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A COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL VIEWS OF
SØREN KIERKEGAARD
AND KARL BARTH

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Theology
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Theology

by
Roger C. Rounds
May 1961

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Major Subject: Theology

Approved:

William M. Arnett
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Asbury Theological Seminary
1961

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

Among theological circles today, neo-orthodoxy, or the dialectical theology, as it is now usually referred to in library indexing, has a strong influence. However, neo-orthodoxy has a background which goes much deeper than the present century. Though many dialectical theologians of the present century would refer back to the reformers and to the early Roman Catholic Church, their primary contender was a Danish theologian of the last century, Søren Kierkegaard, who is commonly known as the father of modern existentialism.

The problem of this thesis is to show the effect of the theological thinking of Søren Kierkegaard upon contemporary theology by indicating his influence in the theology of one leading contemporary neo-orthodox theologian, namely Karl Barth.

Considerations of space lead the writer to choose Barth as one of the leading if not the very leading neo-orthodox theologian of this century. Barth's relation to Kierkegaard is also closer than any other theologian. The following statement by Hoyle gives emphasis to this:

. . . The influence of Kierkegaard upon Barth and all the group around him is predominant. Barth himself declared in the preface to the fourth edition of his Romans: "I keep in mind always, as much as possible, what Kierkegaard described as the infinitely qualitative difference between time and eternity, both in its nega-

tive and positive meaning." . . . In fact the emphasis on the Either--Or, on faith as the only attitude of man towards God, and the criticism of conventional Christianity which mark the Barthian School are simply an underscoring of this great Dane's ideas. Kierkegaard came again into vogue at the beginning of the century when his works were being translated into German and Barth caught the infection. . . . Thus to the mental make-up of Barth we find these factors--the inherited tradition of the Reformed Church, the influence of Herrmann and his re-action under the stress of pastoral work, the ferment of Kierkegaard's ideas at the susceptible period of youth--all combining with the social unrest of the period which culminated in the Great War to give him his need of a gospel for a time of 'crisis.'¹

If Kierkegaard's influence were limited to that which he exerted on Barth, that would be enough to merit this study. Kierkegaard has also had a crucial impact upon many other men such as Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Though he was little read and known in his day, he has in our century been rediscovered and has become the greatest single influence in modern day theology. Bernard Ramm states: "There is no doubt that Kierkegaard is the first of the neo-orthodox theologians and that while not all of neo-orthodoxy derives from him, a great portion does."²

Because of the very nature of this thesis, the study of Søren Kierkegaard becomes a background to understand the theology of Karl Barth. However, it is helpful, especially

¹R. Birch Hoyle, The Teaching of Karl Barth (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1950), pp. 34, 35.

²Bernard Ramm, "The Incipient Heresies of Søren Kierkegaard," United Evangelical Action, October 1, 1952, p. 10.

for those who are new to this field, to give here a very brief biographical sketch of Kierkegaard, as a means of preparing the way for a better understanding of his theology.

"He was born at Copenhagen in 1813, the youngest son of a retired woolen-draper in easy circumstances; he died in 1855. From his father, Michael Kierkegaard, he learnt one lesson which stayed with him to the end--that faith is responsibility to God expressed in personal decision."³ Add to this Kierkegaard's father confiding to his son of his own guilty secrets of the past, plus Kierkegaard's sorrowful breaking of his engagement to his deeply loved sweetheart, Regine Olsen, plus a disgraceful episode with a satirical weekly journal of Copenhagen, and one has the background which so largely contributed to Kierkegaard's dismal theology.

Perhaps in part due to this eccentric background, Kierkegaard was little read by his contemporaries. Less than sixty copies of his Concluding Unscientific Postscript were sold while he lived and, less than four thousand English translations were sold up to January 1951.⁴

Kierkegaard was subject to both positive and negative influences. Of course, the influence of the extremely

³Ibid., p. 7.

⁴Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1949), pp. 220-21.

guilty conscience of his father can never be discounted. The circumstances of his father's life meant much in molding the thought life of this man. Through an episode with a satirical weekly journal of Copenhagen in which Kierkegaard was held up to intensive ridicule, and lacking friends to encourage him at the time he needed it, he claimed that God directly opened his eyes to the deeper truth that being a Christian means to suffer. Thus to him, seeking for company in faith's pilgrimage was a mortal sin.⁵

Hegel was probably Kierkegaard's most potent negative influence. "Hegel stood for the royal autocracy of human thought, the exclusive supremacy of the so-called creative reason of man . . ." ⁶ His chief purpose was not to cleanse or cure men's lives, but to explain them. Thus Hegel dealt lightly with sin. Kierkegaard opposed Hegel vigorously. His own 'qualitative' dialectic was set in opposition to Hegel's dialectic. He revolted against the Hegelian idea that human spirit and the Divine are identical. Kierkegaard felt ". . . that the Hegelian philosophy by failing to define its relation to the existing individual, and by ignoring the ethical, confounds existence."⁷ So it is seen that Kierkegaard's thought was in a sense a reaction against the

⁵Ibid., p. 251. ⁶Ibid., pp. 225-26.

⁷Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 275.

extreme of Hegelianism. In fact he himself claims that his theology was "a corrective to things as they are."⁸ This is very similar to the revolt that neo-orthodoxy has taken against the old-line liberalism, remembering that many of the leading neo-orthodox men of today were originally from the old line of modernism which is deeply indebted to Hegelian humanism.

More positively Kierkegaard was influenced by Hume. Evidence seems to point to the fact that he received his notion of faith as being contrary to reason from Hume.⁹ Thus it would seem that Hume stands in the background of the metaphysical scepticism of Kierkegaard.

In this definitive study of Kierkegaard's theology, it quickly becomes apparent that it is a "dark theology." Expressive of this is his statement: "Alas, the doors of fortune do not open inward, so that by storming them one can force them open; but they open outward, and therefore nothing can be done."¹⁰ This gloomy outlook can only be understood by looking deep into the domestic and social life of this man. There will be found the roots of disappointment

⁸Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 255.

⁹Ramm, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁰Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 18.

and disillusionment that twisted this brilliant mind to assume such an existential theological slant.

A brief statement needs to be made concerning the organization of the remainder of this thesis. The five subsequent chapters are written in a dual fashion. The first major section of each of these chapters deals with some area of Kierkegaard's theology. The second major section of each of these chapters compares Barth's theology to the particular area under discussion. In each of these five chapters, the area under discussion breaks down into two minor divisions. These same minor divisions are used in the discussion of Barth's theology.

The final chapter of this thesis is concerned with a summarization of the preceding five chapters and an analysis of the conclusions that this study has revealed.

Because this is a comparative study between the theologies of two men, much of the text of this thesis is taken up in using the quotations from the writings of these two men to indicate their similarities.

CHAPTER II

EXISTENCE AND SUBJECTIVITY

It would seem that existence and subjectivity make an ideal starting point for this study because they are both so fundamental in all of Kierkegaard's thinking as well as Barth's.

I. EXISTENCE AND SUBJECTIVITY AS FOUND WITHIN KIERKEGAARD'S WRITING

Existence. Although modern existential philosophy is largely derived from the thought of Kierkegaard, it has been noted that he himself never precisely defined the term.¹ He has, however, stated what existence implied for him: "Existence is the child of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore constantly striving . . . an existing individual is constantly in process of becoming."² Upon this one word "existential," Kierkegaard has hung much of his theology. Helmut Kuhn says, "By the epithet 'existential' we mean to describe a thinking animated and support-

¹Donald Attwater, Modern Christian Revolutionaries (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947), p. 21.

²Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 79.

ed by the personal life of the thinker."³ Existential thinking concerns the here and now--the making of decisions as one who is a part of the situation and not merely a spectator. In fact, as Walter Lowrie states in his introduction, Kierkegaard held that the essential task of human existence was, " . . . in realizing a decisiveness of spirit which forms and establishes the personality."⁴ This seems to be the whole pivotal point for Kierkegaard's theology, for this existential view becomes the springboard for his further development of thought.

Kierkegaard's theology has often been termed "meta-physical skepticism" due to the fact that he refuses to concede that anything else can be proven as reality besides one's individual existence. On this point he uses many of the same arguments that the skeptic uses to deny the existence of the material world and the authenticity of history. Thus one's own existence is the only thing man could even come close to proving as real. All other phenomena may be possibilities but not proved realities. It is postulated that the apparent trustworthiness of the senses is an illusion. Kierkegaard argues:

³Helmut Kuhn, "Existentialism--Christian and Anti-Christian," Theology Today, October 1949, p. 311.

⁴Walter Lowrie (trans.), Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. XXIV.

It is not possible for an existing individual, least of all as an existing individual, to hold fast absolutely a suspension of the dialectic moment, namely, existence. This would require another medium than existence, which is the dialectical moment. . . . The only reality that exists for an existing individual is his own ethical reality. To every other reality he stands in cognitive relation; but true knowledge consists in translating the real into the possible.⁵

Thus Kierkegaard is saying that man cannot contemplate himself because he cannot find anything but himself as a measuring stick. So man actually exists only as he is aware of his basic passion for eternal happiness. It is necessary to notice here the 'dialectical moment' as being the occasion when one reasons himself to the point of despair and abandonment of reason, having found reason to be a mere futile attempt to seek reality. Thus at this moment faith swings into operation bringing the individual nearer to Absolute Reality which is God.

Man's attempt to prove his existence through thought ends only in contradiction. Every other reality besides his own reality is known only by thinking. However, it is a question whether his own thinking can abstract reality of himself. Thought and meditation are misleading for Kierkegaard for he says:

If thought could give reality in the sense of actuality, and not merely validity in the sense of possibility, it would also have the power to take away from the existing individual the only reality to which he sustains a

⁵Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 280.

real relationship namely his own.⁶

Thought and existence are anthropomorphic. God neither thinks nor exists, but God creates and is eternal. "Man thinks and exists, and existence separates thought and being, holding them apart from one another in succession."⁷ Real action is then not the external act, but an internal decision in which the individual goes beyond the mere possibility of existence and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it.

This act of existence is not static, but is a process of becoming. This existing subjective thinker is constantly reproducing this existential thought-situation and translating it into terms of process or becoming. Kierkegaard carries this so far as to claim, "No one starts by being a Christian, everyone becomes such in the fulness of time."⁸ The initial decision in Christianity is minimized to an almost meaningless position because the idea of "becoming" is so over-emphasized. He seems to say that many stumble along the blind alley of "becoming without any assurance of arrival. Such an extreme position comes as a result of Kierkegaard's reaction to the evils within the church of his day, which he so vehemently attacks in his Attack Upon Christendom. In

⁶Ibid., p. 265. ⁷Ibid., p. 296.

⁸Ibid., p. 523.

his Point of View he goes so far as to state:

. . . the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, to the problem "of becoming a Christian," with a direct or indirect polemic against the monstrous illusion we call Christendom, or against the illusion that in such a land as ours all are Christians of a sort.⁹

It is this idea of "becoming" as an individual developing experience that caused Kierkegaard to make the claim: "To cram Christianity into a child is something that cannot be done, for it is a general rule that everyone comprehends only what he has use for, and the child has no decisive use for Christianity."¹⁰ Thus Christianity is worthless to the one who has not been able to think through to the end of himself and to see his need of "becoming."

One never arrives at his existence so that he could stop for a moment this constant process of becoming into existence. Thus Kierkegaard says, "Thought and being mean one and the same thing . . ."¹¹ He holds that every man is by nature designed to become a thinker. Thinking like this will make man aware of his own inner passion to have eternal happiness. However, it is not God's fault that most men through habit, and routine, and want of passion, and affec-

⁹Søren Kierkegaard, Point of View, trans. Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 6.

¹⁰Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 523.

¹¹Ibid., p. 170.

tion, and gossiping with friends and neighbors, gradually, ruin themselves so they are thoughtless, and thus go on to base their eternal happiness on something other than passion. It is upon this basis that Kierkegaard asserts, "It is impossible to exist without passion, unless we understand the word 'exist' in the loose sense of a so-called existence."¹² As this study proceeds, there will come an increased awareness of his extreme emphasis on this idea of man's passion for eternal happiness as a foundation for what Kierkegaard expounds. He refers to this passion as "infinite" which puts it in a class with God's. It is that drive within man which he can either suppress or follow, but can never destroy.

At this point, it becomes helpful to consider Attwater's discussion of the way in which Kierkegaard relates reason to this basic passion of man:

It seems clear, indeed, that he ranks "passion" or feeling higher than abstract reason in the scale of apprehension of existential truth. Upon the premise that it is "the whole man facing the whole mystery of life" who can alone reach reality, it must be so. For, while such reason is rare and at one remove from reality, feeling is universal and immediate.

In so far as it denies to abstract reason and intellect the monopoly of truth, existential thinking thus tends towards anti-intellectualism and even irrationalism.

Intellect, abstract reason and analytical science are for him not primary, but they are secondary; they are servants of the human spirit who have usurped the sover-

¹²Ibid., p. 276.

eign seat of the existential decision of the "whole man" and, as such, are to be fought. But he nowhere suggests that reason is not an important element in the apprehension of the whole man to which he appeals, and he himself attacks what he believes to be a false use of reason with the weapons of reason. Indeed he specifically declares that "the race must go through reason to the absolute" (J.1256).¹³

Thus it becomes necessary to understand Kierkegaard's theory that all men have a basic passion for eternal happiness which, if allowed to take its free course, will drive man to the end of his reason--to the dialectical moment of despair--where exercised faith brings him into true or 'authentic' existence. Here he is ever becoming more Christian each time he arrives at this dialectical moment of existential thinking.

Subjectivity. Coming very close to the idea of the existential is the idea of the subjective. In fact, if one were to reread this discussion on existence with this in mind, one could not help but be impressed that Kierkegaard's whole beginning is from within the individual. Of course, this leaves an opening for relativity, and for variation from one individual to another. However, Kierkegaard tends to offset this, laying down a certain pattern for the "passion" as being universal to all men. For him the whole of religious existence is subjective. Even the fall of Adam

¹³Attwater, op. cit., p. 28.

and Eve in the book of Genesis, which is thought by orthodoxy to be historical, is considered by Kierkegaard only to be mythological and to represent outwardly what actually occurred and occurs to man inwardly.

Kierkegaard lays strong emphasis upon the obvious fact that every individual has a bit of the subjective. Existence is only found through a subjective listening to man's infinite passion. Hence, history and science are objective and cannot be trusted. Kierkegaard says it this way:

Now if Christianity is essentially something objective, it is necessary for the observer to be objective. But if Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake for the observer to be objective. . . . But the utmost tension of human subjectivity finds its expression in the infinite passionate interest in an eternal happiness.¹⁴

Thus Kierkegaard exhorts men to be objectively light but to be subjectively as heavy as possible. Kierkegaard continues to undercut objectivity in the following statement about science:

Sad to say, however, in the strict scientific disciplines where objectivity is a requisite, there it is seldom met with; for a scholar equipped with a thorough first-hand acquaintance with his field, is a great rarity. In relation to Christianity, on the other hand, objective Christianity and none other, is eo ipso a pagan, for Christianity is precisely an affair of spirit, and so of subjectivity, and so of inwardness.¹⁵

¹⁴Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 51.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 42.

Thus he defines Christianity:

Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness.¹⁶

From this it is not hard to see why Kierkegaard holds that there are only two realities that are visible: the God-man and man's own soul. Also in his view of subjectivity he claims that a Christian may so shut up his religion within himself as to be undistinguishable among worldlings.¹⁷ Thus the knight of faith is all bound up in the business of finding himself. As Reidar Thomte explains:

The Kierkegaardian expression "choosing oneself" is the counterpart to the Greek γνῶθι σεαυτόν "know thyself" (the inscription of the temple of Delphi). It signifies that the ethical individual is to know himself not in the sense of mere contemplation, but in the sense of coming to oneself, as an inward action of the personality. "Choosing oneself" is illustrated in terms of impregnation and birth. Through the individual's intercourse with himself he is in a sense impregnated and gives birth to himself. The self which the individual knows is the real self, but it is also the ideal self or the pattern according to which he is to mold himself. As a pattern it lies in a sense outside of the individual, yet it is part of him as something which is his possession, his self.¹⁸

Certainly it is not out of place to notice here the absence of altruism in Kierkegaard as well as his failure to take a realistic approach to life. Though he would never agree to

¹⁶Ibid., p. 33. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁸Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 49.

being impractical, yet here this extreme subjectivism tends to lead one in that direction. Practicality for him operates more in the area of inner adjustment to one's real self than in the outreach of benefit to others. The constant infiltration of the existential and the subjective elements are very present in the subsequent chapters which discuss other areas of Kierkegaard's theology.

II. EXISTENCE AND SUBJECTIVITY AS FOUND WITHIN BARTH'S WRITING

Though the theologies of Kierkegaard and Barth are not identical at these points of existence and subjectivity, yet they are so similar that a study of Barth at these points can not help but remind one of the forerunner, Kierkegaard.

Existence. Because Barth is more of a theologian and Kierkegaard is more of a philosopher, the definite discussions of existence as such are not as pronounced in Barth. Yet there is no mistake about the influence of existential thinking in Barth's theology. Where Kierkegaard is more likely to use the word 'thinking' when talking about existence, Barth uses the word 'believes.' The following quotations illustrate the place of faith in Barth's idea of existence:

. . . "I believe" means, "I exist in believing." I have every occasion to know that my existing as such, is not my believing; that I can only believe that my

existing-in-faith is God's work and not mine. But so far as I believe I exist in faith.¹⁹

For Barth, man's proof of his own existence comes primarily through faith. This is in agreement with Kierkegaard who brings out a stronger emphasis on the thought processes whereby man is brought into the faith experience. Barth explains the reality of life and existence in his Dogmatics in Outline.

. . . Christian faith is the illumination of the reason in which men become free to live in the truth of Jesus Christ and thereby to become sure also of the meaning of their own existence and of the ground and goal of all that happens.

.

. . . If a man believes and knows God, he can no longer ask, What is the meaning of my life? But by believing he actually lives the meaning of his life, the meaning of his creatureliness, of his individuality, in the limits of creatureliness and individuality and in the fallibility of his existence, in the sin in which he is involved and of which daily and hourly he is guilty; yet he also lives it with the aid which is daily and hourly imparted to him through God's interceding for him, in spite of him and without deserving it. He recognizes the task assigned to him in this whole, and the hope vouchsafed to him in and with this task, because of the grace by which he may live and the praise of the glory promised him, by which he is even here and now secretly surrounded in all lowliness. The believer confesses this meaning of his existence. The Christian Creed speaks of God as the ground and goal of all that exists. The ground and goal of the entire cosmos means Jesus Christ. And the unheard-of thing may and must be said, that where Christian faith exists, there also exists, through God's being trusted, inmost familiarity with

¹⁹Karl Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1938), p. 57.

the ground and goal of all that happens, of all things; there man lives, in spite of all that is said to the contrary, in the peace that passeth all understanding, and which for that very reason is the light that lightens our understanding.²⁰

A more pronounced emphasis of man's existence in terms of being absolutely dependent upon God's existence, is seen in Barth. However, Barth would, like Kierkegaard, deny that existence can be proven for anything outside of God and man. He shares the "metaphysical skepticism" of Kierkegaard.

Barth also shares the Kierkegaardian idea of "becoming" which is carried out in the reality of Christian experience. Nothing is static or reduced to a fixed base for Barth. The process and activity of existence are always present in the decisiveness of life. This is seen in the following passage that speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit:

. . . this presence has to be interpreted by us in the eschatological sense: i.e. to say, as the presence of the promise. Because God is revealed to us in our creatureliness and sinfulness, we receive the promise. The only explanation of the promise given to us is, that as His creatures we are real and that He is gracious to us, pardoning us as sinners.²¹

This is brought out even more emphatically in Barth's statement which even speaks of the closing events of history as an existential "becoming."

²⁰Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 22, 26, 27.

²¹Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, p. 75.

. . . In the language of his time, and in Calvin's own language, "end" does not only mean what comes last and might be static, motionless, but what keeps man company throughout the course of his life. End is thus equivalent to "sense of life," "goal of life." It is not a terminus to life: it is a continuous action. And this action is "to know God;" it is the primary end, but not the only one.²²

This means for Barth there is no future culmination for which one statically waits but that the existential experience brings one into these events which are viewed by orthodoxy as off in the coming future. Barth emphasizes this departure from orthodoxy in the following statement of sharp disagreement which he makes regarding Augustine:

. . . This is the view of man as one existing in pre-supposed continuity with God. This view of continuity between God and man is always threatening to make man out as being his own creator and atoner. We can now say that the whole of Augustinianism--its doctrine of righteousness as a quality infused into man, i.e. justification by works (and in the last analysis these two doctrines are one and the same)--would be tolerable and feasible, if Augustine had but been interpreted as thinking in eschatological terms of thought. We cannot interpret him in that way. It is only too plain that his language there is of a spirit of fulfilment in place of the Spirit of Promise who is the Holy Ghost.²³

In a similar manner, Kierkegaard broke with orthodoxy because he believed their views to be full of pride and man's attainments. Barth is like Kierkegaard in his reaction against any view that might tend to comfort man with the notion that he had arrived or attained in some concrete way.

²²Karl Barth, The Faith of the Church, trans. Gabriel Vahanian (New York: Meridian Books Inc., 1958), p. 25.

²³Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, pp. 73-74.

In all Barth's theological ideas one cannot help but see the strong vein of Kierkegaardian existentialism. In the following quotations, Barth explains the incarnation, giving special attention to the existential "mystery" and "content" over against the "form" and "miracle" of natural history:

. . . But there is no question there of conception and birth in general, but of a quite definite conception and a quite definite birth. Why conception by the Holy Spirit and why birth of the Virgin Mary? Why this special miracle which is intended to be expressed in these two concepts, side by side with the great miracle of the incarnation? Why does the miracle of Christmas run parallel to the mystery of the Incarnation? A noetic utterance is so to speak put alongside the ontic one. If in the Incarnation we have to do with the thing, here we have to do with the sign. The two should not be confused. The thing which is involved in Christmas is true in and for itself. But it is indicated, it is unveiled in the miracle of Christmas. But it would be wrong to conclude from that, that therefore 'only' a sign is involved, which therefore might even be deducted from the mystery. Let me warn you against this. It is rare in life to be able to separate form and content.²⁴

. . . What is involved is the mystery of the Incarnation as the visible form of which the miracle takes place. We should ill have understood Mark 2, if we wanted so to read the passage, that the chief miracle was the forgiveness of sins, and the bodily healing incidental. The one thing obviously belongs of necessity to the other. And so we should have to give a warning, too, against parenthesizing the miracle of the nativitas and wanting to cling to the mystery as such. One thing may be definitely said, that every time people want to fly from this miracle, a theology is at work, which has ceased to understand and honour the mystery as well, and has rather essayed to conjure away the mystery of the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ, the mystery of God's free grace.²⁵

²⁴Barth, Dogmatics In Outline, p. 96.

²⁵Ibid., p. 100.

Hence, Barth like Kierkegaard sees no injustice to admit the obvious miracles of nature, and then to relegate them to a position of relative valuelessness by the application of the existential postulate. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from Barth:

. . . In precedence of all human existence, as the a priori, goes the existence of Jesus Christ. That is what the Christian Confession of faith says. What is meant by this precedence of His? Do not let the idea of a temporal precedence be prominent. That is also there, for it is finished, there is that great historical perfect, in which lordship was set up over us, in the years 1-30 in Palestine--but that is not the decisive thing. When the temporal precedence acquire the importance, that is because the existence of this man precedes our existence in virtue of His incomparable worth. He precedes our existence in virtue of His authority over our existence, in the power of His divinity.²⁶

Regardless of how supernatural a thing may be, with this theory of existence applied to it, it becomes divested of its authoritative power. Barth has carried out in greater detail this existential approach upon the various Christian doctrines than did Kierkegaard, who stayed closer to the philosophical and psychological side of the discussion. Perhaps the following statement with reference to Jesus Christ and his relation to time and eternity will more pointedly bear out Barth's capability at this point:

. . . But Jesus Christ sitteth beside the Father, as He who has suffered and has risen from the dead. That is the present. Since He is present as God is present, it already admits of being said that He shall come again as the person He once was. He who is to-day just as He

²⁶Ibid., p. 89

was yesterday, will also be the same to-morrow--Jesus Christ yesterday and to-day and the same to eternity. Since Jesus Christ exists as the person He was, obviously He is the beginning of a new, different time from that which we know, a time in which there is no fading away, but real time which has a yesterday, a to-day and a to-morrow. But Jesus Christ's yesterday is also His to-day and His to-morrow. It is not timelessness, not empty eternity that comes in place of His time. His time is not at an end; it continues in the movement from yesterday to to-day, into to-morrow. It has not the frightful fleetingness of our present. When Jesus Christ sitteth at the right hand of the Father, this existence of His with God, His existence as the possessor and representative of divine grace and power towards us men, has nothing to do with what we are foolishly wont to conceive as eternity--namely, an existence without time. If this existence of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God is real existence and as such the measure of all existence, then it is also existence in time, although in another time than the one we know. If the lordship and rule of Jesus Christ at the Father's right hand is the meaning of what we see as the existence of our world history and our life-history, then this existence of Jesus Christ is not a timeless existence, and eternity is not a timeless eternity. Death is timeless, nothingness is timeless. So we men are timeless when we are without God and without Christ. Then we have no time. But this timelessness He has overcome. Christ has time, the fulness of time. He sitteth at the right hand of God as He who has come, who has acted and suffered and triumphed in death. His session at God's right hand is not the extract of this history; it is the eternal within this history.²⁷

Again being true to the Kierkegardian concept of existence, Barth does not limit the scope of his application but makes a total inclusive sweep in the following:

Resurrection means eternity. Since it is the sovereignty of God which gives significance to time, it is for that very reason not in time. It is not one temporal thing among others. What is in time has not yet

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 129, 130.

reached the boundary of death, has not yet been taken under the government of God. It must yet die in order to enter into life. The moment when the last trump is sounded, when the dead shall be raised and the living shall be changed, is not the last moment of time, but is time's τέλος, its nontemporal limit and end. It comes ἐν αὐτῷ, says Paul, in an indivisible, non-temporal, eternal now. Is it yesterday, tomorrow, today? Is it ever? Is it never? In each case we may answer Yes and No. For, though our times are in God's hands, God's times are not in ours. To everything there is a time, but to everything there will also be an eternity.²⁸

Barth gives the existential interpretation of heaven and earth in the following quotations:

. . . Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth. The covenant between God and man is the meaning and the glory, the ground and the goal of heaven and earth and the whole creation.

.....

. . . The world of man, the space for his existence and his history, and at the same time man's natural goal as well, 'to earth thou shalt return': that is the earth. If man does have another origin than this earthly one, and another goal than that of returning to the earth again, then it is on the basis of the reality of the covenant between God and man. We start talking of the grace of God when we ascribe more to man than earthly existence, in which is included that the earth is under heaven. There is no world of man in abstracto. It would be an error if man were not clear that his conceivable world is bounded by an inconceivable one. Well for us that there are children and poets and philosophers who are continually reminding us of this higher side of Historical reality. The earthly world is really only one side of creation. But in the heavenly as little as in the earthly realm are we already in the realm of God;

²⁸ Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. Douglas Horton (Massachusetts: The Pilgrim Press, 1928), pp. 89, 90.

and so the first and second commandments hold good: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any image nor any sort of likeness, either of what is in heaven or of what is on earth . . .' Neither on earth nor in heaven is there any divine power which we have to love or to fear.²⁹

The distinctions between heaven and earth, time and eternity, are lost in the oblivion of the existential.

The Kierkegaardian concept of "becoming" is very evident in this statement of the Second Coming by Barth:

' . . . From thence he shall come.' In this 'from thence' is contained above all this fact, that He will issue out of the hiddenness in which He still remains for us to-day, where He is proclaimed and believed by the Church, where He is present to us only in His Word. The New Testament says of this future coming that 'He shall come on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory' and 'as the lightning goeth out from East to West, so shall be the coming of the Son of man.' These are metaphors, but metaphors of ultimate realities, which at least indicate that it takes place no longer in secrecy but is completely revealed. No one will any more be able to deceive himself about this being reality. So He will come. He will rend the heavens and stand before us as the person He is, sitting at the right hand of the Father. He comes in the possession and in the exercise of divine omnipotence. He comes as the One in whose hands our entire existence is enclosed. Him we are expecting, He is coming and He will be manifest as the One whom we know already. It has all taken place; the only thing wanting is that the covering be removed and all may see it.³⁰

It is surprising how even the final judgment loses its sting under the effect of the existential interpretation. Barth puts into action this Kierkegaardian method of erasing the literal aspect in the following statement:

²⁹Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, pp. 62, 63.

³⁰Ibid., p. 133.

In the Biblical world of thought the judge is not primarily the one who rewards some and punishes the other; he is the man who creates order and restores what has been destroyed. . . . To the seriousness of the thought of judgment no injury will be done, for there it will be manifest that God's grace and God's right are the measure by which the whole of humanity and each man will be measured. Venturus iudicare: God knows everything that exists and happens. Then we may well be terrified, and to that extent those visions of the Last Judgment are not simply meaningless. That which is not of God's grace and right cannot exist. Infinitely much human as well as Christian 'greatness' perhaps plunges there into the outermost darkness. That there is such a divine No is indeed included in this iudicare. But the moment we grant this we must revert to the truth that the Judge who puts some on the left and the others on the right, is in fact He who has yielded Himself to the judgment of God for me and has taken away all malediction from me.³¹

From these above excerpts out of Barth's writings, it is easy to see the indebtedness of Barth to Kierkegaard's existential thinking. From the expositions of these cardinal truths of the church by Barth, one has no difficulty in crediting him with the efficient fulfillment of the task of carrying Kierkegaard's thinking to its logical conclusions. This has not all come about for Barth as a result of studying the particulars of church dogma, but had its root beginning in an existential view of the Bible as such. Though this is more fully discussed in the chapter under the heading, Paradox and Truth, it is mentioned briefly by the following quotation in order to give the understanding necessary to this discussion:

³¹Ibid., pp. 135, 136.

According to all that has been said, revelation is originally and immediately, what the Bible and Church proclamation are derivatively, and immediately, God's Word. We said of Church proclamation, that from time to time it must become God's Word. And we said the same of the Bible, that it must from time to time become God's Word. Now "from time to time" had to do, not with human experience (as if our being affected by this event and our attitude to it could be constitutive of its reality and its content!) but, of course, with the freedom of God's grace.³²

Like Kierkegaard's existentialism, Barth's is also constantly calling for the "new" in favor of casting away the old. Barth like Kierkegaard was in reaction against the extreme humanistic emphasis of his time. This Kierkegaardian concept of "becoming" is constantly keeping society in a state of flux and change where "revelation" is the only determining factor for man. This is well expressed by the following excerpt from Barth:

The Holy Spirit makes a new heaven and a new earth and, therefore, new men, new families, new relationships, new politics. It has no respect for old traditions simply because they are traditions, for old solemnities simply because they are solemn, for old powers simply because they are powerful. The Holy Spirit has respect only for truth, for itself. The Holy Spirit establishes the righteousness of heaven in the midst of the unrighteousness of earth and will not step nor stay until all that is dead has been brought to life and a new world has come into being.³³

³²Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part I, trans. G. T. Thomson (Vol. I of Church Dogmatics. 55 vols.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), p. 131.

³³Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," Contemporary Religious Thought, Thomas S. Kepler, editor (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1941), p. 141.

Though this is a more detailed discussion of the effect of Kierkegaardian existentialism upon Barth, the flavor of it will linger throughout the remaining areas under discussion.

Subjectivity. Closely tied into the existential is the subjective element. Here again Barth takes Kierkegaard's thinking and makes the fullest practical application. It is at this point that Kierkegaard labors long in many of his writings. Though Barth does not go to the same extent in his specific analysis of it as such, the impact of it can not be avoided in any of Barth's writings.

Kierkegaard spoke much about the "passion" which is eternal that exists within every individual. This motivating, God given, and God controlled passion is again re-echoed in Barth and found in such passages as the following:

. . . Blood and tears, deepest despair and highest hope, a passionate longing to lay hold of that which, or rather of him who, overcomes the world because he is the Creator and the Redeemer, its beginning and ending and Lord, a passionate longing to have the word spoken, the word which promises grace in judgment, life in death, and the beyond in the here and now, God's word--this it is which animates our church-goers, however lazy, bourgeois, or commonplace may be the manner in which they express their want in so-called real life.³⁴

Even when Barth writes about the revelation that is found within the Bible, he leans heavily upon the subjective

³⁴Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, pp. 108, 109.

aspect of "passion." However, at this point Barth seems to declare more strongly the absolute activity of God in the move of passion toward faith. Where Kierkegaard takes great pains to prove the activity of passion, Barth seems to accept the fact and goes on to make such statements as the following:

. . . There is a spirit in the Bible that allows us to stop awhile and play among secondary things as is our wont--but presently it begins to press us on; and however we may object that we are only weak, imperfect, and most average folk, it presses us on to the primary fact, whether we will or no. There is a river in the Bible that carries us away, once we have entrusted our destiny to it--away from ourselves to the sea. The Holy Scriptures will interpret themselves in spite of all our human limitations. We need only dare to follow this drive, this spirit, this river, to grow out beyond ourselves toward the highest answer. This daring is faith; and we read the Bible rightly, not when we do so with false modesty, restraint, and attempted sobriety, for these are passive qualities, but when we read it in faith. And the invitation to dare and to reach toward the highest, even though we do not deserve it, is the expression of grace in the Bible: the Bible unfolds to us as we are met, guided, drawn on, and made to grow by the grace of God.³⁵

At this point attention needs to be focused upon the Barthian concept of the Holy Spirit. The subjective element of Kierkegaard is applied by Barth at this point to such an extreme as to make the Holy Spirit the personification of all Christian experience. Barth implies this in his remark below:

. . . When men belong to Jesus Christ in such a way that they have freedom to recognise His word as addressed also to them, His work as done also for them, the message about Him as also their task; and then for

³⁵Ibid., p. 34.

their part, freedom to hope for the best for all other men, this happens, indeed, as their human experience and action, and yet not in virtue of their human capacity, determination and exertion, but solely on the basis of the free gift of God, in which all this is given to them. In this giving and gift God is the Holy Spirit.³⁶

The above mention of "freedom" is a significant element for Barth when he speaks of Christian experience, and by it he always refers to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Barth also drives this Christian experience to such an extremely subjective end as to eliminate all together the objective evidences. Here again Kierkegaard preceded Barth by stating that it was possible for people to be very much Christian and never be detected as such by the objective eye. Quite in agreement, Barth makes this extreme statement:

. . . Easter is indeed the great pledge of our hope, but simultaneously this future is already present in the Easter message. It is the proclamation of a victory already won. The war is at an end--even though here and there troops are still shooting, because they have not heard anything yet about the capitulation. The game is won, even though the player can still play a few further moves. Actually he is already mated. The clock has run down, even though the pendulum still swings a few times this way and that. It is in this interim space that we are now living: the old is past, behold it has all become new. The Easter message tells that our enemies, sin, the curse and death, are beaten. Ultimately they can no longer start mischief. They still behave as though the game were not decided, the battle not fought; we must still reckon with them, but fundamentally we must cease to fear them any more.³⁷

This extreme subjectivity is supported by the concept that

³⁶Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 137.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 122, 123.

the Holy Spirit embodies the total effect of the Christian gospel. In Him it has already been accomplished due to the Holy Spirit being posited as "subjective reality" in such statements as the following:

The subjective reality of revelation consists in the fact that we have our being through Christ and in the Church, that we are the recipients of the divine testimonies, and, as the real recipients of them, the children of God. But the fact that we have this being is the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the Holy Spirit is the subjective reality of revelation.³⁸

As Barth indicates in the following quotation, the Holy Spirit is the sole operator within man's subjective existence in which man has no activity:

We resume our study and inquire as to the significance for the Christian life of the Holy Ghost as the "Finger of God," as the subjective aspect in the conception of revelation. The wonder of the love of God in which we are made to participate by His Word passes beyond His being the Creator, and is, moreover, His fellowship with us, sinners though we be. And this is the wonder of it: it is the wonder of His unmerited mercy. In other words, it is something that we cannot attribute to ourselves, not even in idea, as a quality of our own spirit.³⁹

It is necessary to see how Barth interprets the work of the Holy Spirit in order to understand how he is applying the Kierkegaardian idea of the "moment." Like Kierkegaard, Barth views God, in His arbitrary activity of the Holy

³⁸Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part II, trans. G. T. Thomson, Harold Knight (Vol. I of Church Dogmatics. 5 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1956), p. 242.

³⁹Barth, The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life, p. 39.

Spirit, as being completely responsible for the brief moments of divine revelation that dawn upon man's comprehension, thus making man aware of what God has already accomplished in subjective man. The following illustrates the application of Kierkegaard's "existential moment" as found in Barth's subjective view of the Holy Spirit:

. . . It runs thus: then, and just then, when God wills to be and is gracious to man and makes His grace manifest to him. Therefore then, and just then, when God speaks His Word to him, when Christ, as the Crucified and Risen One, is present there for him, indeed on his behalf. We can describe the same moment chosen by God,--the same event taking place in God's freedom--as man's openness or preparedness for God's grace, as his existence for Christ, as his hearing God's Word. In saying this we have not spoken of any of man's own autonomous actions. But when we keep in view the subjective aspect of the central concept of revelation, we have spoken then of the special work of God the Spirit, of the wonder of the love in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. When revelation takes place, the Holy Ghost is, according to a figure of speech much cherished in the ancient Church, "the finder of God by whom we are sanctified." He is the Paraclete who is not only speaking on our behalf, but speaking to us so that we have to hear Him, the speaking God. For it does not enter into consideration that we somehow open, prepare and equip ourselves for taking part in this event at all. The fundamental significance of the Holy Ghost for the Christian life is, that this, our participation in the occurrence of revelation, is just our being grasped in his occurrence which is the effect of Divine action.⁴⁰

Hence, man is moved along his highway of "passion" on to the experience of the "moment" through absolutely no initiative of his own. This is Kierkegaardian through and through.

Like Kierkegaard, Barth is universal in his inclusion

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 18-20.

of all men in the subjective work of the Holy Spirit. Both men come very close to replacing the human spirit with the Holy Spirit. These ideas are supported in Barth's statement:

When we spoke of faith, we stressed the concept of freedom. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. If we wish to paraphrase the mystery of the Holy Spirit it is best to choose this concept. To receive the Spirit, to have the Spirit, to live in the Spirit means being set free and being permitted to live in freedom. Not all men are free. Freedom is not a matter of course and is not simply a predicate of human existence. All men are destined to freedom, but not all are in this freedom. Where the line of separations runs is hidden from us men. The Spirit bloweth where He listeth. It is indeed not a natural condition of man for him to have the Spirit; it will always be a distinction, a gift of God. What matters here is, quite simply, belonging to Jesus Christ. We are not concerned in the Holy Spirit with something different from Him and new. It was always an erroneous conception of the Holy Spirit, that so understood Him. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 'Of mine He shall take and give to you.' The Holy Spirit is nothing else than a certain relation of the Word to man. In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as Whitsun, there is a movement--pneuma means wind--from Christ to man. He breathed on them: 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost!' Christians are those breathed upon by Christ. Therefore we can never in one respect speak soberly enough of the Holy Spirit. What is involved is the participation of man in the word and work of Christ.⁴¹

It must be remembered that the "freedom" spoken of refers to the enlightenment found in the "existential moment," to use Kierkegaard's phrase, or the "revelation," to use Barth's term.

Barth's extreme subjectivism causes him to frown on any objective manifestations of a Christian experience. He

⁴¹Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 138.

agrees with Kierkegaard's thought that everyman is a lone pilgrim who can be of very little objective help to anyone else's Christian experience. The Christian should not try to paint in word or deed a picture or even an idea of Christ but simply point to Christ. The witness of revelation is such a subjective element, for Barth, as to make all human efforts of witnessing seem like idolatry.⁴² Hence, the inevitable quest of man for God is not satisfied by his own efforts or by the efforts of other men, because man is totally dependent upon the arbitrary disposition of an absolutely transcendent God who will tell man, when He gets ready, what He has already done for man.

Though Barth spends much time explaining the traditional concepts of Christianity, his subjective view brings him around to much the same conclusions that Kierkegaard had reached. That is, Christian experience in its practical application becomes little more than a supreme inner adjustment to a constantly changing world.

As the existential and the subjective infiltrate the whole of Kierkegaardian theology so they infiltrate the whole of Barth's theology. The subjective element, especially, is again prominent in the chapter dealing with faith.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 93, 94.

CHAPTER III

SIN AND SUFFERING

At this point is found the darkest part of Kierkegaard's theology. Also it must be remembered that a theologian's view of sin is always very basic to his whole theology. How a man defines sin, determines the nature and extent of salvation necessary to atone for that sin. The evaluation of sin even effects one's appreciation of a Saviour. In fact, the whole plan of salvation is involved in the definition of sin and the effect of that sin upon man.

I. SIN AND SUFFERING AS FOUND WITHIN KIERKEGAARD'S WRITING

Sin. Unless one takes Kierkegaard's view of sin by steps, it will be difficult to adjust one's thinking at this point. Extreme caution must be used that a strict orthodox meaning is not given to many of the words Kierkegaard uses. For Kierkegaard is very adept at taking orthodox expressions that have become quite traditional and making them fit into his thinking. This means that usually an unfamiliar meaning is affixed to the word or expression which, if not properly understood, will greatly confuse the reader.

This progressive understanding begins by a brief acquaintance with Kierkegaard's meaning of innocence. In

his own words:

Innocence is ignorance. In his innocence man is not determined as spirit but is soulishly determined in immediate unity with his natural condition. Spirit is dreaming in man. This view is in perfect accord with that of the Bible, and by refusing to ascribe to man in the state of innocence a knowledge of the difference between good and evil it condemns all the notion of merit Catholicism has imagined.

In this state there is peace and repose; but at the same time there is something different, which is not dis-sension and strife, for there is nothing to strive with. What is it then? Nothing. But what effort does nothing produce? It begets dread. This is the profound, secret of innocence, that at the same time it is dread.¹

This innocence is lost by the knowledge of sin which is guilt. Guilt actually argues for a previous state of innocence says Kierkegaard in the following: "As Adam lost innocence by guilt, so does every man lose it. If it was not by guilt he lost it, neither was it innocence he lost; and if he was not innocent before he became guilty, he never became guilty."²

This state of dreadful, innocent ignorance drives men to seek the knowledge of sin. The following explains this inception of dread that leads in turn to a knowledge of sin. One must not confuse this with the idea of "passion" previously discussed, though they do appear parallel. Passion drives men to eternal happiness, while dread drives men to

¹Søren Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 37, 38.

²Ibid., p. 32.

sin's knowledge.

Innocence still is, but one word suffices, and with that ignorance is concentrated. Innocence of course cannot understand this word; but dread has as it were obtained its first prey; instead of nothing innocence gets an enigmatic word. So when it is related in Genesis that God said to Adam, "Only of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat," it is a matter of course that Adam did not understand this word. For how could he have understood the difference between good and evil, seeing that this distinction was in fact consequent upon the enjoyment of the fruit?

When one assumes that the prohibition awakens the desire, one posits a knowledge instead of ignorance; for Adam would have had to have a knowledge of freedom, since his desire was to use it. The explanation therefore anticipates what was subsequent. The prohibition alarms Adam [induces a state of dread] because the prohibition awakens in him the possibility of freedom. That which passed innocence by as the nothing of dread has now entered into him, and here again it is a nothing, the alarming possibility of being able. What it is he is able to do, of that he has no conception; to suppose that he had some conception is to presuppose, as commonly is done, what came later, the distinction between good and evil. There is only the possibility of being able, as a heightened expression of dread, because this in a more profound sense is and is not, because in a more profound sense he loves it and flees from it.³

This is difficult to understand, but one must remember that Kierkegaard does not think of sin in terms of simple acts of disobedience to God's laws, but as a psychological activity which has this preceding state of innocence and dread, which then leads to guilt. This is the reason that reference is made to the knowledge of sin, rather than the committing of sin. In Kierkegaard, very little discussion

³Ibid., p. 40

is given to law and commandments as these are thought of in orthodoxy. Man's fall is in terms of a psychological conflict that every individual encounters, termed by Kierkegaard as the "qualitative lead." In the following analysis he argues for this preceding state to the qualitative leap:

. . . Sin is not first immediacy, sin is a later immediacy. By sin the individual is already higher (in the direction of the demoniacal paradox) than the universal, because it is a contradiction on the part of the universal to impose itself upon a man who lacks the conditio sine quo non. If philosophy among other vagaries were also to have the notion that it could occur to a man to act in accordance with its teaching, one might make out of that a queer comedy. An ethics which disregards sin is a perfectly idle science; but if it asserts sin, it is eo ipso well beyond itself. Philosophy teaches that the immediate must be annulled. That is true enough; but what is not true in this is that sin is as a matter of course the immediate, for that is no more true than that faith as a matter of course is the immediate.⁴

Now it becomes necessary to see how Kierkegaard's concept of sin is conjoined with the sexual. For this fall of every man into the knowledge of sin has for Kierkegaard a twofold consequence: that sin came into the world, and that sexuality was posited. Note his argument:

Sinfulness then is not senuousness, not by any means; but without sin there is no sexuality, and without sexuality no history. A perfect spirit has neither the one nor the other, hence also the sexual difference is annulled in the resurrection, and hence too no angel has history. Even though the archangel Michael had recorded all the missions on which he was sent and which he performed, this nevertheless is not his history. The syn-

⁴Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 152.

thesis is first posited in the sexual as a contradiction, but at the same time, like every contradiction, as a task, the history of which begins that very instant. This is the actuality which is preceded by the possibility of freedom. But the possibility of freedom does not consist in being able to choose the good or the evil. Such thoughtlessness has as little support in the Scripture as in philosophy. Possibility means I can. In a logical system it is convenient enough to say that possibility passes over into actuality. In reality it is not so easy, and an intermediate determinant is necessary. This intermediate determinant is dread, which no more explains the qualitative leap than it justifies it ethically. Dread is not determinant of necessity, but neither is it of freedom; it is a trammled freedom, where freedom is not free in itself but trammled, not by necessity but in itself. If sin has come into the world by necessity . . . then there is no dread. If sin has come into the world by an act of abstract liberum arbitrium . . . , neither in this case is there dread. To want to explain logically the entrance of sin into the world is a stupidity which could only occur to people who are comically anxious to get an explanation.⁵

What he is actually saying is, that sexuality and history, though not themselves sinful, come as a result of sin which comes as a result of the possibility of freedom. Beyond this he makes no attempt to find sin's origin.

Though Kierkegaard, as every theological thinker, can go only so far in determining the origin of sin, yet his view of original sin is stated very definitely. For him sin does not stem from the acts of life so much as it does from fear; it is thought of as a psychological event arising from dread or anxiety. Despair, a universal condition, is roughly the equivalent of sin. Kierkegaard explains the sinner in

⁵Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, pp. 44, 45.

these words:

Let us now call the untruth of the individual Sin. Viewed eternally he cannot be sin, nor can he be eternally presupposed as having been in sin. By coming into existence therefore (for the beginning was that subjectivity is untruth), he becomes a sinner. He is not born as a sinner in the sense that he is presupposed as being a sinner before he is born, but he is born in sin and as a sinner. This we might call original sin.⁶

Again it is important to note the distinction between orthodox 'original sin' and this theory of Kierkegaard's. He does not hold that Adam's sin conditions sinfulness as a condition. To say that Adam's sin brought on original sin would be to say, for Kierkegaard, that Adam is outside the race, and that his sin was worse than all other men's sins. He feels that every man brings sin into the world by his own first sin. He argues that if Adam's sin brought the condition of sin upon all men then Adam, being outside the race, caused the race to really begin outside of itself, which is quite contrary to every rational concept. This makes descent a mere carrying on of the racial species, which descent gives man a history but does not generate upon him the past events.⁷ Nevertheless, Kierkegaard does allow in the following quotation that there is a certain condition which is akin to

⁶Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 186.

⁷Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, p. 27.

"original sin:"

In the foregoing I have several times called attention to the fact that the view presented in this work does not deny the propagation of sinfulness through generation; I have only said that sinfulness moves by quantitative determinants, whereas sin comes in constantly by the qualitative leap of the individual. Here one can already see one significance of the quantitative process of generation. Eve is the derived being. True, she is created like Adam, but she is created out of a precedent creature. True, she is innocent like Adam, but there is as it were a presentiment of a disposition which indeed is not yet in existence, yet may seem like a hint of the sinfulness posited by reproduction. It is the fact of being derived which predisposes the individual, without for all that making him guilty.⁸

In the midst of the fine and difficult distinction, it must be recalled that Kierkegaard did not believe that the understanding of this sin problem could be learned from another, but that everyone must learn for himself in his own state of existential progress. Only the science of psychology, he said, could help a little bit.⁹

At this point, it is not hard to see that, for Kierkegaard, entrance into the kingdom is made as difficult as possible, because a man, by himself, must come to conceive of this psychological sin. Sin is hidden within human nature, and does not stem from carnal or Adamic nature. Thus redemption is a fresh beginning which breaks with the past and man's old self, and man's best is in as much need of forgiveness as his worst.

⁸Ibid., pp. 42, 43.

⁹Ibid., p. 46.

Into this picture Kierkegaard does bring what he terms as the "infinite movement of repentance." This implies a complete break with the temporal world where the "return to reality" is the restoration of one's state of innocence. To repent is to recognize the presence of sin and give testimony to the fact that the ethical has been violated. By sinning, one places himself beyond the ethical where restoration to innocence is ethically impossible. This repentance is never to cease because man's best is nothing but sin and only repentance will keep one in a loving relationship to God. Where this repentance leaves off, the religious paradox begins, i.e., the atonement and its correlative faith. Hence, for Kierkegaard, repentance is merely a state of recognizing sin or the sin-personality of man. Consequently he says, "For this reason he who believes the atonement is greater than the one who repents most deeply."¹⁰ This matter of believing is treated at length in a later section of this chapter.

Suffering. Closely entwined in Kierkegaard's theory of sin is his idea of suffering which again adds to the gloom of his thinking. For him suffering is not just a

¹⁰Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 65, citing Kierkegaard, Papirer, IV A p. 116.

matter involving those who lustfully indulge in the activities of sin, but it is also a vital part of the "becoming Christian." Any relation of finite man to the infinite, absolute God is one of suffering because of the vast irreconcilability of the two, which can only be spanned by divine intervention through the absolute revelation of Christ.

It is vitally important to understand that for Kierkegaard this suffering not only has several facets such as: guilt, pathos, dread, and despair, but that suffering is a continuous thing for the religious experience. Suffering is the essential criterion of the religious life because as man stands related to God in an absolute decisive manner, he is unable to find any decisive external expression for this. Thus there is always a certain degree of suffering for man in his relation to an absolute God. However, this suffering is never external or ascetic as the case of the monastic. It must always be subjective "soul suffering."¹¹

Suffering is activated as man, in an effort to hold a relationship with God, renounces the relativity and the immediacy of this present world in favor of the conception of God or an eternal happiness. Man is brought to seek his eternal happiness by the extremely compelling force of pathos which comes as a result of seeing the "either/or" in

¹¹Thomte, op. cit., p. 90, citing Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, pp. 388, 446.

life. In other words, as man is confronted with the choice between good and evil, he senses certain spiritual suffering. This pathos for eternal happiness must be allowed to cause man to choose the good instead of the evil. Hence extreme pathos comes as a result of the eternal recollection of guilt which as has been previously mentioned, is that which results from the knowledge of sin in general, not from the particular acts of sin.

Though man may be forgiven of his sin he can never really escape the pressing guilt of it. However, to be forgiven he must first experience a feeling of being a sinner which is profound suffering. It is pure pain to stand openly before God's exposing and sentencing eyes. Kierkegaard says, "The more clearly the conception of guilt stands out, the greater is the pain, the less profound the sorrow."¹² Hence the sinner must try to understand his predicament of sin, in order that he may experience most fully the guilt which will motivate a humble drawing unto God.

It is at this point of sin where we see the importance of suffering for Kierkegaard. This suffering of the guilty soul never ends, but becomes a crucible of affliction to prove the gold of existential seriousness in our beliefs. Kierkegaard explains:

¹²Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, I, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 120.

But suffering as the essential expression for existential pathos means that suffering is real, or that the reality of the suffering constitutes the existential pathos; and by the reality of this suffering is meant its persistence as essential for the pathetic relationship to an external happiness.¹³

The eternal recollection of guilt, producing extreme pathos, becomes the highest expression of the existential man.

This discussion of pathos and guilt gives a basic understanding of the more evident suffering which is so common to all men. However, there is another even more fundamental form of suffering than these which again all men experience, although it is not nearly so apparent. Kierkegaard calls this 'the concept of dread.' Actually this comes very close to the orthodox idea of original sin, though it is considered in terms of psychological malady rather than as a polluted nature.

Dread goes back to the very beginning of man. It is found within the innocent man as the longing that caused man to seek the knowledge of sin. However, dread has never appeared again in the same form that it did to Adam. "Consequently that dread of his had now acquired two analogous expressions; objective dread in nature, and subjective dread in the individual--of which two the latter contains a more and the former a less than that dread in Adam."¹⁴ Per-

¹³Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 396.

¹⁴Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, p. 54.

haps it would help to realize that Kierkegaard defines dread as ". . . a quality of the dreaming spirit, and as such it has its place in psychology." Also, "Dread is a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy."¹⁵ Thus dread is the reality of freedom as possibility anterior to possibility. This is not fear, but more closely, longing-- a longing which leads man to his pattern of sin, guilt, pathos, despair and finally faith. Kierkegaard explains it:

Thus dread is the dizziness of freedom which occurs when the spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom then gazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself. In this dizziness freedom succumbs. Further than this psychology cannot go and will not. That very instant everything is changed, and when freedom rises again it sees that it is guilty. Between these two instants lies the leap, which no science had explained or can explain. He who becomes guilty in dread becomes as ambiguously guilty as it is possible to be. Dread is a womanish debility in which freedom swoons. Psychologically speaking, the fall into sin always occurs in impotence. But dread is at the same time the most egoistic thing, and no concrete expression of freedom is so egoistic as is the possibility of every concretion. This again is the overwhelming experience which determines the individual's ambiguous relation, both sympathetic and antipathetic. In dread there is the egoistic infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a definite choice, but alarms . . . and fascinates with its sweet anxiety . . . ¹⁶

Whether man is in the state of innocence or guilt, dread is the longing which announces man's desire for deliverance. "So then dread signifies two things: the dread in which the individual posits sin by the qualitative leap;

¹⁶Ibid., p. 55.

and the dread which entered in along with sin, and which for this reason comes also into the world quantitatively every time an individual posits sin."¹⁷ Hence, Kierkegaard follows up with this statement which defines these two distinctions of dread:

It might be more serviceable to note that objective dread is here contrasted with subjective dread, and that this is a distinction which could not have been made in Adam's state of innocence. Taken in the strictest sense, subjective dread is the dread posited in the individual as the consequence of his sin. . . . But when the term is taken in this sense, the contrast with an objective dread vanishes, since dread manifests itself precisely as that which it is, namely, the subjective. The distinction between the subjective and the objective dread had its place therefore in the contemplation of the world and of the state of innocence of the later individual. The division occurs here in such a way that subjective dread designates what exists in the innocence of the individual, an innocence which corresponds to that of Adam and yet is quantitatively different by reason of the quantitative increment due to generation. By objective dread, on the other hand, we understand the reflection in the whole world of the sinfulness which is propagated by generation.¹⁸

Again it is important to see that for Kierkegaard the effects of sin in nature and in the physical are generated but not the polluted nature of man's personality which is called "the bent to sinning." Rather, for Kierkegaard, every man has his own fall in Eden due to the longing of dread that sees the possibility of freedom that will lead to the knowledge of sin.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 50, 51.

Since sinfulness moves by quantitative increments, so dread also. The consequence of original sin or of its presence in the individual is dread, which only quantitatively is different from that of Adam. In the state of innocence, and of that we may speak in the case of the later man, original sin must have the ambiguity out of which guilt breaks forth in the qualitative leap. On the other hand, dread in the later individual can possibly be more reflective than in Adam, because the quantitative increment accumulated by the race now makes itself felt in him. Dread, however, is no more than it was before an imperfection in man; on the contrary, one may say that the more primitiveness a man has, the deeper in the dread, because the presupposition of sinfulness which his individual life supposes, since he enters indeed into the history of the race, must be appropriated. Sinfulness has thus acquired a great power, and original sin is growing.¹⁹

Upon this same ground Kierkegaard would argue that sensuality has become synonymous with sin but that in the beginning it was not so. Man has made it such by his own continual positing of sin.

Mention has been made of this great cloud of suffering incurred by humanity through dread. However, dread is not the total picture of suffering, though it does overshadow all of man's life. Dread leads man into the exploration of the possibilities of sin's knowledge. As man explores with his reason, he is brought to the point of despair through being unable to answer his predicament logically. This despair is also a part of man's continual suffering experience in this world.

Though some other implications of this despair are

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

discussed in the section on faith, here the suffering side of it needs to be viewed. It is not hard to see how a man suffers over the despair of not knowing his way out of condemnation. However, for Kierkegaard, a man is found to be in despair in at least three ways. "Despair is a sickness in the spirit, in the self, and so it may assume a triple form: in despair at not being conscious of having a self (despair improperly so called); in despair at not willing to be oneself; in despair at willing to be oneself."²⁰ He even goes on to say that the state of being unaware of despair is actually one form of despair. So no man can ever completely get away from despair, which is thus illustrated in the following:

Just as the physician might say that there lives not one single man who is in perfect health, so one might say perhaps that there lives not one single man who after all is not to some extent in despair. . . . At any rate there has lived no one and there lives no one outside of Christendom, unless he be a true Christian, and if he is not quite that, he is somewhat in despair after all.²¹

II. SIN AND SUFFERING AS FOUND WITHIN

BARTH'S WRITING

Though both Kierkegaard and Barth are in agreement with each other in the major thrust of these ideas of sin

²⁰Søren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 17.

²¹Ibid., p. 32.

and suffering, yet a variation of emphasis is apparent at some points. The mode of expression is often the greatest difference, rather than the basic theory.

Sin. In the area of sin, Barth holds the same general concept as Kierkegaard, but each man starts from a different point of discussion. Kierkegaard begins in an attempt to search out the beginning of sin. Barth begins with the proposition that sin can only be known by the Word of God.

. . . In general terms it is true enough that the knowledge of God alone includes within itself the knowledge of sin, and that this knowledge arises only in the confrontation of man by the majesty and holiness of God.²²

Going on from here Barth brings out his reasoning in which his theory of the "Word of God" is so basic:

. . .The incline obviously begins at the point where we think we have to create the message of sin from some other source than that of the message of Jesus Christ. This forces us to ask for an independent normative concept, and to move forward to the construction of it, and we fall at once into the whole arbitrary process. The root of the arbitrariness is the belief that we can and should try to escape the one true word of God in this matter. And why should we not avoid the mistake at the point where it begins? What reason is there for that first belief that the doctrine of sin must precede Christology and therefore be worked out independently of it?²³

However, both men arrive at the same conclusion regarding

²²Karl Barth, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part I, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Vol. IV of Church Dogmatics. 5 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 363.

²³Ibid., p. 389.

the meaning of Adam and the beginning of sin at the fall.

. . . Who is Adam? . . . He simply did in the insignificant form of the beginning that which all men have done after him, that which is in a more or less serious and flagrant form our own transgression. He was in a trivial form what we all are, a man of sin. . . . This does not mean that he has bequeathed it to us as his heirs so that we have to be as he was. He has not poisoned us or passed on a disease.²⁴

This fall is not the bringing of sin into the world, it is just an example of how sin enters each individual.

. . . The fall of man comes in and with the pride of man. He falls in exalting himself where he ought not to try to exalt himself, where, according to the grace of God, he might in humility be freely and truly man.²⁵

. . . . The sin of human pride in the relationship of man with God is a failure and repudiation of this kind, and as such it is the guilt or debt of man. He is not forced to commit this sin. As we have seen, there is no reason for it. All that we can say is that he does commit it.²⁶

Where Kierkegaard spends a great deal of time talking about "innocence," the "dread" of innocence and "the knowledge of sin" which these inevitably lead to, Barth assumes all of this with a question mark and says:

. . . That man is evil, that he is at odds with God and his neighbor, and therefore with himself, is something which he cannot know of himself, by communing with himself, or by conversation with his fellow-man, any more than he can know in this way that he is justified and comforted by God.²⁷

Barth maintains that the imperfection and the problematical

²⁴Ibid., p. 509. ²⁵Ibid., p. 478

²⁶Ibid., pp. 484, 485. ²⁷Ibid., pp. 359, 360.

nature of man's existence is not as such his sin but only his limitations. ". . . Only when we know Jesus Christ do we really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man."²⁸ Though Kierkegaard would hold that man does have a knowledge of sin, the two men are more closely agreed upon the extent into which man goes in sin and the state of sin in which man lives. Barth describes these in the following words:

. . . however we may describe the fallen being of man, we cannot say that man is fallen completely away from God, in the sense that he is lost to Him or that he has perished. It is true that the fall of man means that in his being there has opened up the gulf or vacuum of nothingness in the world which God created good.²⁹

. . . And man himself is none other than the one he always was in relation to God, sharing the same creaturely being and capacity. The only difference is that under the authority of the Word of God and in possession of his human capacity he is condemned to exist before God as the one who resists, in an overthrowal of the covenant-relationship and therefore in an overthrowal of his relationship as a creature to the Creator. God still says Yes to him, but this now means, that because he does not hear it he will not thankfully rejoice in it but can only hear the Yes as a destructive No.³⁰

All this defining of sin's origin serves to make sin in its more practical aspect little more than a psychological malady, which is exactly the point at which Kierkegaard arrives in his reasoning. Barth is quite plain in his statement of this:

²⁸Ibid., p. 389. ²⁹Ibid., p. 480. ³⁰Ibid., p. 482.

. . . It is true that in relation to all these elements of his nature the man of sin becomes someone other than himself, that his nature is altered in all its elements when he commits sin. It is also true that his nature, he himself, is not destroyed and does not disappear when he becomes someone other than himself and his nature is altered. It is also true that the man of sin is not stronger than his Creator, that he cannot create another nature than that which God gave him and become a different being because of his sin. Even when he does evil, he is still himself, the good creature of God.³¹

This does not mean that sin does not receive judgment and punishment or that sin does not bring guilt and condemnation.³² But because the concept of sin is so intangible, these concepts also lose their extreme application. They simply are expressed in terms of a wounded or fractured relationship to God.

Barth defines sin in the following statements, which are very close to Kierkegaard's thinking:

. . . Sin, in itself, is obviously never at all this or that act, on which one could lay his finger; but it is solely resistance to God's law, opposition to His gracious pronouncement of acquittal and guilt.³³

. . . In the sphere where the term "sin" is ambiguous, i.e. in the sphere of our own inner and outer action, there is no doubt but that we can acquire a relative sinlessness and righteousness. What comes closer to us than our self-esteem as regards this? And it is just

³¹Ibid., p. 406.

³²Karl Barth, Christ and Adam, trans. T. A. Small (New York: Harper And Brothers Publishers, 1952), pp. 38, 39.

³³Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1938), p. 45.

this self-reliance and self-presumption with regard to this relative sinlessness and righteousness, using it as a safeguard against the accusations made by God's Word; this refusal to be of those who have always to live by God's forgiving mercy: this is unbelief: this is really sin. In comparison with this sin, all the rest do not matter so much, for this unbelief is the most critical sin of all sins.³⁴

Hence, for Barth as for Kierkegaard, the worst sin a man can commit is to try to "do" something that will help his own salvation from sin. Here Barth is even more pronounced than Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard did allow that there was some small bit of resigning that man might do in ridding himself of worldly impressions. Barth leans to an utter passivity of man's efforts.

. . . No psalm-singing to the glory of God and no lowly knee-bending can alter the fact that when God's grace and man's doing are looked upon as two sides of an affair, where one can turn it round and say, instead of the words "Holy Ghost," with just as good emphasis, "religious fervour," "moral earnestness," or even "man's creative activity."--then it is a simple fact that man has been handed over and left to his sins.

. . . But all this talk of theirs about "the gravity of sin" does not alter the fact one jot, that serious sins are not being spoken of by them. For we can as little think of such sins being easily removed as think of curing a corpse: as little think them removed, as little as we can remove them, as matter of fact. A dead person can only be raised, resurrected, and grave sin can only be forgiven. And we cannot make this removal evident in the figure of a changing of man's attitude, as this is sketched so significantly for Augustine's doctrine of justification or even Karl Holl's. We are

³⁴Ibid., p. 46.

compelled to believe this as God's action, without our seeing it.³⁵

This element of passivity pervades Barth's whole concept of forgiveness. Yet this does not essentially change the nature of forgiveness from what Kierkegaard also arrives at. Neither Barth nor Kierkegaard ever spends time worrying about man being lost in terms of a literal hell. The reason is found in this statement by Barth:

. . .By God interceding for man--the New Testament writers were not afraid to use the expression 'paying'--man is a ransomed creature. 'Απολύτρωσις is a legal concept which described the ransoming of a slave. The goal is that man is transferred to another status in law. He no longer belongs to that which had a right over him, to that realm of curse, death and hell; he is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. That means that his position, his condition, his legal status as a sinner is rejected in every form. Man is no longer seriously regarded by God as a sinner. Whatever he may be, whatever there is to be said of him, whatever he has to reproach himself with, God no longer takes him seriously as a sinner. He has died to sin; there on the Cross of Golgotha. He is no longer present for sin. He is acknowledged before God and established as a righteous man, as one who does right before God. As he now stands, he had, of course, his existence in sin and so in its guilt; but he has that behind him. The turn has been achieved, once for all. But we cannot say, 'I have turned away once for all, I have experienced'--no; 'once for all' is Jesus Christ's 'once for all'. But if we believe in Him, then it holds for us. Man is in Christ Jesus, who has died for him, in virtue of His Resurrection, God's dear child, who may live by and for the good pleasure of God. ³⁶

Even more extreme than this is the universalism which seems

³⁵Ibid., pp. 35, 36, 38.

³⁶Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 121, 122.

clear in the teachings of Barth which strips judgment of all its poignant effect. Again Barth is found to be stating this case much more definitively than Kierkegaard, yet he is in perfect agreement with Kierkegaard's concept of "existential suffering" and "eternal life."

But actually we are looking away beyond Good Friday, when we say that God comes in our place and takes our punishment upon Himself. Thereby He actually takes it away from us. All pain, all temptation, as well as our dying, is just the shadow of the judgment which God has already executed in our favour. That which in truth was bound to affect us and ought to have affected us, has actually been turned aside from us already in Christ's death. That is attested by Christ's saying on the Cross, 'It is finished.' So then in view of Christ's Cross we are invited on the one hand to realize the magnitude and weight of our sin in what our forgiveness cost. In the strict sense there is no knowledge of sin except in the light of Christ's Cross. For he alone understands what sin is, who knows that his sin is forgiven him. And on the other hand we may realize that the price is paid on our behalf, so that we are acquitted of sin and its consequences. We are no longer addressed and regarded by God as sinners, who must pass under judgment for their guilt. We have nothing more to pay. We are acquitted *gratis*, *sola gratia*, by God's own entering in for us.³⁷

Again it must be noticed that sin's forgiveness is more akin to the psychological adjustment in Barth. This is like Kierkegaard's idea of the "return to reality."

. . . His forgiveness makes good our repudiation and failure and thus overcomes the hurt that we do to God, and the disturbance of the relationship between Himself and us, and the disturbance of the general relationship between the Creator and creation. His forgiveness repels chaos, and closes the gulf, and ensures that the will of

³⁷Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 119, 120.

God will be done on earth as it is in heaven.³⁸

Before leaving the subject of sin, one must mention more specifically original sin. Barth, like Kierkegaard, denies this to be a reality, yet again like Kierkegaard, he makes statements which imply a vague attachment of the human race to Adam that is like the relation of original sin:

. . . When Paul speaks of sin he means not the puppet sins with which we torment ourselves, but the sin of Adam in which we are begotten and with which we are born, the sin of which we shall not rid ourselves as long as time shall last.³⁹

Yet in the final upshot of Barth's thinking he agrees with Kierkegaard's "qualitative leap" in erasing any generic relation of sin. The following almost sounds like an argument from Kierkegaard himself:

The meaning of the famous parallel (so called) between "Adam and Christ," which now follows, is not that the relationship between Adam and us is the expression of our true and original nature, so that we would have to recognize in Adam the fundamental truth of anthropology to which the subsequent relationship between Christ and us would have to fit and adapt itself. The relationship between Adam and us reveals not the primary but only the secondary anthropological truth and ordering principle. The primary anthropological truth and ordering principle, which only mirrors itself in that relationship, is made clear only through the relationship between Christ and us. . . .

. . . It is also true that each of these others has lived his own life, has sinned his own sins, and has had to die his own death. Even so, the lives of all other men after Adam have only been the repetition and varia-

³⁸Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. Douglas Horton (Massachusetts: The Pilgrim Press, 1928), p. 118.

tion of his life, of his beginning and his end, of his sin and his death.⁴⁰

Barth may take a slightly different course of procedure than Kierkegaard, but the end result is the same--that man can not help himself in his sin, but must wait for God to move.

Suffering. Kierkegaard discusses at great length man's state of suffering and what it does to him as a man, whereas Barth deals more with the defining of this suffering state that exists due to the vast gulf between God and man. It is here where Barth will allow that man does have some sensation of his existence.

. . . An understanding and consciousness of himself which man can attain of himself may also embrace the fact that he does not merely suffer but creates this inward tension, that he continually produces this dialectic.⁴¹

Again the psychological malady is implied. But to realize this is no help. In fact, the helplessness of man is his despair.

. . . You may act as if you were God, you may with ease take his righteousness under your own management. This is certainly pride.

One might equally well, however, call it despair. And it is singular that in our relations with God these two contrasted qualities always keep each other company. . . . We are apprehensive of the righteousness of God because we feel much too small and too human for any-

⁴⁰Barth, Christ and Adam, pp. 28, 29.

⁴¹Barth, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part I, p. 360.

thing different and new to begin in us and among us. This is our despair.

And because we are so proud and so despairing, we build a tower at Babel. The righteousness of God which we have looked upon and our hands have handled changes under our awkward touch into all kinds of human righteousness.⁴²

In other words, the more we interfere with things, the worse we make our own situation before God. This dilemma keeps man in a constant state of mental and spiritual flux which compels him to cry out after God. This is precisely what Kierkegaard described with his idea of the "pathos."

. . . However conscious or unconscious of his situation he may be, man cannot escape his humanity, and humanity means limitation, finitude, creaturehood, separation from God. And if he is not conscious of it, if he cannot tell us about it, and if his fellow men who want to help him cannot understand it, the more serious his plight.

Man as man cries for God. He cries not for a truth, but for truth; not for something good but for the good; not for answers but for the answer--the one that is identical with his own question. Man himself is the real question, and if the answer is to be found in the question, he must find an answer in himself; he must be the answer. He does not cry for solutions but for salvation; not for something human, but for God, for God as his Saviour from humanity.⁴³

The problem of suffering is no trifle for Barth even though he leaves the more psychological implications of it to Kierkegaard and goes on to the more definite doctrinal

⁴²Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, pp. 16, 17.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 189, 190.

expressions of it. Barth amplifies the understanding of the extent of suffering in several ways. He speaks of it as a problem of obedience.

. . . In the secret of the Holy Ghost it is true or untrue that we at times have or have not faith, and therefore are obedient and Christian or are not such. For this reason our sanctification is reality, but our obedience is a problem that we cannot solve, into the darkness of which we can but enter again and again, and be thrown utterly and alone upon God.⁴⁴

Again Barth relates temptation to the suffering of man.

. . . "Temptation," with its anguish, comes when it is shown how much reason we--even we Christians--have to repent, and when suffering crashes in upon Christians, which they alone know, for only they know that God is not owing them anything. It comes when the Christian knows that his being simul peccator et justus becomes a judgment upon him instead of pardon; when, to his consternation, faith is, at the same time, torn in twain into man's act of faith and its source and object to be qualified for the first time to him as being a genuine faith; when the experience, which includes the joy and assurance of Christian confidence, remains: (as Luther said, "Christ withdraws from thee, and leaves thee in the lurch"). The "temptation" comes when the Christian becomes aware that of the supreme words of the Faith, even he only knows and holds actually the words, and his experience, left to itself, is only the experience of his unbelief, and when the Word of God Himself is indeed there but is not there on his behalf:--all these things are what make "temptation." Temptation is the more or less visibly increasing finish of human, or religious powers.⁴⁵

Barth also refers to death in its suffering aspect.

. . . 'resurrection'. For this word is the answer to death's terror, the terror that this life some day comes to an end, and that this end is the horizon of our exist-

⁴⁴Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, p. 69.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 53, 54.

ence. 'In the midst of life we are girt about with death. . . .' Human existence is an existence under this threat, marked by this end, by this contradiction continually raised against our existence: you can not live. You believe in Jesus Christ and can only believe and not see. You stand before God and would like to enjoy yourself and may enjoy yourself, and yet must experience every day how your sin is new every morning. There is peace, and yet only the peace which can be confirmed amid struggle. Here we understand, and yet at the same time we understand so overwhelmingly little. There is life, and yet but life in the shadow of death. We are beside each other, and yet must one day separate from one another. Death sets its seal upon the whole; it is the wages of sin. The account is closed, the coffin and corruption are the last word. The contest is decided, and decided against us. Such is death.⁴⁶

Kierkegaard spoke much about the "dread" aspect of suffering which leads man inevitably on to God. Though Barth more pronouncedly ascribes this inevitable leading to God, he still states a similar case:

We must return to that reserve maintained by the divine over against the human--though it must now have become clear to all that the separation of the two cannot be ultimate, for then God would not be God. There must still be a way from there to here. And with this "must" and the "still" we confess to the miracle of the revelation of God. However much the holy may frighten us back from its unattainable elevation, no less are we impelled to venture our lives upon it immediately and completely. We listen to the voice which says, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. And with Moses, we are afraid to look upon God. But we hear the voice continue, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, and am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians"; and we perceive that the first forbiddance must have been only to complete and clarify the final message. Isaiah, also, and Jonah finally had to prove their devotion to the holy by daring to relate it di-

⁴⁶Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, pp. 153, 154.

rectly to the secular life of man. The mysterium tremendum phase, which comes first, finally ceases, and with it that dread of the divine which is dread and dread alone. The kernel breaks through its hard shell. The message itself, the thought of what God's "coming down" means for us, the decision to venture with him, is suffused with a dread which conquers mere dread. This is not the act of man but the act of God in man. And for this reason God in consciousness is actually God in History--and no mere figment of thought. God causes something to happen, a miracle in our eyes.⁴⁷

Just as in Kierkegaard's concept so in Barth's, suffering is not an asceticism or even an endurance of hardship; it is rather the pain of a broken spiritual relationship to God. Thus the element of suffering is transferred to the work of Christ says Barth:

. . . Being a man means being so placed before God as to have deserved this wrath. In this unity of God and man the man is bound to be this condemned and smitten person. The man Jesus in His unity with God is the figure of man smitten by God. Even this world's justice, which carries out this judgment, does so by God's will. God's Son became man in order to let man be seen under God's wrath. The son of man must suffer and be delivered up and crucified, says the New Testament. In this Passion the connexion becomes visible between infinite guilt and the reconciliation that necessarily ensues upon this guilt. It becomes clear that where God's grace is rejected, man rushes into his own mischief. It is here, where God Himself has become man, that the deepest truth of human life is manifest; the total suffering which corresponds to total sin.⁴⁸

But we can only understand this suffering as men through the revealed Christ.

⁴⁷Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, pp. 287, 288.

⁴⁸Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 106.

. . . Jesus Christ. He has suffered, He has rendered visible what the nature of evil is, of man's revolt against God. . . . He, He has suffered, who is true God and true man. . . . We are simply untouched either by suffering or by evil in its proper reality; we know that now. So we can repeatedly escape from the knowledge of our guilt and sin. We can only achieve proper knowledge, when we know that He who is true God and true man has suffered. In other words, it needs faith to see what suffering is. Here there was suffering. Everything else that we know as suffering is unreal suffering compared with what has happened here. Only from this standpoint, by sharing in the suffering He suffered, can we recognize the fact and the cause of suffering everywhere in the creaturely cosmos, secretly and openly.⁴⁹

Because suffering is a result of being a man of sin, which sin is positionally forgiven but never taken away in natural life, Barth says that suffering has no end and cannot be escaped in natural existence:

When the patient Job pours out his grief, he is thinking evidently of a grief which, humanly speaking has no end. . . . And when Jesus Christ dies on the cross he asks not simply, Is it true? but "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" People have attempted to absolve Jesus from blame for this utterance by the argument, difficult to substantiate, that it was not an expression of real despair--and the fact has been quite overlooked that it was not less but more than doubt and despair: as our old dogmatists knew, it was derelictio, a being lost and abandoned. To suffer in the Bible means to suffer because of God; to sin, to sin against God; to doubt, to doubt of God; to perish, to perish at the hand of God. In other words, that painful awareness of the boundary of mortality which man acquires with more or less certainty in life's rise and fall becomes, in the Bible, the order of the God of holiness; it is the message of the cross, and from it, in this life, there is no escape.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 103, 104.

⁵⁰Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, pp. 118, 119.

Barth's discussion of suffering serves to put a greater emphasis upon the relationship of Christ to man's state, whereas Kierkegaard's emphasis is stronger at the level of analysing the subjective experience of suffering itself. Otherwise both men are, in general, stating the same thing. Of course, this one contrast explains the more positive tone of Barth's writing as against the very dismal picturing of Kierkegaard's writing.

CHAPTER IV

FAITH AND PARADOX

The area of faith and paradox in the thought of Kierkegaard and Barth is one of great contrast and capable of great misunderstanding. The background study of the preceding chapters becomes increasingly helpful to the understanding of this chapter.

I. FAITH AND PARADOX AS FOUND WITHIN

KIERKEGAARD'S WRITING

Faith. Perhaps one of the most popular topics among contemporary thinkers is Kierkegaard's view of faith and paradox. Here the idea of man's basic subjective passion for the eternal becomes the spring board for this study. "Faith is a miracle, yet no one is excluded from it, for passion is common to all men, and faith is a passion."¹ Thus faith could be said to be the expression or activity of this passion.

Faith is not, however, exercised concerning everything. For Kierkegaard suggests that if things are easily understood, you cannot believe them, but if it is difficult

¹Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 86.

to understand, then it can be believed.² His favorite illustration at this point is Abraham's offering of Isaac as a sacrifice upon the altar. Because it was beyond Abraham's comprehension how God could raise a great nation through Isaac and still demand that he be slain, it took faith to act.

However, it cannot be assumed that faith for Kierkegaard was totally a matter of volition. "A man can become a tragic hero by his own strength, but he can never, by his own strength, become a knight of faith."³ It will be remembered that a "tragic hero" is one exalted in men's eyes by the standards of this sensual world. A "knight of faith" is concealed from the eyes of man. Of course this renders faith as rather inexpressable so far as one man seeing faith in another man.

The activity of the will does have its part to play in preparing the way for faith.

. . . faith is not an act of will; for all human volition has its capacity within the scope of an underlying condition. Thus if I have the courage to will the understanding, I am able to understand the Socratic principle, i.e., to understand myself; because from the Socratic point of view I have the condition, and so have the power to will this understanding. But if I do not have the condition . . . all my willing is of no avail; although as soon as the condition is given, the Socratic principle will again apply.⁴

²Ibid., pp. 73, 74. ³Ibid., p. 85.

⁴Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, trans. David F. Swanson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), pp. 50, 51.

This brings in the two basic movements of believing individuals.

. . . According to Kierkegaard the man of faith makes two movements: first the infinite resignation, then the movement of faith. The infinite resignation is the break with the temporal. It is a movement which brings peace and rest, but it does not in itself constitute faith; it precedes faith. Hence, whoever has not made the infinite resignation has not arrived at faith. In the infinite resignation the individual becomes conscious of his eternal validity, and only for the person who possesses such a consciousness can there be a question of grasping existence by means of faith. The infinite resignation is regarded as the last stage prior to faith.

In the infinite resignation the individual resigns the love which is the content of his life (cf. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac) and reconciles himself to the pain. Then the miracle happens. He makes the further motion; he says, I believe that by virtue of the absurd I shall receive back that which I surrender, for all things are possible to God. The absurd must not be regarded as a factor within the compass of the understanding. It is not identical with the unexpected, the improbable, or the unsurmised. When the man of faith makes the infinite resignation, he is convinced humanly speaking of the impossibility of any escape. The only salvation is by virtue of the absurd which he seizes by means of faith. He recognizes the impossibility, and at the same time he believes the absurd. Faith has resignation as its presupposition. It is not an aesthetic emotion, nor an immediate instinct of the heart. It is "the paradox of life and existence."⁵

Again the illustration of Abraham and Isaac is used to bear out the meaning of these movements. No one can actually understand just what happens within a man at this infinite movement, yet it is vital to the final movement of faith.

In its broadest sense faith is considered in three

⁵Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), pp. 57, 58.

basic categories or stages of development which lead up to the dual movements of the actual faith experience itself. These stages are: the aesthetic existence which is essentially enjoyment; the ethical existence which is essentially struggle and victory; the religious existence which is essentially suffering. These are one of the keys to unfolding the complicated entanglement of Kierkegaard's thought. When one is confused at the point of the exact meaning of what he is saying, the answer frequently can be found by discerning which one of these three stages he is speaking about.

The aesthetic stage, which is essentially life enjoyment, has a dual characteristic. The first is immediacy. ". . . The aesthetic in a man is that by which he is immediately what he is."⁶ The second is that it has its condition outside the personality or even within the personality but in such a manner that it is not the individual's own contribution, such as the inherent beauty of the individual.

The ethical stage is rather easily understood because of its proximity to high moral living which for Kierkegaard is more outward form or conformity than inward reality. Here morality is not thought to stem from inner purity but is merely a pattern of life which is socially accepted rather

⁶Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 150.

than divinely initiated.

The strongest emphasis is placed upon the final stage of the truly religious existence.

. . . The task of the religiously existing individual Kierkegaard explains in the following words: "The task is to exercise the absolute telos, striving to reach the maximum of maintaining simultaneously a relationship to the absolute telos and to relative ends, not by mediating them, but by making the relationship to the absolute telos absolute, and the relationship to the relative ends relative. The relative belongs to the world, the absolute relationship to the individual himself."⁷

This "absolute telos" would be likened unto the concept of eternal life except that it is found subjectively in the existential individual. There will always be the paradox of the relative and the absolute, similar to that of the finite and the infinite. Yet one must keep on striving to rid himself of the relative in favor of the absolute. However, this religion is not to be defined as an intellectual knowledge or even as an indoctrination, but rather an existential appropriation. This breaks with rational explanation and leaves religion as experience, which experience Kierkegaard is confident that most do not have. He says, "If then, according to our assumption, the greater number of people in Christendom only imagine themselves to be Christian, in what categories do they live? They live in aesthetic, or, at the most, in the aesthetic-ethical categories."⁸

⁷Thomte, op. cit., p. 88.

⁸Søren Kierkegaard, Point of View, trans. Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 25.

Paradox. Already it has been seen how closely entwined the idea of paradox is to faith for Kierkegaard, because for Kierkegaard faith is that which goes contradictory to all reason yet fills the gap of existence which reason cannot fill. Faith is believing that which seems impossible by all human and natural standards. Notice in the following words of Kierkegaard that this faith must be preceded by resignation or renunciation, but that faith itself is the real paradox.

. . . Faith therefore is not an aesthetic emotion but something far higher, precisely because it has resignation as its presupposition; it is not an immediate instinct of the heart, but is the paradox of life and existence. . . .

For the act of resignation faith is not required, for what I gain by resignation is my eternal consciousness, and this is a purely philosophical movement which I dare say I am able to make if it is required, and which I can train myself to make, for whenever any finiteness would get the mastery over me, I starve myself until I can make the movement, for my eternal consciousness is my love to God and for me this is higher than everything. For the act of resignation faith is not required, but it is needed when it is the case of acquiring the very least thing more than my eternal consciousness, for this is the paradoxical.

By faith I make renunciation of nothing, on the contrary, by faith I acquire everything, precisely in the sense in which it is said that he who has faith like a grain of mustard can remove mountains. A purely human courage is required to renounce the whole of the temporal to gain the eternal, but this I gain, and to all eternity I cannot renounce it, that is a self-contradiction; but a paradox enters in and a humble courage is required to grasp the whole of the temporal by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith.⁹

⁹Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, pp. 67-70.

Hence, the distinction is also seen between self-contradiction or self-denial and the paradox of faith. This paradox of faith is often referred to as the "moment" of the leap of faith. In fact, without the paradox the moment is impossible. The moment is the most abbreviated form of the paradox.

Faith and the paradox are so important in Kierkegaard's thought that it is difficult to make a thorough discussion of them without discussing his whole pattern. However, the paradox of faith must be discussed briefly in relation to certain terms in Kierkegaard's theology. It has been previously discussed that every man has a basic passion to arrive at the eternal consciousness. ". . . the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling. . ." ¹⁰

This paradox of faith is also inclusive of the aspects of dread and suffering in Kierkegaard. In the following quotation, where the "universal" refers to the commonly accepted standard of right and the "knight of faith" refers to the nonconforming, independent individual, Kierkegaard pictures the loneliness of the paradoxical faith.

. . . Let us consider a little more closely the distress and dread in the paradox of faith. The tragic hero renounces himself in order to express the universal, the knight of faith renounces the universal in order to become the universal. He knows that it is beautiful to be

¹⁰Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, p. 29.

born as the individual who has the universal as his home, his friendly abiding-place, which at once welcomes him with open arms when he would tarry in it. But he knows also that higher than this there winds a solitary path, narrow and steep; he knows that it is terrible to be born outside the universal, to walk without meeting a single traveller. He knows very well where he is and how he is related to men. Humanly speaking, he is crazy. If he is not supposed to be that, then he is a hypocrite, and the higher he climbs on this path, the more dreadful a hypocrite he is.¹¹

It may be said that conformity to nonconformity is the dreadful aspect of the paradox. Kierkegaard would not concede that this is being relative about a standard of righteousness, but that it is making Christianity rightly individualistic.

It must be noted that the paradoxical is rooted in the antithesis between God and man, i.e., God's understanding of what life ought to be and man's understanding of the same. Thus as man matures ethically and religiously, he arrives at the place in his thought where he is able to submit himself to the divine in a radically transforming relationship. As the human is defeated and renounced in this transaction, the intellect, feeling or will are brought to a concrete consciousness of the eternal. This is the paradox of faith which keeps moving toward perfection, never to fully arrive. Hence the religious life becomes a process of spiritual transformations in the paradox of faith.

¹¹Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, pp. 115, 116.

II. FAITH AND PARADOX AS FOUND WITHIN BARTH'S WRITING

By interpreting the phraseologies of these two men one can readily see their unanimity at the points of faith and paradox.

Faith. As it was with Kierkegaard so with Barth, faith is a very decisive thing. It literally teems with the existential aspect. Yet because it so intimately involves man's personality, it is also strongly subjective. Barth states this in the following:

. . . Christian faith is a decision. This is where we have to begin, and wish to begin. Christian faith, to be sure, is an event in the mystery between God and man; the event of the freedom in which God acts toward this man, and of the freedom which God gives this man. But this does not exclude, but actually includes the fact that where there is faith in the sense of the Christian Creed, history is taking place, that there something is being undertaken, completed and carried out in time by man. Faith is God's freedom and man's freedom in action. Where nothing occurred--in time, of course, that is, occurred visibly and audibly--there would be no faith either. . . . God Himself is not suprahistorical, but historical.¹²

Faith is the freedom of decision for Barth as it was for Kierkegaard, who spoke of the "absolute telos."

Kierkegaard argues vigorously against conformity to the "universal" standard of Christian dogma. He claims that

¹²Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 28.

one can be a "tragic hero" by human efforts, but that a "knight of faith" is only made by God. To this Barth would not only agree, but would also press the matter even further in the direction of determinism. Whereas Kierkegaard at least allowed for certain preparatory "resignation" by man, Barth would seem even to eliminate this.

Now faith is not the sort of determination of human action that man can apply to his action at will, or that, once received, he can maintain at will. It is rather itself the gracious approach of God to man, the free personal presence of Jesus Christ in man's action. Thus we assert that dogmatics presupposes faith, presupposes the determination of human action through listening, and as obedience to the essence of the Church; whence we assert that at every step and proposition it presupposes the free grace of God, which may from time to time be given or else refused, as the object and meaning of this human action. It depends from time to time upon God and not upon us, whether our hearing is real hearing, our obedience real obedience, whether our dogmatics is blessed and hallowed as knowledge of the proper content of Christian language, or is idle speculation.¹³

This leads to the same passive deterministic attitude toward personal evangelism and missions that Kierkegaard so repeatedly emphasized.

. . .I believe; so then, it is itself a recognition of faith, to recognize that God is to be known only through God himself. And if we can repeat this in faith, it means that I give praise and thanks for the fact that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is what He is and does what He does, and has disclosed and revealed Himself to me, has determined Himself for me and me for Himself. I give praise and thanks for the fact that I am elect, that I am called, that my Lord has made me

¹³Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part I, trans. G. T. Thomson (Vol. I of Church Dogmatics. 5 vols.; Edingburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), p. 19.

free for Himself. In that confidence I believe. That which I do in believing is the only thing left me, to which I have been invited, to which I have been made free by Him who can do what I can neither begin nor accomplish of myself. I make use of the gift in which God has given me Himself. I breathe, and now I breathe joyfully and freely in the freedom which I have not taken to myself, which I have not sought nor found by myself, but in which God has come to me and adopted me. It is a matter of freedom to hear the word of grace in such a way that man may hold to this word. . . . Where there is faith in the gospel, there the Word has found confidence, there the Word has so let itself be heard that the hearer cannot withdraw from it. There the Word has acquired its meaning as the Word and been established.¹⁴

Kierkegaard is also equally emphatic in his contention that the witness of other men will not assist an individual to arrive at faith except as the condition for believing is created by the "Word." This "condition" which Kierkegaard says prepares man for the "paradox of faith," is similarly described by Barth.

A new possibility and reality, as it were, open up to man. Once we are conscious of the life in life, we continue no longer in the land of the dead, in a life whose forms unhappily allow us to miss the very meaning of life--that is, its connection with its creative origin. We perceive the Wholly Other, the eternity of the divine life; and we cannot escape the thought that for us also eternal life can alone be called and really be "life." The Wholly Other, in God--itself resisting all secularization, all mere being put to use and hyphenated--drives us with compelling power to look for as basic, ultimate, original correlation between our life and that wholly other life. We would not die but live. It is the living God who, when he meets us, makes it inevitable for us to believe in our own life.¹⁵

¹⁴Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 18.

¹⁵Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 288.

As Kierkegaard would agree, when we have arrived at "the moment" or the "paradox of faith," in spite of reason or the "absurd" which contradicts, we will believe. Barth states it thus:

. . . Christian faith is the gift of the meeting in which men become free to hear the word of grace which God has spoken in Jesus Christ in such a way that, in spite of all that contradicts it, they may once for all, exclusively and entirely, hold to His promise and guidance.¹⁶

Kierkegaard also implies that Christians could not be discerned by the objective manifestations of their lives.

Barth suggests this same state of hidden faith:

. . . But once more, all this not in tranquil secured "givenness" to us, once for all, but in the act of the divine continual "giving." For this reason faith, as Hebrews xi.1 hath it, is . . . (the proof of things unseen), because all this indicates an activity the subject of which is, and remains, God, and the predicate of it is a thought that cannot possibly be transferred to us. If we are justified, we are so simply in Christ and not in ourselves. That it is really we who are yet and indeed in that state (sc. of justification), is and remains undisclosed to us, because it becomes revealed to us in and through the Word of God. Faith confides, for it confides in God's Word: in this way it is experience, joy, assurance. But because what the Word says to faith is hidden in this manner faith is hidden from itself.

. . . The utter unbelievableness, in theory, of the article of the Faith is only a symptom, in itself unimportant, of this practical hiddenness of faith, and no one else but the Holy Ghost will make faith, in its

¹⁶Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 15.

hidd~~en~~ness, into actual faith; certainly our spirit will not.¹⁷

The subjectivity of faith is so extreme for Barth that even the apparent judgment of God does not upset the strong universalistic position that he and Kierkegaard share.

. . . We look again into the Old Testament and find continual traces, that these obstinate and lost men--astoundingly enough!--in certain situations even confirm their election. When this occurs, when there is a kind of godly, upright continuity, this does not arise from the nature of Israel, but is rather God's ever renewed grace. But where there is grace, men are bound contre coeur to lift up their voice in praise of God, and bear witness that where God's light falls upon their life, a reflection of this light in them is bound to respond. There is a grace of God in the midst of judgment.¹⁸

Of course Barth would not be true to his Kierkegaardian ancestry if he did not also decry anything that might hint at a literal Christian experience which makes demand of man's own efforts or that calls for any manifested standard of objective righteousness.

. . . When we say that faith involves in spite of, once for all, exclusively and entirely, we are to hold to the fact that in faith is involved a 'may', not a 'must'. The moment the thing becomes an ideal instance we have again dropped out of the glory of faith. The glory of faith does not consist in our being challenged to do something, in having something laid upon us which is beyond our strength. Faith is rather a freedom, a permission. It is permitted to be so--that the believer in God's Word may hold on to this Word in everything, in spite of all that contradicts it. It is so: we never

¹⁷Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1938), pp. 49, 50, 52.

¹⁸Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 80.

believe 'on account of', never 'because of'; we awake to faith in spite of everything. God is hidden from us outside His Word. But He is manifest to us in Jesus Christ. If we look past Him, we must not be surprised if we fail to find God and experience errors and disillusionments, if the world seems dark to us. When we believe, we must believe in spite of God's hiddenness. This hiddenness of God necessarily reminds us of our human limitation.¹⁹

Barth's extreme, even if theological, determinism drives him to a point at which he not only holds to universal faith, to a lesser or greater degree in all men, but this faith puts upon men what he terms as a "character indelibilis," that is:

. . . A man who believes once believes once for all. Don't be afraid; . . . Everyone who has to contend with unbelief should be advised that he ought not to take his own unbelief too seriously. Only faith is to be taken seriously; and if we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, that suffices for the devil to have lost his game.²⁰

Even the value of prayer is considered disparagingly through Barth's deterministic view of faith:

Prayer may be the acknowledgment that for all our intentions (indeed, our intentions to pray too!) nothing has been done. Prayer may be the expression of man's desire for the will of God. Prayer may mean that man ("for better or for worse!") gives the verdict for God and against himself. Prayer may be man's answer to the divine hearing of prayer already experienced on the way, the content of the true faith which we ourselves have not actually taken to ourselves. We would not be speaking of real prayer, if we were to say "must" instead of "may." . . . With this indication we are presenting no

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 19, 20.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 20, 21.

one with a means, by the use of which he might contemplate success for himself in his work. But it has to be said that we cannot see how this work in particular can succeed otherwise than on the basis of a divine correspondence with this human attitude: "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!"²¹

Again it bears repeating that Barth, under the strong influence of Kierkegaard's pronounced, deterministic faith, goes even farther than his predecessor in carrying its implications to their logical conclusions in the discussion of the various doctrines of the Christian faith.

Paradox. Unlike Kierkegaard Barth does not go into a detailed discussion of the paradox as such. Yet the element of paradox does very definitely pervade his theology. It is from the Kierkegaardian idea of paradox that Barth gets such a strong emphasis upon the transcendence of God. For both men there is such a vast expanse between the infinite God and the finite man that man is totally unable to approach God or to achieve his own salvation. Barth illustrates this in discussing man's relation to Adam as compared to man's relation to Christ. He emphasizes the point of disparity.

. . . The point here is that when we compare man's relationship to Adam with his relationship to Christ, although the two are formally symmetrical, there is really the greatest and most fundamental disparity

²¹Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part I, p. 25.

between them. . . . 22

This disparity exists between the world of sin and grace. Paradoxically by faith the world of grace overpowers the world of sin, thus bringing man and God together.

. . . We can see the disparity between the result of grace and the result of sin, and so once more, in a new way, the disparity between man in Adam and man in Christ. . . . The result of sin is to destroy human nature, the result of grace is to restore it, so that it is obvious that sin is subordinate to grace, and that it is grace that has the last word about the true nature of man.²³

The paradox is that in spite of the disparity that exists between God and man, that man is good while he is also bad. Barth calls this "always sinner yet always righteous." This is Kierkegaard's idea of the "Absolute" in conflict with the "relative" which are mediated through the "paradox of faith" which is Jesus Christ.

. . . Right from the start we have to take account of the essential disparity between him and Christ, and between our bond with him and our bond with Christ. This is not a case of right against right, but of man's wrong against God's right, not of truth against truth, but of man's lie against God's truth. It is not even a case of power against power, but of man's powerlessness against God's power. Least of all is it a case of God against God--a god of this world against God the Creator--but simply of man against the one God, and, on the other side, the same one God for man. That is why we cannot rest content with the formal parallel and why the question about the priority and superiority of one side over the other can only be answered in one. The main point of

²²Karl Barth, Christ and Adam, trans. T. A. Small (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1952), p. 36.

²³Ibid., pp. 42, 43.

Rom. 5:12-21 is that here man stands against God in such a way that, even in his opposition, his wrongness, his lie, and his powerlessness, he must be a witness for God, that even as Adam and Adam's child he must be the mirror that reflects God's work, and so be the precursor of Christ. Even in his bad relationship to Adam, he still remains man, and the structure of his nature is such that it can find its meaning and fulfillment in his good relationship to Christ. Even under the lordship of sin and death his nature is still human nature and so is the image and likeness of what it will be under the lordship of grace and life. That is how the essential disparity between Adam and Christ is contained within their formal identity. Our relationship to Adam is a subordinate relationship, because the guilt and punishment we incur in Adam have no independent reality of their own but are only the dark shadows of the grace and life we find in Christ.²⁴

The paradox is, for Barth, a "riddle" which covers the whole of man's existence.

Man is a riddle and nothing else, and his universe, be it ever so vividly seen and felt, is a question. God stands in contrast to man as the impossible in contrast to the possible, as death in contrast to life, as eternity in contrast to time. The solution of the riddle, the answer to the question, the satisfaction of our need is the absolutely new even whereby the impossible becomes of itself possible, death becomes life, eternity time, and God man. There is no way which leads to this event; there is no faculty in man for apprehending it; for the way and the faculty are themselves new, being the revelation and faith, the knowing and being known enjoyed by the new man. Jeremiah and the others--may I point out?--at least made a serious attempt to speak of God. Whether they succeeded or not is another story. They made at least the necessary start. At least they understood the need in which man finds himself simply by virtue of his being man. They understood the question man asks in his need. And they linked their attempt to speak of God with that need and that question and with nothing else. They tore aside every veil from that need and that question. They were in dead earnest. And this

²⁴Ibid., pp. 35, 36.

is the reason we claim descent from that historical line. We hear the imperative even from history: we ought to speak of God! It is an imperative which would give us perplexity enough even if we were in a position to obey it.²⁵

Hence, the element of uncertainty and perplexity found in Kierkegaard's writing also manifests itself in Barth.

The tragic distance which severs man from God necessitates the paradox of faith which Kierkegaard called the "Absolute paradox." For both Kierkegaard and Barth, this of necessity goes far beyond man's reason and is personified in Jesus Christ.

. . . The word of Christ, according to the consistent synoptic, Pauline, and Johannine witness, is a type of obedience to the will of the Father that leads him straight toward death. The kingdom of God comes in violently, and after a short application and trial reaches the last question, the last doubt, the last uncertainty, the last boundary, where all things cease, and where there is only one thing to say of the future of the Son of Man: heaven and earth shall pass away! At that point even the question, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? is possible and necessary; at that point there is nothing more to know, nothing more to believe, nothing more to do; at that point the only thing to do is to bear the sin of the world; at that point only one possibility remains, but that lies beyond all thinking and all things--the possibility: Behold, I make all things new! The affirmation of God, man, and the world given in the New Testament is based exclusively upon the possibility of a new order absolutely beyond human thought; and therefore, as prerequisite to that order, there must come a crisis that denies all human thought.²⁶

This paradox is for both men a type of assurance where man

²⁵Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 197.

²⁶Ibid., p. 80.

no longer has to ask questions but takes assurance through the existence of the paradox of faith.

Must we not also grow beyond the strange question, Who is God? As if we could dream of asking such a question, have willingly and sincerely allowed ourselves to be led to the gates of the new world, to the threshold of the kingdom of God! There one asks no longer. There one sees. There one hears. There one has. There one knows. There one no longer gives his petty, narrow little answers. The question, Who is God? and our inadequate answers to it come only from our having halted somewhere on the way to the open gates of the new world; from our having refused somewhere to let the Bible speak to us candidly; from our having failed somewhere truly to desire to-believe. At the point of halt the truth again becomes unclear, confused, problematical-narrow, stupid, highchurch, non-conformist, monotonous, or meaningless. 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' That is it: when we allow ourselves to press on to the highest answer, when we find God in the Bible, when we dare with Paul not to be disobedient to the heavenly vision, then God stands before us as he really is, 'Believing, ye shall receive!' God is God.²⁷

A more detailed study of Barth will also yield the similarity to Kierkegaard regarding the "existential moment" which is the paradox of faith. This is, for Barth, essentially "revelation." It is interesting to compare Kierkegaard's thought with Barth's discussion at this point.

But this 'I believe' is consummated in a meeting with One who is not man, but God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by my believing I see myself completely filled and determined by this object of my faith. And what interests me is not myself with my faith, but He in whom I believe. And then I learn that by thinking

²⁷Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," Contemporary Religious Thought, Thomas S. Kepler, editor (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1941), p. 140.

of Him and looking to Him, my interests are also best provided for. I believe in, credo in, means that I am not alone. In our glory and in our misery we men are not alone. God comes to meet us and as our Lord and Master He comes to our aid. We live and act and suffer, in good and in bad days, in our perversity and in our rightness, in this confrontation with God. I am not alone, but God meets me; one way or other, I am in all circumstances in company with Him. That is, I believe in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This meeting with God is the meeting with the word of grace which He has spoken in Jesus Christ. Faith speaks of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as Him who meets us, as the object of faith, and says of this God that He is one in Himself, has become single in Himself for us and has become single once more in the eternal decree, explicated in time, of His free, unowed, unconditional love for man, for all men, in the counsel of His grace, God is gracious to us--this is what the Confession of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, says. This includes the fact that of ourselves we cannot achieve, have not achieved, and shall not achieve togetherness with Him; that we have not deserved that He should be our God, have no power of disposal and no rights over Him, but that with unowed kindness, in the freedom of His majesty, He resolved of His own self to be man's God, our God. He tells us that this is so. God's telling us, 'I am gracious to you', is the Word of God, the central concept of all Christian thinking. The Word of God is the word of His grace. And if you ask me where we hear this Word of God, I can only point to Himself, who enables us to hear it, and reply with the mighty centre of the Confession, with the second article, that the Word of God's grace in which He meets us is called Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of man, true God and true Man, Immanuel, God with us in this One.²⁸

Like Kierkegaard, Barth would eliminate any inference that the paradox of faith could be a defined state of Christian experience. Man is left without sensation or knowledge to verify his faith, and is in reality oblivious of his own

²⁸Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, pp. 16, 17.

faith. One never arrives at any level of experienced reality in Christ. He must always find himself in the surging flux of the paradox.

. . . This hiddenness of faith becomes concrete again in the fact that, to faith, repentance, yea, deepest repentance for grave sins, can never for a moment be left behind, as if done with . . . it is the action of the Word of God, the action of Christ, who is always the One who makes him out to be a sinner, in order to make him, though a sinner, into a righteous man. But the two things, the knowledge of this contradiction and the knowledge of its being surmounted, are not our own business, but are the Holy Ghost's.²⁹

Barth further makes a defining statement of the paradox which confirms the idea of personal passivity in regard to one's faith in Christ. Here he is even more extreme than Kierkegaard.

. . . They venture the paradox (the necessary paradox) that for the understanding of this righteousness being imparted to the person receiving it, the person must be left out of consideration. . . . Put briefly: their understanding of what alone constitutes Christian life in the Holy Ghost was their affirmation, that man becomes justified for Christ's sake only through faith.³⁰

In other words, understanding the fact of redemption through Christ is the best that man can ever hope to do. Beyond this factual understanding, Barth sees the paradox as being similar to the Kierkegaardian "leap" of faith.

²⁹Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, pp. 52, 53.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 40, 41, 42.

Such a paradoxical structure is possible to the theologies of Kierkegaard and Barth because of the absolute transcendence of God which Kierkegaard posited. Barth again restates the sovereignty of God.

. . . In sovereign anticipation of our faith God has justified us through the sacrificial blood of Christ. In the death of His Son God has intervened on our behalf in the "nevertheless" of His free grace in face of the apparently insurmountable power of our revolt and resistance. . . . So He has made peace, so reconciled us, so commenced His love toward us. Because God in Jesus Christ so exercised His sovereignty on our behalf, because this is the love of God poured forth through the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we have for our future only the bold word sōthōsometha "we shall be saved" . . . and there is nothing left to us but to glory in our existence.³¹

The idea of paradox is again treated, from another vantage-point, in a subsequent chapter dealing with history and God as sovereign of all history.

³¹Barth, Christ and Adam, p. 22.

CHAPTER V

ETHICS AND TRUTH

This is without a doubt the most practical area of Kierkegaard's theology. However, it has also served as the most obvious proof against his thought for many of Kierkegaard's objectors. It is in the area of ethics and truth that his existential theology comes closest to being subjected to the pragmatic test of human life.

I. ETHICS AND TRUTH AS FOUND WITHIN

KIERKEGAARD'S WRITING

Ethics. Though he says much concerning the ethical, yet nowhere does Kierkegaard present what might be termed a systematic ethics. There seems to be a lack of identity between a man's intellectual views and an ethical life. This doubtless has its basis in the fact that Kierkegaard takes a psychological interpretation of the Holy Bible. This leads him to a theory which he calls the "teleological suspension of the ethical," which means that the truly religious individual finds occasion to go beyond the commonly accepted standard of ethics in adopting a temporary standard for some given circumstance. Here again Kierkegaard cites the case of Abraham sacrificing Isaac as a proof to the theory. Ordinarily killing one's son would be unethical.

With Abraham the situation was different. By his act he overstepped the ethical entirely and possessed a higher telos outside of it, in relation to which he suspended the former.¹ This is not to abrogate the ethical but simply to suspend it. Because man's relationship to God is such a private thing, this can be done.

For Kierkegaard the ethical is the universal. But the religious will rise above the ethical and the universal, for the ethical is only the second in three ascending stages of spiritual progress. It must be emphasized again that the particular and the individual are above the ethical and the universal. One determines then his relation to the universal ethical maxims by his relationship to God. Thus, due to this absolute relation to God, the individual can not make himself intelligible to others. This leaves the knight of faith very much alone and in pain. Yet sympathy is useless because this state of being religious is so individualistic that no man can help another; yet he contends that all men have equal access to it. This makes witnessing simply setting an example, not teaching. Even this example is not of one's objective life but rather one's subjective life. This also excludes the necessity of sectarianism, for this

¹Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 88.

only serves to conceal man at the point of the universal and ethical causing him to sin by not exposing himself in an absolute duty toward God. "The absolute duty may cause one to do what ethics would forbid, but by no means can it cause the knight of faith to cease to love. This is shown by Abraham."²

In summary, here are the words of Kierkegaard:

. . . The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual . . . determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute. The paradox can also be expressed by saying that there is an absolute duty toward God; for in the relationship of duty the individual as an individual stands related absolutely to the absolute. So when in this connection it is said that it is a duty to love God, something different is said from that in the foregoing; for if this duty is absolute, the ethical is reduced to a position of relativity. From this, however, it does not follow that the ethical is to be abolished, but it acquires an entirely different expression, the paradoxical expression to that which, ethically speaking, is required by duty.³

Truth. In the area of truth it will likewise be seen that Kierkegaard again moves to a very relativistic position. Truth cannot legislate a world-standard in a code of doctrines but depends upon the individual's absolute relation to a transcendent God. Thus he settles truth for himself individually regardless of others. So man only needs a teacher to make him conscious of what he already knows as

²Ibid., pp. 111, 112. ³Ibid., p. 105.

Truth within himself. Kierkegaard expresses it thus:

. . . Nor can it interest me otherwise than historically that Socrates' or Prodicus' doctrine was this or that; for the Truth in which I rest was within me, and came to light through myself, and not even Socrates could have given it to me, as little as the driver can pull the load for the horses, though he may help them by applying the lash . . . for the underlying principle of all questioning is that the one who is asked must have the Truth in himself, and be able to acquire it by himself.⁴

It must not be mistaken that this inward potential for truth is immanent in man. Truth is not contained within a man immanently or because he is human but rather because of his individual contact with God. Kierkegaard makes a sharp distinction between Religion A and Religion B, as he calls it. Religion A is the religiosity of immanence or human religiosity resting upon the supposition that truth is immanent in the human subjectivity. In Religion A, moral and religious life are brought to normalcy by a concentration of the personality upon the inner self. The reason for this is because God is held to be immanent in all men. This, of course, refers to Hegelian humanism. However, in Religion B or Christianity, the individual knows that human subjectivity is untruth without the absurd leap of faith which brings about the absolute contact with the transcendent God.

⁴Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, trans. David F. Swanson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), p. 8.

. . . Error is then not only outside the truth, but polemic in its attitude toward it; which is expressed by saying that the learner has himself forfeited the condition and is engaged in forfeiting it.

The Teacher is then God himself, who in action as an occasion arises prompts the learner to recall that he is in Error, and that by reason of his own guilt, what shall we call it? Let us call it Sin.⁵

When life has been broken by sin and an immediate relationship to God is destroyed, it is necessary for "repetition," as Kierkegaard calls it, to restore this. Repetition is an act of faith or a religious movement by virtue of the absurd. Kierkegaard defines it as follows:

. . . repetition is the interest of metaphysics, and at the same time the interest upon which metaphysics founders. Repetition is the solution contained in every ethical view, repetition is the conditio sine quo non of every dogmatic problem.⁶

Repetition could be classed as the 'new birth' for Kierkegaard where man by mental deliberation in his existential subjectivity is able to arrive at the condition where he may take the leap of faith. "Repetition" for Kierkegaard becomes about the same as "recollection" was for the Greeks, who taught that all knowledge is recollection. Modern philosophy teaches that all of life is but repetition. "Repetition and recollection are the same movement only in opposite

⁵Ibid, p. 10.

⁶Søren Kierkegaard, Repetitions, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 34.

directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards."⁷ This thought process of repetition which brings one to the condition where faith leaps to the absurd initiated by some "occasion." This occasion could be likened to the orthodox term of "witness" but is not a definitive witness that explains. Rather it is a vague indefinite provoking which simply starts the individual spiritual movement that climaxes in the truly religious state of Christian faith. The following quotation is both significant and typical of Kierkegaard's idea of the way in which one becomes a witness to the truth without explaining anything, but rather provoking the listener to start on his own venture in faith.

. . . If we wish to express the relation subsisting between a contemporary and his successor in the briefest possible compass, but without sacrificing accuracy to brevity, we may say: The successor believes by means of (this expresses the occasional) the testimony of the contemporary, and in virtue of the condition he himself receives from God.--The testimony of the contemporary provides an occasion for the successor, just as the immediate contemporaneity provides an occasion for the contemporary. And if the testimony is what it ought to be, namely the testimony of a believer, it will give occasion for precisely the same ambiguity of the aroused attention as the witness himself has experienced, occasioned by the immediate contemporaneity. If the testimony is not of this nature, then it is either by a

⁷Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 71.

historian, and does not deal essentially with the object of faith, as when a contemporary historian who was not a believer recounts one or another fact; or it is by a philosopher, and does not deal with the object of faith. The Believer on the other hand communicates his testimony in such form as to forbid immediate acceptance; for the words; I believe--in spite of the Reason and my own powers of invention, present a very serious counter-consideration.

There is no disciple at second hand. The first and the last are essentially on the same plane, only that a later generation finds its occasion in the testimony of a contemporary generation, while the contemporary generation finds this occasion in its own immediate contemporaneity, and in so far owes nothing to any other generation. But this immediate contemporaneity is merely an occasion, which can scarcely be expressed more emphatically than in the proposition that the disciple, if he understood himself, must wish that the immediate contemporaneity should cease, by God's leaving the earth.⁸

II. ETHICS AND TRUTH AS FOUND WITHIN

BARTH'S WRITING

Ethics. Kierkegaard and Barth are so much alike at the point of ethics that if there is any difference at all it would be that Barth is more deterministic in regard to human conduct. Of course, it is obvious that Barth grounds every concept of his in his peculiar view of the Bible.

Once more we stand before this "other" new world which begins in the Bible. In it the chief consideration is not the doings of man but the doings of God--not the various ways which we may take if we are men of good will, but the power out of which good will must first be created--not the unfolding and fruition of love as we may understand it, but the existence and outpouring of

⁸Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, pp. 87, 88.

eternal love, of love as God understands it--not industry, honesty, and helpfulness as we may practice them in our old ordinary world, but the establishment and growth of a new world, the world in which God and His morality reign. . . . In this world the true hero is the lost son, who is absolutely lost and feeding swine--and not his moral elder brother. The reality which lies behind Abraham and Moses, behind Christ and his apostles, is the world of the Father, in which morality is dispensed with because it is taken for granted.⁹

This is what Kierkegaard would term as the "teleological suspension of the ethical." Barth like Kierkegaard points to various incidents in Scripture which for him seem to imply a "remarkable indifference to our conception of good and evil."¹⁰

Because Barth is also in reaction against humanistic theology, he does his best to undercut any social idea of Christian ethics. Here again the absolute transcendence of God is pressed to a point of determinism. "What can the Christian in society do but follow attentively what is done by God?"¹¹ This serves to relieve ethical responsibility to others, thus bringing out the extreme individualism which is so apparent within Kierkegaard's writing. Barth's discussion of the conscience and the individual brings out this effect

⁹Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. Douglas Horton (Massachusetts: The Pilgrim Press, 1928), pp. 39, 40.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 38, 39. ¹¹Ibid., pp. 326-27.

of Kierkegaard. Here Barth pushes the deterministic aspect to its utter extreme.

In the Holy Ghost we have a conscience. It is something surprising that theological ethics, which has had so much worry with this word conscience, has never arrived at the simple thought of interpreting it by eschatology. Syn-eidōsis, con-scientia (the Greek and Latin terms) a "co-knowledge" along with God about what is good and evil: who should have this, unless it be the child of God who is continually being regenerated through the word? This child knows, in his action, about his Father's will. This child may, and can, and must say to himself what the Father says, even to this child is referred the great Schleiermacherian monstrosity--the "God-consciousness." God-consciousness within the self-consciousness of man is no longer a horror but utter truth. This child looks beyond the present, also beyond the dialectical paradox of "always sinner and always righteous," to the coming kingdom of His father. This child will always be in the posture of one expecting and hastening. If he is understood, he lives the one, the right life whether in taking in breath or "expiring." He may be such a one, of course, that has even maxims, at least to outward view--("to the pure all things are pure")--he may be a realist or an idealist; these principles of his may be conservative or revolutionary: he may be a pietist perhaps, but quite as well a Communist; he may; for then he certainly must. Enthusiastic fanaticism is not forbidden him. Nowhere does it stand written that God has a preference for home-baked bourgeois talents. But if he is a fanatic (like the Anabaptist), then he is such as all the Prophets were: men who raved. This child of God will speak out and be a missionary whether he will or no, and will not allow himself to be muzzled by any tactics of Church or State manoeuvring and manipulation, in the midst of which he lives. Nor will he be gagged by any hole-and-corner legislation that comes from human movements and institutions. Yea: he will gladly, and in the last resort, be in the minority, as a matter of fact. Finally, he will be utterly alone. Because this child of God speaks, he does not ask what his hearers like, not what the result will be, not as to the consequences.

He speaks because he must speak.¹²

In the face of such utter determinism, what objective can a man possibly have? What does he strive for? Barth answers:

The real Christian life consists therefore in the accomplishment of daily thankfulness and repentance which, when it is efficacious and genuine, is not the good or bad fruit of our efforts, but is as a reiteration of faith in Jesus Christ the work of the Holy Spirit.¹³

Barth agrees with Kierkegaard in the making of an ethical decision.

The problem of the good calls in question all actual and possible forms of human conduct, all temporal happenings in the history both of the individual and of society. What ought we to do? is our question; and this what, infiltrating and entrenching itself everywhere, directs its attack against all that we did yesterday and shall do tomorrow. It weighs all things in the balance, constantly dividing our manifold activities into good and bad--in order the next moment to do the same thing over again, as if for the first time since the world began. It continually breaks out in crisis, causing us to re-examine what but now we thought to be bad.

.....

When we speak of the problem of ethics today, we mean as far as possible to eliminate any time element which might separate us from and cause us to be spectators of the problem in its reality.¹⁴

¹²Karl Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1938), pp. 81, 82.

¹³Karl Barth, The Knowledge of God and the Service of God, trans. J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson (London: Stoughton Publishers, 1938), p. xxi.

¹⁴Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, pp. 138, 139, 142.

Thus, Barth is extremely loyal to the Kierkegaardian habit of viewing ethics in a totally existential perspective.

However, it cannot be assumed that Barth allows even enough of the concrete concept to come in so that one might have any consciousness of doing what is right.

. . . this our obedience, is just as completely hidden as our faith is in its aspect of repentance and trust. It is hidden because this obedience of ours, never, not even partially, becomes perceptible to us unequivocally in itself, and because also, "that" and "how" grace is actual on our behalf is hidden in the darkness of faith, in which only the Word itself is the light.¹⁵

Barth is utterly opposed to any system of ethics as such, just as Kierkegaard is.

. . . Both these things; the presumed sure knowledge about the divine compulsions of our own existence, and the confident taking up of the Bible, as if it gave a list of moral counsels, are both in principle identically arbitrary . . .

The upshot of all this is, that theological ethics should not in any way try to say directly what God's command is. It should not make appeal to the truths supposed to lie in nature as creation of God, not appeal to this, that or the other text in the Bible. . . . The particular thing incumbent upon such ethics is to take the Word of God as being God's Word, and to point out the way whereby the relative necessities of our existence as creatures can become the Word of God's revelation to us. This duty must be discharged by ethics in the light of what Scripture proclaims. But it is not called upon to determine to what extent they are His, for this is solely the business of God's Word.¹⁶

¹⁵Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, pp. 62, 63.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 23, 24.

Barth denies any possibility of human goodness or purity of moral nature which seems to even include the perfection of the human-Christ.

. . . We know that no personality whose will is governed by the idea of humanity and is therefore a pure and autonomous and good will--we know that no such moral personality has ever stepped into our world over the threshold of the world of freedom. No such man has ever lived or will ever live. It is impossible to dream or to think of a man without interest, or of a man with an interest in the moral law as such. There is no such thing in time or space as a human will determined by pure practical reason.¹⁷

For both Kierkegaard and Barth, ethics is an extremely relative subject which rests totally upon the existential freedom of the individual, which freedom is determined by God. Hence, Barth can afford to assume a very careless attitude with respect to human conduct which leaves the ultimate problem totally in God's hands.

The fact remains that man as man is irresistibly compelled to acknowledge that his life is the business for which he is responsible, that his desires require examination, and that the might-be is sometimes the ought-to-be which is the truth about truth, the ultimate governor of conduct.¹⁸

Truth. The definition of truth is a very determinative part of Barth's theology just as it is of Kierkegaard's theology. The basic method of determining truth is the same in

¹⁷Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 154.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 138.

Barth as his forerunner. For both there is the basic supposition of the existential thinking of man. Barth argues this in the following quotation:

By the knowledge of an object by men we understand the proof of their acquaintance with its reality in respect of its being thus and thus (or its nature). But "proof of their acquaintance" implies that the reality of the object in question, its existence and its nature, now becomes, while true in itself, somehow and with some degree of clarity and definition also true for them. Their acquaintance with it from being an accidental becomes a necessary, from being an external becomes an inward determination of their own existence. As knowers they are got at by the known object. They exist no longer without it, but with it. So far as they think of it at all they must think of it, with the entire trust with which they venture to think of it at all, as true reality, as true in its existence and nature. Whatever else and however else they may think of it, they must begin by thinking of the actual trueness of its reality. When faced with this trueness they can no longer withdraw into themselves in order from there to affirm, question, or deny it. Its trueness has come home directly to them personally, has become property. And at the same time they themselves have become the property of its trueness. This event, this verification of proof we call, to distinguish it from mere knowing, knowledge. A knowing becomes knowledge when the man becomes a responsible witness to its content.¹⁹

This, of course, all leads into Barth's theory of the Bible. Barth applies this same existential argument to the validity of the Scriptures. Hence, it is from this that he gets his view of the Bible, and the Bible becomes the basis of all Truth. For him the Bible does not so much give us a know-

¹⁹Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part I, trans. G. T. Thomson (Vol. I of Church Dogmatics, 5 vols.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), p. 214.

ledge about God as it does a knowledge of God. "It is our part to confirm it in our own lives by laboring to relate ourselves, our daily task, and our hour of history to God the Creator and Redeemer."²⁰ Barth's existential application to Scripture enables him to reverse entirely the traditional interpretation so that his approach sounds like this:

It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ. It is this which is within the Bible. The word of God is within the Bible.

.....

But we are not yet quite at an end. We have found in the Bible a new world, God, God's sovereignty, God's glory, God's incomprehensible love. Not the history of man but the history of God! Not the virtues of men but the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light! Not human standpoints but the standpoint of God.²¹

Truth, for Barth, is not found within the details of the Scriptures. The facts of which the Bible speaks are all relatively unimportant as compared to the "spirit" behind the facts. The authority of the scriptures is not based upon

²⁰Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 51.

²¹Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," Contemporary Religious Thought, Thomas S. Kepler, editor (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1941), p. 138, 139.

any objective evidences but purely upon the subjective individual manifestation. It is the expectation of men to be caught hold of by this "spirit" and thus to receive divine revelation through the agency of the Holy Spirit. For this reason Barth remarks of St. Paul's writing: "I seem to see within so transparent a piece of literature a personality who is actually thrown out of his course and out of every ordinary course by seeing and hearing what I for my part do not see and hear--." ²² With this view of truth as being contained within Scripture, no concrete demands can inhibit the existential freedom of a "believer."

It is the peculiarity of Biblical thought and speech that they flow from a source which is above religious antinomies. The Bible treats, for instance, of both creation and redemption, grace and judgment, nature and spirit, earth and heaven, promise and fulfillment. To be sure, it enters now upon this and now upon that side to its antitheses, but it never brings them pedantically to an end; it never carries on into consequences; it never hardens, either in the thesis or in the antithesis; it never stiffens into positive or negative finalities. . . . What the Bible is interested in never loses its importance but is never captured in a word. It desires not to be accepted but understood, πνευματικοῖς πνευματικῶς, spirit by spirit. It is through and through dialectic . . . Biblical dogmatics are fundamentally the suspension of all dogmatics. The Bible has only one theological interest and that is not speculative: Interest in God himself. ²³

Barth maintains that truth, or revelation, comes

²²Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 63.

²³Ibid., pp. 72, 73.

through man's conscience. All that is within man reaches out for the certainty which the conscience gives. Man must let the conscience speak and tell him of the righteousness of God. It is in the conscience that man is convinced that he has a goal in living for "it speaks of an existence higher than joy and deeper than pain."²⁴ But the conscience is not something we can control or help. It is simply the area where man is by faith made aware of truth in a deterministic way.

Faith is therefore invariably the recognition of our limits and the recognition of the mystery of the Word of God, the recognition that our hearing is bound to God Himself who wills to lead us now through form to content, and now through content back to form, and in both cases to Himself, who one way or the other does not give Himself into our hands, but keeps us in His hand.²⁵

Thus it can be seen that Barth dwells upon the absolute activity of God upon the subjective aspect of man, which brings man, regardless of his will, into the truth. This is quite in harmony with Kierkegaard's position though it is expressed in a different way. Barth does not outline the three Kierkegaardian steps of: aesthetic stage, ethical stage, and religious stage. However, both men argue the same subjective, deterministic medium of arriving at truth.

²⁴Ibid., p. 11.

²⁵Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part I, p. 201.

With Kierkegaard, Barth also believes that a propagation of truth by man is not feasible because truth only comes to each man individually through the subjective activity of the Holy Spirit--revelation. Man can never be a teacher of divine truth; only God is a Teacher. Yet there is a sense in which man may make a passive witness:

. . . We cannot speak of God. For to speak of God seriously would mean to speak in the realm of revelation and faith. To speak of God would be to speak God's word, the word which can come only from him, the word that God becomes man. We may say these three words, but this is not to speak the word of God, the truth for which these words are an expression. Our ministerial task is to say that God becomes man, but to say it as God himself says it. This would be the answer to man's question about redemption from humanity.²⁶

This is the only message a preacher and personal witness can give. Aside from this every other message of so called truth is purely relevant. Church dogmatics becomes a kind of watchman to preserve the one essence of truth. As Barth says: ". . . dogmatics, which means a critical examination of modern, relatively free formulations of concepts and new ways of thinking relative to the interpretation of the text in the proclamation of the Church."²⁷ This gives Barth the following view of church creeds:

²⁶Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, pp. 198, 199.

²⁷Karl Barth, God in Action, trans. E. G. Horrighausen and Karl J. Ernst (New York: Round Table Press Inc., 1936), p. 53.

. . . The doctrines, laws, and commandments which we now affirm as existing separately and each in its own right-- . . . all were once a unity; and their unity was not that of a fundamental idea which bracketed them as a system of thought but was rather that of original truth, which is of an order above that of ideas. The reformed creeds differ from the Augsburg Confession and others by the fact that in committing themselves, at a measured distance, to the one object of all thought, they follow a course which, though less dramatic and effective for theology, at least saves them from staking everything upon the card of any doctrine. They refer all doctrines away from itself to the one Object. To them truth is God--not their thought about God but God himself and God alone, as he speaks his own word in Scripture and in Spirit.²⁸

Thus Barth would contend that even dogmatics can do no more than to keep contending after the better. Each succeeding epoch, if the men have been faithful to the Word, will hope for improvement over the latter.²⁹ It is from this basis that Barth defines the function of a human witness:

. . . Testimony is a word of man which has been given of God, the capacity of reminding other men of God's reign, grace, and judgment. Where a human word (speech) has this capacity, there is Church.³⁰

Barth has taken the thinking of Kierkegaard and applied it at the level of the Church. Where Kierkegaard wrote at a distance and failed to define the practical implications of his thinking, Barth has sought to translate Kierkegaard's whole system of truth, and to apply it to the

²⁸Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, pp. 234, 235.

²⁹Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, pp. 11, 12.

³⁰Barth, God in Action, p. 94.

Bible and even to the creeds and dogmas of the church. Where Kierkegaard stood as segmented from all descendant lines of theological thinking, Barth has brought Kierkegaard's thinking of truth into a woven pattern that runs back through John Calvin and St. Paul.

CHAPTER VI

HISTORY AND SALVATION

History and salvation are by no means the least important of the Kierkegaardian themes, yet they come most naturally as a conclusive picture after the other main emphases of his theology have been explored. In this area many traditional orthodox terms are employed with an existential twist.

I. HISTORY AND SALVATION AS FOUND WITHIN

KIERKEGAARD'S WRITING

History. In the study of history it is necessary to take a more definitive approach of Kierkegaard's view of God, for history and God are closely commingled in his theology. In the following statements it can be seen that Kierkegaard's concept of God is rather broad and indefinite. God seems to be an indefinite something, away from which man can never thoroughly break, and yet whom he can never completely prove.

. . . But what is this unknown something with which the Reason collides when inspired by its paradoxical passion with the result of unsettling even man's knowledge of himself? It is the Unknown. It is not a human being in so far as we know what man is; nor is it any other known thing. So let us call this unknown something: God. It is nothing more than a name we assign to it. The idea of demonstrating that this unknown something (God) exists, could scarcely suggest

itself to the reason.

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. . . But between God and his works there exists an absolute relationship; God is not a name but a concept. . . . In beginning my proof I presuppose the ideal interpretation, and also that I will be successful in carrying it through, but what else is this but to presuppose that God exists so that I really begin by virtue of confidence in him?¹

This ideal of God seems to be expressed in man in terms of an unknown longing, with which he will not be at ease except while in pursuit of the eternal rest.

Kierkegaard does have a highly transcendent view of God. There is a paradox between God and man. Man by the help of God finds out that he is totally unlike God. Yet insofar as man receives this knowledge from God--just this much he is like God. Man's unlikeness to God is only explained by what man derives from himself. This unlikeness is sin. Yet man cannot find this out for himself. Thus the paradox demands the divine intervention.

. . . The consciousness of sin, which he indeed could no more teach to another than another could teach it to him, but only God--if God consents to become a Teacher. But this was his purpose, as we have imagined it. In order to be man's Teacher, God proposed to make himself like the individual man, so that he might understand him fully. Thus our paradox is rendered still more appalling, or the same paradox has the double aspect which proclaims it as Absolute Paradox negatively by revealing the absolute likeness of sin, positively by proposing to do away

¹Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, trans. David F. Swanson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), pp. 31, 33.

with the absolute unlikeness in absolute likeness.²

Here can be seen Kierkegaard's faint view of the Saviour who mediates this absolute unlikeness of man to God. Here is God breaking in upon the individual history of every man to bring him to the truth. It is God bringing every man to this knowledge of truth or "condition" where his faith may experience the "moment" and lift man to the level of the truly religious. This is near to the orthodox concept of the God-man.

. . . But faith must steadily hold fast to the Teacher. In order that we may have the power to give the condition the Teacher must be God; in order that he may be able to put the learner in possession of it he must be Man. This contradiction is again the object of faith, and is Paradox, the Moment.³

It may be said that God institutes a divine work of redemption for every man individually, as man is brought to the place where he is able to believe the absurd. This view of God and the saving aspect of God must be seen as a vital part of Kierkegaard's idea of history. Hence, God does not act in secular history as the great culminator of all things. Rather he is the Absolute, at which all men must arrive in spite of, and divorced from, this temporal world.

Again let it be noted how Kierkegaard clings to the

²Ibid., p. 37.

³Ibid., p. 50.

"moment" as the all important content of history.

. . . And now the moment, such a moment has a peculiar character. It is brief and temporal indeed, like every moment, it is transient as all moments are; it is past, like every moment in the next moment. And yet it is decisive, and filled with the eternal. Such a moment ought to have a distinctive name; let us call it the Fullness of Time.⁴

Temporal history is relatively unimportant and of little profit for Kierkegaard. The individual history of existence as related to the absolute divine plan of history seems to take all precedence. The whole plan of man's redemption from sin fits into this individual historical view. The Garden of Eden and the fall and other Biblical concepts of spiritual history all become so very personal and individualistic that they are merely pictures of what every man goes through subjectively and are never to be taken as literal or put on a level with the history of the generations.

One more quotation will summarize the whole picture of the "Teacher" and the "learner" in the historical set up. This parallel use of orthodox terms helps one to fit the whole picture together.

. . . What now shall we call such a Teacher, one who restores the lost condition and gives the learner the Truth? Let us call him Saviour, for he saves the learner from his bondage and from himself, let us call him Redeemer, for he redeems the learner from the captivity into which he had plunged himself, and no captivity is so terrible and so impossible to break, as

⁴Ibid., p. 13.

that which the individual keeps himself. And still we have not said all that is necessary; for by his self imposed bondage the learner has brought upon himself a burden of guilt, and when the Teacher gives him the condition and the Truth he constitutes himself an Atonement, taking away the wrath impending upon that of which the learner has made himself guilty.⁵

Salvation. The subject of salvation has been mentioned many times throughout this discourse. It must be brought out in its most specific form here at the conclusion of the discussion of Kierkegaard, in order to bring the greatest possible clarity.

It must first be noted that the whole problem of becoming a Christian is subjective. It has nothing whatever to do with the systematic arrangement of the truths of Christ. Religion is essentially other-worldly and is related to "an eternal blessedness." His is a salvation from life's despair rather than the condemnation of sin. For him one cannot simply will to be saved at this certain hour, but he must proceed in the journey of spiritual enlightenment by the three "stages."⁶ When he comes to that "moment" of subjective existence where he sees the Truth and takes the leap of faith, he is then becoming a saved or redeemed man. He is saved from his guilt which makes him a sinner. This is not a salvation from the acts of sin or from the motives of

⁵Ibid., p. 12. ⁶Cf. pp. 69, 70.

sin but from the guilt which he engenders from being objective instead of subjective. Yet he is always "becoming" and never arriving at true Christianity.

Kierkegaard is very broad in his view of salvation as being provided for all. He does not believe that God would enter into a covenant with some certain few, making these so distinctive that all other men would cry to heaven for vengeance. Nor does he feel that an accident of time will decide to whom he would grant his favor.

. . . Or is it not rather worthy of God to make his covenant with men equally difficult, since no man is able to give himself the condition, nor yet is to receive it from another, thus introducing new strife; equally difficult but also equally easy, since God grants the condition.⁷

Hence, all men everywhere and at all times have absolutely equal opportunity of and equal likelihood for salvation. This would seem to imply strongly the universalist proposition.

It must not be forgotten that the urge for salvation has its motivation in the universal state of "pathos" which every man senses. This causes him to pursue the "eternal happiness" as the absolute good by transforming the entire existence of the individual. There is no pursuit by objective manifestations, which makes salvation to him an en-

⁷Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, p. 90.

tirely indiscernable and imperceptible thing to the objective eye.

Radar Thomte states very well the Kierkegaardian concept of pursuing salvation in the following:

. . . There are, according to Kierkegaard, only two goals in human life. The one is the goal of eternity, and is spoken of as God or an eternal happiness. This is the goal which man ought to attain. The other is the goal of temporal existence. This is the goal which man desires to attain. These two goals are held to be contrary to one another. It is characteristic of the philosophy of Kierkegaard that the absolute goal is not defined according to its nature, but always according to the manner which it is possessed. It is the pathos of the relationship to an eternal happiness which matters. The pathos of the problem is always to express the relationship to an eternal happiness, in the medium of existence. It is not a question of "testifying about an eternal happiness" but of "transforming one's existence into a testimony concerning it."⁸

In the following manner Kierkegaard does a very complete job of re-stating his concept of salvation into parallel traditional orthodox terms.

When the disciple is in a state of Error. . . but is not the less a human being, and now receives the condition and the Truth, he does not become a human being for the first time, since he was a man already. But he becomes another man not in the frivolous sense of becoming another individual of the same quality as before, but in the sense of becoming a man of a different quality, or as we may call him: a new creature.

In so far as he was in Error he was constantly in the act of departing from the Truth. In consequence of receiving the condition in the moment of the course of his life has been given an opposite direction, so that he is

⁸Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 88.

now turned about. Let us call this change Conversion, even though this word be one not hitherto used; but that is precisely a reason for choosing it, in order namely to avoid confusion, for it is as if expressly coined for the change we have in mind.

In so far as the learner was in Error by reason of his own guilt, this conversion cannot take place without being taken up in his consciousness, or without his becoming aware that his former state was a consequence of his guilt. With this consciousness he will then take leave of his former state. But what leave-taking is without a sense of sadness? The sadness in this case, however, is no account of his having so long remained in his former state. Let us call such grief Repentance; for what is repentance but a kind of leave-taking, looking backward indeed, but yet in such a way as precisely to quicken the steps toward that which lies before?

In so far as the learner was in Error, and now receives the Truth and with it the condition for understanding it, a change takes place within him like the change from non-being to being. But this transition from non-being to being is the transition we call birth. Now one who exists cannot be born; nevertheless, the disciple is born. Let us call this transition the new birth, in consequence of which the disciple enters the world quite as the first birth, an individual human being knowing nothing as yet about the world into which he is born, whether it is inhabited, etc.⁹

It would seem for all practical use that these five divisions cover the entire range of Kierkegaardian theology. There are, of course, many other fine points too numerous and detailed for mention.

⁹Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, pp. 13, 14.

II. HISTORY AND SALVATION AS FOUND WITHIN BARTH'S WRITING

In this final area of history and salvation, Barth again does not stray far from the concepts of his predecessor, Kierkegaard. By both men the historical is only casually considered. The eternal history in God, which transcends the temporal, is the all important thing. Hence, the whole idea of salvation is also thought of as a deliverance from natural history and the universal concepts which bondage men, keeping them from the freedom of the Holy Spirit.

History. In Barth also the definition of God comes very close to his concept of history. Like Kierkegaard, Barth's idea of God is also rather indefinite.

. . . We must be clear that whatever we say of God in such human concepts can never be more than an indication of Him; no such concept can really conceive the nature of God. God is inconceivable. What is called God's goodness and God's holiness, cannot be determined by any view that we men have of goodness and holiness, but it is determined from what God is. He is the Lord, He is the truth. Only derivatively, only in a secondary sense can we venture to take His Word on our lips. In the Apostles' Creed there stands, in place of all possible description of the nature of God, this one word, that He is Almighty, and significantly in connexion with the expression 'Father'. The one word explains the other; the Father is almightiness and almightiness is the Father.¹⁰

Barth tends to merge heaven and earth in his idea of God.

¹⁰Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 46.

God is the ". . . Wholly Other, the infinite aggregate of all merely relative others."¹¹ Though there are other possibilities for man's knowledge of God, it is only in the Bible that God is regarded to be the first consideration and the all-dominating theme. From the Biblical knowledge of God man gets his starting point for all knowledge. Then Barth brings in his existential determinism that he received from Kierkegaard:

. . . We are not outside, as it were, but inside. The knowledge of God is not a possibility which we may, or at worst may not, apply in our search for a meaning of the world; it is rather the presupposition of the basis of which consciously, half-consciously, or unconsciously all our searchings for meaning are made. On the other hand, we are far from being equal to that knowledge.¹²

This existential approach to God is further amplified by viewing Barth's idea of the Christ or the humanity of God:

. . . The humanity of God--that, rightly understood, must mean: God's relationship and approach to man; God, who speaks to man in promise and commandment; God's existence, intervention and action for him; the communion which God holds with him; God's free grace, in which He desires to be and is God not otherwise than as man's God.¹³

¹¹Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. Douglas Horton (Massachusetts: The Pilgrim Press, 1928), p. 74.

¹²Ibid., p. 52.

¹³Karl Barth, God, Grace and Gospel, trans. James Strathearn McNab (London, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1959), p. 31.

This brings the discussion pointedly to the idea of history. The concept of Christ is God breaking into natural history as a mediator between the finite human being and the transcendent God. Here the unlikeness of man to God necessitates the beginning of a new history.

. . . When God enters, history for the while ceases to be, and there is nothing more to ask; for something wholly different and new begins--a history with its own distinct grounds, possibilities, and hypotheses.¹⁴

On account of his concept of God and Christ, Barth denies any history of religion as such just as did Kierkegaard. He does concede the fact that religious history did somehow get started. However, of this he states:

. . . For at the moment when religion becomes conscious of religion, when religion becomes a psychologically and historically conceivable magnitude in the world, it falls away from its inner character, from its truth, to idols. Its truth is its other-worldliness, its refusal of the idea of sacredness, its non-historicity.¹⁵

Just as did Kierkegaard, Barth in one sweep eliminates all the validity of any historical happenings, which makes the historical Jesus and anything pertaining to him become an existential concept which is not tangible to the human perception.

. . . However, it may be with the historical Jesus, it is certain that Jesus the Christ, the Son of the

¹⁴Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 53.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 68, 69.

living God, belongs neither to history not to psychology; for what is historical and psychological is as such corruptible. The resurrection of Christ, or his second coming, which is the same thing, is not a historical event; the historians may reassure themselves--unless, of course, they prefer to let it destroy their assurance--that our concern here is with an event which, though it is the only real happening in is not a real happening of history. The Logos, if misunderstood, will stand in the corner, as a myth. Better to do this than to be shorn of its character of timelessness by being explained historically. The dawn of the new time, of the sovereignty of him which is and which was and which is to come--this is the meaning of Easter.¹⁶

This basic undercutting of the historical theology stems primarily from Barth's non-historical view of the Bible.

Rather than a literal historical view of the Bible, Barth sees a subjective element that teaches him certain aspects about the One God.

. . . God is the Lord and Redeemer, the Saviour and Comforter of all the souls that turn to him; and the new world is the kingdom of blessedness which is prepared for the little flock who escape destruction. Is not this in the Bible? . . . Again: God is the fountain of life which begins its quiet murmuring when once we turn away from the externalities of the world and bow before him in silence; and the new world is the incomparable peace of such a life hid with Christ in God. Is not this also in the Bible? . . . Again: God is the Lord of heaven which awaits us, and in which, when our journey through the sorrows and imperfections of this life is done, we are to possess and enjoy our citizenship; and the new world is just this blessed other life, the 'still eternity' into which the faithful shall one day enter. This Answer also comes directly from the Bible.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁷Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," Contemporary Religious Thought, Thomas S. Kepler, editor (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1941), p. 139.

The Bible for Barth is the history of man, just any man or all men, with God as its subject. Through Christ, the Son of man, all things are comprehended. The man who comprehends is the "new man" who has eternity in his heart. Just as Kierkegaard states, Barth speaks of the creation as a ". . . solemn marking of the distance between the cosmos and the Creator, and precisely not for a metaphysical explanation of the world."¹⁸ The history of the Bible is seen from above as a series of divine acts, while from below it is seen as a series of fruitless human attempts to achieve by self-effort a knowledge of God, which is impossible. Knowing Barth's view of history, it is now understandable why he refers to ethics as the "goal of earthly history" and why he sees the "situation on Sunday morning" as an end of history in an eschatological sense. It is here that man's desire is expressed for an "ultimate" event.¹⁹

Once more Barth has taken a Kierkegaardian concept and expressed it in the contemporary language so that it is made applicable in a life situation. Barth has done an excellent work of translating this concept of history into the application of contemporary church activity.

Salvation. The concept of salvation has not been

¹⁸Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 71

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 110, 157, 158.

without mention in the earlier discourse of this writing.²⁰ However, some specific concepts must be mentioned as a means of bringing this matter to a focal point of understanding. Comparatively both Kierkegaard and Barth stand in agreement at this point. Both men conceive of a salvation which is non-historical and decisive. It is not dependent upon any systematic arrangement of truth but of a totally subjective activity of God which requires no initiative of willful movement on the part of men.

The following quotation covers Barth's view of salvation in general, giving his understanding of the function of the concept "Jesus Christ" in man's salvation.

. . . What is meant by saying that Jesus Christ is our Lord? I have paraphrased it by saying that the existence of Jesus Christ is the sovereign decision upon the existence of every man. A sovereign decision has been made about us men. Whether we realise it and do justice to it is another question. We have to be told that it has been taken. This decision has nothing to do with a destiny, a neutral and objective determination of man, which could somehow be read off from man's nature or history; but this sovereign decision on the existence of every man consists in the existence of the man Jesus Christ. Because he is and was and will be, this sovereign decision is imposed upon all men. You remember that at the beginning of our lectures, as we were expounding the concept of faith, we decided that Christian faith must be regarded absolutely as a man's decision, which is made in view of a divine decision. At this point we now see the concrete form of this divine decision. When we say that God is our Lord and Master, we Christians are not thinking, after the fashion of all mysti-

²⁰Cf. pp. 12, 12, 33, 34, 41-44, 54, 56, 70.

cism, of an indefinable and ultimately unknown divine something, which stands over us as a power and dominates us.²¹

The decisiveness of man's salvation is seen to be totally in the hands of God, the Holy Spirit being the only active agent to create faith in man and make man's decision for him.

This is the reason that Barth views the matter of "Christian" as a purely relative thing, when he states: "The Christian is that within us which is not ourself but Christ in us."²²

Kierkegaard states the same idea in claiming that no one ever became a Christian but everyone was always "becoming" more or less Christian. There is no point of arrival for either of these men. Yet because of the sovereign decision there is also no point of lostness for man, in a literal sense. As Barth contends we are moved by God. Thus in spite of our consciousness or our contrariness, God has already decided salvation for us, and knowledge of such salvation will dawn upon us in due season.

Just as Barth reflects Kierkegaard's universalism, he also assimilates into his own system Kierkegaard's nature of salvation. Salvation becomes more of a psychological adjustment to the status of existing circumstances through the perceiving of God. However, not even this is a total

²¹Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, pp. 88, 89.

²²Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 273.

adjustment, but a constantly adjusting thing.

. . . Man has always been ill and always will be. In the life of individuals and nations, to be cured means: to become a little less ill. The general ill which afflicts humanity is today more visible than at any other time. But, even in the great hospital of the present some patients suffer from more serious diseases than others. And although many and important things concerning all the patients can be said towards the solution of this problem, the problem of a certain cure, is to be considered and answered in different ways, according to each individual case.²³

True to Kierkegaard's idea, Barth sees this salvation for man's malady as that which comes in spite of all forms of religion.

. . . this new life is that from the third dimension which penetrates and even passes through all our forms of worship and our experiences; it is the world of God breaking through from its self-contained holiness and appearing in secular life; it is the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead. To participate in its meaning and power is to discover a new motivation.²⁴

Any other experience than this is an emotional misunderstanding. In Barth's criticism of religious experience, he decries "form" and calls for the "content" found in the "revelation" of the Bible. Thus, Christian experience for Barth can never have any element of human achievement, but is only a reference to God's activity.

In Biblical experience nothing is less important than experience as such. It is an appointment and a

²³Karl Barth, The Only Way, trans. Marta K. Neufeld, Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1947), p. 3.

²⁴Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, pp. 286, 287.

commission, not a goal and a fulfillment; and therefore it is an elementary thing, hardly conscious of itself, and necessitating only a minimum of reflection and confession. The prophets and apostles do not wish to be what they are; they have to be. And therefore they are.²⁵

Barth is just as adept as Kierkegaard in taking the elemental terminology of salvation which has been used in traditional theology and adjusting these terms to fit his existential concept of salvation. In the quotation below, Barth sees repentance as the effect of the Word upon us:

. . . Repentance is not an affair that we can accomplish in our own resources. God's Word can be to us such a law that, first of all, it floors us even in our work-righteousness: its quality is enough to condemn us in that, and it does so in such a way that we do not know we are condemned. The law is not with us, "the law of life," as Psalm cxix somewhat described it. It is left to the Holy Ghost; if so be we have not sinned against Him, if we do not refuse to believe in our own unbelief, and, therefore, in true repentance.²⁶

In the next excerpt Barth describes the new birth as a God given comprehension. Then he goes on to describe man's faith as the activity of the Holy Ghost.

. . . Comprehension:--should not that mean hearing God's Word, hearing God Himself? For such comprehension, even that continuity with God, that ability to take in God's Word must be his own; yet it is not his own possession but it must simply be conveyed to him all along. A sheer miracle must happen to him, a second miracle in addition to the miracle of his own existence, if his

²⁵Ibid., p. 69.

²⁶Karl Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Church, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1938), pp. 47, 48.

life shall be a true Christian life, which is a life within the hearing of God's Word. This miracle is the office of the Holy Ghost.

In the Holy Ghost the man exercises faith; the Scriptural proclamation of the revelation of God meets him and points to him his way as a creature. In the Holy Ghost he hears God's Word, far above any ethical reflection which can be of service only in this mundane sphere, and this Word is not lost in the darkness of his human ignorance. It is beyond any ability of ours to awaken ourselves in it. Because we are hearing we have no certainty, no complete guarantee of truth, save only those things that are given to us in what has been said to us.²⁷

Eternal life becomes a vision for Barth:

. . . One is taken with the vision of an immortality or even of a future life here on earth in which the righteous will of God breaks forth, prevails, and is done as it is done in heaven. In such wise the righteousness of God, far, strange, high, becomes our own possession and our great hope.²⁸

In the quotation below Barth sees redemption as the terminus of God's way with our way. He also holds that being a "new creature" is to be given a divine comprehension of man's predicament.

. . . He is not only the Alpha and Omega within Himself, but is the Beginning and the End on our behalf also. This is what He is still telling us, seeing that He tells us that He is our Creator and Reconciler: and, seeing that He is telling us this, we stand before Him, and at the same time stand facing ourselves, as being at the terminus of His way with us in our character as the redeemed, and as those to whom He wills that they have an all-final end and new-stating future. This is said to us from the farther side of the frontier of death, and

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 26, 27.

²⁸ Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 26.

said to us who must die, and who cannot recognise their death otherwise than as the wages of their sin. This is exactly why the promise is said to us. But it is said to us in the full truth and reality of the Word who is God, and because this is said to us we are born again and become "a new creature," "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1.4): God's children.²⁹

Though both Kierkegaard and Barth hold the same basic conception of salvation, Barth says much more about the place of Jesus Christ in man's salvation. Barth boldly propounds his existential concept concerning the salvation of man as if his ideas stand in perfect alignment with what has been believed by all good Christian theologies.

²⁹Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, p. 75.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This has been a comparative study of the theologies of Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth designed to show the influence of Kierkegaard's thought upon the theology of Barth. Five major areas of Kierkegaard's theology have been used for the basic outline of this discussion. The first portion of each chapter has been used to define an area of the theology of Søren Kierkegaard, while the second portion of each chapter has been used to show the comparison of Karl Barth's theology with Kierkegaard's theology.

I. SUMMARY

This study began with the more general concepts of subjectivity and existence, because these are so very basic to philosophical and theological understanding. These concepts are discussed at great length in Kierkegaard and become the foundation for all his thinking. Though Barth does not specifically categorize his theology under the subjective and the existential, these are unmistakably present as a basis for all of his thinking. Barth's whole view of the Bible is a very direct application of these two elements. Because of their views toward these categories, both men are found arguing against the validity of reason. Yet here

Barth seems to be the more extreme of the two. Man's existence is for both men totally dependent upon God, though Barth is more extreme in his emphasis upon the transcendence of God. The "becoming" aspect of Kierkegaard is the "decisive" aspect found in Barth. This state of constant change eliminates any formulated dogma on the part of either man, except the dogma of existentialism. They are constantly looking for the new to replace the old.

The subjectivism of Kierkegaard is found to be equally prominent within Barth's writing. In fact, it is here that Barth presses beyond Kierkegaard as he so totally ascribes the activity of faith to the Holy Spirit. However, the same idea of "passion" found in Kierkegaard is again paralleled in Barth with an extreme emphasis on the transcendence of God who controls man's spiritual activities. It is this subjective element which Barth sees in the Bible as "revelation." Both men greatly downgrade all objective manifestations of Christianity. All of Kierkegaard's involved argumentation about the "existential moment" and the passion which leads man into it is translated into Barthian terms of the activity of the Holy Spirit. In their subjective attitude toward man, both men are found strong in their assertion of universal salvation, or the salvation of all men.

Another large area of Kierkegaard's thought is that

of sin and suffering. Here again Barth has greatly imitated him. Sin is more nearly a lack of man's understanding than it is a defiant disobedience of the laws and will of God. Man's greatest sin lies in his finite attempt to understand God or be like God, who is infinite. Man has no knowledge of good and evil except as it is given irresistably to him by the Holy Spirit of revelation. Even then this knowledge is not transferable to anyone else or to any other moment of existence. For both Kierkegaard and Barth, the forgiveness of sin is more akin to psychological adjustment. Neither of these men try to explain the entrance of sin into the world but rather refer to the inevitable entrance of sin into the career of every individual. Sin being what it is for them, this precludes any doctrine of original sin as understood by orthodoxy. Sin for these men is the knowledge of trying to be like God. Kierkegaard spends more time discussing the psychological beginnings of sin, whereas Barth spends more time emphasizing the vast gulf between God and man.

Suffering is described by Kierkegaard with a variety of words that define its psychological aspects. Barth tends to reduce all this into a more simplified form which, nevertheless, does not reduce the extent of his agreement with Kierkegaard. Barth does, however, introduce more of the positive aspect to overshadow the element of suffering. Suffering is summed up in the fact that man is irreconcil-

able to God. In man's innocence he wants to know what God knows and so he sins. In man's sin he tries to be God and to understand himself and God. God in mercy spans this gap between Himself and man through Christ's reconciliation of the two extremes. Because this is a continual activity that is never completed, man is always a little bit saint and a little bit sinner. Man is never lost to a literal hell nor saved to a literal heaven. Jesus Christ in becoming man has mediated the gulf by placing Himself in man's sinful, suffering position.

Faith and paradox become the next great area of Kierkegaard's theology. Here again the subjective element enters in very strongly. Kierkegaard thinks of faith in relation to the three levels of becoming Christian. Once more, the element of the existential decisiveness prevents any arrival by human initiative in finding the experience of faith. Kierkegaard's existential "moment" is divine action which goes beyond human reason. He does allow for man's resignation as preparatory to man's "leap" of faith. Barth, however, is strongly deterministic and makes no room whatsoever for man's activity in his own faith. Barth's conception of passivity leaves the Holy Spirit in complete charge of spiritual destiny.

The paradox of faith found in Kierkegaard is similarly found within Barth's writing, though Barth does not de-

scribe the psychological steps of faith in such detail as Kierkegaard. Barth spends more time applying the "paradox of faith" theory to the doctrines of the church and more specifically to the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Barth also presses faith to an utter deterministic position so that once faith is begun it never stops "becoming." This merely serves as universalism and not as any great strides in Christian grace. The paradox between God and man which is only mediated by the "Absolute Paradox"--Jesus Christ, keeps man from any tangible or concrete spiritual attainment that might give occasion to man's major sin of pride.

Ethics and truth in the next great area of Kierkegaard's theology, moves in the area of the practical. His theory of "the temporary suspension of the ethical," which is passed on to Barth, makes ethics a very relative and subjective thing. Any of the objective aspects of Christianity are seriously frowned upon as being superficial. God has in his infinite understanding set an ethical standard so transcendent to man's comprehension that only the "moment" of Kierkegaard or the "revelation" of Barth can enable the individual the briefest glimpse of truth by which he must of necessity act in faith through the over-powering of the Holy Spirit. Kierkegaard would make some allowance for man's ability to resist God's movement, whereas Barth would not.

The relativity and subjectivity of ethics and truth

make the transfer of these to any other individual an impossibility. Thus, systematic outlines of truth and ethics are purely relative and may even become an occasion of sin. Barth does not define the various levels of religious life as Kierkegaard does. Yet Barth applies the Kierkegaardian concept of truth to the interpretation of Scripture which results in his own theory of "revelation." The total passivity of the individual in Christian experience is far more definite and dogmatic in Barth. Kierkegaard does allow for some consciousness of man at this point. For both men the existential process is basic to finding all truth, whether it be knowing God the Creator or understanding the world of God's creation.

Finally, history and salvation considered together, form the concluding area of this discussion. Much within this chapter has been mentioned in the preceding chapters, yet for the purpose of definition it becomes important. Kierkegaard and Barth reject the validity of natural history and emphasize an existential history that relates man to God. God is the supreme event in this divine history. All that man is, is quite insignificant and subordinate. The absolute transcendence of God is highly important to the thinking of both of these men. Jesus Christ is God breaking in upon history to bring about a reconciliation of man to God. This is a relationship, and not a likeness to God. The apparent

reign of God over natural history is relatively unimportant. The great fact is, that God has a history of His own to which men can only become a part as God's mercy deems it so. For both Kierkegaard and Barth there is a sense in which every man sooner or later does become related to God's history whether man is conscious of it or not.

Because of what has been previously reviewed it is unnecessary to give here a detailed account of salvation. Both Kierkegaard and Barth are quite in agreement with each other. Kierkegaard emphasizes the "stages" in the way of salvation while Barth emphasizes the absolute activity of God in salvation. Both are speaking of a psychological salvation from the sin of being human and yet trying to be God. For both men salvation is universal in extent and partial in effect. They are both quite adept at transferring orthodox terms into their mold of thinking.

II. CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded from this study that Karl Barth received the major emphasis of his theology from the influence of the theology of Søren Kierkegaard. Barth, like Kierkegaard, was in reaction against the strong effects of humanism that were manifest in the respective churches of their day. Both men yield to a subjective existentialism which utterly destroys practical Christianity in the forms of

personal witnessing, social reformation, missionary endeavor, and evangelistic purpose.

Kierkegaard is much more psychological and philosophical in his writing than Barth. Barth emphasizes more the place of Jesus Christ in man's salvation. Barth is more strongly deterministic than Kierkegaard as he places even greater emphasis upon the transcendence of God. Kierkegaard seems to imply some little preparatory effort by man in his approach to salvation, namely resignation.

Barth has made Kierkegaard's major concepts far more applicable to the contemporary world of thought. Kierkegaard's aloofness has been translated by Barth into theological concepts which are put into the practical use of the church. The hyper-critical and cynical tone of Kierkegaard has been put into the more conversational atmosphere of Barth, who delves more into the detail of Christian theology, especially in reference to the Bible. In doing this, Barth perfects Kierkegaard's theories in Barth's own "new world" found in the Bible. In fact, Barth carries Kierkegaard to his logical conclusion.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Though this is purely a comparative study, it would be of great interest and profit to make a critical study of the theologies of Kierkegaard and Barth in the light of

conservative Christianity, since both systems of thinking are so much in opposition to each other and yet parallel in doctrines which they consider. The dialectic theology or neo-orthodoxy has re-stated nearly every orthodox or conservative doctrine in its own concepts and understanding.

It would also be highly profitable to show the influence of Kierkegaard and Barth upon the entire field of twentieth century theology. Such men as Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner and Paul Tillich do have outspoken disagreement with Kierkegaard and Barth. Yet these and many more have reaped a certain effect upon their thinking from both Kierkegaard and Barth because of the preceding thought of Kierkegaard and Barth.

Another area in which study would be quite rewarding, would be the investigation of the effect of the dialectic theology upon the old-line liberalism. Some would argue that dialectic theology has caused the more extreme liberal to become more conservative, while others deny this on the ground that neo-orthodoxy is not a move toward conservative theology.

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