them as emerging from his early clashes with J. L. Heiberg (1791–1860) and H. L. Martensen (1808–1884).<sup>25</sup> Another example is the controversy about Hegel’s critique of classical logic that took place in Kierkegaard’s milieu in the late 1830s.<sup>26</sup> The central contributions to that controversy served as the backdrop not only to Kierkegaard’s refer-

<sup>19</sup> SKS 18, 138f., HH:25 / KJN 2, 129f.

<sup>20</sup> See Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit*, 306–319.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, 225–233 and 243–248.

<sup>22</sup> SKS 19, 211, Not7:22 / KJN 3, 207.

<sup>23</sup> See Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit*, 335–349.

<sup>24</sup> See Schreiber, “On the Origins,” 315–322.

<sup>25</sup> See Gerhard Schreiber, “The Real Targets of Kierkegaard’s Critique of Characterizing Faith as ‘the Immediate,’” in *Kierkegaard: East and West*, ed. by Roman Králik et al. (Toronto: Kierkegaard Circle, University of Toronto 2011) (*Acta Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 5), 137–167.

<sup>26</sup> See Jon Stewart, “Introduction: The Debate Surrounding Hegel’s Criticism of the Laws of Classical Logic in Golden Age Denmark,” in *Mynster’s “Rationalism, Supernaturalism” and the Debate about Mediation*, trans. and ed. by Jon Stewart (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009) (*Texts from Golden Age Denmark*, vol. 5), 3–45; István Czakó, “Das Problem des Glaubens und der Geschichte in der Philosophie Kierkegaards und Karl Jaspers,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2000, 373–382; István Czakó, “Das Unbekannte. Die Aufhebung der klassischen theologia naturalis in der negativen Theologie des Johannes Climacus,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2004, 235–249.

ences to and criticism of "mediation," but also and especially to his contrasting of (the idea of) "mediation" and the (absolute) paradox of faith in *Fear and Trembling* and the Climacus writings.<sup>27</sup>

It is only when the young Kierkegaard's intellectual development is taken into account that both Kierkegaard's critique of the understanding of faith as "the immediate" and his protest against applying the "idea of mediation" to Christological dogma can be understood in their true intention and thrust. When this is done, it becomes clear that Kierkegaard's position in both contexts is a reaction to certain philosophical-theological discussions in his local environment. In other words, the targets of his critique are not to be found in far-off Germany, but in Copenhagen. Accordingly, the fact that Kierkegaard is commonly stylized as Hegel's "polar opposite" is at the very least questionable, particularly since Kierkegaard's own reception of Hegel during his student years was fundamentally productive; although before he took his theological examination, his acquaintance with Hegelian philosophy was mainly secondhand.<sup>28</sup> In any case, the fact that investigating Kierkegaard the student can contribute to a better understanding of Kierkegaard the author is further illustrated by Kierkegaard's condemnation of the philosophical "volatilization" of central Christian concepts. The background and origin of this condemnation—which Kierkegaard directed above all against Philipp K. Marheineke (1780–1846),<sup>29</sup> but also, particularly in his *Book on Adler* (ca. June 1846–November 1847), against Hegelian philosophy in general<sup>30</sup>—was Kierkegaard's critical encounter in 1837 with the younger Fichte (Immanuel Hermann Fichte [1796–1879]).<sup>31</sup> In that context, the "volatilization" of the concept of faith means its improper use in a philosophical context—improper because the concept is here given only an everyday or ordi-

<sup>27</sup> See Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit*, 270–297.

<sup>28</sup> See Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90–131; Jon Stewart, "Hegel: Kierkegaard's Reading and Use of Hegel's Primary Texts," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007) (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 6), 97–165 as well as Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit*, 106–130.

<sup>29</sup> See Heiko Schulz, "Marheineke: The Volatilization of Christian Doctrine," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007) (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 6), 117–142.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., *SKS* 15, 258f. / *BA*, 103; *SKS* 15, 276f. / *BA*, 118.

<sup>31</sup> See Gerhard Schreiber, "Die philosophische Verflüchtigung des Glaubensbegriffs. Kierkegaards Auseinandersetzung mit Immanuel Hermann Fichte," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2013, 345–376.

nary meaning, emptied of its specific Christian content, so that its Christian *proprium* is no longer recognizable.

In psychological terms, what is unique about Christian faith is its *a priori* mode of certainty. *A priori* certainty is the nexus at which the young Kierkegaard's various statements about faith converge, though it should be noted that these early statements center on faith as an *act* (*fides qua*), rather than on its propositional *content* (*fides quae*). Rather, as an expression for the "transubstantiation of experience"<sup>32</sup> in/of pre-eschatic reality, this certainty of communion with Christ—which can no longer be shaken by happiness, guilt, and/or suffering—is radically different from the self-certainty of reason, or other empirical certainties. This communion with Christ, of which the believer is certain, *is* a reality on the part of God, and *will become* reality on part of individuals in faith. It is (only) already present in and with the act of faith, even though, in this world, it is also always conceived as still in the process of becoming. For this reason, faith is "victory over the world, and yet it is a struggle."<sup>33</sup> The *a priori* certainty of faith—a certainty that faith does not create or possess, but itself *is*—is neither an objectless state and thus a groundless one, nor is it a certainty founded solely on subjective experience, and so ultimately an unfounded one. Rather, the *a priori* certainty of faith is certainty about the reality of the reconciliation that, *in principle*, has already been accomplished in Christ, and which is now to be attained by the believer by reenactment. As such, the *a priori* certainty of faith is in fact also an expression for the human being's own "ec-centric existence,"<sup>34</sup> which is neither the ground for his own self nor the ground of this certainty.

Faith is directed toward a reality that cannot be experienced as an object of natural experience, but only in faith's peculiar mode of perception. This is why the experience of faith is an experience of *another* kind: "a deeper experience" [*en dybere Empirie*].<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, *a priori* faith and life experience do not necessarily exclude one another, since belief that is not based on experience is *itself* the ground of experience. After Kierkegaard had made this realization himself—coming to grasp the relation between *a priori* faith and life experience, which he had initially regarded as an opposed relation, as a constructive one instead—he proceeded to conclude that the certainty of

<sup>32</sup> SKS 1, 32 / EPW, 76.

<sup>33</sup> SKS 1, 349 / CI, 319.

<sup>34</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens* (6<sup>th</sup> ed., Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011 [1998]), 206.

<sup>35</sup> SKS 1, 32 / EPW, 76.

faith that is *unconditioned* by experience is, precisely thereby, a certainty that *conditions* experience; as in his 1841 trial sermon,<sup>36</sup> in which he characterized the certainty of faith as the precondition for the active shaping of the world and the positive impetus for a Christian's action in the world as "God's coworker."<sup>37</sup> Here, in the practical consequences for life that he is able to draw from faith's certainty, the robustness of Kierkegaard's understanding of faith is evident. Although the *a priori* certainty of faith has its ground beyond the human self, it does not lead to an abandonment of the world, but rather makes possible man's positive freedom in relation to the given reality. Still, the Yes that faith speaks to the world is not an absolute and unreserved Yes, but a Yes that has passed through the cathartic No of resignation: it is a *differentiated* Yes.

## II. FROM A POSITIVE TO A NEGATIVE RELATION OF FAITH TO REALITY

This positive relationship between the believer and this-worldly reality—as it is explicated in Kierkegaard's *From the Papers of One Still Living*,<sup>38</sup> as well as in *The Concept of Irony*,<sup>39</sup> as the result of a certain interrelationship with reality that contains negation as a suspended moment—was essential for Kierkegaard's understanding of faith until the publication of *Fear and Trembling*, which appeared in Copenhagen bookshops on October 16, 1843, together with *Repetition* and the *Three Upbuilding Discourses* (1843), and which was mainly prepared, according to the editors of *SKS*, in June 1843.<sup>40</sup> In what Johannes *de silentio* describes as the "double-movement"<sup>41</sup> of faith, the movement of infinite resignation—understood as the renunciation of some irreplaceable finite thing by one's own power—is followed by the movement of faith in the narrower sense, in or through which the believer regains that same finite thing "by virtue of the absurd."<sup>42</sup> This double

<sup>36</sup> *SKS* 27, 245–257, Papir 270 / *JP* 4, 3915.

<sup>37</sup> *SKS* 27, 254, Papir 270 / *JP* 4, 3915, 53; see also Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit*, 340–352.

<sup>38</sup> See *SKS* 1, 21–25 / *EPW*, 65–69 together with Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit*, 225–236.

<sup>39</sup> See *SKS* 1, 135 / *CI*, 76; *SKS* 1, 296 / *CI*, 257f.; *SKS* 1, 310 / *CI*, 274; *SKS* 1, 316 / *CI*, 279; *SKS* 1, 349 / *CI*, 318f. and *SKS* 1, 357 / *CI*, 328f. together with Schreiber, *Apriorische Gewissheit*, 392–398.

<sup>40</sup> See the *SKS* editors' critical account of *Fear and Trembling* in *SKS* K4, 97.

<sup>41</sup> *SKS* 4, 131 / *FT*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

movement of faith thus consists, in general terms, first of losing "everything finite,"<sup>43</sup> "and then to win the very same finitude again by virtue of the absurd."<sup>44</sup> The Knight of Faith "finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything,"<sup>45</sup> and yet at every moment he makes the movement of infinity, accomplishing even the very least thing "by virtue of the absurd:"

He drains the deep sadness of life in infinite resignation, 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. And yet, yet the whole earthly figure he presents is a new creation by virtue of the absurd. He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd. 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.<sup>46</sup>

A paradigm of such faith is Abraham. His faith was not merely directed toward a future, otherworldly life, but he "had faith specifically for this life."<sup>47</sup> Inasmuch as Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac, he seems to give up hope of a happy earthly life. But by believing in and holding fast, with unbroken trust, to the promise for *this* life that he was given by God, he receives Isaac and his earthly happiness again "by virtue of the absurd" (i.e., "that God, who required it of him, should in the next moment rescind the requirement"<sup>48</sup>): "[I]t is great to lay hold of the eternal, but it is greater to hold fast to the temporal after having given it up."<sup>49</sup>

The "life-renewing meaning"<sup>50</sup> of this "faith directed at something temporal"<sup>51</sup> also appears in several journal entries from the early summer of

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> SKS 4, 132 / FT, 36.

<sup>45</sup> SKS 4, 134 / FT, 39.

<sup>46</sup> SKS 4, 135 / FT, 40f.

<sup>47</sup> SKS 4, 116 / FT, 20.

<sup>48</sup> SKS 4, 131 / FT, 35f.

<sup>49</sup> SKS 4, 115 / FT, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Kristoffer Olesen Larsen, "Über den Paradoxbegriff. 2. Seine Entstehung nach den 'Papieren,'" in his *Søren Kierkegaard. Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1973), 15–33, 27.

<sup>51</sup> According to Emanuel Hirsch in *Søren Kierkegaard. Furcht und Zittern* (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Diederichs, 1950) (vol. 3 of *Søren Kierkegaard. Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 1–27, trans. and ed. by Emanuel Hirsch, Hayo Gerdes and Hans Martin Junghans (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Diederichs, 1950–69)), 145 (note 18).

1843. Journal entry JJ:116, which was written in Berlin in mid-May, contains the following passage: "Faith therefore has hopes for this life, but, be it noted, on the strength of the absurd, not on the strength of hum[an] understanding, otherwise it is only good sense, not faith."<sup>52</sup> Therefore, as Kierkegaard concludes in the next entry, faith is also "what the Greeks called div.[ine] madness,"<sup>53</sup> a faith whose hope defies human understanding and calculation while also having man's everyday reality as its point of reference.<sup>54</sup> Remarkably, Kierkegaard applies this "basically 'optimistic' faith that man is given back anew as a gift that which he has voluntarily given up,"<sup>55</sup> a faith sometimes referred to as "Abrahamic faith,"<sup>56</sup> to his own relationship with his former fiancée Regine Olsen (1822-1904). At the start of journal entry JJ:115, which was also written in Berlin in mid-May, and which was later overwritten in the manuscript with dense bows of ink by Kierkegaard's hand, it is stated frankly: "Had I faith I would have stayed with Regine. Praise and thanks be to God, I have now understood it."<sup>57</sup> His sin was, as Kierkegaard writes elsewhere, that he had no faith—"faith that for God all things are possible,"<sup>58</sup> and that "at this very instant[, God] could make everything good."<sup>59</sup>

Journal entry JJ:146, which may have been written in August 1843, but was certainly written after July 1843, provides the first indication that Kierkegaard had begun to distance himself from this belief:

That is what is difficult about having both the O.[ld] and the N.[ew] Testaments, because the O. has entirely different categories. For what would the NT say about a faith that believes that things should go very well for it in the world, in the temporal sphere, instead of giving this up to grasp the eternal? This is the source of the erratic nature of ecclesiasti-

<sup>52</sup> SKS 18, 179, JJ:116 / KJN 2, 166.

<sup>53</sup> SKS 18, 179, JJ:117 / KJN 2, 166.

<sup>54</sup> See SKS 18, 181, JJ:124 / KJN 2, 168.

<sup>55</sup> Ulrich Klenke, *Denken und Glaube beim jungen Kierkegaard. Kritische Strukturanalyse seiner Grundlegung der dialektischen Wahrheitsbestimmungen humaner und christlicher Existenz* (Dissertation, University of Münster, 1969), 64.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Hayo Gerdes, *Das Christusverständnis des jungen Kierkegaard. Ein Beitrag zur Erläuterung des Paradox-Gedankens* (Itzehoe: Die Spur, 1962), 29; Klenke, *Denken und Glaube beim jungen Kierkegaard*, 27, 31f. and 40; and Emanuel Hirsch, *Kierkegaard-Studien* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1933), 650 (continuous pagination).

<sup>57</sup> SKS 18, 177, JJ:115 / KJN 2, 164.

<sup>58</sup> SKS 19, 231, Not8:20 / KJN 3, 226.

<sup>59</sup> SKS 18, 184, JJ:138 / KJN 2, 170.

cal discourse, all according to whether the O. or the NT is transparent within it.<sup>60</sup>

Here, for the first time in his authorship, Kierkegaard takes the view that the Old and New Testaments are in a relationship of mutual antagonism, such that Old Testament faith is oriented toward this world, while an orientation toward the next world is characteristic of New Testament faith.<sup>61</sup> This view is the first articulation of an insight that would become ever more definitive for Kierkegaard, to the effect that Christian faith is *not* the hope of a happy earthly life, but rather fundamentally presupposes the renunciation of temporal life as preparation for eternal life. "For Kierkegaard, the path of 'Christian faith' still leads through resignation's 'Bridge of Sighs'; but this path does not lead back to the joy of life, but rather into 'religious' suffering."<sup>62</sup>

### III. ON THE BACKGROUND TO THE REVOCATION OF "ABRAHAMIC FAITH"

As background for this change in Kierkegaard's understanding of faith, which occurred in the summer of 1843, various Kierkegaard researchers<sup>63</sup> refer to Regine Olsen's engagement to another man—an event that, as Hayo Gerdes (1928-1981) put it, "with its staggering effect on Kierkegaard, helped him to reach the insight...that true Christian faith [consists of] hope of the eternal, and thereby renunciation of the world."<sup>64</sup> Although Gerdes locates the earliest "documentary evidence"<sup>65</sup> for Kierkegaard's revocation of "Abrahamic faith" in "the 'retraction' of the Abraham story"<sup>66</sup> found in journal entry NB28:41 from about mid-1853,<sup>67</sup> entitled "New 'Fear and Trem-

<sup>60</sup> SKS 18, 188, JJ:146 / KJN 2, 174.

<sup>61</sup> On Kierkegaard's (religiously grounded) criticism of the Old Testament and Old Testament faith, see Gerdes, *Das Christusverständnis des jungen Kierkegaard*, 29-36; Emanuel Hirsch, "Das Alte Testament und die Predigt des Evangeliums" (1936), in his *Das Alte Testament und die Predigt des Evangeliums. Mit anderen Arbeiten Emanuel Hirschs zum Alten Testament*, ed. by Hans Martin Müller (Tübingen: Katzmann and Goslar: Thuhoff, 1986), 33-126.

<sup>62</sup> Klenke, *Denken und Glaube beim jungen Kierkegaard*, 32.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., Hirsch, *Kierkegaard-Studien*, 642; Gerdes, *Das Christusverständnis des jungen Kierkegaard*, 30 and 32, Klenke, *Denken und Glaube beim jungen Kierkegaard*, 31f. and 64f.

<sup>64</sup> According to Gerdes in *Søren Kierkegaard. Die Tagebücher*, vols. 1-5, selected, trans. and ed. by Hayo Gerdes (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Diederichs, 1962-74), vol. 1, 409 (note 862).

<sup>65</sup> Gerdes, *Das Christusverständnis des jungen Kierkegaard*, 29.

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

<sup>67</sup> See SKS 25, 248f., NB28:41 / KJN 9, 250f.

bling," which contains a tale in which Abraham actually carries out the sacrifice of Isaac—he holds that Kierkegaard's "break"<sup>68</sup> with such faith took place some ten years earlier, when Kierkegaard—"probably in July 1843"<sup>69</sup>—learned of Regine's new engagement:

While in the midst of working on the pair of books *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, Kierkegaard learned of the second engagement of his former bride. In the final months of their engagement, Regine had made Kierkegaard swear to remain with her, both by appealing to his father's memory and by threatening that she would not survive the dissolution of the engagement. And after the break, all of Kierkegaard's actions and feelings were under the influence of these oaths and the hope of regaining Regine "by virtue of the absurd." Now, however, he surely perceived the implacable reality of Regine's engagement as an irony annihilating the whole holy sincerity of his concern for her—and the understanding of faith bound up in this.<sup>70</sup>

Because and in light of Regine's new engagement, respectively, Kierkegaard not only came to see "Abrahamic faith" as "a false belief...based on a selfish hope for the earthly, unmasked by reality itself,"<sup>71</sup> but also—as was first and foremost claimed by Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972)—reworked the books *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* accordingly, and only then composed his *Three Upbuilding Discourses* (1843) as a "true and decisive correction of both works."<sup>72</sup>

This cannot be the place to examine the correctness of this assumption in detail. It should be noted, however, that Regine Olsen and Johan Frederik Schlegel (1817-1896) did not actually become engaged until August 28, 1843 (!)<sup>73</sup>—a fact that militates not only against the above assumption, but also against the account of the genesis of *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* in the *SKS* edition.<sup>74</sup> It is thus not at all certain that journal entry JJ:146, as the first indication of Kierkegaard's distancing from "Abrahamic faith," presupposes knowledge of Regine's second engagement, nor that Kierkegaard

<sup>68</sup> Gerdes, *Das Christusverständnis des jungen Kierkegaard*, 29.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 81 (note 7).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>72</sup> According to Hirsch in his introduction to *Furcht und Zittern* (see note 51 above), VII-XIII, X; see also his *Kierkegaard-Studien*, 649ff.

<sup>73</sup> See Kirsten Boas, "Regines ring," *Kristeligt Dagblad*, May 2, 2003; Ejnar Hauberg, "Regines anden ring," *Kristeligt Dagblad*, May 26, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> See *SKS* K4, 83-97 (*Tilblivelseshistorie*).

rewrote the double-work *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* for this reason. The latter assumption can no longer be supported, at least not on the basis of the account of the genesis of these two books that has been generally accepted.

Whatever may have brought about this change in Kierkegaard's understanding of faith, it is a matter of importance that, until the publication of the *Postscript*, it is faith as "the inner certainty that anticipates infinity"<sup>75</sup> (as it is described in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) with reference to G. W. F. Hegel) and "the religious suffering," respectively, that are established as "the expression for the relationship with God" and "the sign of the relationship with God," respectively,<sup>76</sup> in the (or, more accurately, in such an) inwardness of the human being, but bearing no outward marks. Even within the *Postscript*, the suffering of inwardness—the "dying to immediacy,"<sup>77</sup> as is essential to immanent religiosity (A)—is primarily understood as  $\pi\alpha\theta\epsilon\iota\nu$ , in the sense of "letting oneself be overcome,"<sup>78</sup> i.e., the transformation of one's own existence, as is evident not least in Kierkegaard's criticism of the "monastic movement of the Middle Ages."<sup>79</sup> This relation of incommensurability between (religious) inwardness and outwardness manifests itself above all in *Fear and Trembling*, where the Knight of Faith, who performs the "double-movement" of faith at every moment, is outwardly absorbed completely in reality. No outward mark betrays him, which is why he can easily deceive by his appearance, and resemble a man of the petty bourgeoisie, his gait like that of a postman.<sup>80</sup> The point, then, is "[t]o exist [*existere*] in such a way that my contrast to existence constantly expresses itself as the most beautiful and secure harmony with it."<sup>81</sup>

It is precisely on this point, the question of the *outward expression* of religious inwardness, that the *Postscript* emerges as a turning point. In *Fear and Trembling*, the inwardness of faith is characterized as an incommensurate "new interiority"<sup>82</sup> for which there can be no adequate outward expres-

<sup>75</sup> SKS 4, 456 / CA, 157.

<sup>76</sup> SKS 7, 412 / CUP1, 453.

<sup>77</sup> SKS 7, 392 / CUP1, 431 et passim.

<sup>78</sup> Dorothea Glöckner, *Kierkegaards Begriff der Wiederholung. Eine Studie zu seinem Freiheitsverständnis* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1998) (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 3), 71.

<sup>79</sup> SKS 7, 352 / CUP1, 387 (emphasis removed).

<sup>80</sup> See SKS 4, 133f. / FT, 38f.

<sup>81</sup> SKS 4, 144 / FT, 50.

<sup>82</sup> SKS 4, 161 / FT, 69.

sion, but merely a “paradoxical expression”<sup>83</sup> *sub contrario specie*. By contrast, in his late works—beginning with his Easter entries from 1848—Kierkegaard wished to interpret just such a “religiousness of hidden inwardness”<sup>84</sup> marked by invisibility (as was first mentioned in the trial sermon of 1841, and which represents the climax<sup>85</sup> of Religiousness A in the *Postscript*) as characteristic of Christendom’s volatilization of the truth of Christianity. Between the early and late works stands the “effort” that emerges in the *Postscript* “to keep the hidden inwardness separate from the external,” but at the same time to reinforce the inwardness in the paradoxical religiousness of Religiousness B, “to strengthen it to the point where it can no longer remain in the medium in which it is to be held captive.”<sup>86</sup> This “paradoxical inwardness,” which marks the breach with “the hidden immanence of the eternal”<sup>87</sup> by its relation to the “absolute paradox” of the God-man, which it encounters as a historical fact, “is the greatest possible”<sup>88</sup> form of inwardness and *differentia specifica* of what is Christian by contrast to “all other inwardness;”<sup>89</sup> but it is ultimately not viable without a (corresponding) external outward-expression.

Whereas faith is still defined in the Climacus writings as the passion in which “the understanding and the paradoxical happily encounter each other in the moment,”<sup>90</sup> in Kierkegaard’s late works this passion of faith, as “an infinite interest in one’s own eternal happiness,”<sup>91</sup> crystallizes ever more clearly as a passion that generates suffering, and at that not merely “suffering...in their inner beings,” i.e., in the inner world [*i det Indvortes*],<sup>92</sup> but suffering in the outer world, in the imitation of Christ. “The Christianity of

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<sup>83</sup> SKS 4, 162 / FT, 70.

<sup>84</sup> SKS 7, 486 / CUP1, 510.

<sup>85</sup> See Wolfgang Struve, “Die neuzeitliche Philosophie als Metaphysik der Subjektivität. Interpretationen zu Kierkegaard und Nietzsche,” *Symposion. Jahrbuch für Philosophie*, vol. 1, 1948, 207–335, 271.

<sup>86</sup> Hermann Deuser, “Bekenntnis und Handlung—nach Søren Kierkegaard,” in his *Was ist Wahrheit anderes als ein Leben für eine Idee? Kierkegaards Existenzdenken und die Inspiration des Pragmatismus. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Markus Kleinert (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 25–39, 35.

<sup>87</sup> SKS 7, 520 / CUP1, 571.

<sup>88</sup> SKS 7, 520 / CUP1, 572.

<sup>89</sup> SKS 7, 554 / CUP1, 610.

<sup>90</sup> SKS 4, 261 / PF, 59.

<sup>91</sup> SKS 7, 31 / CUP1, 24.

<sup>92</sup> SKS 7, 399 / CUP1, 439.

hidden inwardness is replaced by the Christianity of imitating the Lord.<sup>93</sup> This is especially evident in the section entitled “Christ as the Prototype” of the manuscript of *Judge for Yourself! For Self-Examination, Recommended to the Present Age*, which was mainly written between the autumn of 1851 and the middle of 1852:

Christ is the prototype, to which corresponds *imitation*. There is really only one true way to be a Christian—to be a disciple. The disciple has among other marks also this: to suffer for the doctrine. Anyone who has not suffered for the doctrine has in one way or another incurred the guilt of using his sagacity to spare himself in a secular way.<sup>94</sup>

Up through the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard had understood the “martyrdom of faith”<sup>95</sup> primarily as an *intellectual* martyrdom, i.e., “faith’s crucifixion of the understanding”<sup>96</sup> in the encounter with the “absolute paradox.” Now, in the writings and journal entries of his late period, Kierkegaard—who referred to his own involvement with the *Corsair* as a “martyrdom of laughter”<sup>97</sup>—occupied himself more and more with the question of martyrdom in the imitation of Christ. An impressive example of Kierkegaard’s struggle with this question and its consequences, not least for himself personally, is found in journal entry NB24:103, from early August 1851:

My most profound doubt, which has now been removed. Oh, when I have heard these millions upon millions speak of the leniency of Xnty: to me it was inconceivable.

This is how it has been with me. Deep down (however much I have in fact been humbled before my Lord and Savior) I have believed that I would have come out of it better if only I had to deal solely with God the Father—that it was precisely “the Mediator” who makes the situation so difficult. For if I have only to deal with God the Father, then no “imitation” [*Efterfølgelse*] is required. And so the situation was like this: If I, a sufferer and as wretched as the most wretched, turn to Xt—and he helps me: What then? Then he says: But then you must imitate me [*følge mig efter*], die away, suffer for the teaching, be hated by all peop[le]—in short,

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<sup>93</sup> According to Gerdes in his introduction to *Søren Kierkegaard. Der Liebe Tun* (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Diederichs, 1966) (vol. 14 in *Søren Kierkegaard. Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 1–27, trans. and ed. by Emanuel Hirsch, Hayo Gerdes and Hans Martin Junghans (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Diederichs, 1950–69)), ix–xii, x.

<sup>94</sup> SKS 16, 252 / JFY, 207.

<sup>95</sup> SKS 7, 508 / CUP1, 559.

<sup>96</sup> SKS 7, 513 / CUP1, 564.

<sup>97</sup> SKS 21, 279, NB10:42 / KJN 5, 289.

agony on a scale such as has never been suffered by any hum. being other than a Xn. But good Lord, to be helped in that way!

Now I understand that imitation is not in fact to be brought to bear in that way, that it is there to keep order, to teach humility and the need for grace, to put a stop to doubt.

Then there is reassurance and blessedness—and then it would not be impossible that a hum. being could be so moved at all this love and feel himself so blessed that for him dying away would become love's joy.

If that moment does not come for a hum. being: well, then there is grace, and as Luther says so excellently, "imitation" must hurl him neither into despair nor into presumptuousness. If the moment does come, then despite all its pain, imitation is a matter of love, and thus is indeed blessed.<sup>98</sup>

Kierkegaard's effort to show state-bourgeois Christendom its gnawing distance from the Christianity of imitating Christ—an endeavor expressed in ever more drastic terms—could not fail to exert an influence on his understanding of faith. In his final years of life, in which Kierkegaard preached "virtually the denial of life,"<sup>99</sup> the inseparable unity of faith and suffering came to the fore in such a way that, in the ninth issue of his journal *The Moment* (1855), which appeared shortly before his death, he regarded "one's willingness to suffer for one's faith"<sup>100</sup> as the only proof of one's faith.

If one does not wish to assume that this breakthrough of religious inwardness *into the outer world*, in the readiness to imitate Christ, that emerges in the period following the *Postscript* is not based *purely* on Kierkegaard's working out the intrinsic consequences of his thinking, then one must ask what else could have given Kierkegaard occasion for this breakthrough—and for his concomitant reevaluation of reality as a reference-point for faith.

#### IV. FACTORS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

If I understand the matter correctly, then temporal coincidence alone indicates two external and two internal factors that may help explain this change. Let us start with the two external factors: Kierkegaard's increasingly tense financial situation; and the *Corsair* affair.

<sup>98</sup> SKS 24, 383f., NB24:103 / KJV 8, 388f.

<sup>99</sup> Walter Ruttenbeck, *Søren Kierkegaard. Der christliche Denker und sein Werk* (Berlin and Frankfurt/Oder: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1929) (*Neue Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche*, vol. 25), 256 (emphasis removed).

<sup>100</sup> SKS 13, 386 / M, 324.

The first mention of Kierkegaard's critical economic situation<sup>101</sup> can be found in journal entry NB:2 from the spring of 1846, which was inscribed on a loose sheet that was glued into the *Journal NB* on the verso side of the flyleaf: "It was only after the publication of the last big book, *Concluding Postscript*, that I dared give myself the time to look around and concern myself with my ext[er]n[a]l existence. My finances no longer permit me to be an author."<sup>102</sup> During the same time, Kierkegaard had the idea of giving up his writing career in order "to become a country priest"<sup>103</sup>—but soon qualified this plan, and finally shelved it at the end of January 1847. Subsequently, Kierkegaard's financial situation worsened to such a degree that in late 1847, he had to sell his parents' home at Nytorv in Copenhagen. This financial insecurity and the question it prompted, as to whether and how his activity as a writer could continue, had profound implications for Kierkegaard's self-image as an author: "I needed economic independence [earlier], but those fortunate circumstances concealed from me, perhaps, the truth: that I am essen.[tially] a poet. Now I've understood it. Now patience."<sup>104</sup>

A second external factor, however, should be regarded as much more important in explaining the shift in Kierkegaard's late work from a world-facing to a world-shunning position, namely, the conflict he himself initiated with the political-satirical weekly *The Corsair*. At the end of Kierkegaard's newspaper article "The Activity of a Traveling Esthetician and How He Still Happened to Pay for the Dinner,"<sup>105</sup> which was published under the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus on December 27, 1845, Kierkegaard requested that he himself soon appear in *The Corsair*, as it was "really hard for a poor author to be so singled out in Danish literature that he ... is the only one who is not abused there."<sup>106</sup> Soon thereafter, and mainly during the first half of 1846, *The Corsair* published a number of satirical articles and cartoons about Kierkegaard. From a current-day perspective, *The Corsair's* treatments seem not truly witty, but also not malicious, but rather inane (among other things, Kierkegaard was depicted in a ridiculous outfit with trousers of different lengths, much too big boots, and an isabelline flower

<sup>101</sup> See Frithiof Brandt and Else Thorkelin, *Søren Kierkegaard og pengene*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Copenhagen: Spektrum, 1993 [1935]), 86–90.

<sup>102</sup> SKS 20, 10, NB:2 / KJN 4, 6.

<sup>103</sup> SKS 20, 52, NB:57 / KJN 4, 50.

<sup>104</sup> SKS 21, 359, NB10:192 / KJN 6, 371.

<sup>105</sup> See SKS 14, 79–84 / COR, 38–46.

<sup>106</sup> SKS 14, 84 / COR, 46.

with two unequal stems presented as "Beauty of Kierkegaard"<sup>107</sup>). For Kierkegaard himself, however, the ridicule with which his contemporaries treated him came to be increasingly unbearable.

This feud with *The Corsair*, which Kierkegaard carried on almost exclusively within the privacy of his journals and notebooks,<sup>108</sup> left him with a deep aversion to "the daily press"<sup>109</sup> as "the evil principle in the modern world,"<sup>110</sup> as well as to the mob behavior<sup>111</sup> of "the crowd,"<sup>112</sup> as his journals from that period eloquently attest. Added to this was the weariness he felt at being a misunderstood genius "in a country as small as Denmark;"<sup>113</sup> even worse, at having to eke out a marginal existence as a "half-crazy oddball"<sup>114</sup> in such a "provincial town"<sup>115</sup> as Copenhagen. In the course of this debate, Kierkegaard withdrew more and more from the public into his existence as a "single individual," and so into a position opposed to society as an expression of the universal. This problematic and conflict-laden relationship with his contemporaries, including his church superiors, also left a lasting mark on Kierkegaard's further intellectual development, and did not fail to influence his account of the relationship between Christianity and the world in general<sup>116</sup> and that of faith and reality in particular.

Aggravating these two external factors was the fact that, during the period following 1846, Kierkegaard either rediscovered afresh, or discovered for the first time, a number of other thinkers, such as Abraham a Sancta Clara (1644–1709)<sup>117</sup> and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860),<sup>118</sup> respective-

<sup>107</sup> "Catalog over et rigt og betydeligt Udvalg af de nyeste og smukkeste Pragt-Georginer, (Dadalisser) disponible i Aaret 1846, bestemte til at udstilles Tid efter anden i 'Corsarens' Blomsterhave," *Corsaren*, 1846, no. 289 (April 3), column 13.

<sup>108</sup> For Kierkegaard's reasons, see *SKS* 20, 154, NB2:34 / *KJN* 4, 152.

<sup>109</sup> See *SKS* 20, 128, NB:215 / *KJN* 4, 127 et passim.

<sup>110</sup> *SKS* 20, 152, NB2:29 / *KJN* 4, 150.

<sup>111</sup> See *SKS* 20, 16, NB:7 / *KJN* 4, 12 et passim.

<sup>112</sup> *SKS* 20, 128, NB:215 / *KJN* 4, 126 et passim.

<sup>113</sup> *SKS* 20, 17, NB:7 / *KJN* 4, 14.

<sup>114</sup> *SKS* 20, 401, NB5:69 / *KJN* 4, 402.

<sup>115</sup> See, e.g., *SKS* 20, 117, NB:194 / *KJN* 4, 117.

<sup>116</sup> See *SKS* 22, 221, NB12:131 / *KJN* 6, 222.

<sup>117</sup> See Peter Šajda, "Abraham a Sancta Clara: An Aphoristic Encyclopedia of Christian Wisdom," in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions*, Tome II, *Theology*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 5), 1–20.

<sup>118</sup> See Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "Historical Introduction: When and Why Did Kierkegaard Begin Reading Schopenhauer," in *Schopenhauer-Kierkegaard. Von der Metaphysik des Willens zur Philosophie der Existenz*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Lore Hühn, Søren K. Fauth,

ly—and was also occupied intensely with works of Christian edification, as well as with Martin Luther (1483–1546). These interests should be regarded as *internal* factors for the shift described above.

Much as Pietism (chiefly in the form of the Moravian Brethren in Copenhagen) bore an importance for the Kierkegaard family that is scarcely to be underestimated,<sup>119</sup> for Kierkegaard himself, as Christopher Barnett has shown,<sup>120</sup> the study of the edifying literature of late medieval mysticism and its Pietistic recipients gave him a powerful impetus to reconsider anew the relation between Christianity and secular society.<sup>121</sup> According to Barnett,<sup>122</sup> this is already evident in the contrast between Kierkegaard's critique of the monastic movement in the *Postscript* and his critique of the "present age" in the third section of *A Literary Review* (1846): "Whereas the *Postscript* argues that authentic religious existence is primarily a matter of 'hidden inwardness' ... *A Literary Review* shows Kierkegaard reworking this conclusion in light of the ills of modern secularity."<sup>123</sup> To Barnett, the view expressed in *A Literary Review* that the present age needs no religiosity of "hidden inwardness," but rather "a religiousness of suffering servanthood,"<sup>124</sup> is a crucial precursor to the reception of the thought of *imitatio Christi* in Kierkegaard's late work. The latter represents not merely the "key aspect"<sup>125</sup> of Christian edification literature, but also Kierkegaard's "most significant debt to the Pietist tradition."<sup>126</sup>

However, it should be noted that in his published writings, it is not until *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847) that Kierkegaard speaks of Christ as the "paradigm," or of "the imitation of Christ" (and its theological consequences); and apart from a few earlier passages,<sup>127</sup> it is not until 1849 that both motifs regularly recur in his journals and notebooks. If it is true

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and Philipp Schwab (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012) (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 26), 19–32.

<sup>119</sup> See Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 28–35.

<sup>120</sup> Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011); see my review in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, vol. 137, 2012, columns 451f.

<sup>121</sup> See Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 111–168.

<sup>122</sup> See *SKS* 8, 66–73 / *TA*, 68–76.

<sup>123</sup> Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 141.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>127</sup> For what may be the earliest such reference, see the marginal note *SKS* 20, 227, NB2:227a / *KJN* 4, 227 (1847).

that—as Barnett concludes on the basis of vanishingly few documents, compared to what is available from after 1847—Kierkegaard was “obviously intimate with the *Erbauungsliteratur* tradition”<sup>128</sup> from his *youth*, why, then, do we first find his reception of the thought of *imitatio Christi* only during this later period? On the other hand, if, as Kierkegaard’s journals and notebooks indicate, an intensified devotion to the Christian edification literature did not really begin until *after* 1846, then it may be considered probable that it is Kierkegaard’s experiences with the *Corsair* that serve as background not only to this later occupation with the edification literature, but also to his reception of the thought of *imitatio Christi* in his literary works focusing on the requirement of Christianity. In the words of Hermann Deuser:

That he, as a single individual, attracted vicarious mockery and scorn, and the crowd enjoyed what the good citizens and the clergy simultaneously took the dark pleasure of *Schadenfreude* in—a theme found irrevocably, in infinite variations, throughout the entire corpus of diary entries produced with his late works!—this increasingly assumes Christological significance, forcing him to draw the conclusion: “But there is one thing I have learned: the authentic Christian collision. This collision was not originally part of my stock and it is only thanks to the conflict with the masses that I have it. My collision is the genuinely Christian one: I am persecuted—because of having been well-intentioned.”<sup>129</sup>

The *Corsair* affair led Kierkegaard to the conclusion that a true Christian does not blend in invisibly, in “hidden inwardness,” into the reality of the established order, nor does he distinguish himself from the established order merely externally; but rather, “*contrary* to the nature of the established order, [he] gives ethical expression to the *antithesis* of Christian and world in [his] perceptible form of life.”<sup>130</sup> Once his earlier basic conviction that “hidden inwardness” was the place of true faith foundered, it became clear to Kierkegaard “that true faith, purely as such, is in collision with the established order and with the imitation of the Lord.”<sup>131</sup> In the writings, journal

<sup>128</sup> Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 78 (note 99).

<sup>129</sup> Hermann Deuser, “Kierkegaards Spätwerk als dialektische Theologie,” in his *Was ist Wahrheit anderes als ein Leben für eine Idee?* (see note 86 above), 3–24, 11f. The Kierkegaard quotation originates from SKS 21, 346, NB10:177 / KJN 4, 358.

<sup>130</sup> Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens*, vols. 1–5 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1949–54); vol. 5, 441 (emphases mine).

<sup>131</sup> According to Gerdes in his introduction to *Søren Kierkegaard. Das Buch über Adler* (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Diederichs, 1962) (vol. 26 of *Søren Kierkegaard. Gesammelte Werke*,

entries, and notes of his late period, Kierkegaard is anxiously preoccupied with “the ideal of the martyrdom of Christian imitation”<sup>132</sup>—without, however, “arguing for an undialectical [form of] martyrdom,”<sup>133</sup> despite certain appearances; for “even if Kierkegaard claims ever so strongly that the inward mind cannot shy away from outward suffering, and even if he makes such suffering the very condition of true inwardness, he is nonetheless still bringing the self-sacrifice of martyrdom *into* his theory of inwardness.”<sup>134</sup>

## V. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LUTHER

It must therefore be regarded as probable that Kierkegaard’s engagement with Christian edification literature was motivated by his painful experiences with the *Corsair*, and that this led to his reception of the idea of *imitatio Christi* in his later works. However, another internal factor must also be taken into account, one that did not remain without influence on Kierkegaard’s “Proclamation of the strict imitation Christianity,”<sup>135</sup> and which, interestingly enough, *accompanied* his reading of the edification literature: namely, Kierkegaard’s intensive study of Luther.<sup>136</sup>

Kierkegaard drew his knowledge of Luther “essentially”<sup>137</sup> from Luther’s sermons, as translated into Danish by Jørgen Overgaard Thisted (1795–1855) in his edition of Luther’s church and house postils,<sup>138</sup> though it

vols. 1–27, trans. and ed. by Emanuel Hirsch, Hayo Gerdes and Hans Martin Junghans (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Diederichs, 1950–69), ix–xxiv, xix.

<sup>132</sup> Deuser, “Kierkegaards Spätwerk als dialektische Theologie,” 11.

<sup>133</sup> Friedrich Hauschildt, *Die Ethik Søren Kierkegaards* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1982) (*Studien zur evangelischen Ethik*, vol. 15), 215.

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

<sup>135</sup> Hermann Deuser, “Die Taten der Liebe: Kierkegaards wirkliche Ethik,” in his *Was ist Wahrheit anderes als ein Leben für eine Idee?* (see note 86 above), 106–126, 119.

<sup>136</sup> See Gerhard Schreiber, “Sieg über die Welt? Glaube und Wirklichkeit bei Kierkegaard und die Bedeutung Luthers für sein Verständnis der *imitatio Christi*,” in *Christliche Existenz heute. Zur Gegenwartsbedeutung der Theologie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. by Christine Axt-Piscalar and Mareile Lasogga (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 119–183.

<sup>137</sup> According to Gerdes in *Søren Kierkegaard. Die Tagebücher* (see note 64 above), vol. 2, 262 (note 186). On this see Hermann Diem, *Die Existenzdialektik von Søren Kierkegaard* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1950), 156.

<sup>138</sup> Martin Luther, *En christelig Postille, sammendragen af Dr. Morten Luthers Kirke- og Huuspostiller*, trans. by Jørgen Thisted, vols. 1–2 (Christiania: Selskabets Forlag, 1828). Thisted’s translation is based on the selection edited by Benjamin Lindner, *Kraft- und Saftvoller Kern der evangelischen Wahrheiten aus der Kirchen- und denen beyden Haus-Postillen des seligen Herrn D. Martini Lutheri sorgfältig heraus gesucht, Mit nöthigen und nützlichen Registern*

was not until the spring of 1848 that Kierkegaard read the sermons regularly, and indeed "in regular rotation,"<sup>139</sup> for his own edification. When considering the influence of Luther on Kierkegaard's reception of the idea of *imitatio Christi*, what is of more importance than Luther's *sermons* themselves is his "Preface" to the Church Postil of 1522,<sup>140</sup> with which Thisted begins his edition—the text in which Luther first expressly distinguishes between Christ as *gift* and as *example*. In his journals during the period from March 1849 to January 1852 alone, Kierkegaard refers a full eight times to this preface.<sup>141</sup> And in the course of analyzing the distinction drawn there, Kierkegaard arrives not only at a deeper understanding of the idea of *imitatio Christi*, but also at a clarification of his own position.

While his initial reaction to Luther's preface was critical and hostile,<sup>142</sup> Kierkegaard would soon qualify his criticism, and focus more on the context of Luther's position as a polemic against "the error of the Middle Ages, meritoriousness."<sup>143</sup> He writes,

What Luther says in the preface to the *Postil* about the difference betw.[een] Christ as example and as gift is quite correct. I am also well aware that I have tended in the direction of Christ as example. But in this connection something must be borne in mind. Luther was confronted by the exaggerated misuse of Christ as example, and he therefore emphasizes the opposite. But nowadays Luther has long since triumphed in Protestantism and has caused Christ to be entirely forgotten as an exemplar, and the whole business has r[ea]lly become a pretense about hidden inwardness. Furthermore, I have also been of the opinion that as example Christ must be used in a different manner than that act[ua]lly contemplated by Luther or the Middle Ages. As example Christ must in fact jack up the price so frightfully that the prototype is the very thing that teaches hum.[an] beings to take refuge in grace. The error of the Middle Ages consisted in imagining that it was possible to resemble Christ.

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*verseben*, vols. 1–3, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (S[a]alfeld and Leipzig: Zu Commission bey Joh. Michael Teubner, 1754).

<sup>139</sup> *SKS* 20, 349, NB4:126 / *KJN* 4, 349.

<sup>140</sup> See "Dr. Morten Luther's Fortale," in *En christelig Postille*, vol. 1, XII–XIV ("11–14" according to the table of contents).

<sup>141</sup> See *SKS* 21, 296f., NB10:76 / *KJN* 5, 307; *SKS* 21, 337, NB10:165 / *KJN* 5, 165; *SKS* 22, 241, NB12:162 / *KJN* 6, 243; *SKS* 22, 366–368, NB14:41 / *KJN* 6, 371f.; *SKS* 23, 26, NB15:32 / *KJN* 7, 23; *SKS* 23, 469f., NB20:148 / *KJN* 7, 477f.; *SKS* 24, 82, NB21:132 / *KJN* 8, 78f.; *SKS* 24, 460, NB25:35 / *KJN* 8, 466.

<sup>142</sup> See *SKS* 21, 296f., NB10:76 / *KJN* 5, 307.

<sup>143</sup> *SKS* 13, 46 / *FSE*, 17.

Then came sanctification by works and the like. Then, just so, Luther came and emphasized Christ as gift, making the same distinction betw.[een] Christ as gift and as example as that between faith and works. But I wonder if Luther could have dreamed of the pretense about hidden inwardness that this has engendered. And further, I wonder whether Luther, when he married, could have dreamed that this would finally be carried so far that a priest would come to believe more or less that if only he got married, he would have done everything that God required of him. I can very well see how someone could mount an attack on me precisely from Luther's standpoint; but truly, I too have understood Luther quite well—and I have also been careful not to blunder about in the fog, as if everything were still as it was in Luther's day.<sup>144</sup>

Kierkegaard finds in Luther a necessary "corrective,"<sup>145</sup> albeit one that was subsequently "made into the normative" until it produced the opposite of its original purpose: "the most refined child of secularism and paganism."<sup>146</sup> Inasmuch as, in contemporary Christendom, one has failed to think the thought of discipleship and has taken grace in vain, one "has removed the dialectical element from Luther's doctrine of faith" and forgotten completely that "Luther emphasized faith in order to counter a fantastically exaggerated asceticism."<sup>147</sup> Such decay must be counteracted: "It is of course quite clear that it is Christ as example that must now be brought forward dialectically, precisely because the dialectical (Christ as gift) that Luther brought forward has been taken utterly in vain, so that 'the imitator' resembles the example in no way whatever but is absolutely heterogeneous and then simply slips in grace."<sup>148</sup>

Consequently, Kierkegaard understood his own position as a necessary modification of the Lutheran position: "but if Luther's definition [i.e., Christ as gift] is to come again, it must be modified."<sup>149</sup>

In journal entry NB25:35, from January 1852, Kierkegaard sketches what this modification of the Lutheran position may look like: "Luther rightly puts it as follows: Xt is a gift—to which faith corresponds. Furthermore, he is the Exemplar [*Forbilledet*]<sup>150</sup>—to which imitation corresponds. But with greater accuracy it might be said: 1) imitation, tending toward decisive

<sup>144</sup> SKS 22, 241, NB12:162 / KJN 6, 243 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>145</sup> SKS 25, 279, NB28:82 / KJN 9, 281.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> SKS 21, 323, NB10:132 / KJN 5, 334 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>148</sup> SKS 23, 26, NB15:32 / KJN 7, 23 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>149</sup> SKS 24, 82, NB21:132 / KJN 8, 78.

action, through which the situation for becoming a Xn comes into existence; 2) Xt as gift—faith; 3) imitation as the fruit of faith.”<sup>150</sup> It is thus a matter of, in the first place, coming “into the situation in which I can become a Xn”<sup>151</sup>—a situation of existential exertion that Kierkegaard elsewhere identifies with the “anguished conscience.”<sup>152</sup> The person who has “involuntarily” become unhappy thus has “less difficulty” becoming Christian than the happy person does. “But—as one might act[ua]lly pose the hum [an] objection to Xnty—if I am among the fortunate, am I permitted voluntarily to make myself unhappy like this so that I might get a proper taste for Xnty? This is the question of the voluntary, of the imitation of Xt [*Christi Efterfølgelse*].”<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, Kierkegaard did not draw the consequences for himself that he found necessary in his argument with Luther: “Kierkegaard never wanted to take responsibility himself for the full imitation [of Christ].”<sup>154</sup> Rather, Kierkegaard remained a mere “‘corrective’ to the established order of Christendom”<sup>155</sup> until his early death.

The factors outlined above are to be regarded as decisive in motivating the demand for an imitation Christianity that is set forth in Kierkegaard's late authorship. Here we encounter the ultimate fruition of the negative determination of the relation of faith to reality that was already present *in nuce* in the transition from Kierkegaard's early works to his late works. For Kierkegaard's revaluation of reality as a reference object for belief went hand in hand with his revaluation of his own lived reality. Given this theological processing of his own life story, it must have now seemed paradoxical to the late Kierkegaard—who no longer had any expectation of coming to terms with (t)his world—to regard faith as the basis for man's positive freedom in relation to the given reality, as he had still done in his student days let alone to find “the true reconciliation”<sup>156</sup> with it in the religious sphere. For the late Kierkegaard, any such “victory over the world”<sup>157</sup> achieved in faith by virtue of an inner movement of “resignation” toward reality would ultimately

<sup>150</sup> SKS 24, 459, NB25:35 / KJN 8, 466.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> See SKS 20, 69, NB:79 / KJN 4, 68 et passim.

<sup>153</sup> SKS 24, 459, NB25:35 / KJN 8, 466.

<sup>154</sup> Deuser, “Kierkegaards Spätwerk als dialektische Theologie,” 12.

<sup>155</sup> Hermann Diem, *Theologie als kirchliche Wissenschaft. Handreichung zur Einübung ihrer Probleme*, vol. 2, *Dogmatik. Ihr Weg zwischen Historismus und Existentialismus* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1955), 23.

<sup>156</sup> SKS 1, 330 / CI, 297.

<sup>157</sup> SKS 1, 349 / CI, 319.

## KIERKEGAARD IN CONTEXT

prove—if this *a priori* certainty in faith has no *outward* consequences, and does not lead to the ultimate consequence in the imitation of Christ—to be a Pyrrhic victory.