

INTRODUCING CHRISTIANITY INTO CHRISTENDOM:  
INVESTIGATING THE AFFINITY BETWEEN SØREN KIERKEGAARD  
AND THE EARLY THOUGHT OF KARL BARTH

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* [1846]
- PF *Philosophical Fragments* [1844]
- POV *The Point of View For My Work as an Author* [Posthumous 1859]
- PC *Practice in Christianity* [1851]
- SUD *The Sickness unto Death* [1849]
- JP *The Journals and Papers*

Disclaimer: Some of the material in the section, *Kierkegaard's Dialectical Theology and Barth's possible familiarity with Kierkegaard's thought: The Kierkegaard Renaissance* is taken from my M.A. thesis, *Examining the Primary Influence on Karl Barth's Epistle to the Romans*.

# INTRODUCTION: BARTH'S RELATION TO KIERKEGAARD:

## PROBLEMS AND PROCEDURE

### Introducing the Problem

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth's (1886-1968) relation to the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is one which has been touched upon repeatedly with regard to influence and parallels. It is an issue that has produced diverse conclusions ranging from that of T. F. Torrance, who believed Barth to have been influenced by Kierkegaard to an extent even unknown to himself,<sup>1</sup> to the likes of Bruce McCormack<sup>2</sup> who views the affinity as exaggerated.<sup>3</sup> However, this intriguing relationship refuses a conclusive position regarding the extent to which Barth had been influenced by Kierkegaard; any attempt that seeks to resolve this question disregards both the complexity of Barth's thought and the sheer range of thinkers who had contributed to his theological development.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Barth's own comments on the influence of Kierkegaard on his development complicate the investigation into the relationship between the two. Whereas in 1922 Barth admits a dependence on Kierkegaard in the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*, by 1963 he has assumed a more cautious relation to Kierkegaard.

In 1963, Barth accepted the Sonning Prize in Copenhagen, Denmark, in recognition of his role in facilitating Kierkegaard's reception in both the German and

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<sup>1</sup> See, T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 44.

<sup>2</sup> See, Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 216-217.

<sup>3</sup>The scholarship addressing this relationship, although not mentioned specifically here, will be mentioned throughout this work as relevant to the specific discussion at hand. Therefore, the various considerations given by both Barth and Kierkegaard scholarship which aid in both obscuring and/or clarifying this relationship between Barth and Kierkegaard will be noted at length.

<sup>4</sup> For a full discussion of Barth's theological development see, Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

English speaking world.<sup>5</sup> Commenting on this role Barth states, “The second edition of my *Epistle to the Romans* is the very telling document of my participation in what has been called ‘the Kierkegaard Renaissance.’”<sup>6</sup> As is well known, Barth’s participation in the Kierkegaard Renaissance is confirmed in his own attributing of his methodology of the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* (hereafter *Romans II*) as one grounded in Kierkegaard’s concept of the *infinite qualitative difference* (hereafter *IQD*) between God and humanity. Continuing his speech, Barth notes what he, and others, had learned from Kierkegaard at that time:

[What] attracted us particularly to him, what we rejoiced in, and what we learned, was the criticism, so unrelenting in its incisiveness, with which he attacked so much: all the speculation which blurred the infinite qualitative difference between God and man...all the attempts to make the scriptural message innocuous, all the too pretentious and at the same time too cheap christianism and churchiness of prevalent theology, from which we ourselves were not as yet quite free.<sup>7</sup>

Yet the influence of Kierkegaard’s thought on Barth’s *Romans II* extends beyond the confines of this one concept alone. *Romans II* repeatedly makes use of Kierkegaardian terminology such as *Paradox*, *Incognito*, *indirect communication*, etc.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, however, after reminiscing those early days, Barth’s tone suddenly shifts in direction. He asks, “Did not a new anthropocentric system announce itself in Kierkegaard’s theoretical groundwork – one quite opposed to that

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<sup>5</sup> Although the name “Kierkegaard” is seen scattered and imbedded throughout the works of a few theologians at the dawning of the twentieth century, it was predominantly Barth who had introduced the theological world to Kierkegaard’s thought which found its debut in Barth’s better known second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* (*Der Römerbrief*). For a further, but brief, examination of Barth’s role in the Kierkegaard Reception in Germany, see Heiko Schulz, “Germany and Austria: A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard” in *Kierkegaard’s International Reception Tome I: Northern and Western Europe*, edited by Jon Stewart (Ashgate, 2009), pp. 307-387.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth, “Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille” in *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XI.I (1965), 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> McCormack questions whether the presence of “Kierkegaardian language and concepts” in *Romans II* is suggestive of influence. It could be that Barth, suggests McCormack, merely borrowed Kierkegaard’s concepts but then received the “content” from others such as Heinrich Barth. See, McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 237.

at which we aimed?”<sup>9</sup> In light of Barth’s own admission that his methodology is Kierkegaardian, coupled with his use of other Kierkegaardian language, his questioning, here, is intriguing.<sup>10</sup>

Kierkegaard’s influence on *Romans II* was, for Barth, significant when contrasted with the first edition, which Barth later thought yet too reflective of the liberal theological training he had acquired while studying at Bonn, Tübingen, and Marburg. However, with Barth’s break from this liberal tradition, somewhere around 1914 to 1915, he sought fresh theological instruction in order to articulate what he thought problematic in the theological arena in his time. Later Barth’s *Romans II* articulated the problem of modern theology as one which has eradicated the infinite difference between humanity and God, hence the decision to appropriate Kierkegaard’s concept of the *IQD*.

What is interesting about Barth’s 1963 reflections is that his opinion of Kierkegaard, then, was far different from that of the early 1920’s. Barth’s speech evidences that a crucial shift had occurred in his view of Kierkegaard. Over time, Barth had come to regard Kierkegaard’s theoretical groundwork as one which is essentially anthropological rather than theological. But even more, Barth’s negative comments of Kierkegaard are indicative of yet another problem.

Underlying Kierkegaard’s thought, Barth perceived the existence of an overwhelming negativity emanating from Kierkegaard’s *IQD* whereby humanity is left to ruin and despair. In other words, Barth suggests that the outcome of Kierkegaard’s *IQD* is one wherein the individual, as he states, “is caught in the

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<sup>9</sup> Barth, “Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille”, (1965), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Despite Barth’s (seemingly) favourable bestowment on Kierkegaard’s thinking at this time, the accession would prove to be short lived. Although Kierkegaard appears in Barth’s thought after 1922 – and might I add, still amiably – by 1925 Kierkegaard’s name all but disappears.

wheels of a law which can only deaden and makes one sour, gloomy, and sad.”<sup>11</sup>

Later in 1967, Barth again expressed his reserve toward Kierkegaard’s thought, stating, “The infinite qualitative difference between God and man, with all its consequences, has eaten itself right into them [other theologians]...They [other theologians] see themselves and the others, the Church and the world, surrounded by nothing but threatening negations.”<sup>12</sup>

Barth concludes that insofar as Kierkegaard’s *IQD* leads to the annihilation of the human subject (who is therefore destitute of grace), Kierkegaard’s central concern is not that of “guarding the divine subjectivity”. Rather, according to Barth, Kierkegaard’s aim is ultimately an engagement with the human subject in and of itself.<sup>13</sup> For Barth, Kierkegaard’s notion of truth is thus one whereby the individual is its own criterion; a truth rooted in the subject. In short, Barth views Kierkegaard’s

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<sup>11</sup> Barth, “Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille”, (1965), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Barth, “Kierkegaard and the theologians” in *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XIII (1967), 64. In order to make the point that Kierkegaard’s thought demands caution when appropriating it, Barth imagines three hypothetical theologians who had encountered Kierkegaard, and suggests a strong preference for the third. The first theologian has never bothered with Kierkegaard and, according to Barth, “these men are characterized by a cheerfulness of speech and conduct which in the long run never fails them.” The second is the one to whom the *IQD* has “eaten itself right into them” whereby all they perceive is negativity in themselves and the world around them. However, the third theologian is one who has gone through the school of Kierkegaard “but has passed through it.” According to Barth one should pass through the school of Kierkegaard, “Woe unto them if they do not”. But the key of Barth’s declaration is that they should move past it. The third theologian, as Barth’s ideal, has gleaned important lessons from Kierkegaard and as a result refuses to “return to the flesh-pots of a bourgeois ‘Christianism’.” For Barth there are positive things to learn from Kierkegaard, namely the infinite chasm between God and humanity which puts into question everything on this side of eternity. Thus, as Barth states, after one encounters Kierkegaard, they can “never again ignore or surpass the ‘No’ uttered in the gospel to the world and the Church.” However, this positive lesson, Barth thinks, can all too easily become negative if one does not hear the “Yes” in the “No”. In Barth’s view the second theologian tended only to the “no” and could not perceive the grace of God hidden therein. In the end, Barth thinks, the net effect of Kierkegaard is the creation of anthropology without a corresponding theology of grace insofar as, in hearing only the “no”, “the salvation of human existence is their concern in their ever fresh cognition of its absolute questionableness.”

<sup>13</sup> See, Karl Barth, “Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille”, (1965), 6. Although noting the positive points of parallel between Kierkegaard and Barth, such as that the distance between God and humanity is, for both thinkers, overcome in love, Daniel J. Price states, “In spite of his many positive contributions to the issues facing modern theology, Kierkegaard’s anthropology espoused a type of individualism that allowed the person to exist in cheerless isolation.” For more information see, Daniel J. Price, *Karl Barth’s Anthropology in Light of Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 56-96.



experiment with the self as its own central concern; “an experiment with a faith founded in and moved by itself and thus groundless and without object.”<sup>14</sup> Whilst there is an element of truth in Barth’s perception of a Kierkegaardian overwhelming negativity, this reading is fundamentally incorrect.

Later, in Chapter One, I will suggest that Kierkegaard’s thought relies heavily on the notion of objective revelation, and that the notion of the self as being its own criterion for truth is not Kierkegaardian. Barth’s simultaneous influence by and misreading of Søren Kierkegaard creates one of the most complex, ambiguous, and yet, for this very reason, intriguing relationships within the realm of theological and philosophical history.

### **The Barthian Lenses: The Problem**

The dichotomous nature of Barth’s relation to Kierkegaard, involving this change from early favour to later reservation, requires an explanation. I believe two plausible reasons are detectable. First, as mentioned, Barth’s diminishing regard for Kierkegaard stemmed from a gradual assumption that Kierkegaard’s theology exhibited a crushing negativity, insofar as it employed the *IQD* in a manner which left the human subject in despair. Second, by virtue of a one-sided reading of the *IQD*, Barth believed that Kierkegaard turned to the only option available: the human subject. With the self serving as its own criterion for truth, both the diagnosis of its condition and the solution to its own redemption are products of its own creation; hence “subjectivity is truth.” On account of these reasons Barth viewed Kierkegaard’s theology as nothing but a theological mask on the face of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

anthropology. With anthropological structures serving as Barth's frame of reference in reading Kierkegaard, the result was an overt misreading, one which continues to be propagated within Barth scholarship and which reads Kierkegaard through the "Barthian lens." Several factors contributed to Barth's misreading of Kierkegaard.

During his stay at Göttingen (1921-25), Barth encountered a Kierkegaardianism he had not known previously. As I shall discuss later, his gradual shift away from Kierkegaard is one partly indebted to his acquaintance with the likes of Emanuel Hirsch, Karl Holl, Fredrich Gogarten, and, especially, Paul Tillich and Rudolph Bultmann. These figures presented a Kierkegaard who bequeathed Christianity with more than mere parameters in halting unwarranted discourse of God. For them, Kierkegaard offered not so much the parameters of theology as he did the true starting place for theology, namely, the self.<sup>15</sup> Whereas in the early 1920s Barth had employed Kierkegaard in addressing his colleagues' overt concern for human existence as the source of truth, divorced of revelation, by the end of the 1920s Barth had relegated Kierkegaard to being a member, perhaps even the founding member, of this concern.<sup>16</sup> In sum, Barth's eventual disapproval of Kierkegaard can be understood as being rooted in two misguided beliefs.

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<sup>15</sup> As will be discussed later on in Chapter 2, the Kierkegaard Reception in Germany had been predominated by Christoph Schrempf's translations of Kierkegaard's work. Rune Alf Engebretsen notes, in his *Kierkegaard and Poet-Existence with Special Reference to Germany and Rilke* (Stanford University: University Microfilms International, 1980), "It is unfortunate that so much of German Kierkegaard translation had to be undertaken by Schrempf in the period 1890-1922. His work teems with evidence that his efforts as editor and translator were keyed more to a personal exoneration than to the advancement of Kierkegaard's writings." Engebretsen states further, "Readily adopting earlier translations of others, he [Schrempf] felt quite free to adapt Kierkegaard to his own idiom", see 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> In Karl Barth, *The Paradoxical Nature of the "Positive Paradox": Answers and questions to Paul Tillich*, from *Theologische Blätter*, II (1923), Barth yet appears approving of Kierkegaard. Barth compares Tillich's notion of the God's relation to time as one which, negatively, resembles "the God of Schleiermacher and Hegel" which evidences no true concept of the paradox and therefore bears no affinity "to the God of Luther and Kierkegaard". In short, Barth states, "If Tillich is serious about the paradoxical nature of the positive paradox, then he cannot be serious about either the directness of the relationships he asserts between God and world." Barth states Tillich's problem as

One is that Kierkegaard's *IQD* results in the self left to itself, without any means of overcoming its separation from God. Two, by turning inward to its own resources in overcoming this difference, the self reflects its own disregard for the reality of its situation as one whose means are utterly futile. Barth reveals this concern when, reflecting on his *Romans II* in relation to the *Christliche Dogmatik* of 1927, he states, "Because I cannot regard subjectivity as being the truth, after a brief encounter I have had to move away from Kierkegaard again."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, whereas the Barth of the early 1920s had once endorsed Kierkegaard as an ally in placing the limits to human accessibility to God, Barth slowly adopted the belief that Kierkegaard himself had initiated a concern for human existence in and of itself and thus was responsible for theology's anthropological focus. As will be examined below, although some commentators have recognized the presence of something Kierkegaardian in Barth, they have tended to address this influence as being auxiliary to mainstream Barth scholarship. It will be worthwhile briefly to highlight several works which have addressed this relationship directly.

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one which fears the relegating of salvation history to that one "place in history". For Tillich, such a move, a move which Tillich thinks Barth makes, permits a breaking through of the "imperceptible, non-objective character of faith". But Barth names Tillich's unwarranted apprehension as one which confuses God's relation to humanity as one of his divine initiative, freedom and love, to that of a reversal to the human initiative. Thus, Barth states, in contrast to his later criticisms of Kierkegaard, that Tillich "Runs the great danger of letting the justified polemic against the 'man-god,' once waged by Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, be converted into its opposite, the polemic against the God-man", in short, Christ. (151). From this Barth states his interpretation of the significance of the positive paradox and its relation to history in the most Kierkegaardian of terms, writing: "Therefore it is obvious that the revelation in Christ is 'imperceptible' and 'non-objective' in the sense that the qualification of this history as *salvation* history (as the history of God's becoming man) is concealed all along the line by the view of perceptible historical relations which 'are' in themselves nothing else than possibilities of *offence*." (151) In a decidedly Kierkegaardian tone, Barth continues, "The whole historical 'life of Jesus,' for example, divorced from the testimony of those who encountered the majesty in this abasement, is in itself nothing else than the possibility, the great probability, of *offence*...as if the revelation were directly identical with the empirical fact, with what was then perceptible" (151-2). For more on this see, *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology, vol.1*, Edited by James M. Robinson (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 173.

## The Problem Addressed

Few have written specifically on Barth's relation to Kierkegaard. In what follows, I would like to address, briefly, these works in both their contributions and deficiencies to this relationship. These works are: A. Messer's book, *Sören Kierkegaard und Karl Barth*; William Walter Wells, III, *The Influence of Kierkegaard on the Theology of Karl Barth*; N.H. Søren's, "The Legacy and Interpretation of Kierkegaard", Alastair McKinnon's, "Barth's Relation to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light", Peter S. Oh's "Complementary Dialectics of Kierkegaard and Barth: Barth's Use of Kierkegaardian Diastasis Reassessed, and finally, Bruce McCormack's *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*."<sup>18</sup>

In 1925, Barth commented to his friend Thurneysen on Messer's attempt to examine his thought in light of Kierkegaard's. Barth states:

The book that A. Messer in Giessen has produced on Soren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth (I can only grin painfully!) is better than most of the theological ones descriptively, but in outcome simply touchingly naïve: I am a quite respectable follower of Kant and Fichte (!) who is to be genially pardoned a few theological extravagances such as the 'qualitative difference'...original sin, justification (which in me must originate in a formidable 'primitive religious instinct').<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, Messer's work is a product of his time wherein Kierkegaard was mainly understood through the lens of Christoph Schrempf (1860-1944) whose translations of Kierkegaard said more about him than Kierkegaard. Schrempf's

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<sup>18</sup> See, A. Messer, *Sören Kierkegaard und Karl Barth*; William Walter Wells III, *The influence of Kierkegaard on the theology of Karl Barth* (A dissertation presented for PhD, University of Syracuse, 1970); Egon Brinkschmidt, *Sören Kierkegaard und Karl Barth*; N.H. Søren's, "The Legacy and Interpretation of Kierkegaard", in *Biblioteca Kierkegaardian* 8, 1981; Alastair McKinnon's, "Barth's Relation to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light" in *Canadian Journal of Theology* 13/1, 1967; Peter S. Oh's, "Complementary Dialectics of Kierkegaard and Barth: Barth's Use of Kierkegaardian Diastasis Reassessed", in *GechstraBe*, 81 (Tubingen, Germany) as well as his *Karl Barth's Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Karl Barth's Analogical use of the Trinitarian Relation* (T&T Clark, 2006); and Bruce McCormack's *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth—Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), 233.

Kierkegaard is one which, as a philosopher and not a theologian, moves mainly in the realm of aesthetics. It is no surprise, then, that Messer's work stays faithful to this Kierkegaard. As a result, although Barth thought Messer's work was better than most, Messer's objective missed the central tenets of Barth's thought and thus says more about Barth in relation to Fichte and Kant than Kierkegaard.<sup>20</sup>

Wells' work, on the other hand, aims ultimately at uncovering Kierkegaard in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. Wells is convinced that Barth's thought there has not lost its Kierkegaardian flavour. As with most discussions of this relationship, Wells recognizes *Romans II* as the catalyst for Barth's use of Kierkegaard. But *Romans II* is not his concern. Instead, he follows suit in addressing Barth's use of history, revelation, and paradox in its affinity to Kierkegaard, and then moves expeditiously to the 1927 *Christliche Dogmatik*. However, this work too is of little concern to Wells. Instead, Wells hastens to the *Church Dogmatics* in order to outline points of parallel in light of Barth's later dismissal of Kierkegaard. Hindering his overall project, Wells fails to note, in his sweeping coverage from *Romans II* to the *Church Dogmatics*, the central criticisms Barth makes of Kierkegaard beyond just the well known suspicion that Kierkegaard's theology permits anthropological tendencies.<sup>21</sup>

Problematic about Wells' investigation is its lack of evidence in substantiating his claims along with his use of irrelevant sources. For example, Wells' consideration of *Romans II* looks to the 1923 Barth/Harnack debate to support his view of revelation in *Romans II*. This approach fails to account for the way in which the Barth of *Romans II* differs from that of 1923. Therefore, with such a

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<sup>20</sup> In Paul Schempp's *Marginal Glosses on Barthianism*, pp. 193, he states that the concluding tone of Messer's book, *Søren Kierkegaard und Karl Barth*, is one wherein "Messer has insisted on interpreting Barth's theology in terms of Kant and Fichte."

<sup>21</sup> William Walter Wells III, *The influence of Kierkegaard on the theology of Karl Barth* (A dissertation presented for PhD, University of Syracuse, 1970), 292.

methodology, Wells offers no differentiation between the concepts he is investigating in the *Church Dogmatics* from that of *Romans II*. In short, the complexity of Barth's theological development is overshadowed by an urgency to show his relation, or even indebtedness to Kierkegaard.

But what is probably most concerning about Wells' examination is its lack of attention given to his thesis. Out of two hundred and sixty five pages, only fifteen of them address, specifically, a highly evident Kierkegaardian influence on Barth. The majority of the work instead hones in on other issues which, for the most part, are not relevant to the discussion. The amount of time given to the direct relationship between Kierkegaard and Barth also appears strange in that no time is spent in addressing the possible sharing of influences between Kierkegaard and Barth. In short, these pages, although helpful for a historical/contextual study, bear little relevance to his task. Whilst Wells is right to note that when one reads both Kierkegaard and Barth the parallels appear quite evident, I would not go as far as Wells in generalizing this affinity to "Kierkegaard's writings and some of Barth's work."<sup>22</sup>

Second, Wells notes that Kierkegaard had influenced Barth in his use of *IQD*, the paradoxical form of revelation, the relation of history to revelation, and the objective/subjective distinction. More commendable than anything else, although undeveloped, Wells notes that both thinkers believed revelation to be the only solution in overcoming the *IQD*. At least, here, with revelation serving as the only means in overcoming the difference between God and humanity does Wells offer something useful. This work, although noting some helpful places to start, fails in

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 292.

outlining the problem inherent within this relationship as well as flushing out the parallels, both positive and negative, between Barth and Kierkegaard within historical and developmental confines.

In short, there is no reference to the cause of an appearance of a Kierkegaardian concern for the isolated human subject, namely, the despairing abyss of the *IQD*. Therefore, as a whole, Wells' work offers very little in understanding Barth's relation to Kierkegaard.

On a smaller scale but no less significant are the efforts of N.H. S e's, "The Legacy and Interpretation of Kierkegaard", Alastair McKinnon's, "Barth's Relation to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light", and Peter S. Oh's "Complementary Dialectics of Kierkegaard and Barth: Barth's Use of Kierkegaardian Diastasis Reassessed".

According to Oh, Barth read Kierkegaard in light of Kierkegaard's discussion of "religiousness A" and not "religiousness B". For Oh, religiousness A represents the esthetic individual whose existence, as one infinitely qualitatively distinct from God, is ultimately one of despair. However, what Barth had missed is that, with Religiousness B, Kierkegaard offers the reconciliation between God and the individual. Oh argues that one must first grasp the significance of Kierkegaard's "three qualitatively different stages on life's way", namely, the aesthetical, the ethical, and the religious which are then categorized into two classifications of religiousness A and religiousness B.

Oh posits that within the category of religiousness A exist the two stages of the aesthetical and the ethical which, for Kierkegaard represent what is specifically common to all religion. Religiousness B, however, refers exclusively to Christianity. However, in contrast to religiousness A, religiousness B's dialectic is paradoxical by

means of the person of Jesus Christ who is said to unite the opposing categories of eternity and existence, divinity and humanity. Thus, Kierkegaard's intention in employing the infinite qualitative distinction was to reveal the significance for faith. According to Oh, it is the dual nature of the infinite qualitative distinction as both a negative concept from which nothing can overcome (religiousness A) as well as, by means of this negativity, extends to the paradoxical nature of this dialectic wherein time and eternity meet in Christ as seen in religiousness B which Barth failed to grasp. Thus, "when he appropriates Kierkegaard's dialectic, Barth refers only to the *negative dialectic of religiousness A* that eventually ends with despair."<sup>23</sup>

Regarding McKinnon's diagnosis of Barth's misreading he maintains that there are three different readings of Kierkegaard, and Barth adheres to the wrong one. First, there is the Kierkegaard of the pseudonymous literature wherein Christianity is defined as being illogical. Second, there is the real Kierkegaard wherein Christianity is illogical only to the unbeliever who needs faith to overcome the tension. And third, there is the phantom Kierkegaard who is Kierkegaard of the pseudonymous writings. Barth, McKinnon asserts, had bought into the wrong Kierkegaard, the pseudonymous one, and this accounts for his overall negativity toward Kierkegaard's thought.

Although McKinnon has rightly touched upon the problem with Barth's reading of Kierkegaard as one being the "phantom Kierkegaard," this is merely one aspect of the problem. True, by 1963, Barth's problem with Kierkegaard concerns the anthropomorphic tendencies he thinks existent within Kierkegaard's thought. However, I would argue that Barth's central problem with Kierkegaard is what he

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<sup>23</sup> Peter S. Oh, "Complementary Dialectics of Kierkegaard and Barth: Barth's Use of Kierkegaardian Diastasis Reassessed", in *GechstraBe*, 81 (Tubingen, Germany), 507.



thinks is an overwhelming negativity of the human in relation to God, i.e. an absence of grace in Kierkegaard's thought. Additionally, McKinnon appears to have misplaced where Barth actually begins to hold Kierkegaard in a negative light. McKinnon thinks it is in *Romans II* where Barth has incorporated the "phantom" Kierkegaard.<sup>24</sup> However, it will become evident throughout this project that it is not in *Romans II* where Barth has misread Kierkegaard, but in the mid 1920's after *Romans II*. I maintain that Barth has rightly understood and used Kierkegaard in *Romans II*. Barth's suspicion of Kierkegaard comes later, 1924-25, as a result of his encounter with colleagues at Göttingen.<sup>25</sup>

Looking to Søm, he states: "He [Barth] realized that he had been in danger of constructing a kind of anthropology by way of introduction to the principally theological task of elucidating what is involved in standing face to face with God's self-revelation, that is, he saw that he was about to tread the same path that had led Gogarten and Bultmann astray."<sup>26</sup> As Søm suggests, the problem facing Barth was the apparent danger of ordering the divine/human relationship whereby priority was given to the human side over that of the divine side. He adds: "And this, of course, was bound to influence his view of Kierkegaard and the version of 'human being first', which he represented in his christianly oriented psychological studies."<sup>27</sup> And, although Søm recognizes Barth's belief that Kierkegaard's theology lacks a concept of grace, it is the anthropological motif which he thinks concerned Barth most. The

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<sup>24</sup> Alastair McKinnon's, "Barth's Relation to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light" in *Canadian Journal of Theology* 13/1, 1967, 38.

<sup>25</sup> See pages 5-6 of this thesis. Barth's suspicion that Kierkegaard's thought is or trends the line of theological anthropology will necessitate a post-*Romans II* position on Barth's behalf in light of my endeavour to show the parallels which exist between these two thinkers. In fact, the objective of this project hopes to show that Barth's suspicion of Kierkegaard is one without grounds which reveals a distinction between these two thinkers which exists only in Barth's mind and not in their thinking.

<sup>26</sup> N.H. Søm's, "The Legacy and Interpretation of Kierkegaard", in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana* 8, 1981, 231.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-2.

problem with Søren's examination, in my estimation, is that although he is correct in noting that Barth feared Kierkegaard's theology as assimilating the theological anthropology of Gogarten and Bultmann, his aligning himself with Barth on this point is incorrect. In the end, where this project differs from Søren's is given in his own words. He states, "To what extent Barth is justified or unjustified...is not my task to investigate here."<sup>28</sup>

In sum, Oh, Søren, and McKinnon all share the view that Barth's final reading of Kierkegaard's *IQD* is one-sided. Therefore, their contribution to the articulation of Barth's misreading of Kierkegaard is important. However, although these works articulate something amiss in Barth's later reading of Kierkegaard, their aim is not to provide a shared conceptual analysis of Kierkegaard and Barth.

McCormack's contribution to this debate is indeed significant insofar as his work often takes precedence within Barth scholarship. McCormack's consideration of this relationship is found in his book (revision of a dissertation submitted to Princeton Theological Seminary) *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*. Moreover, McCormack's discussion of this relation does not exceed the confines of *Romans II*. Assessing at length both the cultural events and philosophical/theological influences on *Romans II*, McCormack concludes:

In the English-speaking world especially, the prevailing assumption has long been that Søren Kierkegaard was the dominant influence leading to the changes introduced into the second edition. European researches were divided on the question until fairly recently. A significant group of scholars working in the field of 'early Barth' research have concluded that Kierkegaard's contribution, while not insignificant, was of much more limited value than was once thought.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>29</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 216-217. The group of scholars of whom McCormack references as providing research which minimizes Kierkegaard's predominance in *Romans II* are Eberhard Busch, Werner M. Ruschke, Michael Beintker and Ingrid Spieckermann. In his, *Karl Barth and the Pietists:*

According to McCormack, Kierkegaard provided only the means of strengthening Barth's commitment to a specific form of neo-Kantianism inherited from Barth's brother Heinrich.<sup>30</sup> McCormack admits that "Kierkegaardian language and concepts play a significant role in *Romans II*."<sup>31</sup> But what McCormack suggests is that Barth's use of Kierkegaardian language and concepts should be seen as providing merely the form of Barth's message and not the content. The content, Barth found elsewhere. Thus, McCormack questions whether Kierkegaard's role in *Romans II* is

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*The Young Karl Barth's Critique of Pietism and its Response*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Busch endorses Franz Overbeck as the predominate influence on Barth's *Romans II*, at least over that of Kierkegaard. Busch does not however provide evidence that would substantiate his claim. He merely argues that what Barth had discovered in Kierkegaard he had already learned in Overbeck. Against Busch's view, it would appear strange that the concept *Urgeschichte*, which Overbeck had provided Barth, would predominate over the numerous concepts Barth had learned from Kierkegaard, specifically, Kierkegaard's dialectic of veiling and unveiling. With regard to Spieckermann, there is not too much, if at all, which addresses Kierkegaard specifically. Rather, Spieckermann argues for the importance of neo-Kantianism on Barth's shift from *Romans I* to *II*. For more on Spieckermann's position, see Ingrid Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1985). With regard to Werner M. Ruschke, he represents the common understanding that Kierkegaard's thought is mainly philosophical and therefore moves in a different direction from Barth's theological concerns. In fact, with regard to McCormack use of Michael Beintker, both Beintker and Ruschke agree on their diagnosis of Kierkegaard's use of the concepts he and Barth share as differing in methodology, Kierkegaard being philosophical and Barth, theological. However, Ruschke does mention that "it is Kierkegaard who stressed the *IQD* between God and man, as well as the paradox of faith." (62) However, Ruschke argues that although Barth may have taken these concepts from Kierkegaard, in the hands of Barth, these concepts operate differently in *Romans II*. Therefore, as Ruschke states, "Barth's use of dialectic and paradox in *Romans II* are transformed from the philosophical into the theological. [Furthermore, for Barth], the condition for dialectical thought and paradoxical sayings rests in relation to Jesus Christ." (64) In the end, Ruschke also sees Kierkegaard as Barth had in 1963. Ruschke is sure to mention that Barth believed Kierkegaard as one consumed with religious self-confidence and radical destructive negations. (66) Unfortunately, Ruschke does not offer any evidence that this is indeed Kierkegaard's position but rather presupposes that this is the case and from there argues for a Barth who ultimately differs from Kierkegaard. As it will be demonstrated in this project, Ruschke's position will be shown to be without ground by means of demonstrating that Kierkegaard too is theologically motivated with regard to his use of the *IQD* and paradox in relation to faith in Christ. For more on Ruschke's argument see, Werner M. Ruschke, *Entstehung und Ausführung der Diastaseologie in Karl Barths zweitem "Römerbrief"* (Neukirchener Verlag, 1987). It comes to no surprise, as we shall discover later in our discussion of Paul Brazier's examination of *Romans II*, that Brazier, inasmuch as he relies heavily on McCormack, also takes up Ruschke's position that Kierkegaard's influence on Barth was philosophical rather than theologically, hence the belief that Barth differs from Kierkegaard in their use of the same concepts. See P.H. Brazier, *Barth and Dostoevsky: A Study of the Influences of the Russian Writer Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky on the Development of the Swiss Theologian Karl Barth, 1915-1922* (Paternoster, 2007), 162.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 237.

indicative of his influence on Barth.<sup>32</sup>

The problem with McCormack's argument is that little evidence is offered for his minimizing of Kierkegaard's contribution. Kierkegaard's contribution is said to be "significant" but not primary or major when paired next to neo-Kantianism. To support his thesis, McCormack depends on the work of Michael Beintker who concludes "that most of the conceptual building blocks needed to produce the characteristic shape of dialectic in *Romans II* were already in place before the encounter with Kierkegaard through Barth's reception of his brother Heinrich's *Ursprungsphilosophie*."<sup>33</sup> McCormack's contention that "certain modes of thought" were in place that could account for the dramatic shift from *Romans I* to *Romans II* raises the question as to *which* ones. Assuming these "modes of thought" were rooted in neo-Kantianism, are we to believe that Kierkegaard only provided Barth with terminology that lacked any substantive relation to the theological method uniquely employed by Barth? It appears strange that neo-Kantianism was the true inspiration for a theological system that reflects *Kierkegaard's* thought—a "system" that, by Barth's own admission, he owes to Kierkegaard.

### **Task and Procedure**

Until now, I have suggested that the change in Barth's view of Kierkegaard resulted in his suspicion that Kierkegaard's theology expresses an inescapable negativity in humanity's relation to God. I have further suggested that due to the inescapable abyss of our predicament, coupled with the lack of true objective knowledge of God, Kierkegaard's theology was understood as being decidedly

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 237.

anthropological. In short, Kierkegaard's theology is one absent of grace. This misreading, accepted by most Barthians, I have called "the Barthian lens;" those who have read Kierkegaard in light of Barth's lens have tended to accept uncritically Barth's view on the matter.

Amidst this unfortunate circumstance, I propose that although Barth acquired an incorrect view of Kierkegaard, his theology, nevertheless, betrays a strong likeness to Kierkegaard's own. Although Barth thought he had moved away from Kierkegaard, in light of the influence Kierkegaard had on him (although probably unaware of the extent to which Kierkegaard had affected him) his conscious corrections to the deficiencies in the theology of the time had in the end resulted in his being one of the truest interpreters of Kierkegaard. Thus, despite the pursuit of an interpretation that leads Barth to draw away from Kierkegaard, his thought, ironically, ends up looking a lot closer to Kierkegaard than even he himself recognised; Barth had not gradually drifted from Kierkegaard's thought but rather, by 1923, came to parallel it even more noticeably than in his early days.

Therefore, this project seeks to provide an account of how Barth's use of specific concepts in his *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics* compare to Kierkegaard's own use of these same concepts in order to reveal that Barth's reading of Kierkegaard as being anthropological is fundamentally incorrect. In doing so, my task endeavours to come to terms with how different these two thinkers really are one from another. Of course there are difficulties which face my endeavour, namely, that the Barth of *Romans II* differs, partly, from the Barth of the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and beyond. Also, understanding Kierkegaard is no small feat. However, as I stated, if I am correct in my belief that Barth's theological adjustments do not

further him from Kierkegaard but rather bring them closer, then his continuing theological development should facilitate this conceptual comparison rather than hinder it.

Furthermore, my hope for this investigation is one which will account not only for the affinities between these two thinkers but also one that ultimately offers a correction to Barth's criticisms of Kierkegaard. Whilst the concepts under scrutiny will vary between *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, the main points of focus in this investigation will be the concepts of Revelation, Paradox, History, Faith, Subjectivity, and the *IQD*. Insofar as an examination of one or another particular concept, for example, revelation, necessitates a consideration of sub-categories which fall under its rubric, sub-categories such as indirect-communication, contemporaneity, Objectivity and offence, shall also be examined.

As a whole, this investigation aims to respond to a series of key questions: are Barth's later criticisms of Kierkegaard, as seen in the 1963 speech, directed to his understanding of Kierkegaard at the time of *Romans II*? Or are his criticisms directed against the later encroaching Kierkegaardian existentialism he located in thinkers such as Bultmann and Gogarten? If Barth, in thinking he has moved away from Kierkegaard, has actually moved closer to him without realizing it himself, which concepts dramatically differ from Kierkegaard, and from his use of Kierkegaard in *Romans II* and beyond? Moreover, if Barth *was* aware of both the negative and the positive components in Kierkegaard's dialectic, we might ask whether his criticisms relate more to the dangers of certain *readings* of Kierkegaard, rather than Kierkegaard's thought specifically.

This project will proceed in the following manner; in light of the ambiguity

that not only shrouds Barth's relation to Kierkegaard but Kierkegaard himself, it is paramount that an account of Kierkegaard's thought first be offered. As it will soon be noted, this is a difficult task given the enigmatic nature of Kierkegaard's writings. Despite the difficulty, Chapter One will endeavour to come to terms with Kierkegaard's thought as being thoroughly Christian.

Therefore, I shall first address the nature of his authorship *as a whole* with regard to its theological intention. Such a treatment is necessary since Kierkegaard's authorship appears divided into two *seemingly* contradictory parts, the pseudonymous writings and the signed ones: these two must be read in light of each other as part of a *unified* theological corpus. From this, I will then proceed to examine the nature of his thought within its historical encounter with Hegelianism in order to promote a specific contextual questioning and response by Kierkegaard in relation to his contemporaries. This discussion provides an invaluable service to Kierkegaard interpretation insofar as many interpreters of Kierkegaard extract him out of his context only to translate him within the lexicon of the twentieth and, now, twenty-first century. Next, Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity in relation to reason will be considered by means of examining those concepts mentioned earlier on.

Chapter Two will undertake a thorough investigation of Barth's *Romans II* in relation to Kierkegaard's thought. As stated, this will be carried out in a conceptual comparison of those same categories discerned in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, a more thorough discussion of the problematic nature of Barth's relation to Kierkegaard shall be offered which accounts for the numerous arguments offered by both Barth and Kierkegaard scholarship for or against a strong Kierkegaardian

presence in *Romans II*. Most problems surrounding Kierkegaard's presence in *Romans II* do, however, pertain to a discussion of influence which, although related to conceptual analysis, usually places one or the other thinker at the centre of the investigation, which inevitably leads to an inadequate consideration of other influences; arguing for primacy of influence is something I hope to avoid.

Following an examination of this problem, I shall offer a thorough discussion of Barth's use of the *IQD*. This will consist of an investigation of the historical milieu of Barth's day wherein his methodology of diastasis in *Romans II* will assume its significance. From here, I will then discuss Barth's familiarity with Kierkegaard's thought by means of examining the Kierkegaard Renaissance at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following this examination, I shall then proceed to a specific examination of the concept of the *IQD* itself to that of a discussion of its ground, this supposedly being a decisive point of departure between Kierkegaard and Barth – as if the former grounding it in the self's despair over the self in contrast to the latter's grounding of this difference in sin. Inevitably, the issue of Barth's dialectics emerges here in relation to whether or not there is an overcoming of this difference, and, if so, by what means.

In the wake of this discussion, I will proceed on to an examination of Barth's misapprehension of Kierkegaard's dialectic in noting Kierkegaard's adherence to a *positive* dimension of the *IQD*. Aiding this examination is the work of Kierkegaard scholar Simon Podmore which understands Kierkegaard in light of his Lutheran heritage. Following this investigation, I will then examine Barth's conception of revelation in relation to the *IQD* by means of examining how the concepts of *history*, *paradox*, and *faith* operate within this relation. The outcome of this investigation



intends to account for the parallel between Barth and Kierkegaard in their understanding of these concepts.

Chapters Three and Four will initiate an investigation into unexplored territory, not only within Barth scholarship but also with regard to discussions addressing Barth's relation to Kierkegaard, namely, Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics, Instruction in the Christian Religion* (offered first as lectures in from the summer semester 1924 to summer 1925). This venture is unique in that, after *Romans II*, it is believed that Barth is finished in his utilization of Kierkegaard, generally speaking.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Chapter Three will commence with an investigation into Barth's anthropology within the *Göttingen Dogmatics* which should not only mark the intriguing parallels between these two thinkers but will also serve in concluding Chapter Three's discussion of whether Kierkegaard's dialectic of the *IQD* is wholly negative as Barth thought.

Drawing on Podmore's work in full, this examination of Barth's anthropology will reveal that Kierkegaard's use of the *IQD* exhibits both a positive and a negative aspect. It shall emerge that Barth's reference to the "Yes" and the "No" differs little from Kierkegaard's own insistence upon the positive side of the dialectic. From here the chosen concepts will once again be analyzed in order to account for their similarities and differences from *Romans II* demonstrating the extent, at this point, to which Barth parallels Kierkegaard. In conclusion, I shall draw the argument together by making some definitive statements as to Barth's overall relation to Kierkegaard.

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<sup>34</sup> For example, in his *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), Gary Dorrien states, "Barth's second edition *Romans* contained only a few references to Kierkegaard and these references soon disappeared altogether from his writings." See, 70.

# CHAPTER ONE

## KIERKEGAARD'S DIALECTICAL THEOLOGY

### **Introduction: Procedure**

This Chapter seeks to accomplish four objectives. First, in light of the numerous interpretations of Kierkegaard's authorship, arising from the breadth of topics that he addressed, I shall endeavour to substantiate the most viable reading of his thought. Within Kierkegaard scholarship one will find that he is understood variously as a poet, philosopher, religious thinker, aesthete, and literary figure. Scholarship has divided his writings into a sporadic spectrum of genres and has thus obviated a sense of continuity within his authorship as a whole. Although I think Kierkegaard must be understood primarily as a religious writer, it shall be argued below that he incorporates the aforementioned variety of genres into a unified theological project.

From there, I will provide a brief sketch of Kierkegaard's historical milieu in order to counter those inadequate, fragmentary readings which tend to arise because they are a-historical in nature. The brevity of this section owes its debt to the scope of Jon Stewart's work, which has contributed to a re-reading of Kierkegaard within his historical context, a re-reading which procures a more coherent and consistent comprehension of his work.<sup>35</sup> As Stewart's work demonstrates, readings of

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<sup>35</sup> Complicating the attempt to provide a coherent understanding of Kierkegaard is the continuing debate about the latter's relation to the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Fredrick Hegel. Although much of Kierkegaard scholarship paints this relationship negatively, there are those, particularly Jon Stewart, who question this common conception. In his book, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Stewart articulates persuasively that this common conception has little textual

Kierkegaard which neglect the historical circumstances to which his writings respond result in inaccurate anachronisms, such as the false supposition that Hegel was the arch-enemy of Kierkegaard (rather than the Danish Hegelians Martensen and Heiberg).<sup>36</sup> By providing a historical frame of reference, I hope to identify the questions and problems that faced Kierkegaard. In short, the over-arching goal of this discussion is to suggest that Kierkegaard is best understood as a contextually grounded religious writer.

The second objective aims to provide an examination of Kierkegaard's address to speculative philosophy's encroachment on the theology of his day by means of his use of specific concepts. This section will address the following concerns: First, I will demonstrate Kierkegaard's belief that reason has no claim to knowledge of God, since God and humanity are infinitely qualitatively distinct. From this, I will then show why Kierkegaard believed this to be the case, namely, as a

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support. In fact, what he finds central to this misconception is the inadequacy of most Kierkegaard scholars to produce a fruitful and faithful reading of Hegel's work and intention. As is well known among those familiar with this ongoing debate, Hegel is typically seen as the arch enemy of Kierkegaard and the central target of his polemics. This point can be observed in Stewart's analysis of the work of scholars such as, Eduard Geismar, N.H Søren, Søren Holm, Gregor Malantschuk, Robert Bretall, and Niels Thulstrup, who remain firmly within the confines of the common conception; see 3-32. With Stewart's engaging and critical analysis of the relation between these two prominent thinkers, the common conception has much to answer for. Whilst it would be wrong to negate all differences existing between Kierkegaard and Hegel (as Stewart himself is aware), Stewart's work demonstrates the need for a re-evaluation of the "common conception." In line with Stewart, the position presented here is that although Kierkegaard does find disagreement with Hegel, much of his polemics are aimed not at Hegel himself, but rather are directed to those Hegelians with whom Kierkegaard was acquainted, namely, Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791- 1860), and particularly, Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-84) who had been Kierkegaard's teacher and tutor. Even more surprising is the extent to which Kierkegaard had been positively influenced by Hegel.

<sup>36</sup> As Stewart convincingly argues, from the beginning Martensen's desire to incorporate Hegel's philosophy can be seen in various forms. In the context of *Fragments*, Kierkegaard, it seems, is addressing Martensen's attempt to apply Hegel's doctrine of mediation to speculative theology. Hegel's doctrine of mediation proposes that "individual concepts generate their opposites, and these pairs of categories are mediated, thus producing new concepts" (see Stewart, 293). The result of Martensen's attempts is to allow the basic doctrines of Christianity to be accepted by unaided reason by means of Hegel's doctrine of mediation and immanence. Thus Kierkegaard finds that for Martensen certain doctrines beyond the grasp of human reason, such as the Incarnation, become accessible as mere objects for human knowledge. In this light it seems quite natural that Kierkegaard explicates the doctrine of the Incarnation as something which is an absolute paradox, claiming that no system of mediation can overcome the contradiction confronting human reason (See Stewart, 337-343).

result of human sinfulness. To that end, I will further explicate the contradictions that ensue when reason ignores this difference. In concluding this discussion, I will examine Kierkegaard's conception of the Incarnation which served him in placing the ultimate barrier to historicism and speculative philosophy's encroachment on Christianity. This discussion will endeavour to demonstrate that, in light of the *IQD*, knowledge of God in Christ issues unaided human reason with nothing but both a conceptual and ontological paradox.

The third objective of this Chapter entails outlining Kierkegaard's qualms with historicism in its endeavour to overcome the contradictions central to the Christian faith. This investigation will commence with an examination of Kierkegaard's notion of historical knowledge, specifically, as it relates to the historicity of the Incarnation. This discussion seeks to answer the question Kierkegaard poses, "What does history tell us about Christ with regard to his deity?" Finally, in light of the barriers Kierkegaard places on the human apprehension of God, I will demonstrate that such barriers exist in order to allow for faith as the human response to revelation, not reason. Only in light of this interpretation of Kierkegaard will the conceptual comparison between him and Barth be accessible and enlightening.

### **Kierkegaard's Authorship**

#### *Introduction*

As stated, Kierkegaard's authorship has been nothing less than controversial. The debate continues with regard to the nature of his authorship in general, the relation of his authorship to his epistemology, and of the relationship between his authorship and Christianity. Considering whether or not Kierkegaard's thought

represents an overall theological continuity, Louis Mackey states, “that there can be no such ‘point of view’ for Kierkegaard’s writing, only points of view.”<sup>37</sup> In the debate regarding the shape of his epistemology, Kierkegaard has been linked to a range of thinkers such as Luther, Kant, Fichte and Hegel.<sup>38</sup> Complicating matters is Kierkegaard’s insistence that Christianity can only be approached “subjectively”, resulting in the designation of his epistemology as being “subjective”.<sup>39</sup> In my estimation, however, the most controversial of all the authorship debates is that of the nature of Kierkegaard’s conception of Christianity and his authorial relation to it. Kierkegaard has been associated with irrationalism, rationalism, fideism, and supra-rationalism.<sup>40</sup> The question of Kierkegaard’s personal relation to Christianity has also

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<sup>37</sup> C. Steven Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 4. Against Mackey’s view, Louis Pojman, in his work, *The Logic of Subjectivity: Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*, (Alabama: University Press, 1984) offers that “Sometimes Kierkegaard is interpreted as a poet, sometimes as the Father of Existentialism, sometimes as the scourge of Idealism. The important thing is to see that Kierkegaard’s fundamental purpose was to make eminently clear what Christianity is all about.”

<sup>38</sup> For more on this, see Ronald Green’s *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992) and C. Stephen Evans, “Kant and Kierkegaard on the Possibility of Metaphysics” in *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, edited by D.Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (New York: St. Martins Press, 2000), 5-20.

<sup>39</sup> Insofar as Kierkegaard speaks against the rational and historical methodology in seeking to objectify and make more certain the truths of Christianity, coupled with his belief that such approaches inevitably lead to a mere objective adherence to the Christian faith, Kierkegaard’s conception of “subjectivity as Truth” has been grossly misunderstood. This discussion shall be addressed throughout this thesis. For a reading which offers this subjective/relativistic interpretation see, Frithiof Brandt, *Søren Kierkegaard: His Life – His Works*, translated by Ann R. Born (Copenhagen: Frede Rasmussens Bogtrykker, 1963). On the other hand, as David J. Kangas points out in his work, *J. G. Fichte: From Transcendental Ego to Existence*, Kierkegaard’s understanding of “truth as subjectivity” must be understood within the context of Kierkegaard’s relation to Fichte. Kangas argues, for both Kierkegaard and Fichte, “To think philosophically is to accomplish within oneself and for oneself the very event through which objectivity is first given; it is to think subjectivity in its constitutive power.”(79) Kangas further notes, for Kierkegaard, “To say that ‘truth is subjectivity’ is not merely to oppose subjective truth to objective truth...[rather]...what is at stake for both Fichte and Kierkegaard in prioritizing interiority or subjectivity is to uphold, not some subjective content of truth, but the conditions for any objectivity. Both thinkers were seized by the profound conviction that objective truth constitutes a derivative mode of truth.”(79) For more on Kangas’ argument see, David J. Kangas, “J.G. Fichte: From Transcendental Ego to Existence” in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, Tome I: Philosophy, edited by Jon Stewart (Ashgate: 2007).

<sup>40</sup> Against those who view Kierkegaard as endorsing some form of irrationalism, George Pattison, in his work, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Acumen, 2005), holds that “If we read Kierkegaard as a whole he does in fact create a context in which the Christian claims are meaningful, if not reasonable.” He adds, “It is merely intellectual laziness to declare that Kierkegaard is a fideistic irrationalist;” see pp. 134, 165 Furthermore, most debates concerning Kierkegaard’s understanding of

produced varying opinions.<sup>41</sup> In light of a range of hypotheses about Kierkegaard's faith, Stewart's contribution is indeed helpful.<sup>42</sup> Stewart rightly diagnoses the mass of interpretational confusion as resulting from a-historical readings, and instead seeks

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the rationality of Christianity inevitably revolve around his presentation of Christian tenets as being paradoxical. In this light many understand Kierkegaard as an irrationalist. However, as Time Rose argues in his book, *Kierkegaard's Christocentric Theology*, (England: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), "the paradox can best be understood as a mystery instead of a logical contradiction." This is not to say that the paradoxical unity of God and man is somehow solved, but it does help to reveal a complex entity which reason cannot comprehend. Hence, the theological retention of mystery is quite appropriate. In light of Kierkegaard's favour of mystery, the supra-rational reading has found support in scholars such as George Pattison, C. Stephen Evans, and even Jon Stewart. Most irrationalist or fideist interpretations erroneously substantiate their claims with reference to Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus. Climacus profusely argues against rational and historical investigations of Christianity insofar as Christianity evades such investigation. On this reading it would appear that Kierkegaard's view of Christianity is both un-historical and irrational. However, most fail to acknowledge Stewart's observation that "It must be noted that Climacus has nothing against the fields of philology, history, per se or even against the knowledge of religion or Christianity that results from them. What he objects to is the use of their results in an attempt to ground faith discursively." For more, see *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 467. Arguing in the same supra-rational vein as Stewart are Nerina Jansen and Bruce Kirmmse. Jansen states, "Kierkegaard certainly did not deny the need for scientific and philosophical truth in modern society. When he objects that everything has become objective he is referring to a confusion created by modernity, namely that the art of existence is now communicated as scientific knowledge." For more see, Nerina Jansen, "Deception in the Service of the Truth: Magister Kierkegaard and the Problem of Communication" in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, edited by Robert Perkins (Mercer University Press, 1997), 115-122. Kirmmse, in his book, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990), argues "Reason can come to the understanding that all these attempts to understand the key to divinity as being lodged in history, etc. are unreasonable and wrong, while faith, on the other hand, can see that these efforts to limit God's absolute transcendence by assimilating him to human categories of historical understanding are mockery of God, blasphemy." For more discussions against a relativistic reading of Kierkegaard's notion of Truth, see David E. Mercer, *Kierkegaard's Living Room: The Relation between Faith and History in Philosophical Fragments* (Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press, 2001); Georg L. Strengren, "Connatural Knowledge in Aquinas and Kierkegaardian Subjectivity in *Kierkegaardiana udgivne af Søren Kierkegaard*, translated by Niels Thulstrup, Vol. X (København: C.A. Reitzel Boghandel, 1977); Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard: Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28-39; Steven Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); and C. Stephen Evans, *Subjectivity and Religious Belief: An Historical, Critical Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1978).

<sup>41</sup> For further reading on both Kierkegaard's relation and view of Christianity see, David R. Law, "How Christian is Kierkegaard's God?" in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 48, No. 3, edited by A.I.C. Heron and I.R. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 301-314; Paul Sponheim, *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1968); and G.E. and G.B. Arbaugh, *Kierkegaard's Authorship: A Guide to the Writings of Kierkegaard* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1968), specifically pages, 11-18.

<sup>42</sup> My work relies heavily on Stewart's historical analysis of Kierkegaard's thought. For a full discussion of the foundation on which my claims rest see Jon Stewart's, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, 3 Volumes, Tome I: *The Heiberg Period: 1824-1836*; Tome II: *The Martensen Period: 1837-1842*; Tome III: *Kierkegaard and the Left-Hegelian Period: 1842-1860* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2007).

to place Kierkegaard in relation to his contemporaries, contemporaries who expressed similar concerns as well as employing similar methodologies as Kierkegaard.

Following Stewart's lead, Jamie Turnbull's contribution, which shall be discussed later, focuses on the significance of the 1839 Rationalism and Supernaturalism debate as the impetus for Kierkegaard's authorship, insisting that it is "essentially informed by his theological, super-naturalist, and Christological commitments."<sup>43</sup> This debate is significant for a sound understanding of Kierkegaard since it forms the context against which Kierkegaard's obsessive consideration of concepts such as *Paradox*, *Subjectivity*, *Objectivity*, *Faith*, *Offence*, and *History* etc., can be understood as part of the placement of Christianity beyond the grasp of speculative philosophy. As will soon be discussed, this debate commenced with the questioning of the legitimacy of the Hegelians' efforts to apply a Hegelian logic to the Christian tenets of faith (an exercise the Hegelians thought would benefit Christianity by making sense of its contradictions). As Turnbull notes, "if Hegel were correct, it would seem that the terms 'God' and 'man' cannot be held to be absolutely different, but are, ultimately, different predicates of one and the same thing. In this respect Hegel's logic appeared to resolve the paradox of the incarnation."<sup>44</sup> It was against the attempts of the Hegelians to explain away Christian mystery and paradox that Kierkegaard employed concepts which insist upon the limitation of human reason. These concepts are designed to show that in relation to the central tenets of Christianity, reason comes to a halt.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Jamie Turnbull (Unpublished manuscript) *Kierkegaard's Supernaturalism: Making Sense of the Project of Indirect Communication*, Chapters, 2 and 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Acumen, 2005), 134.

### *Historical Backdrop: Hegelian Christianity*

All thinkers exist in a context conditioned by social, religious, philosophical and political factors, and are thus historically conditioned. Kierkegaard was born into the politically, religiously, and socially volatile time of “Golden Age Denmark”.<sup>46</sup> Stewart rightly insists, therefore, that much of Kierkegaard’s polemics is historically conditioned, particularly by his relation to certain contemporaries such as Hans Lassen Martensen and Johan Ludvig Heiberg.<sup>47</sup> Kierkegaard believed that the efforts of Heiberg and Martensen jeopardized the true nature of Christianity, through the incorporation of their understanding of Hegel’s thought into Christianity in order to mediate the paradoxes of the Christian faith. Kierkegaard employed pseudonyms to address the threat facing Christianity posed by speculative philosophy. As Stewart states:

Here Climacus argues against Heiberg’s (and Martensen’s) claim that mediation is the principle of Christianity, and that dogmas such as the Incarnation and the Trinity cannot be made sense of without it. Climacus’ central plea is to avoid confusing the two spheres and attempting to apply the principle of mediation to the sphere of actuality or Christian faith.<sup>48</sup>

In the mid 1820s, Heiberg returned from Berlin where he had met Hegel personally. After this encounter he enthusiastically sought to introduce Hegel’s thought to his fellow Danes. This task was pursued in his many articles, as well as in

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<sup>46</sup> For a further discussion of the climate pervading nineteenth century Denmark in Kierkegaard’s time see the following: Bruce H. Kirmmse’s *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); Jon Stewart’s, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *A History of Hegeliansim in Golden Age Denmark*, 3 Volumes, Tome I: *The Heiberg Period: 1824-1836*; Tome II: *The Martensen Period: 1837-1842*; Tome III: *Kierkegaard and the Left-Hegelian Period: 1842-1860* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> For a full account of Kierkegaard’s thought in relation to his contemporaries and the issues that consumed the day, see Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Jon Stewart, “Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Kierkegaard’s Criticism of Hegel’s Danish Apologist” in *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries, Tome I, Philosophy, Politics and Social Theory Vol. 7*, pp. 35-71. Edited by Jon Stewart (Ashgate, 2009), 63.



the debates resulting from such articles, where he incorporated Hegel's thought within his own philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Sensitive to Heiberg's own merit as a philosopher, Stewart shows how this often neglected figure had influenced "an entire generation of literary scholarship and was profoundly influential on the young Kierkegaard."<sup>50</sup> Stewart substantiates his claim that Kierkegaard's efforts were historically conditioned by demonstrating the importance of Heiberg's thought on the former; along with Martensen, Heiberg's work demanded a response from Kierkegaard.

As Stewart notes, many of Heiberg's writings were controversial given his adaptation of Hegel's thought for his own philosophical purposes, particularly his *On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age*.<sup>51</sup> Here Heiberg argues that only Hegel's philosophy offers the remedy for an age in which its people have become

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<sup>49</sup> Jon Stewart's, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50-54. Kierkegaard's complaint was that Hegelian philosophy had made Christianity into a system of objective adherence which was the result of philosophical speculation. However, this had not always been the case. However, in his work, *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History*, Stephen Crites notes how the early Hegel understood Christianity in a way not so different from Kierkegaard. His argument is as follows. Hegel conceived religion as having two poles: one objective, the other subjective. The objective side of Christianity is related to its objective, historical, and doctrinal nature which is in turn related to the uninterested observer. However, the subjective side only concerns the religious man for it is the essence of Christianity. (30) Unlike Kierkegaard, by 1800, Hegel "had already become convinced that subjectivity and objectivity were not irreconcilable and indeed had come to consider it a chief task of religion to unite them."(30) Eventually, Hegel would discover that the Greek model of society offered the example he needed for his unification. According to Hegel, the Greeks offered a perfect example of subjectivity and objectivity united within civilization. (36) It was from this conception of "civilization" that he developed his concept of "folk religion." This concept was for him the unifying principle which acted as a "mediating structure in the cultural existence of a people, binding its otherwise fragmented experience and conflicting motives and purpose into an integrated common life."(37) It also gave rise to his philosophy of spirit which "arises immanently out of the actual development of human consciousness in history."(44) Thus, having abandoned his earlier conception that the essence of Christianity already exists at its founding, the truth of Christianity results from all of humanity working together through a historical process of thesis and antithesis, resulting in a synthesis. (41) "Christianity, like any other expression of spirit, can only be comprehended in its entire historical development: And the significance of this development is revealed, not in its beginnings, but in its results."(41) The result Hegel had created was a religion which existed in the mass, where the common spirit of all is nourished. It was this form of Christianity that became the object of Kierkegaard's attack. For more, see Stephen Crites, *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs Kierkegaard on Faith and History* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: American Academy of Religion, 1972).

<sup>50</sup> Stewart, "Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Kierkegaard's Criticism of Hegel's Danish Apologist", 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

alienated from their culture.<sup>52</sup> Ultimately Heiberg's allegiance to Hegel's thought demonstrates a preference for philosophy over theology as a means for cultural redemption.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, as Stewart notes, Heiberg's *Introductory Lecture to the Logic Course* of 1835 inflamed this controversy through the suggestion that since all thinking is the result of the categories, religion becomes subsumed under the task of philosophy inasmuch as religion itself employs categories (God, sin, self, salvation, etc) to contemplate its content.<sup>54</sup> Given the force of this controversial line, it can be of little wonder that Kierkegaard's writings directly confront many of Heiberg's and Martensen's attempts to advance a rational Christianity.

However, of greater significance for contextualizing Kierkegaard was the 1839 Rationalism and Supernaturalism debate. It was initiated as a result of Johan Alfred Bornemann's review of his friend Martensen's dissertation *On the Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness*<sup>55</sup> which pays homage to Martensen's efforts in advancing Hegel and speculative theology at the University of Copenhagen. In short, Bornemann attributes to Martensen the position that modern Christianity need no longer operate as the "older supernaturalism" whereby supernaturalism and rationalism stood in stark contrast to each other. Martensen states, "In theology both rationalism and supernaturalism are antiquated standpoints which belong to an age which has disappeared."<sup>56</sup> Martensen's position implies that although theology had at one time maintained a separation between knowledge and faith, rationalism and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>55</sup> Stewart, "Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Kierkegaard's Criticism of Hegel's Danish Apologist", 59.

<sup>56</sup> Jakob Peter Mynster, "Rationalism, Supernaturalism" in *Mynster's 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism' and the Debate about Mediation*, Edited and translated by Jon Stewart, Texts from Golden Age Denmark, Volume 5 (Soren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009), 95. Quote also in Bornemann's review, pp. 61.

supernaturalism, reason and revelation, this opposition is no longer necessary for Christian thought (in light of Hegel's philosophy), since the Incarnation is seen as providing a supreme model of mediation.<sup>57</sup>

The 1839 debate centred on the consequences such a position has for Christian thought. Certain individuals, like Sibbern and Mynster, with whom Kierkegaard was acquainted, had issued a response to Martensen's thesis. In his essay, "Rationalism, Supernaturalism", Mynster argues in favour of the law of excluded middle, and thus against Martensen. Coming to both Martensen and Hegel's defence, Heiberg responded with an article, "A Remark on Logic in Reference to the Right Reverend Bishop Mynster's Treatise on Rationalism and Supernaturalism." According to both Martensen and Heiberg, "the incarnation or the person of Christ requires that there be no law of excluded middle since it states that Christ is both human and God at the same time."<sup>58</sup> Both thinkers attest, if one insists on the law of excluded middle, then one must either deny the humanity of Christ or his deity.<sup>59</sup> Martensen's portrayal of the Incarnation as evidence of mediation between the opposing terms of God and man is not problematic in and of itself, for this adheres to the basic logic of the Incarnation.

However, what Mynster, and later Kierkegaard, contest is Martensen's apparent grievance against the older theology's reducing Christianity "to a foreign authority for consciousness, an impenetrable mystery that could be grasped by faith

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<sup>57</sup> Hans Lassen Martensen, "Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the principium exclusi medii" in *Mynster's 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism' and the Debate about Mediation*, Edited and translated by Jon Stewart, Texts from Golden Age Denmark, Volume 5 (Soren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009), 130, 133. Preceding this quotation, Martensen argues that the law of excluded middle, "cannot be a final court of appeals for theology...when we see how Christianity continually sublates it."

<sup>58</sup> Stewart, "Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Kierkegaard's Criticism of Hegel's Danish Apologist", 60.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

but not knowledge.”<sup>60</sup> In short, Christianity demands the adherence to Christ’s nature as being both human and divine. This adherence however does not entail a logic explanation as to the rationality of this union in Christ.

Martensen’s position presents dangerous implications for Christian thought, as Mynster shows: “In each case, subjective human reason is the sole organ through which the truth expresses itself.”<sup>61</sup> Mynster argues that Martensen accedes too much to human reason and thus affirms the ability of the self to achieve that which it cannot, namely, a logical mediation. Such human mediation of truth is both logically and ontologically antithetical to basic Christian belief. The central tenets of Christian faith have always been held as being accessible exclusively to faith, not reason, and thus recognize “man’s drive to another and higher help.”<sup>62</sup> In the forthcoming discussion of Kierkegaard’s thought, the problematic nature of Martensen’s position will be pertinent in understanding why Kierkegaard sees the definition of the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity as *urgent*. According to Kierkegaard, this difference was jeopardized by Martensen’s criticism of Jacobi’s view of revelation as being “one-sidedly as object and... not recognized in its subjective immanence in consciousness.”<sup>63</sup> In response to Jacobi, Martensen holds that we recognize that revelation is “self-consciousness’ own essence, its inner true self.”<sup>64</sup>

To anticipate, Kierkegaard’s concepts of paradox, faith, subjectivity, etc. appear to be conditioned by the jeopardy into which Martensen had placed Christian

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<sup>60</sup> Martensen, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the principium exclusi medii” in *Mynster’s ‘Rationalism, Supernaturalism’ and the Debate about Mediation*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> Mynster, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism” in *Mynster’s ‘Rationalism, Supernaturalism’ and the Debate about Mediation*, 101.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>63</sup> Martensen, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the principium exclusi medii” in *Mynster’s ‘Rationalism, Supernaturalism’ and the Debate about Mediation*, 142.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

orthodoxy. Below, it will be demonstrated how Martensen's conception of history and the meaning of the Incarnation are refuted by Kierkegaard's own treatment of these issues. As Stewart points out, Kierkegaard was obviously aware of this debate and the problem posed to orthodox Christianity.<sup>65</sup> One sees, then, how the intellectual atmosphere in which Kierkegaard operated was one heavily immersed in the discussion of Christianity's relation to Hegelian philosophy.<sup>66</sup>

In light of the problems presented by Danish Hegelianism, Kierkegaard's task can be described as offering a rational defence of the limits of Christian knowledge. Just as Luther had demurred the reduction of Christian life to nothing more than habitual practices divorced from true spiritual significance, so Kierkegaard believed that the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), at the hands of his followers, had damaged the Christianity of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing on Luther's context as an analogy for the problems facing Danish Christianity, Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, describes pre-Reformation Catholicism as one characterized by a surfeit of objectivity: "Did not the papacy have objectivity and objective definitions and the objective, more of the objective, the objective in superabundance? What did it lack? Appropriation, inwardness."<sup>67</sup> But why should Kierkegaard find objective Christianity so appalling? It would seem that adherence to a faith without objectivity would be more appalling in that such a faith would be rationally unwarranted.

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<sup>65</sup> Stewart, "Johan Ludvig Heiberg: Kierkegaard's Criticism of Hegel's Danish Apologist", 61.

<sup>66</sup> It is important to note that before Kierkegaard ever begin his critique of Danish Hegelianism, others, such as Fredrik Christian Sibbern (1785-1872), Poul Martin Moller (1794-1838), and even the Bishop Jakob Peter Mynster (1775-1854), among others, had already entered the arena of critical analysis regarding the elusive and brilliant work of Hegel. If there was anyone more enthusiastic about introducing Hegel to Denmark, it was Heiberg. Yet even Heiberg himself was critical of Hegel, rejected the notion of being Hegel's disciple (Stewart, 55).

<sup>67</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *CUP*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 366.

According to Kierkegaard, objective *truth* could be understood in two ways. The first is historical truth, the second, philosophical truth. Historical truth is established by historical evidences or reports whereas philosophical truth is established in relation “to the eternal truth.”<sup>68</sup> The question then, for Kierkegaard, is in what sense are such notions of truth related to Christianity? It is not that he believed Christianity existed without objective or historical truth as if it was a mere belief divorced from reality. Concerning the historicity of Christianity, Kierkegaard says, “Objectively viewed Christianity is a given fact,”<sup>69</sup> meaning, “Christianity is a historical truth; it appears at a certain time and certain place and consequently it is relevant to a certain time and place.”<sup>70</sup> But his concern is with the inevitable consequences from which the “inquiring, speculating, knowing subject accordingly asks about the truth but not about the subjective truth, the truth of appropriation,”<sup>71</sup> and to what extent, if any, historical investigation and rationalism inhibit or promote appropriation. Thus, for Kierkegaard, “The objective issue, then, would be about the truth of Christianity. The subjective issue is about the individual’s relation to Christianity.”<sup>72</sup>

But even more, as will be developed later, the centre of Christianity itself poses an impenetrable barrier to the nonchalant acceptance of Christianity, namely,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, Volume 2, F-K, Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 232.

<sup>71</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 17. For Kierkegaard, if Christianity is not about objective adherence but rather about subjective appropriation, true Christian living, then the obsessive efforts of theological scholarship and historicism fail to even understand the history of Christianity with regard to its infiltrating the world. He asks, “Or was it perhaps objective doctrine, the objective, which triumphantly penetrated the whole world? What infinite nonsense! No, the objective has nothing to do with such things; it never moves from the spot. No, it was not doctrine, it was not the objective which conquered the world, but it was the blood of the martyrs and the sacrifices of the faithful – in short, it was the subjectivities who triumphantly fought the doctrine through.” (357) See, Søren Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Papers*, Volume 4, S-Z, edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1975.

the Incarnation. To accept this doctrine as just another objective truth claim similar to that of other historical phenomena, would result, according to Kierkegaard, in an objective relationship to Christianity. “To objective reflection, truth becomes something objective, an object, and the point is to disregard the subject. To subjective reflection, truth becomes appropriation, inwardness, subjectivity, and the point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity.”<sup>73</sup>

If Christian truths exist in a way that parallel empirical truths, then Kierkegaard believed that the outcome would consist of a position of constant deliberation, whereby one would continually seek to ascertain more knowledge about the credibility of the object. Thus the result would be a dispassionate and blasé relation to Christianity. Since Christianity makes claims which could never be historically or conceptually verified, Kierkegaard believed that not only was the objective position untenable but that it also stood in stark opposition to what was central for the Christian faith, namely, subjectivity i.e., active Christian living. The significance of this objective/subjective distinction originated from Kierkegaard’s central concern presented in the work preceding *CUP*, *Fragments*. There Kierkegaard is concerned with the relation of historical evidences and scholarship to Christianity. At the beginning of *Fragments*, he asks: “Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?”<sup>74</sup>

In *CUP*, with succinct clarity, Kierkegaard addresses the issues he had posed earlier in the *Fragments*. In sum, Kierkegaard considered *objectivity*, which

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>74</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *PF*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 3.

represents impersonal, uninterested acceptance, the antithesis of true Christian faith. Faith had become a hybrid of an acceptance of historical facts and continual speculation, which sought to ascertain the historical truth more secularly by way of evidence and demonstration. As similar to the papacy of Luther's time, Christianity in Denmark had become an everyday objective fact requiring no personal commitment. And since there exists a debate regarding Kierkegaard's conception of subjectivity, in that some read Kierkegaard as a proponent of fideism, it is important to reiterate that Kierkegaard is not denying the objective/historical reality of Christianity.

What he denies Christianity is the ability of historical evidence and rationalism to provide any objective certainty equal to that of other historical events or realities; this would be to deem faith superfluous. Kierkegaard sums up the whole problem of objective adherence to Christianity, stating, "The entire confusion and tragedy of the modern age can be expressed in one sentence: it has taken Christianity in vain."<sup>75</sup>

### *The Authorship's Task*

In 1848 Kierkegaard had written *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. In this book Kierkegaard feels it necessary to explain the task of his authorship. "A point has been reached in my authorship where it is feasible, where I feel a need and therefore regard it now as my duty: once and for all to explain as directly and openly and specifically as possible what is what, what I say I am as an

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<sup>75</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *JP*, Volume 1, A-E. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 187.



author.”<sup>76</sup> Since the publication of his pseudonymous work, *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard, so he thought, had primarily been understood as an esthetic author. As a result of *Either/Or*’s success, most people had not taken notice of his following, signed work, *Two Upbuilding Discourses*.<sup>77</sup>

From the outset, Kierkegaard’s authorship contained a duplicity consisting of both signed works and pseudonymous works. In 1843, he had published pseudonymously *Either/Or*, *Repetition*, and *Fear and Trembling*. This same year he also published, in his name, what he calls “religious” works, namely, *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, *Three Upbuilding Discourses*, and *Four Upbuilding Discourses*. In 1844, he published, pseudonymously, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and *Prefaces*. The signed works of that year were nine more *Upbuilding Discourses*. In 1845, he published, again pseudonymously, *Stages on Life’s Way*, and *A Cursory Observation Concerning a Detail in Don Giovanni*, side by side with three more *Discourses*. 1846 would see the last pseudonymous work until 1848 with the publication of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. The signed works of 1846 included *Two Ages: A Literary Review*, *Upbuilding Discourse in Various Spirits* and *Works of Love*.

From 1848 until his death in 1855, Kierkegaard would publish only four more pseudonymous works in contrast to many more signed ones. The interesting point about Kierkegaard’s division of his authorship into two different classes is that the difference is merely an illusion. Uniting these two classes is, according to Kierkegaard, one theme which is the overall objective of his authorship. This theme

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<sup>76</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *POV*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 23. Note that this was not apparent to Kierkegaard at the outset of his authorship.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

is “Christianity”. The overall objective of both the religious and the esthetic, as Kierkegaard states in *My Point of View for My Work as an Author*, is “That I am and was a religious author, that my whole authorship pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian, with direct and indirect polemical aim at that enormous illusion, Christendom, or the illusion that in such a country all are Christians of sorts.”<sup>78</sup> And herein with Kierkegaard’s distinction between a “direct and indirect polemical aim”, lies the significance of the esthetic works in relation to the task of “becoming a Christian”.

Against the backdrop of what Kierkegaard thought inherently problematic with the mingling of speculative philosophy and theology (that Christianity ends in being equal in certainty to that of any other science, and is therefore to be approached like any other science, with disinterest or as “matter of fact”) Kierkegaard believed the Christianity of Christendom to be an “enormous illusion”.

He writes:

What does it mean, after all, that all these thousands and thousands as a matter of course call themselves Christian...People who perhaps never once go to church, never think about God, never name his name except when they curse...Yet all these people, even those who insist that there is no God, they all are Christians, call themselves Christians,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 23. In understanding the mystery surrounding Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms, with regard to his overall intention, Merold Westphal provides some helpful insight. He states, “He [Kierkegaard] wants the reader to see for herself and to choose for herself...[thus]...he resorts to pseudonyms so as not to place himself, his opinions, and his arguments between the reader and what Hegel would call die Sache (the matter at issue).” (15) With regard, then, to readers of Kierkegaard, Westphal continues stating, “A responsible reader will try to make sense of the author’s self-interpretation rather than simply setting it aside on the basis of personal antipathy to his central concerns.” (24) See, Merold Westphal, “Johannes and Johannes: Kierkegaard and Difference” in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, Vol. 7, edited by Robert Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1994). Furthermore, even Kierkegaard’s contemporaries understood his task as seeking to explicate what it means to be a Christian. Writing in 1856 to C.K. F. Molbech, Kierkegaard’s good friend, Hans Brøchner, writes about Kierkegaard’s view of Christianity. He states, “For him [Kierkegaard], Christianity was unconditionally incompatible with the world; it was absurd to the understanding; it could be embraced only in the passion of faith; its requirement was to die away [from the world]; its hallmark was suffering ; its constant companion was the possibility of offense.” See, *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A life as seen by His Contemporaries*. Collected, edited, and annotated by Bruce H. Kirmmse. Translated by Bruce H. Kirmmse and Virginia R. Laursen (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

are recognized as Christians by the state, are buried Christians by the Church, are discharged as Christians to eternity!<sup>79</sup>

In short, Kierkegaard's authorial objective was one which sought to introduce Christianity once again into Christendom, thereby destroying this illusion. According to Kierkegaard, however, this task needed to be handled delicately. The delicacy of the matter pertained to the means in achieving the objective. Kierkegaard believed that if one makes a direct attack on an illusion, "he only strengthens a person in the illusion and also infuriate[s] him."<sup>80</sup> Kierkegaard perceives that "there is nothing that requires as gentle a treatment as the removal of an illusion."<sup>81</sup>

For Kierkegaard, a direct attack was not an option. "Consequently, in Christendom the religious author, whose total thought is what it means to become a Christian, properly starts out with being an esthetic author."<sup>82</sup> In his view, Kierkegaard's task would be best served "by concurrent esthetic and religious works."<sup>83</sup> Therefore, whereas the religious writings served as direct communication to the task of removing the illusion, the esthetic served this task indirectly incognito.<sup>84</sup> On this designation of the esthetic as serving the objective *incognito*, Kierkegaard writes, "But from the total point of view of my whole work as an author, the esthetic writing is a deception, and herein is the deeper significance of the *pseudonymity*."<sup>85</sup> In using the pseudonymous writings as a form of deception,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 48. See pp. 49.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. With regard to Kierkegaard's intention in employing pseudonyms, Bruce Kirmmse notes, "The intent of this pseudonymity was not to obscure the actual facts of authorship, which were obvious enough, but to allow for the proper sort of 'dialectical distance' between Kierkegaard's own position as an 'ordinary' person and the radical critique permissible for an author who was not embarrassed to wield 'the ideal'." See, Bruce H. Kirmmse's *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). Kierkegaard, himself, notes in his work, *The Moment and Late Writings*, "In the books by me or by pseudonymous authors, I have

Kierkegaard calls to mind how Socrates deceived people into the truth.<sup>86</sup> But what does it mean to deceive in relation to Kierkegaard's task?

It means that one does not begin directly with what one wishes to communicate but begins by taking the other's delusion at face value. Thus one does not begin in this way: I am Christian, you are not a Christian—but this way: You are a Christian, I am not Christian. Or one does not begin in this way: It is Christianity that I am proclaiming, and you are living in purely esthetic categories. No, one begins this way: Let us talk about the esthetic. The deception consists in one's speaking this way precisely in order to arrive at the religious.<sup>87</sup>

This explanation of the pseudonymous writings sheds some light on the confusion surrounding Kierkegaard's own relation to Christianity.

In his writings, one can find statements which support the belief that Kierkegaard was not himself a Christian. However, this assumption fails to read Kierkegaard in the context of his overall authorial continuity, and in light of his explanations in *My Point of View for My Work as an Author*. In light of the quotation above, it becomes clear why Kierkegaard can claim that he is not a Christian; such a claim is a theological and authorial device designed to disturb the illusions of his readers.<sup>88</sup> And here one can recall the relationship between Johannes Climacus and

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thoroughly, as I always work, expressed and described the different stages before reaching where I am at present. Thus one will find, especially in the pseudonymous Johannes Climacus, what approximately may be said in defence of the kind of Christianity that is closest to that of the established order, and will find it described in such a way that I would like to see whether any of my contemporaries here in the country can do it better." See, Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998, 66.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>88</sup> In the *Journals and Papers to On my Work/Point of View*, 220-221, Kierkegaard not only explains the deception presented through the pseudonyms in relation to his project, but also explains the deception of his personal existence. When Kierkegaard indicates that he is not a Christian, he is saying that he is not a Christian of the sort typical in contemporary Christendom. Kierkegaard understood himself to be a "spy" a "traitor" in the service of true Christianity. For example, he states, "What Christianity needs for certain is traitors. Christendom has insidiously betrayed Christianity by wanting not to be truly Christian but to have the appearance of being so. Now traitors are needed" (notice the distinction Kierkegaard makes between a false Christianity (Christendom) and true Christianity). For Kierkegaard, the traitor, the spy, has a specific mission; to introduce true Christianity by attacking false Christianity. Kierkegaard distinguishes between attacking Christianity and Christians by contrasting his own mission with that of the devil and his spies, "who do not attack Christianity but attack the Christians – with the express purpose of getting more and more to fall away." It is not Kierkegaard's intention to attack Christians, but to attack those who *purport* to be

Anti-Climacus to which Kierkegaard states, “The pseudonym is Johannes Anticlimacus (*SUD* and *PC*) in contrast to Climacus, who said he was not a Christian. Anticlimacus is the opposite extreme: a Christian on an extraordinary level – if only I myself manage to be just a simple Christian. ‘Practice in Christianity’ can be published in the same way, but there is no hurry...On the whole, I must now venture in quite different directions. I must dare to believe that through Christ I can be saved from the power of depression in which I have lived.”<sup>89</sup>

As the author of *CUP*, Johannes declares himself an observer who possesses a better understanding of Christianity than those in Christendom. In this light, Kierkegaard’s intention in writing *CUP* appears congruent with his project as a whole. He states: “In December 1845 I had completed the manuscript of Concluding Postscript...This book constitutes the turning point in my entire work as an author, inasmuch as it poses the issue: becoming a Christian. Thereafter the transition to the second part is made, the series of exclusively religious books.”<sup>90</sup> The same explanation also serves *SUD* and *PC*. Here Kierkegaard uses a pseudonym for *SUD*

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Christians whilst demonstrating through the vacuity of their faith that they are not. His call is for Christendom to become once again true Christianity. He writes, “God, too, has his traitors: God-fearing traitors, who in unconditional obedience to him simply and sincerely present Christianity in order that for once people may get to know what Christianity is.” Interestingly, Kierkegaard sees Johannes Climacus as this sort of traitor. Johannes Climacus appears as one who is not a Christian, admits he is not. He appears to relentlessly attack Christianity insofar as he speaks of nothing else but limits, the absurdity of Christianity, its existence as negation. Thus, Johannes is the traitor. But he is not a traitor to true Christianity but to Christendom, a false, established Christianity which exists in contradiction to true Christianity. In this light, Johannes is a traitor indeed, but a spy in the service of God, in the service of true Christianity. Kierkegaard writes, “Dialectically Johannes Climacus is in fact so radical a defence of Christianity that to many it may seem like an attack. This book [*CUP*] makes one feel that is Christendom that has betrayed Christianity.” The same journal entry offers support for the argument that Kierkegaard saw himself as striving to become a true Christian. He states, “‘Johannes Climacus’ was actually a contemplative piece, for when I wrote it I was contemplating the possibility of not letting myself be taken over by Christianity, even if it was my utmost honest intention to devote my whole life and daily diligence to the cause of Christianity, to do everything, to do nothing else but to expound and interpret it, even though I were to become like, be like the legendary Wandering Jew – myself not a Christian in the final and most decisive sense of the word and yet leading others to Christianity.”

<sup>89</sup> Kierkegaard, *POV*, 199-200.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

and *PC* not in order to align himself with being a Christian but rather to separate himself from being equated with the ideal, the ideal Christian, which no Christian can be. He states, “When the demands of ideality are to be presented at their maximum, then one must take extreme care not to be confused with them himself, as if he himself were the ideal...The difference from the earlier pseudonyms is simply but essentially this, that I do not retract the whole thing humorously but identify myself as one who is striving.”<sup>91</sup>

And so, with regard to his authorship, Kierkegaard writes, “Here was a religious author, but one who began as an esthetic author, and this first part was the incognito, was the deception.”<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, with the completion of this book, Kierkegaard faced the dilemma as to whether or not to publish the manuscript. In 1849, Kierkegaard stated, “In God’s name, then! What worries me most is ‘*The Point of View for My Work as an Author*’.”<sup>93</sup> What concerned him was that, in this work, he had addressed, as directly as possible, the nature of his authorship and was thus concerned with how such a revelation would affect his authorial objective. In the end he decided against publishing the manuscript given its openness with regard to his position as an author. He adds:

*The Point of View for my Work as an Author* must not be published, no, no! And this is the deciding factor: I cannot tell the full truth about myself. Even in the very first manuscript, I was unable to stress the primary factor: that I am a penitent, and this explains me at the deepest level...The fact that I cannot give the full truth in portraying myself signifies that essentially I am a poet – and here I shall remain...I thank God that it was precluded and that I did not go ahead and publish ‘The Point of View for My work as an Author’...The book itself is true and in my opinion masterly. But a book like that can be published only after my death.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 203. See also, 207, “On the Year 1848”.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 176-7.

Kierkegaard's hesitation resulted in the publication of *The Point of View for my work as an Author* posthumously in 1859. Instead, Kierkegaard wrote and published a condensed version of this work in 1851 title, *On My Work as an Author*.

In conclusion, Kierkegaard's task was to offer a corrective to Christendom's reformulating of what it means to be a Christian. For Kierkegaard, Christianity is not as Christendom perceived it to be, as the mere accumulation of historical facts and continual speculation of its doctrines. Furthermore, the attempts of "Hegelians" like Martensen and Heiberg to apply Hegelian methodology to Christian concepts would in the end result in reducing divinity to humanity, Christianity to social relations, and, in light of the use of speculative and historical methods, produce a Christianity which demands only mere objective adherence rather than the uncertainty of faith and passion.<sup>95</sup> In seeking to combat these results, Kierkegaard commenced an authorship which would be able to treat these issues on two sides. One side was the religious whereby he communicated directly under the rubric of theological terminology. The other side was the esthetic writings whereby he communicated indirectly in order to deceive subtly the reader into considering the issues of the day without repelling them. It was from Socrates that Kierkegaard had learned and employed this art. However, Kierkegaard's use of Socrates served a higher end: "I can very well call Socrates my teacher—whereas I have believed in only one, the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>96</sup>

Having painted a picture of Kierkegaard's historical context, I shall now move to an examination of his thought in relation to this context. I shall assess the significance which some of the concepts attained in placing a barrier to the efforts of

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<sup>95</sup> Jamie Turnbull (Unpublished manuscript) *Kierkegaard's Supernaturalism: Making Sense of the Project of Indirect Communication*, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Kierkegaard, *POV*, 55.

speculative philosophy to produce a rational theology. As stated in the introduction, the concepts under investigation are *Reason, History, Contemporaneity, Paradox, Subjectivity, Objectivity, the IQD, Faith, and Offence.*

## **Speculative Philosophy and Knowledge of God: The Infinite Qualitative**

### **Difference**

As noted in the Introduction, Barth accuses Kierkegaard with presenting a self which is left to ruination brought on by the *IQD* between itself and God. In short, Barth's view of Kierkegaard's self is a self left to its own despair, existing without grace. Recently, Simon Podmore's work, *Kierkegaard & the Self before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*, offers a correction to this specific reading of Kierkegaard's notion of the self.<sup>97</sup> In what follows, I will, with the aid of Podmore's work, seek to offer what Kierkegaard truly holds to regarding the self in relation to itself and, more importantly, to God.

Indispensable to understanding Kierkegaard's conception of the self in both its relation to itself and to God is his concept of the *IQD*.<sup>98</sup> According to Kierkegaard, "God and man are two qualities separated by an infinite qualitative difference."<sup>99</sup> Initially, the *IQD* serves Kierkegaard in reminding humanity of both its ontological difference from God as well as its relational separation from God, but

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<sup>97</sup> For a full treatment of Kierkegaard's concept of grace given in the forgiveness of sin, see Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard & the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).

<sup>98</sup> Note that it is not merely in his pseudonymous literature that Kierkegaard concerns himself with the God-relation but also in his signed Discourses. See "To Need God is a Human Being's Highest Perfection" and "To Gain One's Soul in Patience" in Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*: Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 307.

<sup>99</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *SUD*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 126. Kierkegaard repeatedly expresses the *IQD* in his Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses, with the phrase, "You are on earth and God is in heaven."



this is not its only purpose. As Podmore notes, the *IQD* contains both a positive and negative function. Podmore states, “The theme of Kierkegaard’s infinite qualitative difference between humanity and God – in both its negative and positive connotations – is employed throughout as the prime hermeneutical key through which to explore a Kierkegaardian vision of the self before God.”<sup>100</sup> Podmore’s aim is to relate that Kierkegaard’s use of the *IQD* is, at its core, to first unveil the self’s coming to knowledge of its separation from God in order to then understand that it is not a true self.

In light of the self’s coming to this knowledge, Kierkegaard’s use of the *IQD* transitions in emphasis to the positive component whereby the self is both reconciled to itself and to God, namely, by means of God’s forgiveness. This dual aspect of the *IQD* is therefore nothing less than the biblical narrative of repentance and forgiveness. To this point Podmore writes, “The true expression of the infinite qualitative difference is found, not in the initial sense of sin and estrangement, but in the Holy *mysterium* of forgiveness.”<sup>101</sup> Kierkegaard himself acknowledges this dual function of the *IQD* of sin and estrangement to that of forgiveness stating,

As sinner, man is separated from God by the most chasmic qualitative abyss. In turn, of course, God is separated from man by the same chasmic qualitative abyss when he forgives sins. If by some kind of reverse adjustment the divine could be shifted over to the human, there is one way in which man could never in all eternity come to be like God: in forgiving sins.<sup>102</sup>

In sum, as it will be demonstrated shortly, the force of the *IQD* is felt, first, in the self’s awareness of its separation from God. With the coming of this knowledge, the self thus despairs over this abyss separating himself and God. The self despairs insofar as this separation serves in revealing to him that it is not a true self, for a true

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<sup>100</sup> Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard & the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>102</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 122.

self is one which exist in relation to God, or as Kierkegaard maintains, one can only truly come to know oneself before “the mirror of the Word...To stand before the mirror means to stand before God.”<sup>103</sup>

In that the self is without the truth of both its own fragmented condition as well as the power to establish itself, our existence therefore is one shrouded in despair. In short, as will be demonstrated, for Kierkegaard, the category of despair relates to the helplessness of the human condition in attaining both the truth of its dual existence as well as the remedy for it.

### *The Self with/without Self-hood and God*

Kierkegaard’s examination of the self can primarily be found in his *Fragments* and *SUD*. Although differing in approach, these two works ultimately share the same diagnosis of the human condition, namely, that the self is without God and thus is without true selfhood. Furthermore, these two works share the view that the self is unable by its own powers to reconcile itself to itself as well as to God. But what is the self? According to Kierkegaard, “A human being is spirit ...and ... Spirit is the self.”<sup>104</sup> For Kierkegaard, that the self is defined as spirit denotes the eternal nature in the self as one who is to exist in relation to God.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, in light of this relation, for Kierkegaard, “A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal.”<sup>106</sup> However, insofar as every human being exists before God as a sinner, the self is *IQD* from

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<sup>103</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *JP, Volume 4, S-Z*, Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 287.

<sup>104</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

God.<sup>107</sup> The infinite distance which separates us from God therefore disrupts the self's obtaining true selfhood insofar as, according to Kierkegaard, only in relationship to God can the self obtain true selfhood.<sup>108</sup> He writes:

Paganism required: Know yourself. Christianity declares: No, that is provisional – know yourself – and look at yourself in the mirror of the Word in order to know yourself properly. No true self-knowledge without God-knowledge or [without standing] before God. To stand before the mirror means to stand before God.<sup>109</sup>

He adds:

What is Christianity? – it is God's will that each man relate himself before God to Holy Scripture in this matter, and in particular God does not want all this chattering and prattling between man and man. Such an individual who relates himself to God in this way becomes an authentic individual.<sup>110</sup>

In light of our situation, as one out of relation with ourselves and God, Kierkegaard maintains that the self has nothing at its disposal in order to rectify the situation. Only by God's revelation can the self become aware of its situation.<sup>111</sup> It is here, with the necessity of revelation in order to make known the *IQD*, and its consequences for the self, where Kierkegaard takes up the notion of despair.

For Kierkegaard, sin is thus defined dialectically as existing before God, to “despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself.”<sup>112</sup> This distinction in the dialectical nature of sin is, on one hand, not to will to be the true self (new man) over against the self conditioned by sin (the old man) or on the other hand to want to be oneself (the new man) and unable to do so by human effort. Concerning the first notion of despair, Kierkegaard poses the self as one who is unaware of the chasm which separates itself from God. Unaware of its separation, the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>109</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 4, 40.

<sup>110</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 3, 361.

<sup>111</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 96. In both *PF* and *SUD*, Kierkegaard maintains that humanity's existence as one which is *IQD* from God is due to human sinfulness. Even more, an awareness of our situation can only be achieved by God's revelation and not anything we ourselves can do. Kierkegaard states, “That is why Christianity begins in another way: man has to learn what sin is by revelation from God” (*SUD*, 95).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 81

self continues in the self-delusional existence that it is established by itself.<sup>113</sup> In other words, the self, unaware that it can only become a self in relation to God, thinks that it is a self by virtue “of a synthesis that relates itself to itself”, and this misrelation, is despair.<sup>114</sup> It is this notion, of the utter powerlessness of the self in obtaining the truth about itself as a self as well as in relation to God, which Kierkegaard discusses in *PF*.

In *PF*, Kierkegaard, experimenting with the Socratic model, investigates the self’s relation to the truth with regard to its awareness of both its existence as fragmented by sin as well as its ability to retrieve true self-hood. According to the Socratic definition, “Sin is ignorance.”<sup>115</sup> But the problem for Kierkegaard is the ambiguity which encompasses this definition with regard to how the ignorance itself is to be understood, specifically concerning the origin of this ignorance.<sup>116</sup> Kierkegaard wonders, if sin is nothing more than mere ignorance, then can it be said that sin really exists at all.<sup>117</sup> Thus the Socratic conception of sin appears deficient in that it lacks a distinction between knowing and willing in regard to what is right and wrong.

If one, knowing the difference between right and wrong, acts wrongly, then ignorance is not the issue. Rather, the issue is that of the will whereby, in knowing the difference between what is right and what is wrong, one yet wills to do what is wrong.<sup>118</sup> In noting the deficiency inherent in the Socratic conception of sin, Kierkegaard looks to Christianity. “Christianity”, he states, “begins in another way:

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>115</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 87.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 90

man has to learn what sin is by revelation from God; sin is not a matter of a person's not having understood what is right but of his being unwilling to understand it, of his not willing what is right."<sup>119</sup> And here, in light of the necessity for revelation to make known the human condition, Kierkegaard believes the Socratic view fails.

According to Socrates, "all learning and seeking are but recollecting."<sup>120</sup> The truth is therefore something that is within the human. However, Kierkegaard poses the question as to whether man has the truth at all.<sup>121</sup> If this is the case (that man is not in possession of the truth) he asks by what means and from whom man is to obtain such truth.

His solution to the problem is explicated in his notion of the "teacher". But one might question what role the teacher would have in the Socratic Method, for one who needs not to be taught but only to be reminded. Kierkegaard writes, "The teacher merely helps the pupil to realize what he had known all along. In such a case, the individual is in the truth rather than in error."<sup>122</sup> As we can see with the Socratic approach, the teacher, ultimately, is insignificant. For he does not teach nor present new truth but serves only as a medium, an instrument to help the individual recall what he has forgotten.

However, if man is in untruth, then what would this approach achieve? Kierkegaard's response is that what would be achieved is untruth.<sup>123</sup> Our existence as those without the truth is thus not grounded in our *unawareness* that we already possess it. Rather, for Kierkegaard, our existence is the very condition which prohibits our very ability and desire for truth:

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 95

<sup>120</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 11.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

Now if the learner is to obtain the truth, the teacher must bring it to him, but not only that. Along with it, he must provide him with the condition for understanding it, for if the learner were himself the condition for understanding the truth, then he merely needs to recollect because the condition for understanding the truth is like being able to ask about it - the condition and the question contain the conditioned and the answer.<sup>124</sup>

Kierkegaard's point here is that humanity in and of themselves cannot serve each other in obtaining the truth of their existence, not in its diagnosis or remedy. Such endeavours, Kierkegaard thinks, reflect the despair of our existence in our not knowing that we are in despair.

At this point, Kierkegaard proposes that if the teacher is to be any help at all then he must be more than a mere teacher, more than a mere human being conditioned in sin.

He states, "The teacher, then, is the god, who gives the condition and gives the truth. Now, what should we call such a teacher, for we surely do agree that we have gone far beyond the definition of a teacher,...let us call him a *savior*, for he does indeed save the learner from unfreedom, saves him from himself."<sup>125</sup> The role of the Saviour in Kierkegaard's discussion of the human condition can in no way be over emphasized. Even with the condition for the truth, without the truth itself, the self is yet left to its own despair insofar as the condition only initiates the process of the self's returning to true self-hood. Thus, if one is unaware that they are sick then they will fail to seek a remedy for this sickness, and this is to despair. In sum, as Podmore states, "Before the self can behold itself through this divine mirror [the self as a self before God], it must first recognise its own solipsistic disintegration – its own failure to know itself according to its own powers, and consequently its need to orient self-knowledge in relation to a divine other."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 15,17.

<sup>126</sup> Podmore, *Kierkegaard & the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*, 35.

In his examination of the deficiencies in the Socratic conception of sin, Kierkegaard seeks to re-establish the infinite distinction between God and humanity which Enlightenment thought had so quickly diminished. If, by theoretical reason, one is able to be its own ground for the morally imperative, then God, as the supposed ground of morality, is ultimately superfluous. However, if reason be made to account for its limits, then, as Kierkegaard says, “the older dogmatics was right in maintaining that because sin is against God it is infinitely magnified.”<sup>127</sup> That is, sin infinitely magnifies reason’s powerlessness to discover the ultimate ground for our existence. Provided that such a distinction exists between God and humanity, the question arises as to what access, if any, human understanding has with regard to knowledge of God?

Of our mere knowledge of God’s existence, Kierkegaard asks, “But what is this unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides and which even disturbs man in his self-knowledge?” and responds, “It is the unknown.”<sup>128</sup> According to Kierkegaard, human thought is confronted with the ultimate paradox when conscious of its inability “to discover something that thought itself cannot think.”<sup>129</sup> In this case, the unknown which thought seeks to penetrate is God.

In light of this discussion, Kierkegaard seems to suggest that all human beings possess an innate knowledge of God. From the selected *Journal* entries on *Fragments*, Kierkegaard notes a section that was deleted from the final copy of this work which suggests some form of an innate knowledge of God with us.

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<sup>127</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 80. Kierkegaard’s reference to the “older dogmatics” is to contrast the “later dogmatics” which “frequently took exception to it (sin) because it did not have the understanding or the feeling for it.” 80

<sup>128</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 39.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

Discussing the “fantastic” desire to want to demonstrate that God exists, “and then have an atheist accept it by virtue of the other’s demonstration”<sup>130</sup> Kierkegaard says, “So has there never been an atheist.”<sup>131</sup> In reference to the innate knowledge of God he says, “Therefore there has never been a man who has not believed it, but there certainly have been many who have been unwilling to let the truth conquer in their souls, have been loathe to allow themselves to be convinced, for what convinces me exists, but the important thing is that I become immersed in it.”<sup>132</sup>

The demonstration of God’s existence appears a futile task since all possess some notion that God exists. Nevertheless, reason’s attempt to know God is to no avail. In fact, Kierkegaard thinks demonstrations for God’s existence betray a contradiction in the desire to demonstrate God to begin with. He writes:

If, namely, the god [Guden] does not exist, then of course it is impossible to demonstrate it. But if he does exist, then it is foolishness to want to demonstrate it, since I, in the very moment the demonstration commences, would presuppose it not as doubtful-which a presupposition cannot be, inasmuch as it is a presupposition-but as decided, because otherwise I would not begin easily perceiving that the whole thing would be impossible if he did not exist.<sup>133</sup>

What Kierkegaard finds amusing is that in seeking to prove God’s existence, one must possess the presupposition that God first exists, otherwise the desire to demonstrate it would have never been initiated. In short, “the whole process of demonstrating continually becomes...an expanded concluding development of what I conclude from having presupposed that the object of investigation exists.”<sup>134</sup> Kierkegaard’s criticisms of the proofs for God’s existence stand under his harsher criticisms of apologetics.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.,191

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.,40

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.



Discussing the correlation between God and his works, Kierkegaard wonders if a relation is detectable.”<sup>135</sup> He concludes that, yes, “an absolute relation.”<sup>136</sup> But is this relation immediate? He writes:

The works from which I want to demonstrate his existence do not immediately and directly exist, not at all. Or are the wisdom in nature and the goodness or wisdom in Governance right in front of our noses? Do we not encounter the most terrible spiritual trials here, and is it ever possible to be finished with all these trials? But I still do not demonstrate God’s existence from such an order of things, and even if I begin, I would never finish and also would be obliged continually to live in suspense lest something so terrible happen that my fragment of demonstration would be ruined.<sup>137</sup>

If empirical reality, immediate and sensate, adds nothing in aiding our concept of order within nature in relation to God, then from where does this relation emerge? In that the concept of God exists ideally or presupposed, so too does the uniformity of his existence to his creation.

However, it is in the ideality of reason where meaning is imposed, or more specifically, the connection between God and his works are made to exist relationally. Therefore, Kierkegaard says, “I do not demonstrate it from the works, after all, but only develop the ideality I have presupposed.”<sup>138</sup> However, if there is no immediate, or direct correlation between God and his works, wherefrom does the transition take place from what was once unknown to what is now known?

This transition, according to Kierkegaard, results from a leap.<sup>139</sup> For Kierkegaard, a “leap” signifies that faith has become aware of the presupposition allowing us therefore to make the connection between Creator and creation. Nothing from nature or reason tells us, explicitly, that God exists or that the world reflects his existence. To some extent, Kierkegaard seems to reflect a certain amount of Kantian

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 43.

and German Idealist influence upon his thought with regard to reason's limits. Where Kierkegaard differs from the Idealist tradition is in the belief that the limitations posed by the Kantian and Idealist notion of reason are overcome by some other means.

For Kierkegaard, although the understanding is unable to transcend from what is known to that of the unknown, human understanding cannot but desire to do so. The unknown exists, as Kierkegaard says, as "the frontier that is continually arrived at."<sup>140</sup> It is the frontier of the "absolutely different." But this distinction of that which is absolutely different is not a distinction arrived at outside of the understanding itself. Rather, it is the understanding that "consequently thinks the difference in itself, which it thinks by itself. It cannot absolutely transcend itself and therefore thinks as above itself only the sublimity that it thinks by itself."<sup>141</sup>

In the end, human reason affords us nothing with regard to our knowledge of God. In fact, as was demonstrated, for Kierkegaard it is quite the opposite. Therefore, left to its own powers, the self exists both without God and true self-hood thus consumed in the despair brought on by the *IQD*. However, amidst this discussion of the sheer negativity of the self divorced from self-hood and God, grace has been present. In his insisting that revelation is needed in order to overcome the effects of the *IQD*; that the self needs the "Saviour" in order to both receive the condition for the truth and the truth itself, Kierkegaard does not leave the self to its own ruin in the abyss. Therefore, for Kierkegaard, the *IQD* between God and humanity is not comprised of merely sin but also of the forgiveness of sin.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.,44

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 45 See, Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 99, 117, 126, 127.

Kierkegaard's objective in highlighting the negativity of human existence is to point beyond the hopeless endeavours of the modern self to establish self-hood. To this objective, Kierkegaard was compelled to first expose the inability of human reason in reconciling itself to itself and to God in order to point to God's grace in his revelation, thus making known the human need for redemption. And herein with the necessity of revelation in making known the plight of human existence Kierkegaard explicates the form of despair which arises in light of our coming to the consciousness of our separation from God. Podmore explains the situation, stating:

If sin forms the infinite chasmic abyss that separates the self from God, then despair over sin, is venturing a potentially mystifying image, a second and more fatal abyss. Yet, whereas the consciousness of sin is revealed by God, this second fracture is a supplementary abyss which the self has willed of itself by despairing over this revelation. It is a second abyss born from despairing over the revealed abyss of sin.<sup>142</sup>

When the self is made aware of its separation from God, there follows the inevitable awareness of its inability to overcome this separation and thus, in light of revelation, despairs.<sup>143</sup>

Indeed, for Kierkegaard, "forgiveness is ... viewed as the means by which the estrangement of the infinite qualitative difference between the self and God is reconciled and transformed into the relational possibility of the self before God"<sup>144</sup> as demonstrated above. In short, "the consciousness of sin is, in this schema, a vital step on the road to faith."<sup>145</sup> However, according to Kierkegaard,

Sin was despair, the intensification was despair over sin. But now God offers reconciliation in the forgiveness of sin. Nevertheless, the sinner still despairs, and despair acquires a still deeper manifestation: it now relates to God in a way, and yet precisely because it is even further away it is even more intensively absorbed in sin. When the sinner despairs of the forgiveness of sins, it is almost as if he walked right up to God and said, 'No, there is no forgiveness of sins, it is impossible'.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Podmore, *Kierkegaard & the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*, 288.

<sup>143</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 25.

<sup>144</sup> Podmore, *Kierkegaard & the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*, 12.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>146</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 114.

With the impossibility of the offence maintained by the *IQD* being breached on this side of eternity, humanity is “reminded that God has accomplished ‘the impossible;’ a gift which requires the consent, not of human comprehension, but the consent of the free will to a forgiveness which is revealed by God.”<sup>147</sup> Kierkegaard heeds us to take comfort in the divine possibility whereby, as he states, “the self is healthy and free from despair ... when, precisely by having despaired, it rests transparently in God.”<sup>148</sup>

It is this similarity between Kierkegaard and Barth which, having been overlooked, has resulted in the assertion that Barth’s dialectic of judgement and grace reflects an affinity with Hegel rather than Kierkegaard. This reading of Barth’s dialectic, which is overcome by grace and thus representing some kind of synthesis, is said to differ from Kierkegaard’s dialectic which refuses resolution and is thus, as McCormack notes, “static in character, in which a synthesis can only be awaited.”<sup>149</sup>

It must be remembered that Kierkegaard’s examination of the self emerged within an intellectual and social context that demanded a thorough reminder of our helplessness in relating to the Divine based on our own abilities. On this, Stewart indicates that *Fragments* serves as an address to the abuses of speculative philosophy.<sup>150</sup> But even in *Fragments*, although “the issue of the limits of human knowledge runs through the whole discussion,”<sup>151</sup> it is evident that Kierkegaard is not ignoring the element of human redemption insofar as he poses the human need for the “Saviour”. Furthermore, the whole section at the beginning of *Fragments*,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>149</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 268.

<sup>150</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 337.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 339.

“Thought Project” is nothing less than the biblical story of the Incarnation.<sup>152</sup> Interestingly enough, it seems that Kierkegaard was aware of the negative tone emanating from *Fragments* and *Sickness unto Death* given that, as Bruce Kirmmse notes, he had projected a sequel titled, *Fundamental Recovery* which suggest an amendment to our separation from God.<sup>153</sup> Kierkegaard himself was concerned with the possibility that his intentions with the self would be misunderstood. He states:

This self is no longer the merely human self but is what I, hoping not to be misinterpreted, would call the theological self, the self directly before God. And what infinite reality the self gains by being conscious of existing before God, by becoming a human self whose criterion is God!<sup>154</sup>

In sum, the theological implications of Kierkegaard’s presentation should be quite clear. Humanity is born into sin and thus is without hope by means of its own efforts. They are without hope because they lack not only the truth but also the condition to receive it. Therefore, Christ is both the teacher and Saviour who saves humanity from its condition. By virtue of the Saviour’s initiation, the individual can now come to Christ and follow him in truth. In this light, the “teacher is the way, the truth, and the life.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> See Kierkegaard, *PF*,

<sup>153</sup> Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 375.

<sup>154</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 79.

<sup>155</sup> T.H. Crosscall, *Kierkegaard Studies* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 141. At the conclusion of this section it is important to note that much of the interpretation of Kierkegaardian subjectivity, in the relative or fideist sense, is derived from the infamous passage found in a journal entry dated 1835 where Kierkegaard says “The thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die. What would be use of discovering so-called objective truth, of working through all the systems of philosophy and [being able] to review them all and show up the inconsistencies within each system? What good would it do me to be able to develop a theory of the state and combine all the details into a single whole, and so construct a world in which I did not live? What good would it do me to explain the meaning of Christianity if it had no deeper significance for me and for my life? What good would it do me if truth stood before me, cold and naked, not caring whether I recognized her or not, and producing in me a shudder of fear rather than a trusting devotion? I certainly do not deny...an imperative of understanding and that through it one can work upon men, but it must be taken up into my life.” The fact that this entry was recorded in 1835 and his work *Philosophical Fragments* was not written until 1844, could lead some to conclude a form of relativism, in the strict subjective sense of Kierkegaard’s early thought. However, even if one is to adopt this view, it is clear that Kierkegaard refutes this particular philosophy derived from the statement that “the thing is to find a truth which is true for me” in his *Philosophical Fragments*. This

Before moving on to a consideration of what the Incarnation affords reason regarding knowledge of God, I wish briefly to relate our present discussion to Kierkegaard's notion that "Truth is Subjectivity". I mentioned earlier that among Kierkegaard interpretation this notion remains one of his most disputed claims.<sup>156</sup>

Among philosophical and/or existential readings of Kierkegaard<sup>157</sup>, this notion is seen as Kierkegaard's endorsement of a relativistic notion of truth. It is easy to find passages in Kierkegaard's writings which could support interpreting him as maintaining a relativistic notion of truth, i.e. truth, with no regard to objectivity, is subjective, a matter of one's own right to believe whatever without objective warrant. One of the most drawn on passage to support this reading of Kierkegaard is a journal entry he made in 1835. He writes,

The thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die. What would be use of discovering so-called objective truth, of working through all the systems of philosophy and [being able] to review them all and show up the inconsistencies within each system? What good would it do me to be able to develop a theory of the state and combine all the details into a single whole, and so construct a world in which I did not live?<sup>158</sup>

Indeed, read outside of the context in which they were written, these words suggest that Kierkegaard is concerned with merely subjective truth, epistemologically

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form of truth, as we shall see later is the Socratic Truth. Truth, as seen in *Philosophical Fragments*, does not lie in the subject, as Socrates taught, but is foreign to the subject and hence must be brought to the subject. The subject is confronted with the object of belief and therefore appropriates the objective in the act of belief, being the act of subjectivity. Therefore the idea of Kierkegaard endorsing subjectivism as a form of relativism from this entry is clearly incorrect.

<sup>156</sup> See James Fairley, 'Method in Theology: Possibilities in the light of Barth, Kierkegaard, and Wittgenstein', PhD dissertation, The British Library Document supply Centre, UK. Fairley offers a clarification to Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity which resonates in Peter S. Oh. Fairley argues that although both spheres A and B are concerned with "inwardness", inwardness in B departs from A in B's abandonment of personal resources. Furthermore, inwardness is the way in which one appropriates the truth, the Christian truth. Thus inwardness denotes a subjective approach versus an objective one in relation to truth. This, Fairley notes, is what Kierkegaard means by "Subjectivity is Truth". Fairley continues, "Yet, he [Kierkegaard] goes on to say that this must be surpassed. This is accomplished by the realisation that 'Subjectivity is untruth'."

<sup>157</sup> See footnote, 31 and 32 of this manuscript.

<sup>158</sup> Kierkegaard's *Journals and Notebooks*, Volume 1, Journals AA-DD, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7.

speaking. However, this passage does not end with these words. Kierkegaard continues:

What good would it do me to explain the meaning of Christianity if it had no deeper significance for me and for my life? What good would it do me if truth stood before me, cold and naked, not caring whether I recognized her or not, and producing in me a shudder of fear rather than a trusting devotion? I certainly do not deny...an imperative of understanding and that though it one can work upon men, but it must be taken up into my life.”<sup>159</sup>

The context of this passage is, for Kierkegaard, the nature of Christianity. With regard to the discussions of his time concerning Christianity’s relation to philosophy, and the efforts of rational theology to make Christianity “objective”, Kierkegaard is concerned with what significance Christianity could have then for his life. He is not questioning the objective truth of Christianity with regard to its claims, its historicity in relation to the individual as something outside of the subject’s creative power. For Kierkegaard, issues concerning the truth of Christianity are not to be decided subjectively but are to be decided in a source outside the subject, namely, Scripture. He writes, “When the truth of Christianity is asked about historically, or what is and what is not Christian truth, Holy Scripture immediately presents itself as a crucial document.”<sup>160</sup> This concern is therefore objective.

However, this is not, according to Kierkegaard the issue of Christianity. He writes:

If Christianity is viewed as a historical document, the important thing is to obtain a completely reliable report of what the Christian doctrine really is. If the inquiring subject were infinitely interested in his relation to this truth, he would here despair at once, because nothing is easier to perceive than this, that with regard to the historical the greatest certainty is only an approximation, and an approximation is too little to build his happiness on and is so unlike an eternal happiness that no result can ensue.<sup>161</sup>

For Kierkegaard, if Christianity is truth, then its truth is not that equal to other objective truths which are accepted as a matter of fact. Rather, Christianity demands

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>160</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 23.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 23. Kierkegaard’s notion of the historicity of Christianity as “approximation” is, as we shall discuss in the section *Christ and History*, not isolated to Christian history but to history in general.

more than objective adherence, it demands existence, an existence which exists in the truth. Nevertheless, even if one adopts this view, it is clear that Kierkegaard refutes a relativistic notion of truth from what he argues in *PF*. Truth, Kierkegaard argues in *PF*, does not lie in the subject, as Socrates taught, but is foreign to the subject and hence must be brought to the subject. The subject is confronted with the object of belief and therefore appropriates the objective in the act of belief, being the act of subjectivity. Therefore the idea of Kierkegaard endorsing subjectivism as a form of relativism from this entry is clearly incorrect.

In sum, this interpretation, however, fails to recognize several factors central to Kierkegaard's use of this phrase. First, this reading ignores the historical context wherein this notion assumes its meaning. Second, in that this reading relegates this notion to discussions of the religious, it fails to account for its epistemological implications in relation to then the religious connotation. Thirdly, and more importantly, any discussion of Kierkegaard's notion of truth cannot be understood outside of his theological notion of the self. In short, Kierkegaard's belief, that sin inhibits any access to supernatural claims, demands that the self must first be given the means to understand revelation and from there accept it.

These three often neglected factors all fail to account for Kierkegaard's inherited problem as posed by the 1839 Rationalism and Supernaturalism debate, namely, reason's relation to faith. In order to correct such relativistic readings of the Kierkegaardian concept I wish to focus now on the specific issues that arose from the debate as recorded in Martensen's reply to Mynster.

Kierkegaard's conception of the self as a self without truth stands in contrast to the Socratic notion that truth is innate within the individual. Kierkegaard also



discussed the self in terms of its dichotomous existence of the infinite and the finite, a dichotomy which can only find resolution in the power that has established it, namely God. Furthermore, insofar as Kirmmse notes that Kierkegaard had originally intended a sequel to *PF* and *SUD* which would have discussed the remedy of the self in more positive of terms, the shared themes and concepts between these two works are therefore not incidental. The reading I have provided is, of course, one among many, and stands in stark contrast to the relativistic interpretation. However, in light of the 1839 debate and the discussions ensuing thereof, the relativistic reading appears untenable. As noted, Bishop Mynster had published a reply to Bornemann's review of Martensen's work, *On the Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness*. What had "suddenly awakened his full attention and reflection" was Martensen's claim that "In theology both rationalism and supernaturalism are antiquated standpoints, which belong to an age which has disappeared."<sup>162</sup>

In sum Mynster asks his readers to consider that the "new philosophy" had not made obsolete these two opposing positions. And therefore, given their continuing existence as being mutually opposed to each other, the choice was an "either/or", either supernaturalism or rationalism. Implicit in Mynster's calling for a choice, is his reliance to what Martensen criticizes as "the old supernaturalism" whereby Christianity "was reduced to a foreign authority for consciousness, an impenetrable mystery that could be grasped by faith but not knowledge."<sup>163</sup> Martensen claimed that the crux of Mynster's critique is that the old supernaturalism

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<sup>162</sup> Mynster, "Rationalism, Supernaturalism" in *Mynster's 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism' and the Debate about Mediation*, 95.

<sup>163</sup> Martensen, "Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the principium exclusi medii" in *Mynster's 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism' and the Debate about Mediation*, 136.

was not antiquated to begin with.<sup>164</sup> But what Martensen found ultimately problematic in Mynster's critique was an unwillingness to perceive that Christianity itself offers a mediation of contradictories in the act of the Incarnation.

Moreover, for Martensen, human self-consciousness reflects the non-existence of the law of excluded middle insofar as "The identity of the subjective and the objective, of self-consciousness and revelation is the presupposition of all speculative theology. It is not pantheistic but truly Christian to believe that God would not be Spirit if He, who is object of our knowledge, were not Himself also the true knowledge in us."<sup>165</sup> What is evident about Martensen's statement here is that he held an optimistic view of human reason in and of itself. Inasmuch as human beings were created by God, the religious consciousness allows human recognition of God.<sup>166</sup> In contrast to Kierkegaard's conception of sin and its consequences for the human and divine relationship, Martensen's own view of the rational self is not as dire. Ultimately, Martensen maintains an innate, unqualified unity between the human and the divine, even if Bornemann presents him as adhering to the qualitative difference between Creator and creature.<sup>167</sup>

In sum, the issue with Martensen's sublation of the divine and human, is that it does not account for a true difference within this relation and thus appears somewhat reminiscent of the Socratic model of the self's relation to the truth. For both Martensen and Socrates, our possession of the truth is telling of our unity with

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<sup>164</sup> Mynster, "Rationalism, Supernaturalism" in *Mynster's 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism' and the Debate about Mediation*, 95.

<sup>165</sup> Martensen, "Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the principium exclusi medii" in *Mynster's 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism' and the Debate about Mediation*, 141.

<sup>166</sup> Johan Alfred Bornemann, "Review of Martensen's *De autonomia conscientiae*" in *Mynster's 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism' and the Debate about Mediation*, Edited and translated by Jon Stewart, Texts from Golden Age Denmark, Volume 5 (Soren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009), 61.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

the divine whether in the world of forms or as created in his image. The difference between them is that Socrates, it seems, maintains a more Christian view of the self than does Martensen, for whom sin is not as inhibiting to our access to the truth as the “older theology” presents. Regardless of the difference between the two, both Martensen and Socrates differ from what Johannes Climacus deems central to an understanding of human sinfulness in relation to God, namely, that we are in need of the truth. Thus, Kierkegaard’s truth as subjectivity does not endorse a subjective notion of truth that is relativistic, but rather a notion which exists as a specific response to the paradoxical nature of Christianity, specifically Christ. This response is nothing less than the passionate inwardness of faith.

#### *Christ as Knowledge of God*

Perhaps it was no accident that Danish Hegelians, specifically Martensen, honed in on the Incarnation as an example of Hegelian mediation.<sup>168</sup> In that the Incarnation is said to express the coming together of transcendence and immanence, ideality and reality, infinitude and finitude, God and man, for Martensen, there was no better example than the Incarnation in demonstrating “that the basic doctrines of Christianity can be grasped by unaided human reason and thus can be objects of knowledge.”<sup>169</sup> In other words, in Christ, we have not the *Deus Nudus*, God hidden in his divine majesty, but rather the *Deus Revelatus*, God as an object. Against this Kierkegaard contends that the Incarnation, although offering us knowledge of God, fares our cognitive faculties no better in claiming knowledge of the Divine. For

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<sup>168</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 346.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

Kierkegaard, “God cannot be an object for man, since God is subject.”<sup>170</sup> Therefore, for Kierkegaard, the *Deus Revelatus* is also the *Deus Absconditus*, the hidden and the revealed God.<sup>171</sup>

Because “God is pure Subjectivity”<sup>172</sup> he must make himself known in a way which yet guards his divine subjectivity. God’s veiling and unveiling of himself is achieved in his taking on of human flesh in order to be an object for human knowing all the while remaining hidden in human flesh. It is the taking on of human flesh whereby God remains “incognito” within time. Kierkegaard writes, “He is God but chooses to become this individual human being. This...is the most profound incognito or the most impenetrable unrecognizability that is possible, because the contradiction between being God and being an individual human being is the greatest possible, the infinitely qualitative contradiction.”<sup>173</sup>

Insofar as the human being bears no relation to that of the concept “God”, for Kierkegaard, the Incarnation expresses both a conceptual and ontological contradiction, and hence, constitutes a paradox.<sup>174</sup> In fact, Kierkegaard thinks the

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<sup>170</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 2, F-K, 99.

<sup>171</sup> For an in-depth study of Kierkegaard’s use of the “veiling and unveiling” God, and its relation to Luther’s thought, see Craig Hinkson’s “Luther and Kierkegaard: Theologians of the Cross,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3, no. 1 (2001):25-45, and “Kierkegaard’s Theology: Cross and Grace. The Lutheran and Idealist Traditions in His Thought,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1993), chaps. 1-3.

<sup>172</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 3, L-R, 121. See also, pp. 121, 122, 265, 275, 284, 345, 270, 370, 404, 412-413, 420, 421.

<sup>173</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *PC*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 131.

<sup>174</sup> As Tim Rose states, “Most often ‘paradox’ is interpreted as a logical (or formal) contradiction, or self contradiction and thereby taken to be a negative term, as a thing contrary to reason, such as a square circle.” (50) However, is this how Kierkegaard understood the word? Many proponents of Kierkegaardian rationalism understand Kierkegaard’s use of this word as a “language which arose largely out of Romanticism.” (51) Thus, Kierkegaard’s understanding of “Paradox” implies more of a mystery than a logical contradiction. Our own use is a product of the Logical Positivism and is not how Kierkegaard understood the term. Most often the element of Paradox has led some to conclude that the whole of Christianity is Paradox. Eduard Geismar, in his *Lectures on the Religious Thought of Soren Kierkegaard*, states: “Negatively, the paradoxical element in Christianity is the protest against every merely intellectual assimilation, every attempt to regard it as something to understand or explain. If the central feature of Christianity is a paradox, every effort to

Incarnation offers *the* “Absolute” paradox in that “God became man.”<sup>175</sup> In the most empirical and rational sense, the notion “that an individual human being is God, that is, claims to be God, is indeed the offence [in an eminent sense],”<sup>176</sup> because, as

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assimilate Christianity as a doctrine for the understanding must be futile.” (63) The “central feature” to which Geismar is referring is of course the paradoxical unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. The mistake that Geismar makes, concerning the paradox, is the confusion of distinguishing that which can be understood in history in contrast to that which can be understood by history. The objective stance in the union of God and man, as Paul Sponhhelm writes, “tends to become a juxtaposition of realities for which no common ground is available, save the subjective ground of the believers’ passion.” See, Edward Geismar, *Lectures on the Religious Thought of Soren Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); Tim Rose *Kierkegaard’s Christocentric Theology* (England: Ashgate Publishing : 2001): and Paul Sponhhelm, *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968).

<sup>175</sup> For Kierkegaard, the absolute paradox of the Incarnation is that it constitutes a contradiction. In his *Practice in Christianity*, p. 125, Kierkegaard writes, “The qualitative contradiction—is between being God and being an individual human being.” See also p. 131. Furthermore, noting that for Kierkegaard, Christ is the “Absolute Paradox”, it is important to recognise that Kierkegaard understands the whole of Christian faith as “paradoxical”. This does not however, as it will be noted later, imply the absence of “non-paradoxical” elements within Christianity, as for example, concerning Christianity’s historicity. Furthermore, lending from Geismar, Kierkegaard does not view something “paradoxical” as meaning that it is irrational in and of itself. When Kierkegaard uses the word “paradox” it is to denote, not the character of a thing within the realm of knowledge and therefore rational enquiry. Rather, that something is a “paradox” denotes that its qualification lies beyond the realm of rational inquiry and thus is qualified as a “mystery”. In his *Journals and Papers*, [*Soren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, Volume 1, A-E, Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1967, 5] Kierkegaard’s notes this distinction concerning the “absurd”, or here, “paradox”, writing, “the absurd is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense; no, it is a symbol, a riddle, a compounded riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense. But, of course, if faith is completely abolished, the whole sphere is dropped, and then reason becomes conceited and perhaps concludes that, ergo, the paradox is nonsense.” And yet, for Kierkegaard, the “absurd” or “paradox” can also refer to Christian existence, or living, and not merely an epistemological relation to the doctrines of Christianity itself. Kierkegaard points to two works of his wherein this concept is used differently. He writes, “That there is a difference between the absurd in Fear and Trembling and the paradox in Concluding Unscientific Postscript is quite correct. The first is the purely personal definition of existential faith – the other is faith in relation to a doctrine...Finally, it is one thing to believe by virtue of the absurd (the formula only of the passion of faith) and to believe the absurd. The first expression is used by Johannes de Silentio, the second by Johannes Climacus.” (8) According to Kierkegaard, the absurd, or paradox, denotes a concept which human reason gives to something it cannot dissolve. In short, “reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense.” (5) On the other hand, reason cannot just simply dissolve it whereby it makes sense. Therefore, for Kierkegaard, the paradox, the absurd “is a symbol, a riddle, a compounded riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense.” (5) Since reason can neither make sense or nonsense of the riddle, Kierkegaard thinks the inevitable result is reason’s despair. Thus, “the absurd is the expression of despair: that humanly it is not possible.” (6) Despair, however unfortunate a category it may be for human reason, is something Kierkegaard believes to be intrinsically related to faith and offence. Without faith, human reason “concludes that, ergo, the paradox is nonsense.” (5) This is a conclusion to which all human reason arrives in face of the absurd. In its inability to make sense of the paradox reason is offended. In short, “offence is the negative criterion of which confirms the quality between God and men” (6) – namely, that God and man are infinitely qualitatively different.

<sup>176</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 26.

Kierkegaard states, it “conflicts with all (human) reason.”<sup>177</sup> For Kierkegaard, the conflict emerges “by placing the eternal, essential truth together with existing.”<sup>178</sup> Therefore, in light of the *IQD* between God and a human being, reason has nothing at its disposal to logically unite these two opposing concepts. In neglecting the difference between God and humanity, speculative philosophy incorrectly perceived the Incarnation as an object, or idea, open to scrutiny.

According to Stewart, Kierkegaard’s formulation of the paradox directly responded to Martensen’s Christological mediation wherefrom “the divine is immanent to human understanding and can therefore be known by human thought.”<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, the distinction between God and a human being allows our understanding nothing more than the ability to affirm that which is only human. Does the human understanding ascertain the similarities existing between God and man, as if such categories of distinction exist a priori within reason?

To these questions Kierkegaard responds that, “If God and man resemble each other to that degree, if they are to that degree kindred, consequently essentially within the same quality, then the conclusion ‘ergo it was God’ is humbug; for if to be God is nothing else than that, then God does not exist at all.”<sup>180</sup> He states further:

He [Jesus Christ] could say it [that he is God] to someone present, because someone present, by seeing the speaker, this individual human being, through this contradiction would nevertheless not receive a direct communication, since the contradiction is between what is said and what it seen, that is, who the speaker is according to appearances.<sup>181</sup>

Therefore, the “paradox *sensu strictissimo*,”<sup>182</sup> whereby we mock the claim that a mere human is deity, contradicts not only the empirical manifestation from whence

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

<sup>178</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 209.

<sup>179</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relation s to Hegel Reconsidered*, 352.

<sup>180</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 28.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>182</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 217.

the claim was made but mainly the presupposition of what, in our minds, constitutes the concept of God, as infinitely qualitatively distinct from human existence. “Can one, then, make that which conflicts with all reason into the rational-actual?”<sup>183</sup> In sum, even though God had revealed himself in Christ, he is not directly recognizable.<sup>184</sup> And therefore Kierkegaard believed that the Incarnation can only be explained as a paradox and thus inexplicable to human reason.

In moving forward from this discussion, I would like to make some concluding comments which are necessary for the following examination. First, for Kierkegaard, humanity is infinitely qualitatively distinct from God. This distinction is both conceptual and ontological. Moreover, whereas the ontological distinction lies in human sinfulness, the conceptual is conceived in terms of paradox resulting from the inherent distinctions in the concepts of God and humanity themselves. Furthermore, as suggested by Podmore, the *IQD* exists not merely in human sinfulness but also in the forgiveness of sin. All things considered, the *IQD*, therefore, inhibits any means on behalf of humanity to know God. With regard to the means whereby God has made himself known, in Christ, this too affords human knowledge nothing in knowing God. The reasons for this are, as noted, indicative of the ontologically and conceptual components of the *IQD*. What this means in reference to Christ, is that not only does human reason mock the equivocation of the terms God and man but, in light of this equivocation, human reason mocks “when a human being claims to be God.”

In short, this section has determined that Kierkegaard’s grievance is with a rational theology which adheres to an unwarranted accessibility in knowing God.

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<sup>183</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 26.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

Such an adherence, as noted, was specifically seen in Martensen's Christological mediation coupled with the presumed account for humanity's rational faculties, generally speaking, to know God in the first place. However, this is not the end of Kierkegaard's criticisms of the speculative program. Inasmuch as the figure of Christ was central to this program, in that it provided a means of integrating theology and Hegelian speculation, speculative philosophy's other brother, historicism, maintained a formidable presence in this program. Although, Kierkegaard's works, *Fragments*, *CUP*, and *Training*, unite in addressing the abuses of rational theology in its refashioning the significance of Christianity's central tenets, it is *CUP* and *Training* where Kierkegaard extensively addresses these problems. Therefore, I will now examine Kierkegaard's dealings with the question of the relation between historical knowledge and Christ as it pertains to what Kierkegaard thought was at stake, namely, true Christian existence.

### **Christ and History**

Kierkegaard's discussion of the historicity of Christianity is so highly dialectical that it presents, as Louis Pojman has stated, "both a necessary aspect and an embarrassing destruction to Christian faith."<sup>185</sup> In fact, as a whole, Kierkegaard thinks our knowledge of the past, i.e. historical knowledge, is generally clouded in uncertainty. At best, he contends, our knowledge of historical events is merely an approximation. However, with regard to our knowledge of the historicity of Christianity, a special case presents itself. The speciality pertaining to Christianity's history is that at its centre there exists an absurdity, a paradox; in fact it is an

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<sup>185</sup> Louis P. Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity: Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (Alabama: University Press, 1984), 38.



“absolute paradox”. He writes, “The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come into existence exactly as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being.”<sup>186</sup> In short, for Kierkegaard, the absolute paradox is “that the Son of God became man.”<sup>187</sup> In other words, central to the Christian faith is the belief that, in Christ, God has entered time therefore becoming historical.

Now, one must be careful not to equate the absurdity of the God-man with Kierkegaard’s view of the historicity of Christianity as a whole. Recalling Pojman’s statement, for Kierkegaard, the Christian faith rests necessarily on its being historical. Kierkegaard does not recreate a Christianity divorced from history. Thus, it is central to Christian belief that one believe, as Kierkegaard states, that “Christianity is a historical truth; it appears at a certain time and certain place and consequently it is relevant to a certain time and place.”<sup>188</sup>

According to Kierkegaard, the adherence to Christianity’s historicity is one which entails, not only the belief that God had become historical, but that the absurdity embedded in this belief does not disturb its general historical claims. The acceptance of the historical generalities of the life of Christ are therefore ones which

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<sup>186</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 210.

<sup>187</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 4, 401.

<sup>188</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 2, 232. For Kierkegaard, the question of history’s relation to Christianity is one as to whether historical investigation provides able enough ground upon which to trust in one’s salvation. And, as will be discussed below, although Kierkegaard believes the answer to this question is “no”, this does not deny the generally historical aspect of the Christian narrative. Kierkegaard writes, “First of all comes, quite properly, Lessing’s doubt that one cannot base an eternal happiness upon something historical. But there is [existerer] something historical, the story of Jesus Christ. But is it historically entirely certain? The answer to this must be that even if it were the surest thing in all history, this does not help; no direct transition from the historical can be made as the basis for an eternal happiness.” The relation between the historicity of Christian, specifically the Incarnation, and belief, if for Kierkegaard, guaranteed by the “if” of history, of the past. Thus, Kierkegaard’s reply to this relationship is: “Then I say to myself: I choose; the historical here means so much to me that I resolve to venture my whole life on this *if*...This is called venturing, and without venturing faith is impossible...Thus the historical is the occasion and still also the object of faith.” Kierkegaard’s whole address to the problem of the relationship between faith and history is in short a problem of the limits of knowledge. See, Kierkegaard, *JP*, Volume 1, 27-28.

Kierkegaard places within the confines of history, generally speaking, and therefore are open to historical investigation. For as he states, “historically, there are no objections to make, but the difficulty lies elsewhere.”<sup>189</sup> However, what distinguishes the necessary aspect of Christianity’s general historicity from that of its most necessary aspect of the Incarnation is that the latter has the ability to enable its own “destruction”.

Aware of the inherent difficulties related to the historicity of the Incarnation, Stewart notes, “History or speculative philosophy can discover many outward facts about Christianity and its development but nothing about its subjective significance.”<sup>190</sup> What Stewart perceives is that Kierkegaard not only had reservations about historical knowledge in general but specifically with regard to the Incarnation. Kierkegaard continually beckons his readers back to the point that Christ had offered himself as “the object of faith” and not of knowledge. Noting that Kierkegaard’s use of the term “knowledge” is not directed to the natural historical claim of Christianity but rather to its supernatural ones, as examined earlier in the section “Christ as knowledge of God”, the Incarnation presents a barrier to human reason.

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<sup>189</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 576. As it pertains to the objective/historical nature of Christianity, it is clear that Kierkegaard did believe that such historicity exists. Thus, for those who seek to deny Kierkegaard this fact, they miss the point that Kierkegaard’s concern is not to deny Christianity its historical foundations but to stress in a time that had confused objective adherence with the central issue of Christianity which is subjective appropriation, meaning, what it means to be a Christian. He says, in *CUP* on page 578, “Objectively, it is not at all more difficult to find out what Christianity is than to find out what Mohammedanism and anything else historical are, except insofar as Christianity is not something merely historical; but the difficulty is to become Christian, because Christian is Christian only by being nailed to the paradox of having based his eternal happiness on the relation to something historical.” Furthermore, on the same page, he adds “the historicity of Christianity is true” concerning its historical origins, persons, and events, even though he believed the supernatural claims in Scripture to be true as well.

<sup>190</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 468.

If reason has no categories at its disposal in order to overcome the logical contradictions emerging from uniting the terms *God* and *man*, historical investigation appears futile in making it sensible.<sup>191</sup> That God had entered history in Christ “conflicts with all (human) reason.”<sup>192</sup> Therefore, Kierkegaard asks, “Can it be demonstrated from history that Christ was God?”<sup>193</sup> Insofar as historical knowledge can only provide an approximation, to those who would seek to prove the logic of the Incarnation by historical means, Kierkegaard thinks, at best, history can offer that Christ “was a great man, perhaps the greatest of all.”<sup>194</sup> And yet, Kierkegaard is appalled that “history is the very thing that people have wanted to use to demonstrate that Christ was God.”<sup>195</sup> “If the paradox [Christ] is explained objectively by speculative philosophy, then it ceases to be an object of faith and becomes the object of scientific knowledge.”<sup>196</sup>

Aside from the arrogant presupposition apparent in historicism’s attempt to grasp something beyond its reach, Kierkegaard maintains that such attempts ultimately deem faith superfluous and thus destructive to the very centre of Christianity. Therefore, Kierkegaard’s discussion of history and Christ highlights two barriers which challenge the success of historical investigation. The first is the inability of reason to unite two opposing concepts, God and man. The second, being indicative of the first, is that given all the historical evidence for the deity of Christ,

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<sup>191</sup> Kirmmse notes, “Reason can come to the understanding that all these attempts to understand the key to divinity as being lodged in history, etc. are unreasonable and wrong, while faith, on the other hand, can see that these efforts to limit God’s absolute transcendence by assimilating him to human categories of understanding are mockery of God, blasphemy.” See 384-389 for further discussion.

<sup>192</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 26.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>196</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 471.

this evidence would not be able to transcend the rational barrier given to reason and thus given to historical investigation.

Even more, Kierkegaard thinks the very attempts of historical investigation to prove the Incarnation ends up working against itself. Pondering the idea of God's coming into existence Johannes Climacus, in *Fragments*, asks, "How is that changed which comes into existence or what is the change of coming into existence?"<sup>197</sup> The question concerns the certitude of historical knowledge and asks whether it is indeed as certain as we suppose, since, by the term "history" we communicate that it exists as something past, something that has happened. And yet, we find ourselves continuing more assuredly in our apprehending of what actually happened in days gone by. Since history is something past, its form of existence seems to relate something intrinsically necessary about those events from our present perspective.

When something comes into existence a change is presupposed, namely, from non-existence to existence. If a certain object has come into being then we assume, by this coming into being, that it did not previously exist and, as such, is thus not necessary. As an example Kierkegaard states, "If, in coming into existence, a plan is intrinsically changed, then it is not this plan that comes into existence; but if it comes into existence unchanged, what, then, is the change of coming into existence? This change, then, is not in essence but in being and is from not existing to existing."<sup>198</sup>

That something has come into existence is, for Kierkegaard, a movement from possibility to actuality.<sup>199</sup> It demonstrates that it has moved from possibility to actuality. But then Kierkegaard asks, "Can the necessary come into existence?"<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 73.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

When we refer to something as necessary we are making a claim about the form of existence that something necessary possesses, namely, that it is. Anything that can come into existence has demonstrated that it is by definition not necessary and is therefore only possible. “For the only thing that cannot come into existence is the necessary, because the necessary is.”<sup>201</sup>

What Kierkegaard has in mind in regard to this discussion, beyond the remoteness of historical events in general, is the very central Christian claim of the Incarnation that the eternal, i.e., the necessary, has come into existence. If God, as necessary, comes into existence, does this not prove that he is indeed not necessary since his coming into existence would prove that he did not exist? Kierkegaard finds this troubling and yet nothing escapes his critique. In that an event is past and as such historical, it is an event which has come into existence as not necessary but as only possible. And herein is the ambiguity of historical knowledge in general, as apprehension of the past.

Something that is dialectical with respect to time has an intrinsic duplexity, so that after having been present it can endure as a past. The distinctively historical is perpetually the past (it is gone; whether it was years or days ago makes no difference), and as something bygone it has actuality, for it is certain and trustworthy that it occurred. But that it occurred is, in turn, precisely its uncertainty, which will perpetually prevent the apprehension from taking the past as if it had been that way from eternity.<sup>202</sup>

Since historical events are simultaneously certain and uncertain, it follows that our conclusions about specific historical events will always be to a certain degree inconclusive.

Again, Kierkegaard is not saying that history is unknowable, only that it possesses a past reality which is not fully accessible to the present. If this is the case,

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 79.

then history can always be rewritten when presented with more evidence. As such, history poses a problem for the believer.

Consider the believer who is at the mercy of historical evidence (supposing it possible), who bases his confidence in Christianity on certain sources which today seem more or less established. So he decides to believe the Gospel; but tomorrow the evidence takes on a new dimension and he is forced to withdraw his confidence in that evidence and change his commitment, suspending his faith. Can one really subject faith and commitment to the changing shifts of evidence in this way?<sup>203</sup>

Concerning the historicity of Christianity, Kierkegaard directs his attention to the speculative thinker who views Christianity as something merely historical. Such a thinker “approaches Christianity from a historical and conceptual perspective”<sup>204</sup> and thus is indifferent to the central issue of Christianity which is subjectivity, personal living and devotion. Of course, Kierkegaard, as we have stated, is not against historical criticism or speculative philosophy *per se*. Both “can discover many outward facts about Christianity and its development but nothing about its subjective significance.”<sup>205</sup>

In the end, Kierkegaard believes, “with regard to the historical the greatest certainty is only an approximation.”<sup>206</sup> But where one’s eternal fate is concerned, an approximation is not good enough. Hence, those who seek to be fully assured of the truth of Christianity by means of historical evidence will be greatly disappointed. It cannot be otherwise, for history has to do with the past. Those who live in the present can never know for sure the actual events of the past. Add to this Christianity’s claim that the eternal came into existence at a past moment in time, and the situation becomes utterly untenable.

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<sup>203</sup> Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity: Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*, 42.

<sup>204</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 468.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 23.

The implications of Kierkegaard's conception of historical knowledge are indeed significant for Christianity. If the nature of historical knowledge exists as something past, something which we can only ascertain approximately, then what about those events within the Christian narrative which exist not only as something past, but as something supernatural?<sup>207</sup> The methods of historical criticism find themselves hard pressed in unearthing a particular event which has no natural ground from which it came into existence. Naturally, although we shall discuss the concept in more detail later, Kierkegaard's use of the concept "Absolute Paradox" to describe the Incarnation presents an impossible feat for historicism to overcome. The eye of reason looks upon this lowly servant and is offended that he claims to be God. It would never occur to man's reason that God in all his majesty would reveal himself in this paradoxical form. Fallen reason looks upon this man Jesus, and finds "nothing to be seen except a lowly human being who by signs and wonders and by claiming to be God continually constituted the possibility of offence."<sup>208</sup> That one claimed to be God, in history, raises the question as to what historical investigation may offer such a claim. With historical investigation at a standstill, it is here we find the significance of the objective/subjective response in relation to the nature of Christianity.

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<sup>207</sup> It must be noted that Kierkegaard's examination of the modal categories may at first seem to be a direct reference to Hegel's own conception of the categories universality, particularity, and individuality which exist as the three moments of the Concept. However, as Stewart once again elucidates, Kierkegaard's attacks on the necessity of history make no sense if directly aimed at Hegel in that Hegel's use of "necessity is conceived as logical necessity rather than a mechanical necessity conditioned by the cause and effect relations of a particular place and time" (363). Thus, Kierkegaard's critique looks much more like an empiricist conception of necessity (364). This being the case, Kierkegaard's argument here seems related to Martensen's claim that the incarnation was necessary, where "the doctrine of the incarnation is the concept working itself out in time, that is, as the universal (God the Father) becoming the particular (the Son) in history... Thus, the incarnation is truly understood only when it is grasped as a necessary culmination of the conceptual development" (See Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel Reconsidered*, 367).

<sup>208</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 65. It must be noted that the offence, resulting from the paradoxical nature of the incarnation, is an offence that is *impenetrable by means of historical evidence*, although the Incarnation is itself an historical event.

Since the central claims of Christianity transcend human reason, and thereby the use of historical critical methods of investigation, Kierkegaard believes that one of two decisions can be taken. Either, one takes the “leap of faith” which is the subjective response, or one takes the objective response and continues in the process of speculative deliberation on the matter, although the matter at hand, Christianity, is beyond objectification in this sense of the word. “Christianity is spirit; spirit is inwardness; inwardness is subjectivity,”<sup>209</sup> according to Kierkegaard. “When the matter is treated objectively, the subject cannot impassionedly relate himself to the decision, can least of all be impassionedly, infinitely interested.”<sup>210</sup>

It is obvious, given the epistemological and historical illusiveness of the past, that the objective position in relation to Christianity ends in failure since it could never muster up the kind of reliability it demands in order to rest assured. And even if it did, Kierkegaard believes that such objective cognition is always accepted as immediate and thus without interest. He says:

The objective view... continues from generation to generation precisely because the individuals (the observers) become more and more objective, less and less infinitely passionately interested. On the assumption that one would in this way continue to demonstrate and seek a demonstration of the truth of Christianity, something remarkable would finally emerge, that just as one was finished with the demonstration of its truth, it would cease to exist as something present: it would have become something historical to such a degree that it would be something past, whose truth, that is, whose historical truth, had now been brought to the point of reliability.<sup>211</sup>

Kierkegaard’s point is that there is no amount of demonstration or evidence able to provide objective certainty for Christian truths which belong to the realm of faith. When one continues in the search for certainty, faith, or subjectivity, is delayed. Delaying subjective decisions thus results from assenting to an objective fact which is casually accepted as history, with little or no significance for one’s life.

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<sup>209</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 33.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



For with regard to historical issues it is of course impossible to reach an objective decision of such a nature that no doubt would be able to insinuate itself. This also indicates that the issue is to be formulated subjectively, and that it is indeed a misunderstanding to want to assure oneself objectively and thereby avoid the risk in which passion chooses and in which passion continues upholding its choice.<sup>212</sup>

But does not scholarship, in relation to the historical text of Scripture, afford a bit more objectivity than Kierkegaard will permit?

In reference to the “research scholar” Kierkegaard claims that since their objective is to secure the greatest amount of objectivity, thus reliability, in regards to Holy Scripture, the most that they can reach is also an approximation.<sup>213</sup> This is not to belittle or diminish the role scholarship contributes to the field of biblical interpretation. Kierkegaard says that “philological scholarship is wholly legitimate,”<sup>214</sup> and that he “has respect...for that which scholarship consecrates.”<sup>215</sup> However, these efforts are somewhat exaggerated in regards to what they hope to achieve. It appears that scholarship acts in such a way that its endeavours will result in faith.<sup>216</sup> But when all is said and done, the fact remains that reliability is never reached. And thus, the question yet remains as to whether such pursuits are enough on which to base one’s eternal happiness.

Since scholarship continually seeks to establish the reliability of Scripture, the quest continues from one generation to the next as new problems arise which demand attention. But where does one rest content? Kierkegaard wonders at what point the ground is secure enough wherefrom we halt deliberation and begin with faith. Within such a process, the inevitable outcome is that, “The subject’s personal, infinite, impassioned interestedness (which is the possibility of faith and then faith,

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

the form of eternal happiness and then eternal happiness) fades away more and more because the decision is postponed as a direct result of the results of the learned research scholars.”<sup>217</sup>

Kierkegaard argues that although scholarship has much to offer in regards to various historical, linguistic, and textual problems, such difficulties will always exist. Furthermore, solving problems inevitably leads to more problems. So, Kierkegaard asks, when does one finally decide to rest secure in regards to the amount of epistemological warrant whereby a decision for faith can be made? The answer seems obvious. If one rests their eternal happiness on the amount of objectivity one can obtain, then one will never come to a decision for faith since there will always be either more or less knowledge to come. Faith, for Kierkegaard, is not just mere intellectual assent, as is the case when one is persuaded by evidence to admit the thing or event once in question.

In such a case, what is the relation between the object which has been verified empirically, and the subject to which the object is presented? If “everything is assumed to be in order with regard to the Holy Scriptures—what then? Has the person who did not believe come a single step closer to faith?”<sup>218</sup> Kierkegaard’s reply to these questions is an emphatic “No, not a single step.”<sup>219</sup> The basis for why Kierkegaard finds the cause so inadequate to the effect results from his conception of faith. Although we shall examine this concept in depth later on, it will suffice for now to say that Kierkegaard believes that “faith does not result from straightforward scholarly deliberation.”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

Reflecting on what has been said concerning Kierkegaard's view of historical knowledge (that it exists as past, and as such, exists dialectically as something certain yet uncertain) the implications resulting from his understanding for Scripture, as a historical text, are also quite obvious. He says, "The New Testament is something of the past and is thus historical in a stricter sense."<sup>221</sup> And, as past, Scripture, although an objective/historical text which claims a significant amount of historicity does, in and of itself, retain that certain amount of uncertainty, especially in relation to the supernatural, which is to be approached only in the act of faith which provides the certainty needed. And herein lays the significance of the Church in Kierkegaard's estimation. According to Kierkegaard, the Church, as an entity which exists at present, "eliminates all the proving and demonstrating that was required in connection with the Bible, since that is something past, whereas the Church is something present."<sup>222</sup> But here again, Kierkegaard eliminates the tendency to seek any form of objectivity whereby the subjective significance of Christianity may be placed in jeopardy.

Although existing always in the present, the Church is an entity which is not grounded in the present but rather rests upon the apostolic Church. It too possesses a form of historicity and thus exists as something past.<sup>223</sup> Although Kierkegaard may be correct in his criticisms against the misappropriation of historical knowledge in seeking the surest sense of Christian objectivity, again the question can be raised whether or not the credibility of those biblical writers, as mediate witnesses to the events, might warrant a bit more objectivity than Kierkegaard allows. Said differently, some forms of recorded history seem more reliable in that they were

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

written by those who were contemporaries to the events themselves. Kierkegaard considers this possibility within his work, *PF* and presents the problem as follows.

Whereas Kierkegaard had shown the inability of historical investigation to produce subjectivity, it is the “paradox” which Kierkegaard believes offers historical investigation its greatest limitation. Kierkegaard notes that many were contemporaries with Christ. These people were witnesses to his miracles and teachings. However, Kierkegaard reminds us that even though many witnessed the events of Christ’s life, they still did not believe. To clarify his point, Kierkegaard gives an example of possible ways that a contemporary might react to Christ.

The first contemporary is one who spends all of his time following Christ, accumulating as many facts as is historically possible. The second contemporary is the most attentive student, always listening to every word the teacher says.<sup>224</sup> However, does this behaviour make either contemporary a true follower of Christ? For Kierkegaard, neither of these contemporaries possesses real faith. The reason is, “for the first contemporary, that life would have been merely a historical event; for the second one, that teacher would have been the occasion for understanding himself.”<sup>225</sup>

The true contemporary of Christ is one who possesses both objective knowledge and subjective appropriation. Therefore, “as long as the eternal and the historical remain apart from each other, the historical is only an occasion.”<sup>226</sup> By the word “occasion,” Kierkegaard is signifying the role that actual historical events play in relation to faith. He says:

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<sup>224</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 60.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

The contemporary follower, too, obtains a historical point of departure for his eternal consciousness, for he is indeed contemporary with the historical event that does intend to be a moment of occasion, and this historical event intends to interest him otherwise than merely historically, intends to be the condition for his eternal happiness.<sup>227</sup>

To obtain faith, the contemporary's interest must exceed the desire to procure mere historical events or objective knowledge. This is to say that his happiness lies in the subjective appropriation of the historical which is the qualification of a true contemporary. Still, the act of faith does not eliminate the historical aspect, since the latter is the occasion for the contemporary's eternal happiness.

With this in mind, Kierkegaard reveals the limitations presented to the historical contemporary. He says, "A contemporary can be a noncontemporary: the genuine contemporary is the genuine contemporary not by virtue of immediate contemporaneity"<sup>228</sup> (By "immediate," Kierkegaard means "historically present", for example, the apostles). Kierkegaard reminds us that being a mere witness to historical events, as shown by the first contemporary, does not make one a true contemporary. It is evident that Kierkegaard understands the word "contemporary" as signifying the true follower of Christ as distinct from a mere historical eyewitness. But can one who was not an eyewitness be considered a true contemporary? Kierkegaard's reply is that one becomes a contemporary in the same way as the immediate contemporary, by virtue of faith.

For Kierkegaard, the historical events, though providing the occasion, do not provide the saving condition. Therefore, "if one who comes later receives the condition from God himself, then he is a contemporary, a genuine contemporary."<sup>229</sup> A "contemporary such as this is not an eyewitness (in the sense of immediacy), but

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 69.

as a believer he is a contemporary in the autopsy of faith. But in this autopsy every non-contemporary (in the sense of immediacy) is in turn a contemporary.”<sup>230</sup> Thus, the non-contemporary can be either one who was a historical contemporary (in the sense of immediacy) or also one not related in immediacy (historically) who does not possess subjective appropriation. Only faith is the condition of a true contemporary, not historical investigation or observation. “Faith can only be based on a personal encounter with Christ, and that historical revelation merely provides the existing individual an occasion for such an encounter.”<sup>231</sup> Therefore, we can conclude that true contemporaneity is subjective appropriation, not objective adherence resulting from mere historical knowledge. If historical events, in general, are at its maximum an approximation,<sup>232</sup> then the task of the historian to achieve the surest amount of certainty in regards to a historical event, like the Incarnation, is an endless task of deliberation.

As such, the historian exists in an objective relation to the task before him. He cares little, if at all, whether or not the event demands more than the mere exactness of its nature. Christianity, on the other hand, asks more from its observers than mere knowledge of its origins, significant people, and events. But, this subjective demand is of no concern for the historian. Historical evidence may always be waiting to be discovered, waiting to be counted among the rest of the evidence in providing history greater clarity. Thus, the historian belongs to the generations of historians who endeavour “from generation to generation”<sup>233</sup> seeking to come “as

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>231</sup> Steven M. Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 69.

<sup>232</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 574.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 575

close to certainty as possible.”<sup>234</sup> But, as we have stated, the events of Christianity can be elucidated only up to a certain point. Its truths evade such historical methods because no such methods could ever relate the happenings of those events which transcend their use.

Rationally, Christ is a contradiction. And thus, no amount of historical evidence can lessen the tension that, in Christ, God is both hidden and revealed. Therefore, for Kierkegaard, Christianity demands that humanity relate to that which, although historical, by our reasoning cannot become historical.<sup>235</sup> It is to forget that Kierkegaard’s concern with “what it means to be a Christian” was one to which he already presupposed a definition, namely, to believe with the passion of the infinite. In order to offer “true Christianity” Kierkegaard first had to address the use of historicism and speculative philosophy which threatened to transform how one is to appropriate the Christian message. Thus, his efforts sought to indicate that what Christianity demands is the utmost subjective passion of the individual, namely faith.

In light of Kierkegaard’s efforts to re-establish how one approaches Christ, it appears that his portrayal of Christ as the absolute paradox was appropriate. With the Incarnation “the understanding must come to a standstill”,<sup>236</sup> Kierkegaard thought that all human efforts, whether by historical investigation or speculation, must be reconsidered in light of this “standstill”. Therefore, for Kierkegaard, faith is the only response to the paradoxes of the Christian faith and to, specifically, Christ himself.

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 385.

<sup>236</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*. 82.

## Faith or Offence

In *Practice in Christianity* Kierkegaard takes up the issue of the relationship between faith and offence.<sup>237</sup> It is here that Kierkegaard seeks to articulate the notion that if the Incarnation poses a barrier unable to be breached by human enquiry, be it speculation or historical investigation, the individual's relation to the God-man must reside in another mode of access. In imposing a barrier to human reason by means of the paradox of revelation, for Kierkegaard, the possibility of offence, "is the guardian or defensive weapon of faith...in such a way that all human understanding must come to a halt in one way or another, must take umbrage—in order then either to be offended or to believe."<sup>238</sup>

Therefore, only faith, whereby the individual enters into the God-relation, is able to come terms with the hidden God in Christ. As Kierkegaard states, "He [Christ] is the paradox, the object of faith, exists only for faith."<sup>239</sup>

Without it, one can only be offended at Christ's claim to be God. As Kierkegaard states, "Essentially offence is related to the composite of God and man, or to the God-man."<sup>240</sup> More importantly, for Kierkegaard, offence to the God-man is not something to be bypassed. Rather, offence precludes faith insofar as one must first be confronted with the offence in order to then obtain faith. On this Kierkegaard writes, "From the possibility of offence, one turns either to offence or to faith, but one never comes to faith except from the possibility of offence."<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> In Kirmmse's *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), he notes that publication of *PC*, "marks the beginning of a relentless and single-minded campaign against 'Christendom'."

<sup>238</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 105.

<sup>239</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Volume 2, 25.

<sup>240</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 81.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 81. Kierkegaard further states on page 105, "The possibility of offence, which is the guardian or defensive weapon of faith, is ambiguous in such a way that all human understanding must come to a halt in one way or another, must take umbrage—in order then either to be offended or to



In other words, offence brings the individual either to remain offended or to take up the offence in the utmost passion of existence which is what it means to have faith. Therefore, “the possibility of offence is not to be avoided.”<sup>242</sup> This is why, for Kierkegaard, faith is subjectivity in its highest form.

Human reason must first be offended, must first be left to despair its own inability in order that faith becomes the only means in overcoming the paradox. Kierkegaard thus considers despair “as the negative sign of faith.”<sup>243</sup> But in light of the distinction between God and humanity, the believer, by virtue of faith, “is nevertheless not offended – he expresses just the opposite of offence”<sup>244</sup> – namely belief. Kierkegaard sums up the relation between faith in the absurd from offence due to the absurd stating:

The absurd is a category, the negative criterion, of the divine or of the relationship to the divine. When the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd – faith transforms it, but in every weak moment it is again more or less absurd to him. The passion of faith is the only thing which masters the absurd – if not, then faith is not faith in the strictest sense, but a kind of knowledge...The absurd and faith are inseparables, which is necessary if there is to be friendship and if this friendship is to be maintained between two qualities so unlike as God and man.”<sup>245</sup>

Kierkegaard’s statement here is of extreme importance in making sense of the different ways in which he uses the terms “absurd” and “paradox” throughout his writings. Indeed, sometimes, such terms appear synonymous, conflated when used in relation to the categories of faith and offence. However, Kierkegaard does, himself, offer us what differences in connotation might exist at times when using such terms. For example, he states: “That there is a difference between the absurd in Fear and

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believe.” Furthermore, Kierkegaard states on page 143, “So inseparable is the possibility of offence from faith that if the God-man were not the possibility of offence he could not be the object of faith, either. Thus the possibility of offence is taken up into faith, is the negative mark of the God-man. For if there were no possibility of offence, there would be direct recognizability, and then the *God-man would be an idol; then direct recognizability is paganism.*” See *Barth Romans II*, 38.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>243</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 1, 6.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Trembling and the paradox in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is quite correct. The first is the purely personal definition of existential faith – the other is faith in relation to a doctrine...Finally, it is one thing to believe by virtue of the absurd (the formula only of the passion of faith) and to believe the absurd. The first expression is used by Johannes de Silentio and the second by Johannes Climacus.”<sup>246</sup>

Here, Kierkegaard explains his use of Paradox in *CUP* by contrasting it to *Fear and Trembling*. The argument Kierkegaard seeks to make in *CUP* is that reason, by way of speculative philosophy, seeks to make sense of what is beyond sense, is absurd. Therefore, the only way in which to believe the absurd is only by virtue of it which is to have faith. In faith, then, the absurd is not absurd. However, divorced from faith, human reason can and should only conclude, from a rational, speculative vantage point, that the doctrines of Christianity are prima facia, absurd, beyond the boundaries of human comprehension, a “riddle” as Kierkegaard himself states. But, when the absurd is taken up in faith, by the absurd, then there is no longer a tension like that of human reason in relation to the absurd.

All in all, the self cannot evade the absurd. It either, “conceitedly” concludes “the paradox is nonsense” and rests thus offended, or else, in faith, it overcomes the absurdity in such a way that there exists a certain rational relation to the self. All such categories are for Kierkegaard necessary descriptions of human reason in relation to the divine. Without faith, reason evades the paradox by concluding that it is nonsense, that it is absurd. This is a form of despair since the self continues without knowledge of its own situation as distinct from God. In fact, herein lays Kierkegaard’s critique of the audacity of speculative philosophical attempts in

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 8.

apprehending and making sense of what is out of bounds, namely, God. However, in light of the knowledge from God that there exists an infinite abyss separating God and humanity, the self is also in despair in that it is aware of its powerlessness in overcoming the abyss. From here one can either stand offended or in faith believe that the absolute paradox, Christ himself, had overcome the distance separating God and humanity.

And herein, with faith as the only means of coming to terms with the absolute paradox, is the significance of Kierkegaard's critique of rational theology. Kierkegaard notes,

For if what is commonly called faith-believing that there is a God, a providence, etc. (which is nothing other than knowing, or a spontaneity which can indeed be clarified by thought but is not tested by spiritual trials, does not anguish to the point of the absurd)—if this is what it is to believe, then Christ's words become an anticlimax and Christ comes to say the opposite.<sup>247</sup>

Rational theology appeared to want to make sense of the Incarnation by means of both Hegelian mediation and/or historicism. But for Kierkegaard, these approaches, as examined, sought to assimilate intellectually that which can only be subjectively appropriated. As Kierkegaard states,

In Christ God volunteered his willingness to become involved with the human race. But what has the human race done? Instead of becoming involved with God, it has changed this into history about: how God in Christ has involved himself with the apostles, or history about how God in Christ has involved himself with man. In short, instead of becoming involved with God, they have made this into something historical which they repeat in progressively diluted form from generation to generation.<sup>248</sup>

Intellectual assimilation of Christ can only result in either a mere objective adherence or the translating of Christ in terms of the ideal moral archetype. Either approach betrays the fact that the category of offence had not arisen, for offence would not have allowed for either approach to arise. Offence indicates that the individual has

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<sup>247</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 2, 12.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

understood that which cannot be understood, i.e. that God had appeared in human flesh. But faith, for Kierkegaard, allows for the “triumphant breakthrough” whereby the offence is overcome.<sup>249</sup> “Without faith one remains in the offence.”<sup>250</sup>

It is necessary to note an important qualification with regard to that which appears as Kierkegaard’s impenetrable barrier between God and the individual. Kierkegaard’s portrayal of the individual’s relation to the Incarnation, and hence to God, is presented by Kierkegaard in the most negative of terms. However, keeping in mind the context of his day, Kierkegaard believed the times demanded the need to first hear the “no” to their abuses in order, subsequently, to hear the “yes” of grace. Kierkegaard states as much:

But if the essentially Christian is something so terrifying and appalling, how in the world can anyone think of accepting Christianity? Very simply and, if you wish that also, very Lutheranly: only the consciousness of sin can force one, if I dare to put it that way (from the other side grace is the force), into this horror. And that at the very same moment the essentially Christian transforms itself into and is sheer leniency, grace, love, mercy.<sup>251</sup>

Kierkegaard believed that in a time when Christianity was presented in terms of its *accessibility*, Christianity needed once again to be as it is expressed in the older theology, as *difficult* for human understanding to comprehend. Aiming his criticisms at Lutheran Denmark, his mentioning of Lutheranism can only be understood as the call for a return to Luther himself. The false assumption that Kierkegaard lacked a concept of grace derives from an inability to understand his objective within the context of his time.

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<sup>249</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 120.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

## Conclusion

The issue facing Kierkegaard regarded what means human reason has at its disposal in knowing God. But even more the issue, for Kierkegaard, was the sublation, the eradication of the distance between God and humanity. Kierkegaard's task in emphasizing this distance was to demonstrate that human reason is, in and of itself, absent of grace. Thus, what Kierkegaard considered the epitome of the error of the times was the notion of subjectivity, namely that the human being is the sole criterion for its own existence coupled with reason being a power which encompasses all reality, even God. Kierkegaard writes, "It is absolutely true, isolated subjectivity as the age understands it is evil, but restoration to health by means of 'objectivity' is not a hair better."<sup>252</sup> In fact, Kierkegaard believes that an individualistic conception of the human is one that represents "subjectivity in its untruth" and as such must be passed "all the way through 'to the single individual'—face to face with God."<sup>253</sup>

Therefore, against the placement of reason at the pinnacle of human existence, for Kierkegaard, faith is that pinnacle in relation to knowing God in Christ. Faith is the means by which one halts on the deluded path of the powers of human reason in relation to God. Faith is God's chosen mode of access for humanity from which they relate to him; it is the creation of a new epistemology. Kierkegaard writes:

In the presentation of supernaturalism there is a difficulty, for what Kant has pointed out is probably true, that if there is no theoretical knowledge, then this obviously means that the entire sphere of the *an sich* is excluded from human consciousness and therefore never comes to man through consciousness either, and I therefore readily concede to Goschel that nonknowledge consistently ends in nonfaith – but therefore the supernaturalist maintains also that there must be a complete change in consciousness, that a development must begin from the very beginning and [be] just as eternal in idea as the

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<sup>252</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 4, 355.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

first. It is therefore probably a mistake for the supernaturalist to link his faith to the nonknowledge of Kant, because as stated, from nonknowledge of Kant must come nonfaith, and the supernaturalist's faith is precisely a new consciousness.<sup>254</sup>

For Kierkegaard, faith is the only way from which the indirect communication of God in Christ is made known. Revelation is thus dialectical insofar as it is indirect to the ordinary mode of human knowledge but direct to faith. Furthermore, revelation is for Kierkegaard centred in the historical person of Jesus Christ whereby God became an object for human knowing. Kierkegaard states,

One can discern that faith is a more concrete qualification than immediacy, because from a purely human point of view the secret of all knowledge is to concentrate upon what is given in immediacy; in faith we assume something which is not given and can never be deduced from the preceding consciousness – that is, the consciousness of sin and the assurance of the forgiveness of sins....The consciousness of the forgiveness of sins is linked to an external event, the appearance of Christ in his fullness, which is, indeed, not external in the sense of being foreign to us, of no concern to us, but external as being historical.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 2, 523.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

CHAPTER TWO  
KIERKEGAARD AND *DER RÖMERBRIEF*: INFINITE  
QUALITATIVE DISTINCTION

**Introduction: Procedure**

The aim of this Chapter is to explore Barth's use of the *IQD*, History, Paradox, and Faith in relation to revelation as found in *Romans II*, in order to discern to what extent Barth parallels Kierkegaard's own use of these concepts. This investigation shall proceed in three steps. First, beyond the generalities of the problematic Kierkegaard/Barth relationship outlined in the Introduction, attention will be given specifically to the question of Kierkegaard's presence in *Romans II*. Second, the similarities of the theological/historical backdrop between Kierkegaard's day and Barth's shall be discussed in that providing the context wherein these concepts appear will aid in explicating how they are used. Third, I will briefly discuss what works of Kierkegaard's were available at the time of Barth's re-writing of the *Epistle to the Romans* in order to offer the possibility that Barth was more familiar with Kierkegaard's work than what is usually allowed.<sup>256</sup>

Finally, by means of examining Barth's own use of the conceptual material listed above, it will be demonstrated that a strong affinity exists between these two thinkers. The outcome will be to establish that this affinity exists not only in their

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<sup>256</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 235-6.

employment and conception of a negative dialectic of diastasis between God and humanity, but also in the positive overcoming of this diastasis by revelation.<sup>257</sup>

### **Kierkegaard in *Romans II*: Problems**

Barth's relation to Kierkegaard within *Romans II* is interesting and yet perplexing for several reasons. First, as is well known, Barth affirms that the method of *Romans II* can be "limited to a recognition" of the Kierkegaardian concept of the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity.<sup>258</sup> Yet, aside from this affirmation, Barth's method develops in "recognition" of many other influences.<sup>259</sup> Given the breadth of influence on Barth at the time of the shift from *Romans I* to *II* the Kierkegaardian presence within *Romans II* is both clear and obscure; clear due to Barth's own admission of Kierkegaard's presence, coupled with the presence of Kierkegaardian concepts, obscure, as to whether or not Barth's use of these concepts stay faithful to Kierkegaard. Second, this relation admits further obscurity if McCormack is right when he identifies that "the order in which Barth presented these influences was not accidental; the ordering was intended to attribute a priority of importance..."<sup>260</sup> If this is indeed the case then the influence of others such as Plato,

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<sup>257</sup> It has been noted that Podmore's work contributes to a reading of Kierkegaard's dialectic of the IQD as being both positive and negative in function, the negative serving in necessitating the positive overcoming of God's grace. Peter S. Oh, also maintains this exact reading of Kierkegaard's dialectic. He states, "Both Kierkegaard and Barth use the diastasis between God and man not as the ultimate stage of their thought but rather as a negative condition en route to substantiating and enlightening the forthcoming positive and qualitatively different elements." (35) See, Peter S. Oh, *Karl Barth's Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Karl Barth's Analogical use of the Trinitarian Relation* (T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>258</sup> Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 10.

<sup>259</sup> For a list of these other influences see the *Romans II*, 3-4.

<sup>260</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 217. For example, it is the opinion of some scholars that Franz Overbeck's attack upon Christendom was central to Barth's own critique. However others, especially T. F. Torrance, believe that Barth's attack was not due to the influence of Overbeck alone, but Kierkegaard as well. In view of Barth's familiarity with Kierkegaard's writings – specifically *Practice in*



Kant and Overbeck retain primacy over that of Kierkegaard. For example, in his *Barth and Dostoevsky: A Study of the Influences of the Russian Writer Fyoder Mikhailovich Dostoevsky on the Development of the Swiss Theologian Karl Barth, 1915-1922*, P.H. Brazier argues for Dostoevsky's role in *Romans II* in a way which seeks to marginalize Kierkegaard's role.<sup>261</sup>

Although this work must be credited for its efforts in extracting the influence Dostoevsky had on *Romans II*, its minimization of Kierkegaard's presence is unwarranted in that it reflects no knowledge of Kierkegaard. Furthermore, Brazier seeks to credit Dostoevsky for those traces of the *IQD* in Barth's thought as early as 1915 before his encounter with Kierkegaard. Arguing for Dostoevsky as the force behind Barth's development of this concept Brazier's posits, "But when Barth discovers Kierkegaard (in 1919) he finds a Christian philosopher who expresses succinctly and with brevity in only three words, infinite qualitative distinction, what Dostoevsky does using over one million words in his novels."<sup>262</sup> Brazier omits the point that Kierkegaard's writings articulate the distinction between God and humanity in more words than Dostoevsky. What is more, it is Kierkegaard, not Dostoevsky, who Barth credits as having provided him with this concept. Brazier also neglects to mention that the most probable source for Barth's use of this concept

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*Christianity and Attack upon Christendom* – and given his self-avowed debt to Kierkegaard, it would be naïve to credit Overbeck with sole responsibility for Barth's critique of the state of Protestant Christianity in his day. For more information, see T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1031* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962).

<sup>261</sup> For other examples of Kierkegaard's role in Barth's *Romans II* see: Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)216-17; Bruce McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth's Theology, 1921-31* (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I., 1989); Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists: The Young Karl Barth's Critique of Pietism and its Response*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 125; Michael Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der dialektischen Theologie Karl Barths* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1987).

<sup>262</sup> P.H. Brazier, *Barth and Dostoevsky: A Study of the Influences of the Russian Writer Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky on the Development of the Swiss Theologian Karl Barth, 1915-1922* (Paternoster, 2007), 163.

prior to 1915 may well have been the Lutheran influence he received in Wilhelm Herrmann rather than Dostoevsky.

Continuing, Brazier seeks to establish his case by appealing to other sources which actually work against his thesis rather than for it. For example, consider his use of Karl Adams. Quoting Adams, he states:

In the close connection with Kierkegaard, that of dialectics corroding, probing the endless qualitative difference between God and humanity, creator and cosmos, eternity and time is always newly striking out at rudiments but does not lay bare...there were touches also, of the hunger for eternity of Dostoevsky.<sup>263</sup>

Adams' statement affirms an awareness of the thoroughness of Kierkegaard's development of this concept inasmuch as he describes it as "that of dialectics corroding, probing the endless qualitative difference between God and humanity."<sup>264</sup> By contrast Adams states that there were only "touches" of Dostoevsky's influence in a notion of a hunger for eternity. It appears, then, that Adams supports, rather than undermines Kierkegaard's role in Barth's use of the *IQD*.

Brazier exhibits a deficiency in his understanding of Kierkegaard's development of this concept in relation to Dostoevsky's lack thereof. Had Brazier been aware of Kierkegaard's own use of this concept, he would have steered clear of his repeated generalizations, which he hoped would warrant his position — generalizations such as "The influence/effect of Kierkegaard is well researched by Barthian scholars."<sup>265</sup> In short, Barth himself points to the help Dostoevsky's "characters" provided him in *Romans II*, but that is all.<sup>266</sup>

Advancing the obscurity which envelops Barth's relation to Kierkegaard is McCormack's work. Although it is generally accepted that Barth had employed the

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>266</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 67.

Kierkegaardian concept of the *IQD* in order “to attack all speculation which wiped out the infinite qualitative difference between God and man,” this employment becomes suspect inasmuch as McCormack argues that Barth already had a form of dialectic long before his encounter with Kierkegaard.<sup>267</sup> Referencing the work of Michael Beintker, McCormack concludes “that most of the conceptual building blocks needed to produce the characteristic shape of dialectic in *Romans II* were already in place before the encounter with Kierkegaard through Barth’s reception of his brother Heinrich’s *Ursprungsphilosophie*.”<sup>268</sup> However, as we shall see, there is more to be said about the “characteristic shape” of dialectic in *Romans II* in relation to Kierkegaard, than about Heinrich’s *Ursprungsphilosophie*, which calls into question the accuracy of McCormack’s, via Beintker’s, analysis.

In conclusion, in light of what has been stated above, it appears that Barth’s relation to Kierkegaard in *Romans II* is both highly enigmatic, as well as deemed (possibly as a result of the elusiveness of Kierkegaard in Barth’s works) generally insignificant by Barth scholarship.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 237. For further reading on Barth’s use of the *IQD*, see, Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 116. For Barth’s acclaimed use of the *IQD* see T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962); Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Jerome Hamer, O.P., *Karl Barth*, (The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland, 1962); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Robert E. Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth* (Leiden E.J. Brill, 1971); G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the theology of Karl Barth* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1956); Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>268</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 237. For Beintker’s discussion of Barth’s early dialectical development see, Michael Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barths* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1987).

<sup>269</sup> See, footnote 1.

## The Infinite Qualitative Distinction and Dialectical Theology

### *The Historical Context of the significance of the IQD*

In a time not very different from Kierkegaard's own, wherein the subversion of central Christian tenets at the hands of speculative idealism ran rampant/unbridled, the era in which *Romans II* was produced was one in which "Christianity became, as a result of the humanistic and rationalistic presuppositions ... representative of nineteenth-century thought, 'spiritualistic anthropomorphism'."<sup>270</sup> Thus, the medium for human knowing of God resided in feeling (*Gefühl*) and/or ethics grounded in the historical person of Christ.<sup>271</sup> The presumptuous use of historical-critical methodology in Kierkegaard's day reached its apex in the era preceding WWI in the historical theology of figures such as Ritschl, Harnack, and Troeltsch. Barth, therefore, had faced the ultimate evaporation of the "older dogmatics" in a way that even went beyond Kierkegaard's context. Nevertheless, there is no subtraction from the common bond they shared in addressing a problem inherited from the Enlightenment –namely, the turn to the subject where everything had been placed at the altar of rationalism.

Contending that Kant had foreclosed the possibility of knowing God by the faculty of pure reason,<sup>272</sup> Barth's earliest theology shows its debt to theologians such as Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack, Troeltsch, and Herrmann, for whom historical criticism or human experience enabled theology to find its way forward. However, as

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<sup>270</sup> Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931*, 61.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. For lengthy and thorough discussions of the historical context of Barth's earlier development leading up to the publication of the *Romans* commentary as well as the transition from the *Romans I* to *II*, see Bruce McCormack's, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth's Theology, 1921-31* (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I, 1989), and his *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>272</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1789, trans, Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan and Co. LTD, 1961) and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Chicago: William Benton, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, 1952).

Barth later became aware, avenues such as these would fare no better than the eighteenth-century in that both ended with the same starting point and end – namely, the primacy of the subject. Against this backdrop, Barth’s later theology of 1919, and more importantly 1921, reflects an aversion to his earlier development whereby the application of historical-critical methodology to Christianity betrays its allegiance to a rational theology.

For Barth, the culmination of a theological agenda, which had placed the human subject at the heart of theological inquiry, manifested itself in the reduction of Christian dogmatics and ethics to rationalism and war ideology; the irresistible result of which was the widespread theological support of Kaiser Wilhelm’s declaration of war.<sup>273</sup> For Barth, the use of theology to support WWI expressed the evident disintegration of the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity insofar as theology had been translated into purely moralistic terms with its ultimate goal being that of ushering in the “Kingdom of God.” Although, historically, the primacy of the subject had manifested itself somewhat differently in their respective times, both Kierkegaard and Barth are equally suspicious of an ungrounded optimism regarding humanity’s own moral existence. For both thinkers, whenever the Church shares this optimism, Christianity has assumed “an ineffective peace-pact or compromise,”<sup>274</sup> negatively defined as “Christendom.”

In sum, Barth’s diagnosis of the Christianity of his day as a false Christianity, inasmuch as it has assumed a theological position contrary to that of the Gospel,

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<sup>273</sup> In August 1914, ninety-three German intellectuals, among them many of Barth’s former teachers, gave their support to the war effort on the grounds that it would advance the kingdom of God on earth. This day is recorded by Barth as “a black day” on which he witnessed the abuse of theology to support a human agenda. See, Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 81.

<sup>274</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 36.

follows Kierkegaard's own assessment of Christianity in his time. In light of this affinity, it is not coincidental that Barth found Kierkegaard's negative assessment of Christendom useful, for, as he states, "We have heard what Kierkegaard said about it all, and we agree with him."<sup>275</sup>

*Barth's possible familiarity with Kierkegaard's thought: The Kierkegaard Renaissance*

During those months when Barth began his revisions of *Romans I*, later to become *Romans II*, much of Kierkegaard's work had already been translated and was therefore at his disposal.<sup>276</sup> Hans Peter Barfod's earliest edition of Kierkegaard's journals, commissioned by Kierkegaard's eldest brother, Bishop Peter Christian Kierkegaard, in 1865, was published in several instalments. The first came in 1869, entitled *Af Søren Kierkegaards efterladte papirer, 1833-43* [From Søren Kierkegaard's Posthumous Papers, 1833-43].<sup>277</sup> Volume two (comprising the years 1844-46) appeared in 1872, volume three (1847) in 1877, volumes four (1848), five (1849), and six (1850) in 1880, and the last two volumes – seven (1851-53) and eight (1854-55) – appeared in 1881.<sup>278</sup> Even before Kierkegaard's journals appeared in Danish, however, his published works were being translated into German.

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>276</sup> For an in depth look at the Kierkegaard Renaissance in late nineteenth and earlier twentieth century Germany see Habib C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Heiko Schulz, "Germany and Austria: A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard" in *Kierkegaard's International Reception Tome I: Northern and Western Europe*, edited by Jon Stewart (Eldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 307-387; and Rune Alf Engebretsen in *Kierkegaard and Poet-Existence with Special Reference to Germany and Rilke* (Stanford University: University Microfilms International, 1980).

<sup>277</sup> Habib C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 216.

<sup>278</sup> Jens Himmelstrup, *Søren Kierkegaard. International Bibliografi* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, Arnold Busck, 1962), 15.

The earliest, full-length translation appeared in 1861, titled “A Work.” It consisted of the first nine *Øjeblikket* articles.<sup>279</sup> A second edition appeared in 1864, unchanged except for the title: *Christentum und Kirche. “Die Gegenwart”. Ein ernst Wort an unsere Zeit, insbesondere an die evangelische Geistlichkeit* [Christianity and Church. “The Present” An Earnest Word to Our Time, Especially to the Evangelical Clergy].<sup>280</sup> At about the same time, in 1862, Christian Hansen published a translation of Kierkegaard’s *For Self Examination. Recommended to the Present Age* under the German title, *Zur Selbstprüfung, der Gegenwart empfohlen*. These earliest translations were eagerly received by the Tübingen theologian and professor, Johann Tobias Beck (1804-1878). It is this same Beck whom Barth mentions in a letter to Thurneysen on July 27, 1916, when he wrote, “Discovery of a goldmine: J. T. Beck!! ... I came on the track of him through my work on Romans and will make use of him there.”<sup>281</sup> And make use of him he did. “More than I myself realized, it was strongly influenced by the ideals of Bengel, Otinger, Beck, and (by way of Kutter) Schelling,”<sup>282</sup> Barth says. Of course the date 1916 reveals that Barth is discussing the first edition of Romans, published in 1919.

Beck’s presence in *Romans II* is formidable in that Barth commends his desire to execute a “genuine understanding and interpretation” of Paul’s Epistle, aligning him with the likes of Luther and Calvin.<sup>283</sup> More importantly, Beck’s theology was so influenced by Kierkegaard that he employed Kierkegaard’s attack

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<sup>279</sup> The *Øjeblikket* articles, The *Instant (Moment) articles*, consisted of Kierkegaard’s 1855 writings whereby he attacked the established Church. Today, this writings are published in English under *The Moment and Late Writings*, translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>281</sup> *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth—Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), 38.

<sup>282</sup> *Karl Barth/Rudolph Bultmann: Letters 1922-1966*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 155.

<sup>283</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 7.

upon Christendom in his own confrontation with various church officials of his time.<sup>284</sup> Frederick C. Petersen, a professor of theology at the University of Christiania, once spoke of Beck as the only theologian of his time “who wishes to adhere to the faith as Kierkegaard knows it.”<sup>285</sup> More importantly, Beck’s love for Kierkegaard was so contagious that it led to the translation and publication of selections from *Practice in Christianity* by one of his students, Albert Barthold in 1872.<sup>286</sup>

The previously mentioned works of Kierkegaard that were first translated into German were only the beginning. Thereafter a flood of works came to press. *The Point of View* and *An Open Letter* both appeared in 1873, followed by selections from *Fear and Trembling* (1874), *Judge For Yourself* (1876), some of the *Discourses* (1876), all of *Practice in Christianity* (1878), *The Sickness Unto Death* (1881), a full translation of *Fear and Trembling* (1882), both volumes of *Either/Or* (1885), *The Lilies of the Field* (also 1885), and *Stages on Life’s Way* (1886). All were translated and published by Albert Barthold. In 1890 yet another student of Beck’s, Christoph Schrempf (1860-1944), provided his first translation of the *Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments*, together titled *Zur Psychologie der Sunde, der Bekehrung und des Glaubens* [*On the Psychology of Sin, Conversion, and Faith*].<sup>287</sup> *Works of Love*, translated by Albert Dorner, appeared that same year. In 1896 he and Schrempf collaborated on *Søren Kierkegaards agitatorische Schriften und Aufsätze. 1851-1855*, also published under the title, *Søren Kierkegaards Angriff an die*

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<sup>284</sup> Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought*, 220.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.* 261.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.* 220.

<sup>287</sup> Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought*, 313.



These early efforts led to the first critical edition of the collected works, the Jena edition, edited by Schrempf and Hermann Gottschied (also a student of Beck), which appeared between 1909 and 1922. Furthermore, that Barth's era was one highly occupied with the Dane's writings is evident in at least two of his contemporaries specifically. Karl Holl (1866-1926), a student of Harnack and inaugurator of the twentieth-century Luther renaissance, expressly avowed his debt to Kierkegaard. And his student, Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972) – an exact contemporary of Barth's – became one of the leading Kierkegaard scholars of the twentieth-century.

Despite the wealth of Kierkegaard's works available long before Barth's *Romans II*,<sup>289</sup> McCormack nevertheless states:

What can be known with certainty is that he [Barth] read an abridged edition of Kierkegaard's Journals, Training in Christianity, and the Moment...Beyond that, the concepts and phrases he derived from Kierkegaard can all be accounted for on the basis of the books which can be confirmed. There is no good reason to think he read the Philosophical Fragments or Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments.<sup>290</sup>

However, it seems unquestionable that Barth had also read Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* by the time he had written *Romans II*. Although Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* is scattered throughout the sections, *the presupposition*, *Positive Possibilities*, and *Love* in *Romans II*, the clearest evidence is found on page 442, where Barth quotes

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<sup>288</sup> Jens Himmelstrup, *Søren Kierkegaard. International Bibliografi*, 27.

<sup>289</sup> Barth admits that Kierkegaard only entered his thinking more seriously with his revision of the first edition to what later became the more famous, second edition. See, Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 252.

<sup>290</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 235, 236. However, MacDonald alludes to the possibility that Barth had read Kierkegaard's PF and CUP wherein Kierkegaard use the word "system" in signifying his own reaction to the use of the Hegelian system. For further discussion of MacDonald's argument here see Neil B. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment* (Paternoster Press, 2000), pp. 21-60.

Kierkegaard writing, “But the neighbor is—‘every man. A man is not thy neighbor because he differs from others, or because in his difference he in some way resembles thee. A neighbor is that man who is like unto thee before God. And this likeness belongs to all men unconditionally’.”<sup>291</sup>

In addition, as will be demonstrated in our examination of Barth’s conception of faith, his notion of faith, as the *Moment*, strongly suggests that he had read Kierkegaard’s *PF* as well. Barth scholarship recognises that his use of the *moment* is Kierkegaardian. In light of this term, the assumption, it seems, is that he had taken this concept from Kierkegaard’s work, *The Moment*. But this is not the case. Barth tells us that the first of Kierkegaard’s works he had purchased was *The Moment* in 1909. He writes, “The first book by this man which I bought—it was in 1909—was the Moment...But it cannot have made a very profound impression on me.”<sup>292</sup>

However, Kierkegaard’s use of the *moment* in *The Moment* is not the *moment* of faith whereby the eternal becomes known to the individual in time. Rather, in that this work exists as part of his attack on Christendom, Kierkegaard uses the *moment* in reference to significance of time for such an attack. He writes, “The moment is when the man is there, the right man, the man of the moment.”<sup>293</sup> Faith is yet related to Kierkegaard’s understanding here but only in the sense that it serves in relating “itself as possibility to the moment.”<sup>294</sup> In other words, faith gives the moment the possibility to become significant when the individual acts in faith to do what seems impossible, i.e. attack Christendom. On the other hand, in *PF*, Kierkegaard writes,

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<sup>291</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 442. This quote is from Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*, 60.

<sup>292</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from letters and Autobiographical texts*, 252.

<sup>293</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 339.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

“In the moment, he [the individual] becomes aware of the rebirth, for his previous state was indeed one of ‘not to be’.”<sup>295</sup>

McCormack’s assertion becomes even more questionable given that the numerous concepts in *Romans II*, which bear a Kierkegaardian hallmark, indicate that Barth had knowledge of more than *PC* and *PF*. According to T. F. Torrance, Barth’s conception of sin, as developed in chapters five and eight of *Romans II*, is so evidently reflective of Kierkegaard that he is convinced that Barth had read *The Sickness unto Death*, *The Concept of Dread*, and *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>296</sup> Even though Torrance does not fully substantiate his inclination, Heiko Schulz claims that Barth had “read Kierkegaard’s journals (Gottsched’s selected edition from 1905) plus the *Fragments...*”<sup>297</sup> Whether or not there is enough evidence to substantiate Barth’s acquaintance with Kierkegaard’s work beyond *PC* is of minor importance. What is important is that Barth was familiar with the dawning of the Kierkegaard renaissance and that he had considered himself a participant in it.<sup>298</sup>

Given Barth’s frustration with the nature of theology, by 1916 he and others sought “to introduce, with hesitating steps, a better theology than that of the nineteenth century and of the turn of the century.”<sup>299</sup> With the pinnacle of the Kierkegaard renaissance ready to be realized, Barth found in Kierkegaard the means by which to introduce a “better” theology.

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<sup>295</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 21.

<sup>296</sup> Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931*, 63.

<sup>297</sup> Heiko Schulz, “Germany and Austria: A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard” in *Kierkegaard’s International Reception Tome I: Northern and Western Europe*, edited by Jon Stewart (Ashgate, 2009), 336.

<sup>298</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>299</sup> Barth, “Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille’ in *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11:1, 1965, 4-5.

### *The Function of the IQD in Romans II*

In order to evoke an awareness of the danger inherent in a theological discourse, which persisted in its affirmation of the uninhibited unity between God and humanity, Barth employed a theological methodology of diastasis which sought to enunciate God's "Wholly otherness" from humanity. More specifically, its purpose was to draw a sharp demarcation between God's thoughts and man's thoughts, between genuine Christianity and cultural Christianity. Barth states, "The Gospel proclaims a God utterly distinct from men. Salvation comes to them from Him, because they are, as men, incapable of knowing Him, and because they have no right to claim anything from Him."<sup>300</sup> In enunciating this diastasis, Barth's *Romans II* upholds an *IQD* between God and humanity which ensures a dialectical relation between time and eternity – a dialectic which seeks to remind humanity that "the line which separates here from there cannot be crossed."<sup>301</sup>

Therefore, in the hands of Barth, the *IQD* expresses a highly negative function inasmuch as eternity stands in infinite contrast to time and thus is beyond human apprehension and comprehension. The negativity of this distinction is in its dissolution of all and every religious experience and endeavour. While the barrier from here to there is, for Barth, unable to be breached there is yet a relationship between time and eternity. For, although eternity cannot become time, it can "break into time."<sup>302</sup>

However, the relationship between time and eternity is not only one of infinite repulsion, but also of an infinite negation of that repulsion – namely,

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>301</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 111.

<sup>302</sup> Bruce McCormack's, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth's Theology, 1921-31*(Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I, 1989), 146.

interrelation. Thus there exist two worlds: the “world of the Father, of Primal Creation” and the world of man.<sup>303</sup> In Christ, as with no one else or with nothing else, do these “two worlds meet and go apart, two planes intersect, the one known and the other unknown.”<sup>304</sup> In that the “distance between time and eternity, which is safeguarded by the time-eternity dialectic, is not spatially conceived, in the revelation event, eternity becomes “present” not intuitably but “between the times.”<sup>305</sup> It is the dialectical notion of the interaction between time and eternity which Kierkegaard and Barth call the “Moment”.

Unlike the Hegelian dialectic, whereby the tension given in two opposing members allow for the positing of another category by means of some sort of necessity or synthesis, the time and eternity dialectic of *Romans II* is said to express a complementary dialectic “in which two members stand over against one another in a relation of contradiction or antithesis.”<sup>306</sup> “The dialectic does not provide a synthesis...it cannot be involved in a Hegelian synthesis, which overcomes the tension.”<sup>307</sup>

If human reason is, in-and-of-itself, limited by means of its own categories, and if sin is a factor which intensifies this limitation, then human experience and endeavour must also be rendered futile in knowing God. And yet, in light of the *IQD*, Barth perceived that the theological discourse of his day rendered the *IQD* as inconsequential. Barth succinctly describes the error in humanity’s advancement when he writes, “We allow ourselves an ordinary communication with Him [God],

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<sup>303</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 29.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>305</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth’s Theology*, 147.

<sup>306</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 237.

<sup>307</sup> Terry Cross, *Dialectic in Karl Barth’s Doctrine of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 86-87.

we permit ourselves to reckon with Him as though this were not extraordinary behaviour on our part. We dare to deck ourselves out as His companions, patrons, advisers, and commissioners. *We confound time with eternity.*<sup>308</sup>

In light of this confusion, then, as McCormack argues, the central problem which *Romans II* addresses is that of “the knowledge of God.”<sup>309</sup> In order to avoid the “subjectivism” of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Barth’s *Romans II* sought to provide the means whereby it can be said that knowledge of God “occurs within the realm of theoretical knowing.”<sup>310</sup> Long before he had considered the nature of this knowing, Barth had first advanced a barrier between God and humanity unseen even in Kant. Unlike Kant, Barth’s use of the *IQD* is one which would not only bar theoretical knowledge of God, but also any form of human capacity in and of itself which claimed access to God.<sup>311</sup> In making even more problematic the problem Kant left theology, Barth employed a system of infinite human inadequacy inhibiting even Kant’s use of practical reason to supplement the restrictions of theoretical reason.

Faced with the reality of the *IQD* whereby God is wholly unknowable in his ultimate transcendence, humanity is made aware that their ethical and religious endeavours are but an illusion. Aware of the futility of their endeavours, humanity

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<sup>308</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 44.

<sup>309</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2008), 23,

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>311</sup> It should be clear that Barth’s endeavour here took direct aim at the theologies of those like Schleiermacher and Herrmann whose own approaches, although varying slightly, in Barth’s opinion, relegated knowledge of God attainable by means of religious experience. McCormack, in his *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the theology of Karl Barth* and his earlier work, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, offers an acute discussion of the various approaches to the question of “knowledge of God” after Kant as seen in Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack, and Herrmann as well as Barth’s own consideration of these approaches in both their contributions and deficiencies.

exists in a state of *krisis*.<sup>312</sup> For Barth, *krisis* is telling of humanity's coming to terms with the chasm between themselves and God. Moreover, *krisis* also betrays that our relation to God is one of unrighteousness.<sup>313</sup>

Barth's condemnation of human effort, especially religion, was intended to awaken his contemporaries to the political and theological crisis of his time. Just as Kierkegaard had stated, "In order that the 'No,' which in a way wants to grapple with God, can be heard, a person must get as far away from God as possible",<sup>314</sup> Barth employed the concept of the *IQD* in order that humanity first hear the "no" of God to their endeavours wherefrom they could perceive their efforts as under divine judgement. Such is the situation of humanity; such was the situation of German theology.

Barth's description of our relation to God as one of *krisis* undoubtedly emanates negativity with regard to the human predicament. Therefore, many have concluded that the central theme of *Romans II* is that of *krisis*. For Barth, the *IQD* serves in announcing the "no" of God in order that his "yes" may be then heard.<sup>315</sup> The *IQD*, then, first seeks to place all that is human under judgement so that grace may come to the forefront. But due to the theological climate of the day, Barth thought it necessary that humanity acknowledge its relation to God as one of opposition.

In sum, the *IQD*, expressed in the time/eternity dialectic, is one which is "used by Barth to hold apart two things which ought never to be confused, God and

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>314</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 114.

<sup>315</sup> McCormack rightly notes that an understanding of *Romans II* as a theology of crisis "rests upon a superficial reading of the book." See, McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 210.

humanity. It is intended to prevent any illegitimate synthesis from the side of humankind. Here is a dialectic of the strictly to-be-maintained opposition, a static dialectic.”<sup>316</sup>

Thus far, both the historical basis as to why Kierkegaard and Barth thought it necessary to employ a system of diastasis given in the *IQD*, as well as the function of this concept, specifically, within *Romans II*, has been stated. What has not been addressed, however, is in what sense Barth’s use of this concept is justified. In other words, wherein lies this limitation in regard to humanity? Is it merely an epistemological limitation as found in Kant’s theoretical critique? Or is there a more plausible explanation that has yet to be articulated for understanding Barth’s conception of this limitation given his preoccupation with certain theologians when rewriting the Romans commentary?

#### *The Grounding of the IQD*

As demonstrated in Chapter One’s discussion of Kierkegaard, God is unknowable by virtue of reason alone; with this Barth agrees. In his attempt to make knowledge of God knowable (intuitable) in a way unlike his predecessors, Barth understood that such an attempt must yet maintain the ultimate unknowability of God—namely that God must become an object for knowledge in a way unlike other objects given to theoretical reason. As McCormack notes, what Barth wanted to put forth was a “‘special’ kind of knowing (distinguished from all other acts of theoretical knowing) ... because it has its source in an act of God by means of which the human knowing apparatus described by Kant is ‘commandeered’ (laid hold of,

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<sup>316</sup> McCormack’s, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth’s Theology, 1921-31*, 171.



grasped) by God from without and made to conform to God as its object.”<sup>317</sup>

McCormack’s allusion to Kant with regard to Barth’s epistemology is not fortuitous.

It has been argued by McCormack that Barth’s “theological epistemology in *Romans II* stands everywhere in the long shadow cast by Immanuel Kant.”<sup>318</sup> This observation seems irrefutable in that already in 1908, having only begun his university education in 1904, Barth states he had read Kant, “almost with a toothcomb.”<sup>319</sup> Kant’s theoretical system demanded that all that is knowable for theoretical reason is that which is intuitable, i.e. empirical or an object of intuition. Like Kant, Barth’s epistemology in *Romans II* evinces that “human knowing is the consequence of the synthesizing activities of the mind (the combination of intuited sense data with the categories of the understanding).”<sup>320</sup> For example, in *Romans II* he states, “There is no object apart from our thinking of it.”<sup>321</sup>

And yet to read Barth’s epistemology as being solely Kantian suggests an extreme devaluing of the role that revelation serves in *Romans II* in overcoming those epistemological strictures Kant himself had placed in knowing God. Without doubt, Barth agrees with Kant in rejecting a specific way of knowing—the extrapolating from observed phenomena the existence of a first cause or a First Principle, i.e. God. Barth evidences his agreement with Kant on this point, stating, “In speaking of God, human logic characteristically ignores both His nature and the fact that, when the reference is to Him, *the argument from operation to cause is*

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<sup>317</sup> McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the theology of Karl Barth*, 28.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 245. For further discussions on Barth’s relationship to Kant see; Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists: The Young Karl Barth’s Critique of Pietism and its Response*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Neil B. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment* (Paternoster Press, 2000).

<sup>319</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 45.

<sup>320</sup> McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the theology of Karl Barth*, 12.

<sup>321</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 82.

*inapplicable*, since He is not a known thing in a series of things...”<sup>322</sup> In fact, it is this rejection whereby Barth’s epistemology has been deemed “anti-metaphysical.”<sup>323</sup>

All things considered, the crux of the matter is that reading Barth’s epistemological limitations as being solely Kantian neglects Barth’s account of our limitations in knowing God as one grounded in sin, something Kant would never admit, at least not in strict theological terms.<sup>324</sup>

For Barth, the cause of humanity’s inability to know God is not, at root, an epistemological issue but rather it is a relational issue rooted in the human disposition toward God being one of defiance, i.e. human sinfulness. And although Barth does not provide a clear conception of sin in *Romans II*, yet, in the absence of a well defined hamartiology, several points can be made about Barth’s understanding of sin in *Romans II*. First, we are all sinners and as such stand before the judgment of God. Barth states, “Sin is that by which man as we know him is defined, for we know nothing of sinless men...”<sup>325</sup> Second, in light of the chasm between us and God, sustained by sin, *Romans II* posits God as one “who is distinguished qualitatively from men and from everything human, and must never be identified with anything which we name, or experience, or conceive, or worship, as God; God, who confronts

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>323</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 245. It must be noted that the context of this reference offered by McCormack concerns only Barth. Also, it must be noted, as McCormack points out, to call Barth “anti-metaphysical” is not to imply that, even though he does reflect a Kantian epistemology which disallows metaphysical knowledge- a priori, such knowledge cannot be provided elsewhere such as in the Incarnation, see 246.

<sup>324</sup> Although Kant affirms that man has a “propensity” towards evil, this evil does not reside within his reason or even in his natural inclinations. Instead, evil is manifested in the will’s ability either to choose or reject the law. For more on Kant’s account of evil in relation to knowledge of God, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Chicago: William Benton, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, 1952), 344.

<sup>325</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 167.

all human disturbance with an unconditional command, ‘halt.’”<sup>326</sup> Due to sin, Barth upholds an infinite barrier between God and humanity which humanity is utterly unable to penetrate. Thirdly, sin is described in terms of human arrogance or pride.<sup>327</sup> And finally, sin serves Barth in explicating our situation as one in need of grace.<sup>328</sup>

For Barth, the solution to the problem of the *IQD* between God and humanity is one dependent on our understanding of this problem. Given the pervasiveness of the time and eternity dialectic in *Romans II*, which places an infinite barrier between us and God, Barth believes our relation to God is one which exhibits an unwarranted blurring of this distinction. Humanity demonstrates this in its numerous endeavors to relegate God to human ways of thinking, historicism, ethics etc. Such endeavors appear to ignore the reason why they exist in the first place, namely, knowledge of God is beyond theoretical reason. In seeking to circumvent our theoretical limitations by pragmatic or practical means, Barth thinks two things manifest. First, if knowledge is truly theoretical, then humanity reveals its ignorance in seeking to obtain and thereby claim knowledge of God to which they have no access. Barth states, “We know that God is He whom we do not know, and that our ignorance is precisely the problem and the source of our knowledge.”<sup>329</sup> If this is the case, that humanity knows that its endeavors or claims in knowing God speak to its awareness that it is destitute of this knowledge, then why yet do such endeavors persist?

Second, therefore, and in light of this ignorance Barth thinks something else becomes manifest, namely, that humanity persists in their ignorance due to their arrogance. He writes, “Our arrogance demands that, in addition to everything else,

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 44-8.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 45.

some super-world should also be known and accessible to us.”<sup>330</sup> In claiming an unbridled access to God in their numerous undertakings, humanity reveals that the distance which separates them from God is not due to the limits of human categories but rather, as Barth states, “To a fundamentally wrong attitude to life.”<sup>331</sup> What is fundamentally wrong is “the vanity and utter questionableness of all that is and of what we are.”<sup>332</sup> Barth thinks that our unrighteousness evidences our failure to acknowledge God as wholly other and that as men we have no claim to him. It is the unrighteousness of arrogance from which, as Barth states:

We press ourselves into proximity with Him: and so, all unthinking, we make Him nigh unto ourselves. We allow ourselves an ordinary communication with Him, we permit ourselves to reckon with Him as though this were not extraordinary behavior on our part...This is the ungodliness of our relation to God. And our relation to God is unrighteous...We are not concerned with God, but with our own requirements, to which God must adjust Himself.<sup>333</sup>

In failing to acknowledge our distance from God, we perpetuate the misrelation between us and Him which inevitably results in idolatry, the setting of ourselves “upon the throne of the world.”<sup>334</sup> Therefore, God is not understood as one infinitely distinct from us. Rather, as Barth writes, “We make of the eternal and ultimate presupposition of the Creator a ‘thing in itself’ above and in the midst of other things...an endlessly uncertain object of our experiences.”<sup>335</sup> He adds, “Whenever the qualitative distinction between men and the final Omega is overlooked or misunderstood, that fetishism is bound to appear in which God is experienced in birds and four footed things, and finally, or primarily, in the likeness of corruptible man.”<sup>336</sup> In short, there is a forgetting of the abyss which separates us

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 50.

from God. Barth states, “The more the individual “marches along his road secure of himself”<sup>337</sup> it becomes evident that there is “a forgetting of the abyss.”<sup>338</sup> By virtue of humanity’s neglecting of the *IQD*, God’s judgment against our arrogance and ignorance maintains what we are unwilling to accept. Barth states, “He [God] acknowledges Himself to be our God by *creating* and *maintaining* the distance by which we are separated from Him.”<sup>339</sup> In sum, from what is detectable in *Romans II*, Barth affirms that the *IQD* between us and God exists due to the arrogance of human thought and endeavor through which, in betraying our consistent defiance of the *IQD*, we “confound time with eternity. That is our unrighteousness.”<sup>340</sup> But distance between God and humanity is not the last word of *Romans II*.

Earlier, it was mentioned that Barth employed the concept of *krisis* in order to express human existence apart from God. But this expression is merely a preliminary foundation in order to make room for grace. In other words, what Barth advances in his use of the *IQD* is, in fact, the dialectic of judgment and grace wherein one must first acknowledge the innate distance between us and God and only then recognize their reconciliation despite the difference.

In affirming the *IQD* between us and God, we affirm the “no” of God against us. Barth writes, “The wrath of God is the judgment under which we stand in so far as we do not love the judge; it is the ‘No’ which meets us when we do not affirm it.”<sup>341</sup> Yet, in affirming the *IQD* between us and God it becomes apparent that such

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 44. Walter Lowrie posits that Barth’s use of sin in relation to the *IQD* is one not only conditioned by the distance between creature and Creator, qualitatively, but also one resulting from the failure of the creature to respect this difference. “It consists rather in the fact that he ignores this distance with the guilty ambition to be like God.” For more on this see, Walter Lowrie, *Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1932), 187.

<sup>341</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 42.

an affirmation is necessary in order to receive the grace of God. Barth describes human awareness of this positive dimension within the concept of *krisis* as a “wholesome crisis.” Of the necessity of our affirming of the *IQD* for reconciliation, Barth writes,

If mankind be itself God, the appearance of the idol is then inevitable. And whenever the idol is honored, it is inevitable that men, feeling themselves to be the true God, should also feel that they have themselves fashioned the idol. This is the rebellion which makes it impossible for us to see the new dimensional plane which is the boundary of our world and the meaning of our salvation.<sup>342</sup>

In sum, acknowledging the *krisis* of our existence admits “the boundary which bars us in.”<sup>343</sup> And yet, seen in light of the dialectic of grace and judgment, this boundary “nevertheless points beyond itself.”<sup>344</sup> Barth affirms that even in the midst of human crisis, “the speech of God [is] heard out of the whirlwind.”<sup>345</sup> In affirming the boundary between time and eternity, humanity perceives God not only as the one who maintains our limitation but also as the one who becomes “the dissolution of our limitation.”<sup>346</sup> However, unless we affirm our difference from God, whereby we acknowledge that only he is righteous, then the barrier remains but a barrier, a negation, an abyss.<sup>347</sup> It is the reality of our equating or reckoning ourselves with God about which Barth writes, “Men fall a prey first to themselves and then to the ‘No-God’. First is heard the promise – ye shall be as God!—and then men lose the sense for eternity. First mankind is exalted, and then men obscure the distance between God and man.”<sup>348</sup> In sum, the *IQD* is grounded in our failure to

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 44.

affirm it whereby we perpetuate the distance between God and ourselves in our exalting of ourselves rather than God.

In light of our present discussion, it is worth returning, for a moment, to our discussion of Barth's epistemology in relation to Kant. In contrast to Kant's adherence to noetic limitations in knowing God, it has been shown how Barth's account of human limitation first exhibits the knowledge of God presupposed by humanity who then fails to acknowledge what is known, i.e., that God is infinitely different. However, for Kant, what theoretical reason could not accomplish, practical reason could. By its means the "knowledge" of God (his existence and moral nature) was vouchsafed.<sup>349</sup> Therefore, what Barth maintains as crucial for knowledge of God (acknowledging first the *IQD* and then the impossibility of overcoming it), namely, human limitation, Kant overcomes by means of equating our moral capacity with the divine command and thus postulating the necessity of the divine Being.<sup>350</sup> Barth reveals his indebtedness to a Kantian epistemology but only insofar as the limits of reason relate to the world of the empirical and not to the ground of this limit.<sup>351</sup>

Thus far, a few parallels are detectable between Kierkegaard and Barth with regard to the *IQD*. First, both thinkers maintain that God is infinitely qualitatively

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<sup>349</sup> According to Kant, practical reason postulates God's existence as necessary if man is to attain to his *telos*, that moral perfection which makes him worthy of the *summum bonum*, or supreme good. Furthermore, since man is finite, and the task of achieving moral perfection is an arduous endeavor owing to his natural inclination for evil, a further postulate is laid down by practical reason: the immortality of the soul. In all, practical reason necessitates three realities that proved elusive to theoretical reason: freedom, immortality, and God. These three postulates, which arise naturally from reason in its practical use, are absolutely requisite if morality is to be sustained as a possible endeavor. See, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated and edited by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>350</sup> See footnote 31 of this manuscript.

<sup>351</sup> In Chapter One, we noted that Kierkegaard's conception of sin was one which sought to place the sinner before God by whom a true sense of selfhood is given—the self before God. T. F. Torrance notes, concerning Barth's understanding of sin, "Barth's questioning of them [Kant and Schleiermacher] took him down to the bed-rock and in that he was aided on his part by Kierkegaard's insistence that these questions [of human relation to God] must be examined *sub specie aeterni*, or, to use Luther's terminology, *Coram Deo*." See, T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 62.

distinct from humanity, both ontologically as well as relationally, given the effects of sin. Second, in light of the various means of knowing God representative among rational theology since Kant, both Kierkegaard and Barth concerned themselves with the rearticulation of the *IQD*. This concern was one which ultimately sought to reorient theological discussion to a reconsideration of the significance of faith. Barth himself attests to this concern, stating: “The judgment under which we stand is a fact, quite apart from our attitude to it. Indeed, it is the fact most characteristic of our life. Whether it enters within the light of salvation and of the coming world depends upon the answer we give to *the problem of faith*.”<sup>352</sup> Third, bearing in mind our examination of Kierkegaard in Chapter One, both thinkers affirm a dialectic of judgment and grace given in the *IQD*. This means that although both thinkers emphasize the concept of diastasis, the emphasis is necessary in order to open the way for grace. Furthermore, it is this two dimensional notion of the dialectic of judgment and grace from which Kierkegaard is said to differ from Barth.<sup>353</sup>

Usually, it is maintained that Barth’s dialectic of sin and grace, especially with regard to his dialectic of Adam and Christ within *Romans II*, reflects something of a Hegelian dialectic whereby the tension between thesis and antithesis is overcome in a synthesis.<sup>354</sup> In this light, it is maintained, Barth’s dialectic of judgment and grace stands in stark contrast to Kierkegaard’s one-sided dialectic of sheer negativity.<sup>355</sup> Although performing, initially a negative function, Barth’s static

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>353</sup> See footnote 354 and 355 below.

<sup>354</sup> See, McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 268.

<sup>355</sup> Due to the static nature of Kierkegaard’s complementary dialectic as seen in the dialectic of time and eternity as well as the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, a few prominent Barth scholars maintain that Barth’s dialectic of Adam and Christ (judgment and Grace) therefore tends to reflect that of a Hegelian dialectic insofar as Barth does argue for a real overcoming of the tension between the old and new man, whereby the new man is a reality here in time, see McCormack, *Barth’s Critically*



dialectic of time and eternity is overshadowed by the overwhelming reality of God's breaking into time, of the reality of grace realized in the new man. The two classes wherein Barth's four types of dialectic (Adam and Christ dialectic; time and eternity dialectic; dialectic of life; and the dialectic of veiling and unveiling) are classified are that of either a supplementary dialectic or a complementary dialectic. The former can be understood where "one member of a pair predominates in value and potency over

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*Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 268. But, although the supplementary function is clearly visible here in Barth's discussion of the old and new man, this overcoming of the tension does not pertain to the dialectic of Adam and Christ alone. In fact, what McCormack seeks to elucidate relates to a misreading of Barth's intention in *Romans II* as one who maintains merely a static notion of dialectic, i.e. a Kierkegaardian notion. In short, McCormack argues that the overcoming of the tension in Barth's dialectics expresses that Barth's theology in *Romans II* is not one of *Krisis* but of grace. It is here that McCormack gains notoriety in arguing against this misreading of *Romans II*. However, the notion of *Krisis*, resulting from the static dialectic of time and eternity, is functional in *Romans II* but only insofar as it is understood from humanity's perspective and not God's. Only when we consider the dialectic of Adam and Christ in relation to time, does, as McCormack argues, "a new dialectic surface—a dialectic of the Kierkegaardian type". 269. Yet, McCormack's placing Barth's dialectic against Kierkegaard's fails to acknowledge a point of parallel between Barth and Kierkegaard, namely, that the overcoming of the tension is merely one which is understood by faith on this side of eternity. Therefore, both Barth and Kierkegaard give nothing to human ability in being able to perceive the existence of the new man in place of the old. In short, what humanity sees as impossible and as a barrier between them and God, God sees the possible and overcomes the barrier in grace. As Terry Cross points out, it is God who performs "the synthesis within the realm of eternity." (92) Even Eberhard Busch, in his *Barth and the Pietists*, makes this distinction wherein he states: "Indeed, there is an 'identity between him and me,' a paradoxical yet unified identity which is the person 'who I am' encounters at his end." (125) And yet, Busch agrees with McCormack in stating that "This is an identity whose paradoxical nature seems to be more like Hegel's, in which two contradictory members are joined together into one identity and whose paradoxical nature seems to be less than the paradox Kierkegaard affirms, for whom this paradox takes the place of the synthesis." (125) In short, the problem facing us is one which is tied to a view that due to Kierkegaard's desire to emphasize the infinite barrier between time and eternity he was then left to ponder mainly on the side of the subject the inevitable results of this distinction. Therefore, as McCormack states concerning Kierkegaard's theological motif, "Kierkegaard's central aim was to safeguard the reality of the thinking individual human being who exists in time against the absorption into the Hegelian Absolute." (237) Furthermore, McCormack argues that Barth's separation from the other dialecticians of his day, specifically Bultmann, was due to a controversy over Kierkegaardian methodology. Quoting Jungel, McCormack states, "It is Kierkegaard's Existenzdialektik which provided a kind of inheritance in the face of which all the dialectical theologians had to take a position. Does one interpret the divine-human relation from the side of humanity and therefore, with Kierkegaard, on the basis of the dialectic of finite and infinite which Kierkegaard saw as constituting the structure of human existence? (See, Bruce McCormack's, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth's Theology*, 1921-31 (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I, 1989), 125. It was to this question that Barth had thus moved away from Kierkegaard's overly anthropomorphic starting point to the divine-human problem. However, as we have seen in our discussion of Kierkegaard, an interpretation of Kierkegaard that sees him working in categories of the human divorced from the divine is one which is wholly without ground. Kierkegaard was not interested in the absorption of the human subject in the Hegelian absolute in and of itself. Rather, it was the absorption of all that is central to Christianity into the Hegelian absolute which was Kierkegaard's concern. To this problem, Kierkegaard addressed, in affinity to Barth, the problem of knowledge of God etc.

the other. As a consequence of this ‘imbalance’ the predominate member takes up the weaker into itself with the result that the weaker member is either cancelled out altogether or is perhaps taken up into the other in a higher synthesis.”<sup>356</sup> The latter expresses a static dialectic wherein the two members stand in opposition without hope of reconciliation.

It is well known, especially due to McCormack’s work, that the role of grace in Barth’s *Romans II* is indeed an active component. For Barth, grace overcomes the abyss separating God and humanity. As demonstrated in his dialectic of the old and new man, Barth held that Adam as the “old man,” the “old subject,” represents the sinful state of humanity. As such, humanity is under the wrath and judgment of God.

Barth writes:

This then is our past – Adam and all of us, Adam in his relationship to us, we in our relationship to Adam. This is the history of man and of humanity outside Christ: the sin and death of a single man, of Adam, the man who in his own person is and represents the whole of humanity, the man in whose decision and destiny the decisions and destinies, the sins and the death of all the other men who come after him, are anticipated.<sup>357</sup>

Cut off from God’s world, the old man is under the *krisis* of God. As fallen, his efforts are useless. Thus he is left to himself without any means whereby he may know God or gain His favour. However, in the “God-given occurrence” of faith, humanity becomes aware that they stand under judgement, that their existence is one of *krisis*. But *krisis* is not the last word concerning our existence.

Over against the old man stands the new man, represented by Christ, “the ‘new’ subject, the Ego of the coming world.”<sup>358</sup> *Krisis* invites the possibility of God’s grace by which our existence as the old man is “dissolved in order that they

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<sup>356</sup> McCormack’s, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth’s Theology, 1921-31*, 163.

<sup>357</sup> Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam*, 29.

<sup>358</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 181.

may be established” as the new man.<sup>359</sup> Barth writes, “Those who take upon them the divine ‘No’ shall themselves be borne by the greater divine ‘Yes’.”<sup>360</sup> Acknowledging our inability to procure God’s favour reveals that grace “pertains to the will of God, and His will alone.”<sup>361</sup> Grace is God’s “divine prerogative” which affirms humanity’s inability to procure it.<sup>362</sup> The presentation of grace has nothing to do with humanity and everything to do with God. It is “the promise of the new man, of a new nature.”<sup>363</sup> This new nature, of course, is for Barth something “unobservable to human perception and thus is in this world negative, invisible, and hidden.”<sup>364</sup> Only in faith is the distinction between the old and new man “immediately dissolved in the oneness of the new man.”<sup>365</sup>

Barth’s affirmation of the new man, in light of the dissolution of the old, is thus representative of the supplementary dialectic insofar as it is an eschatological reality maintained by faith and not insofar as it is one open to human observation. However, returning to the claim that Barth’s dialectic is more representative of Hegel than Kierkegaard’s, the question is, in what sense this might be the case. Stated differently, if, for Barth, the overcoming of the tension is procured by grace, in what

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 41. To better clarify the role of grace in relation to the overcoming of the chasm indicated by the *IQD*, Barth offers Abraham as an example of one who came to terms with the situation of humanity as one of *krisis*, standing under judgment. That Abraham “awoke to his position and was aware of the KRISIS” reveals at the same time the exit out of *krisis*. If one is not aware that they are sick then they have no inkling that they are in need of a remedy. Only when one is made aware of their sickness, of their crisis, do they see the need for help. Thus, in the “No” of God there exists also his “Yes”; “In His ‘No’ God utters His ‘Yes’.” Abraham had perceived that all human endeavor stands under the judgment of God. In perceiving the “No” of God, his eyes were open to the “Yes” of God. Thus for Barth, Abraham serves as a reminder to humanity that in order to receive the grace of God, his “Yes” to human existence, one must first recognize “the inexorable ‘No’ that is set against all human righteousness and the judgment to which the whole illusion of religion is subjected.” See, 125.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 220.

sense is this dialectic representative of a Hegelian dialectic? Perhaps Barth's dialectic of the old and new man bears some resemblance to Hegel's dialectical movement of thesis, antithesis and synthesis insofar as something of a synthesis is perceivable. But a reading of Barth's dialectic as Hegelian is nevertheless an oversimplification of Hegel's meaning in that there is no evidence Barth had read Hegel at the time of his writing *Romans II* nor is his synthesis truly Hegelian.<sup>366</sup>

Moreover, while Barth's view that the overcoming of the tension owes itself to God, Hegel's logical movement of concepts in overcoming the tension owes itself to reason within the context of historical processes. Regardless of the parallels between Barth's dialectic and Hegel's, all such parallels are relativized, not only in respect of the means whereby the tension is overcome but also with regard to the locus of the tension itself. Hegel's dialectic is a logical/conceptual movement. By contrast, Barth's is existential.

Additionally, Hegel's dialectic opens up to a new knowledge within the phenomenal world, while Barth's offers a new knowledge of which transcends the phenomenal, i.e., the new man. Therefore, the end result of Hegel's notion of synthesis is inapplicable to Barth's conception of the old and new man, as, for Barth, there is not an obvious overcoming of the former by the latter, at least not one

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<sup>366</sup> See footnote 355 of this manuscript. Against the common conception that Barth's dialectic of the old and new man reflects Hegel's dialectic of synthesis, i.e. an overcoming of the negative, Lowrie states, "Barth does not go on...to the synthesis. He learned his dialectical method, not from Hegel, but from Kierkegaard – who believed in his turn that he had learned it from Socrates." Lowrie continues, "Many people are not capable of believing that the paradox is all he ventures to offer them, that instead of going on triumphantly to resolve by a synthesis the paradoxical thesis and antithesis." For further discussion see Walter Lowrie, *Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1932), 44. Torrance also agrees that Barth's dialectic is closer to Kierkegaard's rather than Hegel's dialectic which "is rather the masterful stroke of the reason whereby it seeks to overcome the antitheses which confront it by transcending them in a higher synthesis, thus insinuating itself, as it were, into God's own self-consciousness or arrogating to itself God's own point of view." See, T.F. Torrance *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 83. For those who hold to the common conception see footnote, 331.

evident to reason or logic. Barth states, “Sin is that by which man as we know him is defined, for we know nothing of sinless men.”<sup>367</sup> He adds, “As the old man, he is what he ‘is’, the man ‘we’ know, who is under the wrath of God: as the new man, he is what he is not, the man ‘we’ do not know, who is righteous before God.”<sup>368</sup>

Thus, whilst Barth’s statement offers the appearance of some sort of synthesis a tension is yet present. For Barth, our existence, as the new man, must not “be confounded with those eschatological illusions in which the union of ‘here’ and ‘there’ is anticipated in our imagination.”<sup>369</sup> Rather our new existence in Christ is one which exists at present. The paradoxical essence of Barth’s dialectic allows the tension between the old and new man to be overcome in the “moment” of faith while upholding the tension in order to keep the overcoming evident only to faith and not to reason. And to this point he adds:

But only in the light of the critical ‘Moment’, when mankind and its world are passing as one whole, from the old to the new, from ‘here’ to ‘there’, from the present to the coming age, does the distinction between the two become apparent. The distinction exists therefore only when this world is dissolved by the dissolution whereby it is established.<sup>370</sup>

Moving on to the other form of dialectic evident in *Romans II*, both the dialectic of time and eternity and that of veiling and unveiling are said to be complementary in that “two members stand over against one another in a relation of contradiction or antithesis. No reconciliation or synthesis between the two is admitted.”<sup>371</sup>

It is this form of dialectic which is said to be more Kierkegaardian. On the other hand, as noted by McCormack, this form is said to move beyond Kierkegaard with regard to Barth’s use of it, in that grace again overcomes the tension, as we shall

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 237

soon see with Barth. Furthermore, since grace is seen as overcoming all opposition from humanity's vantage point, Barth thus parallels Kierkegaard in maintaining a dialectic of overcoming and tension regarding time and eternity and thereby revelation. In other words, from our investigation in Chapter, Kierkegaard too actually reflects a supplementary action with regard to his dialectic, both thinkers agree in posing the impossibility of human knowledge of God only for humanity with regard to its capacity and endeavor outside of grace. The problem in seeing Kierkegaard's dialectic as static is therefore further evidence for Barth's overall misreading of him, as noted in the Introduction and throughout this thesis. As discussed in Chapter One, Kierkegaard's dialectic of time and eternity is not merely negative in function. And so Barth and Kierkegaard can be seen as possessing a shared affinity for the positive overcoming of the *IQD* through the grace of God's redemptive self-revelation. And yet, although Barth parallels Kierkegaard in this respect, a difference can be detected in that it can be said that Kierkegaard's limits are not as pervasive as Barth's.

For Kierkegaard, all human existence can be said to possess an awareness that God exists, in what he describes as a "human presupposition." He states, "Therefore there has never been a man who has not believed it [God's existence] but there certainly have been many who have been unwilling to let the truth conquer their souls."<sup>372</sup> Although *Romans II* might suggest a similar conclusion to that of Kierkegaard, in the end, such a conclusion would be highly premature.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 192.

<sup>373</sup> In his *Orthodox and Modern*, McCormack addresses the inadequacies of those readings of Barth which seek to allow more than Barth would himself—in this case, Walter Lowe's reading of Barth which argues for natural theology in *Romans II*. But as McCormack rightly notes such readings reflect a "lack of historical awareness." For more of McCormack's considerations see pp. 9-18 of this work.

In conclusion of our discussion of the ground of the *IQD*, the task has been to demonstrate that amidst the misunderstanding that Kierkegaard's use of the *IQD* operates with a one-sided negativity, Barth comes to believe that he has revised Kierkegaard's position in his understanding of the *IQD*. In the Introduction to this thesis it was posited that the problem with Barth's later assessment of Kierkegaard's thought related to the *IQD*. This problem is one which yet plagues Kierkegaard research and Barth research alike – namely, the idea that Kierkegaard's thought is, despite his best efforts, a form of theological anthropomorphism brought on by the abyss humanity encounters in the *IQD*.<sup>374</sup>

In seeking to place such an extreme barrier between God and humanity, it is held, then, that Kierkegaard's extreme preoccupation with the human subject was inevitable – a preoccupation which allows many Barth scholars to view Kierkegaard's dialectic as being not only static in nature but also as such leaving the human subject in despair. As was noted, this position is one which finds its basis in a specific misinterpretation of Kierkegaard's dialectic as being mainly negative in function. Podmore diagnoses the situation as follows: “This trajectory [the negative dimension of the *IQD* alone] would further corroborate the suspicion, shared by many philosophers and theologians, that Kierkegaard provides a detailed cartography of the abyss without showing any exit from the interior labyrinth of despair.”<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Against the position that Kierkegaard's work is a form of anthropomorphism, there are resources which place Kierkegaard's work within a historical and accurate theological context in an undisputed fashion whereby Barth's accusations of Kierkegaard stand corrected. See, Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard & the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011); Kristen K. Deede, “The Infinite Qualitative Difference: Sin, the Self, and Revelation in the thought of Soren Kierkegaard” in the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53:1 (February 2003), 25-48.

<sup>375</sup> Podmore, *Kierkegaard & the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*, 3.

Interestingly, it seems that Barth did not think, at the time of *Romans II*, that Kierkegaard was guilty of such a charge. At the meeting of the “Friends of the Christian World” in Elgersberg in October, 1922, Barth stated:

Those who accept the thought I have brought forward as germane to the essential facts thereby acknowledge themselves descendents of an ancestral line which runs back through Kierkegaard to Luther and Calvin, and so to Paul and Jeremiah...The very names Kierkegaard, Luther, Calvin, Paul and Jeremiah suggest what Schleiermacher never possessed, a clear and direct apprehension of the truth that man is made to serve God and not God to serve man.<sup>376</sup>

Here, Barth aligns Kierkegaard to those thinkers (in contrast to Schleiermacher) whose theology clearly expresses a preoccupation of the divine-human relationship from the side of the divine. In light of the statement above, Barth’s later apprehensiveness toward Kierkegaard seems to reflect a gradual transition away from Kierkegaard throughout his theological development. The question is why?

What I shall attempt to do next is to address the discrepancy between the early Barth and the later Barth in regard to his understanding of Kierkegaard’s *IQD*. Our objective is therefore to find out if, in fact, it is correct to understand Barth’s dialectics in *Romans II*, which clearly present the tension between time and eternity, and between sin and grace, as being overcome by grace, as being in contrast to Kierkegaard’s presumed highly negative function of the *IQD* in which revelation and grace are trampled underfoot by the ruination of sin and despair. In light of what we have seen of Barth’s use of the *IQD*, coupled with our investigation of Kierkegaard’s use of the *IQD* in Chapter One, I would like to draw these two studies together thus bringing this particular discussion to a close.

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<sup>376</sup> Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Translated by Douglas Horton (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1928), pp. 195-6.



*Barth's misapprehension of Kierkegaard's dialectic: Positive dimensions of the IQD*

Preceding our investigation into Barth's misreading of Kierkegaard, T.F. Torrance, in his *Karl Barth: an Introduction to his Early Theology 1910-1931*, states most curiously: "There is no doubt that Kierkegaard's break-through from ethics to grace, that is to forgiveness and Christianity, and his analysis of man's sin as the dead wound in his existence which he cannot heal, but which is both revealed and healed by grace, lies behind much of Barth's thinking."<sup>377</sup>

Torrance's declaration of Barth's indebtedness to Kierkegaard's "break-through from ethics to grace" may suggest that the Barth of *Romans II* did in fact understand Kierkegaard correctly even if he was later convinced that he had not. However, Barth later believed that his earlier use of Kierkegaard was naïve, if not premature. There are several factors which may have contributed to Barth's moving away from Kierkegaard. First, at the turn of the twentieth-century, and even up until Barth's rewriting of the *Romans commentary*, Kierkegaard's works, *PF* and *CUP*, had predominated in familiarity. Second, Barth had in his possession the translation of Kierkegaard's works offered by Christoph Schrempf and Gottsched.

As Heiko Schulz argues, Schrempf's "translations soon became the authority for many German scholars."<sup>378</sup> Therefore, the Kierkegaard received in the twentieth century was the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, the sceptic and critic of Christianity. From Climacus one would have received a harsh lesson into the problems facing Christianity as well as the critique of theological endeavour, especially in relation to

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<sup>377</sup> Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931*, 65.

<sup>378</sup> Schulz, "Germany and Austria: A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard" in *Kierkegaard's International Reception Tome I: Northern and Western Europe*, 307-387. See this essay for further insight to Kierkegaard's reception by German theologians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as well as Barth's relation to that reception.

verification of Christian truths by means of historical investigation and speculative idealism.

Third, as a result of Barth's interaction with thinkers such as Gogarten and Bultmann, he had come to think of Kierkegaard as one who was more concerned with existential motifs of individuality, subjectivity, and existence rather than the Kierkegaard of his early days who was a proponent of Luther's theology of the cross. During his stay at Göttingen, Barth began to question the Kierkegaard he had received from *Training in Christianity* in light of the Kierkegaard taken up by Bultmann, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre.<sup>379</sup> Fourthly, we might question the possible influence that Barth's beloved teacher Wilhelm Herrmann may have had on his understanding of Kierkegaard.

"Both Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Herrmann claim that it [Kierkegaard's work] is anthropology, more specifically, the believer's first-person perspective which functions as the sole ground, starting point and necessary condition of theology."<sup>380</sup> Amidst the speculation as to Barth's partial reading of Kierkegaard, of concern is whether or not Kierkegaard warrants Barth's criticism. Something worth considering is that perhaps a misreading of Kierkegaard's *IQD* as wholly negative resulted, and continues today, from an over emphasis on Barth's positive component within his methodology of diastasis in *Romans II*.

One must not be too hasty in emphasizing the aspect of grace whereby the predominating negative force of judgement in *Romans II* is compromised. This does

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<sup>379</sup> See Karl Barth, "Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille.' *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11:1, 1965, pp. 6.

<sup>380</sup> Schulz, "Germany and Austria: A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard" in *Kierkegaard's International Reception Tome I: Northern and Western Europe*, 320. Also, Schulz references Barthold's comments on both Ritschl and Herrmann in *Zur theologischen Bedeutung* pp. 21, 53, 56, 58-9, as well as Ruttenbeck's Kierkegaard pp. 278-81.

not, of course, allow for a minimization of the role of grace in *Romans II* either. Rather, the overwhelming negativity of the *IQD* should be seen as a necessary step in paving the road to a discussion of grace. As Torrance states concerning *Romans II*, “The emphasis was quite definitely upon what became known as diastasis, the distance, the separation, between God’s way and man’s ways, God’s thoughts and man’s thoughts, between Christianity and culture.”<sup>381</sup> Indeed, Torrance admits that “the great positive theme of the *Romans* is the saving grace and compassion of God.”<sup>382</sup> Still, although grace is present in *Romans II*, it should not be seen as overshadowing the overwhelming presence of diastasis which Barth thought necessary in order to clear the way for grace.

In recalling that there appears to be a neglect of grace in Kierkegaard’s *IQD*, what he seeks to establish is a genuine description of the human response, unaided by grace, to the grace of God, rather than eliminating grace altogether. In other words, like Barth, Kierkegaard sought to emphasize the effect of sin on our knowing God, in order to give God primacy in rectifying this deficiency. Kierkegaard writes, “Ultimately it is here the yawning chasm lies: Christianity stipulates the defectiveness of human cognition due to sin, which is then rectified in Christianity. The philosopher tries qua man to account for matters of God and the world.”<sup>383</sup> Therefore, Kierkegaard’s expression of the *IQD* is, as he states, “An expression of being extremely close to consummation, this feeling for the last time of the chasmic depth of separation between being man and being with God; therefore, it is the final

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<sup>381</sup> Torrance, Karl Barth: *An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 49.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>383</sup> Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Notebooks*, Volume 1, Journals AA-DD, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 26.

expression for what comes next – being blessedly with God.”<sup>384</sup> In the end, aided by Schrempf’s translations, the rise of the existential Kierkegaard, Barth, as least in 1963, thought Kierkegaard’s *IQD* in wholly negative terms. Barth writes, concerning Kierkegaard’s *IQD*, “I simply could not hold to the theoretical and practical diastasis between God and man on which I insisted at the time of Romans.”<sup>385</sup>

In conclusion, Kierkegaard’s development of a theology which both expresses and dissolves the *IQD* between God and humanity lays the foundation for Barth’s own theological direction in *Romans II*, even if Barth himself only discovered the negative dimension of Kierkegaard’s dialectic thereby missing the full dialectical force of Kierkegaard’s intention. At least, in the negative force of barring all human points of access to God, by means of maintaining the *IQD*, Barth believed he had remained faithful to Kierkegaard throughout his theological development.<sup>386</sup> Once Barth came upon the *IQD* he states “to go back to Hegel or even Bishop Mynster has been out of the question ever since.”<sup>387</sup> Though Barth thinks (at least by 1963) Kierkegaard lacks a theology of grace by which to resolve the *IQD*, we have seen that Kierkegaard’s upholding of the ‘no’ acts as a dialectical presupposition of the ‘yes’. Therein, Barth actually remains a far more faithful reader of Kierkegaard’s dialectics than even he realised.

Insofar as we have first discussed the powerless nature of human understanding in relation to knowing God outside of revelation, we are now able to advance our discussion of Barth’s relation to Kierkegaard concerning reason’s

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<sup>384</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Volume 1, 136,

<sup>385</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 173.

<sup>386</sup> Evidence of Barth continual adherence to an infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity can be seen in his “The Rationality of Discipleship”, in Karl Barth, *Fragments Grave and Gay*, ed. By Martin Rumscheidt, trans. By Eric Mosbacher (London: Collins, 1971), 43, which is a 1963 reply to Professor Max Bense’s article *Atheism, For and Against*.

<sup>387</sup> Barth, “Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille.’ *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11:1, 1965, 5.

relation to revelation, specifically as it is given in the Incarnation. Before proceeding to this comparison, we will first examine to what extent Barth's view of history's relation to Christian truths parallels Kierkegaard's. From this, we shall then address what knowledge of God is perceivable in the person of Christ which will bring us to a comparison of Barth's use of "Paradox" in relation to Kierkegaard's own use discussed in earlier.

### **History and Christian Truth**

The Barth of *Romans II* had often been charged with being "anti-historical" as a result of his highly dialectical notion of time and eternity. Barth, however, defended himself against this charge stating "nor am I a 'bitter enemy of historical criticism.'"<sup>388</sup> Rather, Barth believed the pursuits of historical criticism well justified and adds, "I have nothing whatever to say against historical criticism. I recognize it, and once more state quite definitely that it is both necessary and justified."<sup>389</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, Kierkegaard too is often seen as being "anti-historical" to such an extent that he is seen as the ideal proponent of the most extreme form of fideism which needs nothing of historical or objective grounds in being epistemologically justified. This accusation, hopefully, has been shown to be wholly unwarranted. The charge of "anti-historicism" levelled against both Kierkegaard and Barth is one which confuses their resistance to the all-encompassing validity of historical investigation of Christianity as espousing a non-historical Christianity.

What might appear as an over-exaggerated reaction to historicism was in fact

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<sup>388</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 9.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

the result of a problem that Kierkegaard and Barth both shared. This problem existed in “seeking to find a way to speak of revelation *in* history, but not *of* history.”<sup>390</sup> Both thinkers had witnessed, within their respective times, that the obsession with historicism and speculative thought had become so profound that, in an all encompassing swoop, the emergence of Christianity had been subsumed and addressed as another mere historical happening amongst others. Therefore, what is central for both thinkers is that the truths of Christianity be understood as historical but not in the normal sense of the word.

In Barth’s day, specifically, the abuses of historicism and psychologism, as seen in the proponents of Ritschlianism, compromised the true essence of Christianity.<sup>391</sup> Due to these abuses, it comes as no surprise that Barth relied upon Kierkegaard’s earlier attack on Christendom, not to mention the writings of Franz Overbeck,<sup>392</sup> in aiding his own attack.

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<sup>390</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 233. For further reading see this same work, 262-66.

<sup>391</sup> Interpreting Kant as an anti-metaphysical moralist, Ritschl took to task the presumptuous metaphysical claims of speculative rationalism. For him, morality needed no metaphysical foundation. Indeed, metaphysics was deemed an impossible endeavor because all putative knowledge claims must, in principle, be verified by historical/empirical investigation. Lacking such warrants, a retreat to metaphysical grounds must be considered superfluous and ethically useless. In sum, since knowledge can only be obtained empirically, the only basis for any knowledge of God and His will is to be found in the historical person of Jesus Christ, as one who fully represents God by exemplifying the ideal, ethical human being. Similarly, Ritschl rejects the subjectivism of Schleiermacher’s knowledge of God as residing in “God-consciousness.” Ritschl’s theology begins with the gospel as historically given in Jesus Christ. For more on the effects of theology after Kant, specifically with regard to Barth’s influences see Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Karl Barth, *Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl*, trans. Brian Cozens (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959); and Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936).

<sup>392</sup> The tension within scholarship concerning Barth’s use of Overbeck over that of Kierkegaard has not gone unnoticed. However, since the objective here is not to try and ascertain the primacy of influence on Barth’s conception of history, a few brief observations will suffice in regard to this debate. First, the evidence is overwhelming that Barth had indeed employed Overbeck’s concept of *Urgeschichte* used to signify the unobservable origins or conditions of external history thus representing “Primal History.” Furthermore, this is supported by Thurneysen who credits Overbeck in providing Barth with this concept which served as a central motif in the second edition, see (*Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth—Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, trans.

In issuing his warning to Christendom in chapter eleven of *Romans II*, Barth appeals directly to Kierkegaard when he states: “We have heard what Kierkegaard said about it all, and we agree with him.”<sup>393</sup> A page later he says, “When a Kierkegaard or a Kutter, measuring the Church by an absolute standard, proceeds to utter his complaint against it, we are bound to uphold his criticism, indeed we must underline it and endorse it.”<sup>394</sup> Given the aforementioned comments by Barth in his 1963 Sonning Prize address about Kierkegaard’s criticism of a “too pretentious and at the same time too cheap christianism and churchiness of prevalent theology”<sup>395</sup> it is clear that Kierkegaard’s thought on the relation of historical knowledge and Christianity had informed much of Barth’s own thoughts on the matter in regard to not only diagnosing the problem of this relation but in offering a solution as well. Both the diagnosis and the remedy are posed in the *IQD* whereby time and eternity relate one to another without being sublated.

Therefore the relation of the *IQD* in the time and eternity dialectic to Barth’s concept of history is an inseparable one. McCormack notes that for Barth “eternity

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James D. Smart (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), 21. However, in light of Barth’s own words in *Romans II*, which point to Kierkegaard’s harsh dialectic in separating time and eternity, coupled with Barth’s mentioning of Kierkegaard’s criticisms to cultural Christianity, to maintain a one-sided position which credits Overbeck with the distinction between history and sacred history, Christianity and Culture, is ambitious. Indeed, in arguing for the primacy of Overbeck over that of Kierkegaard with regard to influencing Barth’s *Romans II*, Busch argues that what Barth had discovered in Kierkegaard was reaffirmed in what he had already encountered in Overbeck, see Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists: The Young Karl Barth’s Critique of Pietism and Its Response*. Translated by Daniel W. Bloesch (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 73. However, if the argument is a matter of who Barth encountered first, Barth discovered Kierkegaard in 1909, long before his 1916 encounter with Overbeck. But the issue is what Barth himself evidences with regard to the distinction between Christianity and Culture, history and sacred history, and the evidence suggests that both Overbeck and Kierkegaard help Barth in this regard. For Barth’s use of Kierkegaard in this regard, see Barth, *Romans II*, 279 and 395.

<sup>393</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 392.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>395</sup> Barth, “Thank – You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille,” 1965, 5.

cannot become time without ceasing to be eternity.”<sup>396</sup> The difficulty that the time and eternity dialectic poses for our discussion of revelation and history exists in the apparent inability of revelation to be historical given the restrictions of the *IQD*, as McCormack points out.<sup>397</sup> Demanding attention now, is Barth’s position on the inability of eternity to become time which is reminiscent of the same problem that concerned Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard’s purpose in relating the extenuating problem of the elusive nature of the concept of “becoming” was to raise the barriers for historical investigation in seeking to make sense of revelation. Furthermore, their admonishment was to the contradiction ensuing when, given the restrictions of human knowledge, historical criticism laid claim to what was inaccessible, i.e., *sacred* history. Revelation is “historical”, but only faith can affirm it. Kierkegaard writes, “‘History,’ says faith, ‘has nothing at all to do with Jesus Christ; with regard to him we have only sacred history (which is qualitatively different from history in general).”<sup>398</sup> Yet, in that the concept of revelation denotes God’s entrance into human history, these events, it would seem, invite such investigation. But this is not case for either thinker.

Barth expresses the relation of time and eternity as consisting of two planes which are distinct one from another: one being the world of the Father which is unknown and the world of humanity which is known.<sup>399</sup> The crisis which this

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<sup>396</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 263. Even though eternity cannot become time without ceasing to exist as eternity, it can, as McCormack states, “encounter time.”

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>398</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 30.

<sup>399</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 30. In seeking to articulate the relation of eternity to time, or in this case, sacred history to history, Barth describes the relation as one wherein eternity touches the earth “as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it.” Interestingly, inasmuch as Kierkegaard’s understanding of the relation between time and eternity parallels Barth’s own



qualitative distinction causes for human history is one whereby it is cut off from the primal history of God. “History bears inevitable witness to its non-historical beginning and its non-historical end”<sup>400</sup> by means of its efforts to establish ethical society and in the existence of religion and religious institutions. The key for understanding Barth’s use of the “infinite qualitative distinction” rests in grasping the disjunction that the related “time/eternity dialectic” creates for our understanding of history-viz., that of secular history (*Geschichte*) vs. primal history (*Urgeschichte*). For Barth this understanding rests in our

Apprehension that the world and human history are moving in a secular and relative context, which is in itself ultimately meaningless; but it involves also the apprehension that they have meaning as a parable of a wholly other world; that they bear witness to a wholly other history; that they are reminiscent of a wholly other mankind; that they are, in fact, a parable, a witness, and a reminiscence, of God.<sup>401</sup>

Insofar as humanity seeks to grasp the divine in concrete manner, it betrays its dependence and acknowledgement of this unobservable, ahistorical unknown origin history of the world and humanity<sup>402</sup> which Barth terms *Urgeschichte*.

When one seeks to understand Christianity’s historicity divorced from its source (eternity), then it exists in stark contradiction to what it was originally meant to be. In that Christianity presents a history unlike ordinary history, its historical claims are untouchable by ordinary historical investigation. Barth writes, “No road to the eternal meaning of the created world has ever existed, save the road of negation.

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understanding, it would come of no surprise that the way in which they perceive this relation also parallels. Keeping in mind Barth’s words just mentioned, Kierkegaard, describing the relation between time and eternity by means of the Incarnation, states, “Christ veritably relates tangentially to the earth (the divine cannot relate in any other way): He had no place where he could lay his head. A tangent is a straight line which touches the circle at only one single point.” See Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, Vol. 1, A-E, 138, and Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 30.

<sup>400</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 147.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>402</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 230. For more on Barth’s separation between history and sacred history, see this work.

This is the lesson of *history*.”<sup>403</sup>

The existence of the *IQD* prohibits the equating of time and eternity wherefrom humanity lays hold of God thus reducing him to a creation of human thought, religious experience, or ethics. Barth writes:

If it were possible for a man to penetrate with his understanding the non-historical in which every great episode in history had its origin, he might, by raising himself beyond the sphere of history, attain to that knowledge which would absolve him from the necessity of taking serious account of the actual facts of history.<sup>404</sup>

Barth reflects Kierkegaard’s separation between human history and sacred history in order to safeguard the divine. Quoting Kierkegaard he states, “The moment I make of my words an existential thing – that is to say, when I make of Christianity a thing in this world - at that moment I explode existence and have perpetuated the scandal.”<sup>405</sup> However, Barth’s relation to Kierkegaard extends well beyond the implication of the *IQD* for the historicity of the Christian faith. With Kierkegaard, Barth maintains an epistemological reservation as to the surety and meaningfulness of historical knowledge, generally speaking, which suggests another similarity between them.

Reminiscent of Kierkegaard’s notion of historical knowledge as approximation, Barth maintains that although we can learn from the past, this knowledge is limited. In the relation between the past and the present, “time is at once dissolved and fulfilled.”<sup>406</sup>

For Barth, as well as Kierkegaard, exact historical certainty does not exist. If historical knowledge in general remains ultimately uncertain what can be known historically of those events which claim to have their cause in that which is

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<sup>403</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 87.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 438-39.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

unhistorical. In other words, if reason and its endeavours, i.e. historical criticism, are not granted certainty, what resources does humanity have at its disposal in perceiving the divine in history?

Barth offers that faith which, resting in “the non-historical, the invisible, and ... the incomprehensible”<sup>407</sup> permits our acceptance of the divine element within human history. Without the “non-historical” whereby “history reveals its importance,” the past can say nothing to us.<sup>408</sup> Addressing the significance and limitations of this dialogue, or “intercourse,” Barth reflects not only a Kierkegaardian scepticism towards historical knowledge but also the notion of Kierkegaard’s concept of contemporaneity whereby, in the act of faith, knowledge of the past becomes a real and meaningful reality for the present. He states: “However accessible the authorities and sources for the writing of history may be, the keenest historical acumen can discover nothing, if contemporary intercourse be not mingled with it.”<sup>409</sup>

The concept of contemporaneity is indeed important for both Kierkegaard and Barth for several reasons. First, without it, the person and work of Christ would exist isolated to its historical context with little or no relevance for the present. Second, the notion of contemporaneity, lends itself to an understanding of how we are to relate to the historical/rational uncertainties of Christianity. Insofar as Christianity was a movement relegated to a specific time and place, with specific individuals, it is historical in the normative sense. However, although Christianity is a historical event, its origin is not in the sense of other events in history which are historical condition or dependent on events within time for its existence. Instead,

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

Christianity has its beginnings, its source in a cause outside time, namely, God. In this view, Christianity is and is not historical.

Therefore, Christianity welcomes the human subject a relation to it different from that of normal history, namely, the relating of subjective appropriation. Subjective appropriation overcomes both the remoteness of the past as well as that “history” which is said cannot become historical. Historical investigation’s wanting to unearth Christianity’s ambiguities thus fails to perceive that Christianity does not concern itself with exact historical knowledge because its history is a history beyond the scopes of investigation. Barth states: “Be the material never so carefully and critically brought together; be the devotion in delving into the past never so great, and the accuracy of the scholarship never so precise ... yet this, for all its competence, is not history.”<sup>410</sup> If historical knowledge demands nothing but our mere acknowledgement of its objective certainty, then, with Kierkegaard, its knowledge is of little consequence insofar as it demands nothing for our present existence. Barth too, then, faced a similar task to that of Kierkegaard’s in seeking to resurrect the essence of Christianity as that which demands faith, not historical/rational certainty or justification.

Barth’s affinity with Kierkegaard, in regard to the relation between history and Christian truths, is one which he seems to have carried with him throughout his theological maturation. In his 1963 reply to Professor Max Bense’s article *Atheism, For and Against* Barth expresses this ongoing “faithfulness to Kierkegaard’s reveille in his words

The atheism that is the real enemy is the ‘Christianity’ that professes faith in God very much as a matter of course, perhaps with great emphasis, and perhaps with righteous indignation at atheism wild or mild, while in its practical thinking and behaviour it carries

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 146.

on exactly as if there were no God. It professes its belief in him, lauds and praises him, while in practice he is the last of the things it thinks about, takes seriously, fears or loves.<sup>411</sup>

Examining the relation of Barth's conception of history to Kierkegaard's leads to a consideration of what is central for both thinkers criticism of history, namely, the efforts of historical criticism in seeking to make sense of the Incarnation.

### **Paradox: The Incarnation and History**

It is generally recognized that Barth relied heavily on Kierkegaard's concept of *Paradox* in order to describe how human understanding relates to the truths of Christianity.<sup>412</sup> Initially with our comparative analysis of shared concepts between Kierkegaard and Barth, it was mentioned that Barth's use of the *IQD* served as the ground wherefrom his time-eternity dialectic lent itself to the formation and uncovering of his other dialectics as seen in the dialectic of judgement and grace (Adam and Christ), as well as the distinction between Primal History and History. This conceptual relationship has not gone unnoticed in the work of others, like

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<sup>411</sup> Karl Barth, "The Rationality of Discipleship", in Karl Barth, *Fragments Grave and Gay*, ed. By Martin Rumscheidt, trans. By Eric Mosbacher (London: Collins, 1971), 46-47.

<sup>412</sup> Interestingly, although Busch credits Overbeck as having the predominate influence on *Romans II*, he maintains that the crucial discovery Barth makes when rewriting *Romans I*, is the concept of paradox (82). It seems, then, in light of the significance the concept of paradox, specifically as it relates to the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, perhaps Overbeck's role in *Romans II* is a bit exaggerated. See, Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists: The Young Karl Barth's Critique of Pietism and its Response*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 80-83. For more on the acknowledgment of Barth's use of Kierkegaard's concept of paradox, see T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Thought*, 83; Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 67; Terry Cross, *Dialectic in Karl Barth's Doctrine of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 34-39; Jerome Hamer, O.P., *Karl Barth*, trans. Dominic M. Maruca, S. J. (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1962), 239; Rev. J. Heywood, "The Christology of Soren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth," *The Hibbert Journal* 53, no.3 (1955): 282-87; McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 269; Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists: The Young Karl Barth's Critique of Pietism and its Response*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 80-83; Neil B. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment* (Paternoster Press, 2000), 65.

McCormack and MacDonald.<sup>413</sup> For example, MacDonald writes, “Barth took the view that his various dialectical ‘meanderings’ were merely ways of expressing ‘God is God’.”<sup>414</sup> Therefore, in that our attention now turns to Barth’s conception of the relation between historical/speculative knowledge and the Incarnation, the question is raised as to what role the *IQD* serves, if any, in explicating this relation.

To bring us back to our earlier discussion of the difficulty the time-eternity dialectic extends to revelation within history, it was stated that “the solution to this problem is given in the problem itself.” And although discussing the limits which the time-eternity dialectic imposes on the ability of historical-critical methods to investigate revelation in history, we left the problem unsolved, this we will now address.

Thus far, it cannot go unnoticed that Barth’s use of the time and eternity dialectic has secured a limitation in our relation to God. In light of the negativity resulting from this dialectic regarding to Christian knowledge, McCormack asks, “Given the misunderstanding to which the time-eternity dialectic so easily gave rise, why did Barth use it?”<sup>415</sup> Aside from the negative aspect this dialectic extends in rendering all human possibilities impossible, McCormack answers:

It was useful for bearing witness to a theological state of affairs. Eternity cannot become time without ceasing to be eternity, but eternity can encounter time. So too, in the case of revelation, God (as the content of revelation) cannot become the medium in which He veils Himself without ceasing to be God...So it was the structural similarity between the time-eternity dialectic and the dialectic of veiling and unveiling which made the former a useful tool for bearing witness to the latter. [But] unlike eternity, which can only limit or bound time, God can realize new possibilities in time.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> See Bruce McCormack’s, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth’s Theology, 1921-31* (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I, 1989), 171 and Neil B. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment* (Paternoster Press, 2000).

<sup>414</sup> Neil B. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment* (Paternoster Press, 2000), 59.

<sup>415</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 264.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

McCormack posits that the time and eternity dialectic functions first, in negating all human attempts to relegate the historicity of revelation to the mere historical wherefrom it becomes accessible to historical-critical methods. Second, showing the questionability of its presupposition, historical-critical methodology is supplanted for that of God's bringing in the "new possibility" of accessibility of revelation. To this dialectical relation of a "new" history within "human" history, Barth writes, "The years A.D. 1-30 are the era of revelation and disclosure."<sup>417</sup> And so, as we shall see, the time-eternity dialectic remains intact even when overcome by God's revelation. This means, that the *IQD* between God and humanity remains in full force by means of revelation as being both the veiling and unveiling of God in Christ. This is to say that in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, God's revelation creates both a surmountable and yet insurmountable problem for human understanding; this is how.

The paradoxical nature of revelation in Christ offered Barth the means for a better understanding of the relation between time and eternity. According to Barth, in Christ, time and eternity "meet and go apart, two planes intersect, the one known and the other unknown."<sup>418</sup> First, where these two worlds meet is observable in the historical person Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>419</sup> Barth states, "The name Jesus defines an historical occurrence and marks the point where the unknown world cuts the known world."<sup>420</sup> However, although affirming an objective point of reference lest humanity look to themselves in grounding knowledge of God, Barth does not permit an equating of history and revelation whereby revelation becomes another historical

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<sup>417</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 29.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*

event open to human scrutiny. Instead, the dialectic of time and eternity is further strengthened even in God's revelation insofar as God remains hidden in Christ.

Although, in Christ, the world of the Father touches the known world of humanity, this world is not permitted direct observation by virtue of revelation itself. For Barth, God's revelation in Christ is dialectical with regard to human affirmation of it. In the historical person of Jesus, humanity begins with something concrete with regard to knowledge of God, in contrast to their own subjective projections and creations. However, the concreteness of this knowledge is one which does not exist in the historical person of Christ in and of himself. In fact, Barth's use of the word "concrete" does not denote a lack of concreteness in revelation but rather denotes the inability of our human capabilities to perceive revelation. He states, "We who stand in this concrete world know nothing, and are incapable of knowing anything of that other world."<sup>421</sup> In light of this limitation then, Barth demands an honest admittance on our behalf as to what is meant when one affirms that "the years A.D. 1-30 are the era of revelation and disclosure."<sup>422</sup> In other words, when one affirms that in the historical person of Christ there God has made himself known, on what grounds exists this affirmation. From sheer historical observation, aided by the eyes of reason, Barth believes that all we see is Jesus of Nazareth, not the Christ of faith. Barth writes,

Jesus stands among sinners as a sinner; He sets Himself wholly under the judgment under which the world is set; He takes His place where God can be present only in questioning about Him; He takes the form of a slave; He moves to the cross and to death; His greatest achievement is a negative achievement. He is not a genius, endowed with manifest or even with occult powers; He is not a hero or leader of men; He is neither poet nor thinker.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 97.



In the historical person of Jesus, we perceive a human being unlike any other. In ourselves, we have not the means to look past the empirical, temporal, historical person of Jesus and affirm that God stands before us. Rather, by virtue of our epistemological limitations, the Incarnation does not issue an obvious acknowledgment on our part. Quite the contrary, human reason denies such a notion of God becoming incarnate. As such, the revelation of God in Christ is a scandal to human understanding and therefore “criss-crosses every form of rationalism.”<sup>424</sup> Therefore, Barth affirms that Christ, “can be comprehended only as Paradox (Kierkegaard).”<sup>425</sup> He adds, “As Christ, Jesus is the plane which lies beyond our comprehension.”<sup>426</sup> When confronted with the veiling and unveiling God, Barth thinks that reason faces a paradox in its contemplating of two opposing concepts, i.e., God and man. Like Kierkegaard, the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation affords Barth the means whereby to fundamentally question the endeavours of historical criticism and rational speculation. Both these enterprises are however not questionable in themselves but only when they seek to transcend their inherent limitations

In sum, God has unveiled himself in Christ, in history, by means of human flesh. However, it is the means itself which perpetuates the dialectic of revelation. In other words, God has unveiled himself in a way which leaves him indistinguishable from any other human being. Therefore, God’s unveiling of himself as a human being in history simultaneously veils himself from mere human perception and historical investigation. Barth writes:

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 30.

In Jesus revelation is a paradox, however objective and universal it may be. That the promises of the faithfulness of God have been fulfilled in Jesus the Christ is not, and never will be, a self-evident truth, since in Him it appears in its final hiddenness and its most profound secrecy. The truth, in fact, can never be self-evident, because it is a matter neither of historical nor of psychological experience, and because it is neither a cosmic happening within the natural order, nor even the most supreme event of our imaginings. Therefore it is not accessible to our perception.<sup>427</sup>

Even though it will not be until the *Göttingen Dogmatics* where Barth will fully articulate the significance of human flesh in guarding the divine Subjectivity of God, this notion is yet present at this time in Barth's thought. It is because God is righteous and wholly other that "in Jesus God becomes veritably a secret."<sup>428</sup> Because God is infinitely qualitatively distinct from humanity, the Incarnation exists as "the most complete veiling of His incomprehensibility."<sup>429</sup>

For Barth, given that "there is no object apart from our thinking of it...if God were...an object among other objects, if He were Himself subject to the *Krisis*, He would then obviously not be God."<sup>430</sup> It is within the context of the notion of revelation as both the veiling and unveiling of God from which Barth's harsh attack on historicism is to be understood. Recall, that Barth had earlier in the preface to the *Romans II*, addressed those who had unjustly labelled him as being "a bitter enemy of historical criticism."<sup>431</sup> In view of human reason's inability to perceive in Christ nothing but a paradox, the endeavours of historical criticism to make sense of the divine in Christ become utterly futile. For Barth, the paradoxes of Christianity existed in order to protect the efficacy of its power in both judging and saving humanity. Quoting Kierkegaard, Barth writes,

Remove from the Christian Religion, as Christendom has done, its ability to shock, and Christianity, by becoming a direct communication, is altogether destroyed. It then becomes a tiny superficial thing, capable neither of inflicting deep wounds nor of healing

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 9.

them; by discovering an unreal and merely human compassion, it forgets the infinite qualitative distinction between man and God.<sup>432</sup>

Due to the infinite chasm which separates time and eternity, God and humanity, coupled with the impenetrable revelation of God in Christ, Barth maintains that “there are no human avenues” of approaching the knowledge of God in Christ. Even more, if “the wrath of God is the judgment under which we stand,”<sup>433</sup> then the “judgment of history is that those devoted to its investigation are driven to a final deprivation: they become dumb before God.”<sup>434</sup> In short, the words such as “history”, “historical criticism”, and “humanity” are synonymous with time, and time denotes limitation and corruption.<sup>435</sup> In short, Barth’s criticisms of historicism are directed to its presumptuous attempt to treat the Incarnation as another mere historical event. In light of the limitations given to our knowledge, and our endeavours, Barth maintains therefore that “within history, Jesus as the Christ can be understood only as Problem or Myth.”<sup>436</sup> In the end, Barth adherence to the *IQD*, given in the dialectic of time and eternity, “the difference between that which lies beyond the judgment and that which lies on this side of it is not relative but absolute: the two are separated absolutely.”<sup>437</sup>

At most, history can only provide insight to the historical Jesus, not the Christ of faith. God’s revelation in the historical person of Jesus “can never be self-evident, because it is a matter neither of historical nor of psychological experience.”<sup>438</sup> Furthermore, “it can neither be taught nor handed down by tradition, nor is it a

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 98-9. This statement is found in Kierkegaard’s *PC*, 140.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>438</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 98.

subject of research...Therefore it is not accessible to our perception.”<sup>439</sup> Therefore, quoting Kierkegaard again, Barth writes, “Now, Spirit is the denial of direct immediacy. If Christ be very God, He must be unknown, for to be known directly is the characteristic mark of an idol.”<sup>440</sup>

As we observed earlier in Kierkegaard, the Incarnation reveals an ontological impossibility, in that, since God exists necessarily, it would therefore be impossible for him to come-into-being in that this transition is one from possibility to actuality and therefore would suggest that the Incarnation is like that of other temporal events. Since God exists necessarily he is unable to come-into-being as historical. Thus, the Incarnation, as Barth says, presents “the paradox that eternity becomes time.”<sup>441</sup> If the human categories of the understanding exist only in relation to the empirical, then revelation necessarily transcends what can be known.

Appropriately, Barth echoes Kierkegaard in issuing a warning to “be on our guard against that ‘fibrous, undialectical, blatant, clerical appeal that Christ was God...”<sup>442</sup> Whence comes the seriousness of Barth’s warning? Quoting Kierkegaard, Barth states that “he [Christ] was beyond our comprehension.”<sup>443</sup> Barth’s development here appears to parallel Kierkegaard’s own discussion in *PC* on all sides. Barth continues stating:

He [the observer] may pronounce Him to be divine because of His peculiar awareness of God or because of His religious- ethical heroism- to this Kierkegaard referred when he spoke of the ‘clerical appeal’ to the visible Jesus. Or he may pronounce the visible figure of Jesus to something well known to the student of ancient mythology, or may dismiss Him as a madman.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 38. Barth takes this quote from Kierkegaard’s *PC*, 136.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 279. See Kierkegaard’s *PC* and *CUP* for more information.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

In sum, Barth's use of *paradox* is descriptive of revelation in relation to reason.

However, this too has been put into question. It is stated that:

[Barth] must be viewed as incautious and inconsistent in his use of terminology like 'dialectic' and 'paradox.' He does not work with a single definition of either concept, nor does he attempt to coordinate his various usages in order to show their interrelation.<sup>445</sup>

This assessment follows from a specific reading of Kierkegaard's thought which can be interpreted in either of two ways. The concept can be used either in a "logical sense of a non-synthesizable opposition between two statements,"<sup>446</sup> or it can be used to denote "anything which goes against appearance or expectations."<sup>447</sup>

McCormack believes that Kierkegaard's use of paradox should be understood in the first sense (to which here he stands closer to Barth) and that Barth's use of the term paradox is predominately presented in the second sense, as relating to what is contradictory to appearance. However, as we have observed, Kierkegaard's use of this term is predominantly expressed in the second sense, although incorporating the first. Kierkegaard writes: "The thesis that God has existed in human form, was born, grew up, etc is certainly the paradox *sensu strictissimo*, the absolute paradox."<sup>448</sup> That this man, Jesus of Nazareth, should declare that he was God, "come into existence exactly as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being,"<sup>449</sup> not only contradicts what is given to our senses, but also our reason, which brings us to another important clarification.

The basis of the paradoxical appearance of the Incarnation is one grounded in reason's inability to come to terms with what is contradictory to the senses.

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<sup>445</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth's Theology, 1921-1931*, 124.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>447</sup> 164.

<sup>448</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 217.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

Kierkegaard himself says that “the understanding declares that the paradox is the absurd.”<sup>450</sup> Barth reflects Kierkegaard’s use exactly when he states, “The assumption that Jesus is the Christ is, in the strictest sense of the word, an assumption, void of any content that can be comprehended by us.”<sup>451</sup> A further example of Barth’s agreement with Kierkegaard’s use of this concept can be seen in Barth’s statement, “We - God’s Children! Consider and bear in mind the vast unobservability, impossibility, and paradox of these words.”<sup>452</sup>

It seems clear that Barth’s use of the term “paradox”, like Kierkegaard’s, consists of both an empirical nature and also a categorical nature in that the two are needed in order to produce knowledge. Inasmuch as both Barth and Kierkegaard were indebted to Kant’s epistemology a definition of a paradox which reflects both an empirical and conceptual contradiction seems valid. Indeed, both Barth and Kierkegaard extend their use of the term paradox beyond the nature of the Incarnation to that of Christianity. But this extension does not create an inconsistency as McCormack suggests.

Due to the employment of the *IQD*, whereby humanity possesses no categories to know that which extends beyond the phenomenal, all that pertains to God and his relation to time is also unobservable and thus paradoxical. For, “we must abide humbly by the recognition that His [God] procedure is altogether beyond our powers of observation.”<sup>453</sup> The rational/empirical use of *paradox* is, as we observed earlier, also evident in Barth’s dialectic of the old and new man as well as in his assessment of the Church of Jacob which, as “observable, knowable and

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<sup>450</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 52.

<sup>451</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Roman*, 36.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

possible” exists as the Church of Esau.<sup>454</sup> For Barth and Kierkegaard alike, God’s revelation in Christ is a scandal to reason since it contradicts its preconceived idea of the nature of God. When reason reflects on God, it thinks of an omnipotent ruler clothed in honor and majesty. That this majestic God of creation should reveal himself in the form of a lowly servant is utterly preposterous:

He was a lowly human being, a lowly man who did not set himself off from the human throng either by soft raiment or by any other earthly advantage and was not distinguishable to other human beings, not even to the countless legions of angels he left behind when he humbled himself.<sup>455</sup>

In light of the hiddenness of God’s revelation in Christ, how, then, is one able to overcome the logical-empirical contradiction given in revelation whereby God, hidden in the medium of human flesh becomes an object for human knowledge despite the contradiction? This question inevitably leads us to the role of faith in relation to the truths of Christianity and, specifically, the Incarnation.

### **Faith and Offence**

When discussing Barth’s notion of faith, his concept of the *Moment* assumes prominence. According to Barth faith, he states, “Is the ‘Moment’ when men are moved by God, by the true God, the Creator and Redeemer of men and of all human things...The ‘Moment’ of the movement of men by God is beyond men.”<sup>456</sup> In relegating human capability for faith beyond human attainability, Barth maintains that our possession of faith is not dependent on our own righteousness.<sup>457</sup> Rather, being beyond human merit, faith is a “decision which lies only in God’s hands.”<sup>458</sup> In light of the *IQD* between God and humanity, Barth therefore understands the *moment*

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 137.

of faith as a *moment* “which is beyond all time.”<sup>459</sup> Furthermore, for Barth, the reality of the moment of faith is eschatological insofar as it is a reality which, although relating to time, shall be affirmed “only in the context of the negation of the Last Trump.”<sup>460</sup> In Barth’s estimation, faith, like all the truths of Christianity, can only be realized in the end when time is consumed by eternity. Therefore, within time, faith can only appear as paradox. Humanity is only able to, “in fear and trembling, assert the possibility of its occurrence”<sup>461</sup> and not “that we have attained this possibility.”<sup>462</sup>

In short, for Barth, in that the reality of faith is the moment when eternity encounters time, this encounter denies observation in time. But more importantly, for Barth, the moment of faith itself assumes predominance with regard to its function. Faith is the means wherefrom humanity receives the ability to know God. Therefore, Barth’s notion of faith, although pertaining to the Gospel as a whole,<sup>463</sup> aims specifically to the question of humanity’s knowledge of God. Therefore, inasmuch as in Christ God has made himself known, the category of faith denotes the mean in which this knowledge is attained.

However, insofar as knowledge of God in Christ presents reason with a paradox, this knowledge, Barth maintains, “is a matter for faith only.”<sup>464</sup> In other words, in that God’s revelation in Christ is indirect rather than, like human knowledge, direct, His revelation “is intelligible only by faith.”<sup>465</sup> For Barth, faith is

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 112.



“the ‘Moment’ when men are moved by God, by the true God”<sup>466</sup> in order that what is unattainable by reason becomes attainable by God’s grace.<sup>467</sup> Therefore, as a gift of God’s grace, faith is a miracle which reveals the utter impossibility of human effort in making known what only God can make known.<sup>468</sup>

By the miracle of faith, humanity comes to perceive not only God hidden in Christ, but perceives the possible impossibility of being reconciled to God. However, as Barth states, “This miracle of reckoning of the divine righteousness, this non-reckoning of human unrighteousness...is the paradox of faith.”<sup>469</sup> The paradox of faith points to the fact that all human reason and endeavour exists wholly futile in both understanding and attaining this knowledge of revelation and its work on our behalf. “Men come to faith, only from and through faith.”<sup>470</sup> By faith, humanity comes to understand the sheer “otherness” of God. Faith denotes that humanity is aware of their inability to overcome the chasm of the *IQD* which separates them from God. It, as Barth states, “renders inevitable a qualitative distinction between God and man.”<sup>471</sup> But faith, insofar as it operates against the power of reason, is a serious matter.

For Barth, the seriousness of matter rests in the problem given to reason in its encounter with the Incarnation. Here, reason is faced with a choice to either believe or to be offended.<sup>472</sup> Barth writes, “To him that is not sufficiently mature to accept a contradiction and to rest in it, it becomes a scandal – to him that is unable to escape

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 39. With regard to reason’s encounter with the revelation of God in Christ, Barth states, in strong Kierkegaardian language, “There is no single incident in His life known to us in such a way as to be free from ambiguity and free from the possibility of offence.” See, 280.

the necessity of contradiction, it becomes a matter for faith.”<sup>473</sup> Therefore, with the words of Kierkegaard, Barth issues a warning to the temptation of lessening the paradox which necessarily exists in order to allow faith, He writes,

We must therefore be on our guard against that ‘fibrous, undialectical, blatant, clerical appeal that Christ was God, since He was so visibly and directly’! May we be preserved from the blasphemy of men who ‘without being terrified and afraid in the presence of God, without the agony of death which is the birth-pang of faith, without fear and trembling which is the first requirement of adoration, without the panic of the possibility of scandal, hope to have direct knowledge of that which cannot be directly known...and do not rather say that He was truly and verily God, because, because He was beyond our comprehension.’<sup>474</sup>

To the necessity of the paradox for faith, arising from God’s taking on of human flesh, Barth adds,

In order that the condemnation might be perfected, this KENOSIS of the Son of God, this form of a servant, this impenetrable incognito, is not accidental but essential. It is imperative that the incognito of the Son of God should increase and gain the upper hand, that it should move on to final self-surrender and self-abandonment; imperative that we, from the human point of view, should be scandalized; imperative that we should that not flesh and blood but only the Father in heaven can reveal that there is more to be found here than flesh and blood.<sup>475</sup>

By virtue of the uncertainty which accompanies the God-man, Barth believes “All faith is both simple and difficult for all alike it is a scandal, a hazard, a ‘Nevertheless’; to all it presents the same embarrassment and the same promise; for all it is a leap into the void.”<sup>476</sup>

Barth’s describing faith in terms of “scandal” and “hazard” betrays another interesting aspect of faith.

According to Barth, faith’s inherent risk of a leap procures its significance as active. For Barth, faith is “living.”<sup>477</sup> Many times throughout *Romans II*, Barth uses words such as individual, action, obedience, decision and existential which underline his conviction that, as he states, “The Gospel demands participation, comprehension,

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 279. Barth quotes Kierkegaard’s *PC*, 135.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 134.

co-operation.”<sup>478</sup> Given his understanding that only faith allows for the individual’s relation to God, this implies that faith works in those it has been given.

As a whole, these terms relate that, in short, faith is “the demand for obedience.”<sup>479</sup> This demand is, as Barth states, “a call which enlightens and rouses to action.”<sup>480</sup> Therefore, Barth’s description of faith insinuates a subjective dynamic insofar as it relates to the human response to God’s revelation. Moreover, Barth distinguishes time and eternity in terms of the objective and subjective. This distinction serves Barth in underscoring what he thinks indicative of humanity’s relation to truth. The truth, i.e. what pertains to God, is a reality to which humanity must be given access. In this sense, the individual’s relation to the truth is synonymous for the individual of faith. Barth writes, “There is no objective observation of the Truth; for its objectivity is that by which we are observed before ever we have observed anything at all. Truth is that primal objectivity by which the observing subject is itself constituted. Truth...cannot be subjectivized.”<sup>481</sup> Thus, when viewed in terms of objectivity and subjectivity, objectivity correlates to the reality of the invisible, new world’s relation to the “human, historical, subjective side” of time.<sup>482</sup>

Of course, Barth’s distinguishing the human and divine in these terms prohibits relegating the source of truth to humanity. Rather, as Barth’s words attest,

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 28. For more on the way in which Barth uses the concept of the individual in this regard see, 116, 218, and 189 in *The Epistle to the Romans*. With regard to Barth’s use of “existential”, this concept serves in describing the reality of the new man, the unobservable ego, see 229, 269, 273, 282, 297. Therefore, Barth understanding of this concept as descriptive of what constitutes true existence bears a striking resemblance to Kierkegaard’s own use as found in *CUP*. There Kierkegaard relays the meaning of our existence as one engulfed in the highest form of subjectivity, passion, i.e. faith; see, *CUP*, 129-251.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 183.

subjectivity conveys the individual's relation to God in terms of obedience and faith.<sup>483</sup> In fact, faith's manifestation in obedience is described by Barth in Kierkegaard's own words as the "passionate motions of eternity."<sup>484</sup> The notion that faith is subjective seems appropriate in light of Barth's adamant rejection of any sort of objectifying of eternity's presence in time.<sup>485</sup> This notion finds further support in Barth's description of faith as a risk or hazard for the one who exercises it. He writes, "If there be no gamble of faith, if faith be forgotten or for one moment suspended, or if it be thought of as anything but a hazard, this identity [between the new and the old man] is no more than an entirely trivial enterprise of religious or speculative arrogance."<sup>486</sup>

The risk innate within faith obviously relates to the hidden ground from which humanity acts and thinks in contrast to the empirical or objective. In other words, to the eye of reason, faith appears ridiculous and ungrounded insofar as it has no empirical referent to which it relates. Therefore, to the one who acts against what constitutes "rationality" faith is a risk insofar as it contradicts our ways of knowing. This is why, for Barth, faith is understood in terms of "fear and trembling". In short, if knowledge of God is unattainable theoretically, then faith must denote a mode of epistemological apprehension whereby the individual exists in the most passionate, existential relation to God insofar as the risk of faith necessitates such a relation. Barth writes, "And to call upon the Lord means existential knowledge and faith and fear and love."<sup>487</sup> And, again, it is appropriate to mention that Kierkegaard himself ascribes to this very notion of faith. He writes, "The essential thing about subjectivity

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 384.

is that in resolution and the decision of choice one runs the risk. This is the absolute decision.”<sup>488</sup> Aligning Barth to a Kierkegaardian notion of truth presents, as noted in the Introduction, a very uncomfortable parallel for some.

As noted in Chapter One of our study of Kierkegaard, his task of explicating the nature of Christianity as being subjective has most often led to an abuse of his intention. He has usually been understood as endorsing an extreme view of subjectivity wherein Christianity has been presented as being void of objective truth and thus sheer delusion. However, if one does not understand Kierkegaard’s use of faith, subjectivity and truth, as seen in Chapter One, in relation to the Incarnation then one will inevitably interpret his notion of subjectivity incorrectly.<sup>489</sup> An example of this is evident in McCormack’s assertion that:

The basic problem confronting Kierkegaard was that of guarding the subjectivity of the human individual against its absorption by the Hegelian dialectic of absolute spirit...This is not Barth’s problem at all. His problem is that of guarding the divine subjectivity, not human subjectivity.<sup>490</sup>

Furthermore, McCormack argues that given Kierkegaard’s concern with the human subject himself, Kierkegaard, unlike Barth, sought to interpret “the divine-human relation from the side of humanity.”<sup>491</sup>

Again, as we noted in Chapter One, Kierkegaard’s concern cannot be as McCormack asserts. Kierkegaard’s notion of subjectivity denotes a specific approach to the objective uncertainties of the Christian faith, namely, the approach of faith. Kierkegaard is radically opposed to any human means in apprehending God outside of God’s own initiation in making himself known. The problem with Kierkegaard is

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<sup>488</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 1, 346.

<sup>489</sup> See pages 54 and 75-9 of this thesis. For secondary reading on this issue see footnote, 33-4, 147.

<sup>490</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth’s Theology, 1921-1931*, 126.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

that, in light of his harsh attacks on the attempt of rational theology to make Christianity so accessible, as mere matters of fact, readers of Kierkegaard assume his notion of subjectivity naturally replaces an objective epistemology for a subjective one. But this is not Kierkegaard's position. Rather, as he states, "It is absolutely true, isolated subjectivity as the age understands it is evil, but restoration to health by means of 'objectivity' is not a hair better."<sup>492</sup> In fact, as examined in Chapter One, Kierkegaard believes that an individualistic conception of the human is one that represents "subjectivity in its untruth" and as such must be passed "all the way through 'to the single individual'—face to face with God."<sup>493</sup> Even more against interpreting Kierkegaard as one who advocates the subject as the loci of truth in contrast to the truth in God, Kierkegaard writes, "The maieutic cannot be the final form, because, Christianly understood, the truth does not lie in the subject (as Socrates understood it), but in a revelation which must be proclaimed."<sup>494</sup>

Furthermore, the Kierkegaardian approach to the divine-human relation, which is rooted in Kierkegaard's dialectic of the finite and infinite as the structure of what constitutes human existence, is thought to be an expression of Barth's earliest theological Liberalism which he abandoned for that of interpreting the divine-human relation from the side of God.<sup>495</sup> Unfortunately, of these possible approaches, which is said to have arisen out of a controversy among the dialectical theologians concerning the correct understanding of Kierkegaard, it seems the view of Gogarten, Brunner, and Bultmann has prevailed.

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<sup>492</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 4, 355.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>494</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 2, 383.

<sup>495</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth's Theology, 1921-1931*, 125.

## Conclusion

Barth's discussion of faith here reflects, if you recall, Kierkegaard's own discussion of faith on several points. First, for Barth, faith is "the free initiative of the absolute 'Moment' of the righteousness of God."<sup>496</sup> Kierkegaard too maintains that the re-birthing of faith is "the moment."<sup>497</sup> It is a moment of decisive significance in that, as a moment "filled with the eternal,"<sup>498</sup> it is "the fullness of time."<sup>499</sup> Furthermore, the "moment" signifies the point of contact between time and eternity whereby the individual receives the condition for conversion, namely the condition of faith.<sup>500</sup> Kierkegaard writes, "In the moment, he becomes aware of the rebirth, for his previous state was indeed one of 'not to be'."<sup>501</sup> Interestingly, throughout Barth scholarship, it has been stated that Barth took his notion of the moment from Kierkegaard. To this, it is assumed that the work from which Barth found this concept was Kierkegaard's *The Moment*, or *The Instant*. However, in this work, this concept bears no resemblance to Barth's use as found in *Romans II*. Rather, where Barth's reflects Kierkegaard with regard to the *moment* is in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*.

Second, for Kierkegaard too, faith is a miracle and hence by the grace of God.<sup>502</sup> Third, Faith, because it is God's doing, overcomes human impossibility in achieving it. Kierkegaard writes:

Faith should make striving possible, because the very fact that I am saved by faith and that nothing at all is demanded from me should in itself make it possible that I begin to

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<sup>496</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 381.

<sup>497</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 18.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>502</sup> See, Kierkegaard, *PF*, 9-22.

strive, that I do not collapse under impossibility but am encouraged and refreshed, because it has been decided I am saved, I am God's child by virtue of faith.<sup>503</sup>

Fourth, Kierkegaard too held that the paradoxical revelation of God in Christ was necessary in order that humanity respond in faith. Kierkegaard states, "But one cannot become a believer except by coming to him [Christ] in his state of abasement, to him, the sign of offence and the object of faith."<sup>504</sup> He adds, "The possibility of offence is not to be avoided. You must go through it; you can be saved from it in only one way: by believing. Therefore Christ says: Blessed is he who is not offended at me."<sup>505</sup> Barth echoes Kierkegaard here almost exactly stating, "In Him God reveals Himself inexorably as the hidden God who can be apprehended only indirectly. In Him He conceals Himself utterly, in order that He may manifest Himself to faith only."<sup>506</sup>

Fifth, in light of the paradox, human reason, as we observed, is placed with a decision to either believe or be offended. To this Kierkegaard writes, "Faith is a choice, certainly not direct reception—and the recipient is the one who is disclosed, whether he will believe or be offended."<sup>507</sup> Barth again echoes these words stating, "This discovery [In the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation] is...a free choice between scandal and faith."<sup>508</sup> Sixth, with Barth, due to the risk present with the decision of faith, Kierkegaard holds that Faith is a leap into the void.<sup>509</sup>

Finally, given Barth's latter problem with Kierkegaard's supposed negative dialectic of the *IQD*, both thinkers agree that faith affirms both the maintaining of the *IQD* as well as its being overcome by revelation. Kierkegaard writes, "The

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<sup>503</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 2, 19.

<sup>504</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 24.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-8.

<sup>506</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 369.

<sup>507</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 141.

<sup>508</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 39.

<sup>509</sup> See, Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 98-9, 105.



possibility of offence [which is intrinsically linked to faith], as we have tried to show, is present at every moment, confirming at every moment the chasmic abyss between the single individual and the God-man over which faith and faith alone reaches.”<sup>510</sup>

In conclusion of this examination of the affinity between Barth’s thought in *Romans II* and Kierkegaard’s, I think it is permissible to state, in speaking of Kierkegaard, Barth’s general tone is overtly positive. Barth expresses his appreciation for Kierkegaard’s thought by virtue of the numerous concepts and themes he borrows from him. In light of the theological situation to which *Romans II* addressed, Kierkegaard’s heavy use of *diastasis* served Barth in expressing the problem of this situation as one which has blurred the *IQD* between God and humanity. Barth notes both the Kierkegaardian criticism he had learned from as well as an admonishment to the reader to listen to “the dialectical audacity of Kierkegaard,”<sup>511</sup> stating, “When a Kierkegaard or a Kutter, measuring the Church by an absolute standard, proceeds to utter his complaint against it, we are bound to uphold his criticism, indeed we must underline it and endorse it.”<sup>512</sup> Throughout this examination of *Romans II*, I have endeavoured to trace Barth’s development of the *IQD* in relation to revelation, specifically with reference to the Incarnation and to historical criticism’s unwarranted investigation of revelation. Thus Barth, as Kierkegaard before him, relentlessly maintained the *IQD* against the never ending approximations of historicism in seeking to make “sense” of the Incarnation. Thus it was argued that in view of the *IQD*, for both thinkers, the revelation of God in Christ

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<sup>510</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 139.

<sup>511</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 252

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

presents a paradox to reason which stands offended. Moreover, the offence issued by the Incarnation is only overcome by God's grace in the renewal of faith.

Barth's *Romans II* serves as a strong indictment of the inflated attempts of reason to usurp the divine prerogative, and a stern warning that all human endeavours stand under the judgment of the transcendent God. But as we discovered, Barth's purpose in employing the *IQD* was to open the door for grace. Thus, in light of our discussions of Kierkegaard and Barth, their conception of *IQD* is one comprised of both a negative and positive dimension. Furthermore, the misunderstanding prevailing among readers of Barth concerning Kierkegaard's use of subjectivity has also been addressed in ways which reveals some affinity to Barth's own use whereby the *IQD* safe-guards the divine Subjectivity.

Now, at this point in my endeavour, in moving beyond *Romans II* to the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, I am entering, seemingly at face value, a less secure footing related to any fruitful discussion of Barth and Kierkegaard. However, if a choice between *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics* were required regarding which of the two is more Kierkegaardian in tone, it would have to be the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. This is why: within these lectures we discover that Barth is doing something quite different, in fact new, in contrast to *Romans II*. Delaying, for now, what is new here, Barth carries out his new task by means of employing concepts very similar to Kierkegaard's whereby the parallels are far more striking than those discussed in *Romans II*.

To start, Barth, in a richer sense, betrays a new understanding of the human subject, in and of itself, in relation to God's revelation. Intrinsically related to this relation, Barth also offers a more developed understanding of revelation, specifically

in the Incarnation which also bears a strong likeness to Kierkegaard's own conception of the Incarnation. In short, I am suggesting that, contrary to the overwhelming position that after *Romans II* Barth has left Kierkegaard behind, in fact the *Göttingen Dogmatics* reveals that Barth has moved on with Kierkegaard.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Besides MacDonald's comment, "It is widely held that Overbeck ceased to be any great importance to Barth after *Romans II*; that, like Kierkegaard, his influence was restricted to this work," research into the Barth/Kierkegaard relation does not exceed *Romans II*, with the exception of those like Wells. Therefore, my argument that I am moving into new territory is one from the silence to this relation after *Romans II*. See, Neil B. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment* (Paternoster Press, 2000), 74.

## CHAPTER THREE

### KIERKEGAARD AND THE *GÖTTINGEN DOGMATICS*

#### **Introduction: Procedure and Problems**

The objective of this present chapter is to accomplish the following. First, I will offer a discussion of Barth's more refined anthropology in order to show how closely it approximates Kierkegaard's own notion as found in his *SUD* and his *Journals*. The result of this examination will be to demonstrate that Barth has now moved beyond *Romans II* to articulate the effects of sin in relation to the self, in and of itself, and the self in relation to God. Addressing this point will allow me to bring to a conclusion, by way of evidence, the discussion which commenced in *Romans II* concerning Barth's growing suspicion that Kierkegaard's *IQD* was one which leaves the subject in despair, destitute of grace. From this, I will offer some parallels between these two thinkers in relation to this discussion. Second, in light of the more expansive discussion of Kierkegaard in Chapter One, I will endeavour to unveil Barth's more developed articulation of revelation as being composed of both an objective and subjective component. A discussion of the objective component will consist in specifically evaluating the way in which this component is related to Barth's Christology, a relation which is said to mark "a real watershed in Barth's development."<sup>514</sup> In light of this point of departure in Barth's thinking, I will address the way in which he now seeks to articulate revelation *in* history from which this articulation comes to parallel Kierkegaard's conception of revelation even more. In

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<sup>514</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth's Theology, 1921-31*, 336.

view of this new articulation what also emerges is the way in which Barth comes closer to Kierkegaard in expressing not only the reality of revelation in history but also the limitations which history offers humanity in knowing revelation.

Finally, I shall discuss the subjective component of revelation in Barth's own terms of human response, namely, faith and obedience. This too shall, by way of reminder, be contrasted with Kierkegaard's own use of subjectivity. It must be briefly noted that all such parallels cannot hide some differences between these two thinkers. For example, in seeking to speak of the objectivity of revelation, Barth relies heavily on the authority of the Church in a way which exceeds Kierkegaard's understanding of ecclesial tradition in relation to its affirmation of God in history. However, such differences, in fact, relate more to individual objectives or pursued problems rather than to conceptual difference and therefore do not disrupt, significantly, any similarities.

#### *The Objective in the Göttingen Dogmatics*

In comparison to *Romans II*, the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, *Instruction in the Christian Religion* (offered first as lectures from the summer semester 1924 to summer 1925) marks the emergence of a different Barth, although not wholly different, in at least two ways which, however, are intrinsically linked. One difference is a change in direction for Barth, or rather a change of concern. Without rehashing, in detail, the whole of the *Göttingen Dogmatics*<sup>515</sup> let me state a very condensed summary of this difference.

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<sup>515</sup> For a very descriptive examination of not only Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics*, *Instruction to the Christian Religion* but the other writings from the Göttingen period, see Bruce McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth's Theology, 1921-31* (Ann Arbor, MI:

As a whole, Barth's central task in these lectures was his concern with the questions of the ground or possibility for Christian thinking and preaching. Barth questions what talk about God can mean, specifically as it is affirmed within Christian preaching and teaching. In order to address this concern, Barth, by means of the Trinitarian development at Nicea as well as the Christological resolution reached at Chalcedon, takes up the way in which revelation is related to scripture and then to preaching. He states:

The Word of God on which dogmatics reflects – I need only refer to the common formula to show the point at issue – is one in three and three in one: revelation, scripture, and preaching – the Word of God as revelation, the Word of God as scripture, and the Word of God as preaching, neither to be confused nor separated...yet not three Words of God...Scripture is not revelation, but from revelation. Preaching is not revelation or scripture, but from both.<sup>516</sup>

Whereas the Barth of *Romans II* relied heavily on drawing the limits to what we can know and say of God, his lectures at Göttingen reveal that his endeavour is now to overcome these limits. Indeed, Barth's emphasis on grace in *Romans II* does offer the overcoming of human limitation. Yet, in light of his inarticulate notion of revelation, this overcoming appears weak in its objective. Thus, Barth's desire to affirm human knowledge of revelation inevitably, points to a new epistemological development in Barth's conception of revelation.

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U.M.I., 1989) 224-373 as well as the introduction to the English translation of this work by Daniel Migliorini.

<sup>516</sup> Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 14-15. McCormack's explanation of Barth's three-fold Word of God, although condensed, sums up Barth's thought excellently. He states: "The Word of God is first of all that speaking of God which is identical with God; identical, because it is a speaking by God. Barth calls this form of the Word simply revelation. As revelation, the Word of God does not continue. Revelation in itself is an eternal happening. Barth can even say it has never 'happened'...Yet if the Word of God is to be known, it must be received by us in the present. It must, in some form, continue. The Word of God in its second form is Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is the witnessing of the prophets and the apostles engendered by their encounter with the Deus dixit, by the speaking of God to them. As the testimony of the prophets and apostles, Holy Scripture is a piece of history and as such it does not continue...The third form of the Word of God is Christian preaching and as preaching, the Word of God does continue." For further discussion see, Bruce McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth's Theology, 1921-31*, 292.

McCormack notes, “What is new here is the understanding of the relation of revelation and history – a new understanding which does not set aside the eschatological reservation of *Romans II* but succeeds in making clearer the significance of history in relation to revelation.”<sup>517</sup> This new development is said to have resulted from Barth’s encounter with Heinrich Heppe’s discussion of anhypostatic – enhypostatic Christology,<sup>518</sup> which results in the epistemological significance of the Incarnation as an intuitable event “in” history,<sup>519</sup> namely, that God has become an intuitable object so that we may know him. In sum what we have here is Barth’s new reliance on the Alexandrian Christology of the Word-flesh which allows him to speak afresh that “revelation really does enter fully into history and time.”<sup>520</sup>

In light of his use of Heppe’s discussion of the theological development of the Early Church and the Reformation, Barth assuredly moves well beyond Kierkegaard’s own concerns. As McCormack states, with the formation of the Göttingen lectures, “a new phase characterized by a growing predominance of dogmatic thinking is initiated.”<sup>521</sup> However, from what follows, although I cannot deny Barth’s indebtedness to Heppe in formulating his new Christological expression, nevertheless I have cause to doubt the level of this indebtedness in light of the striking parallels his Christology shares with Kierkegaard. Inasmuch as Barth’s Christology continues to acknowledge the dialectical fervor of veiling and unveiling, there remains a question as to what is exactly new here in comparison with

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<sup>517</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth’s Theology, 1921-31*, 296.

<sup>518</sup> McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 30.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>520</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth’s Theology, 1921-31*, 314-5.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

*Romans II*. I will return to this discussion later at the conclusion of the examination of the objective possibility of revelation.

In highlighting the differences in scope between the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and *Romans II*, it is quite evident that Barth's reading list in preparing his lectures at Göttingen differs greatly from the list of the "critics of Christianity" he employed in *Romans II* wherein Kierkegaard is included. Now, Barth's reading list in preparation for his lectures on "Reformed Dogmatics" reveals the extent to which he was prepared to wrestle for the first time with the lineage and development of Christian doctrine from the early Church and from there to the Reformation and beyond. Therefore, he had immersed himself in thinkers such as: "The Apologies of Justin and Aristide, the Octavian of Minucius Felix, Origen's *Contra Celsus*, Tertullian's Apology, Athenagorus, Gregory of Nyssa's *Logos Catechetikos* and Augustine's *Enchiridion*, Karl Heim, Thomas Aquinas, D.F. Strauss, Alexander Schweizer, Wilhelm Herrmann, and Fr. A.B. Nietzsche."<sup>522</sup>

Although Barth's lectures at Göttingen betray new considerations these do not alter the theological strictures shared with *Romans II*. Said differently, the Barth of the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, in continuity with *Romans II*, has retained certain qualifiers in articulating his newly formed relation between history and revelation. According to McCormack they are as follows. First, although Barth will evidence a new approach in speaking about revelation, *in history*, by means of a new understanding of the incarnation, his idea of the incarnation yet remains unable to be penetrated by historicism. What this means is that Barth has carried on his dialectic of veiling and unveiling.<sup>523</sup> Thus, by means of upholding this dialectic, in his

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 283-4.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 294, 317.



revelation God is still the Subject who can never be equated, directly, to the medium, the object, Christ himself. God yet remains hidden in a veil of human flesh such that all human capacity comes to a halt which only faith can penetrate.<sup>524</sup> Secondly, revelation is such only insofar as it involves the God who speaks and the human subject who listens, namely, the divine and the human participation.<sup>525</sup> And finally, in continuity with *Romans II*, revelation continues to be a-historical and eschatological.<sup>526</sup>

But more importantly with regard to Barth's expression of revelation in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, whereas in *Romans II* where revelation is mainly discussed in terms of the resurrection in relation to Christ, Barth now speaks of revelation in terms of scripture and human proclamation. Barth's extending his understanding of revelation to incorporate scripture and preaching does not however minimize the dialectical nature of revelation. The trinitarian formulation of revelation in Christ, scripture and proclamation exhibits yet the tension between time and eternity. With regard to scripture and proclamation, the *IQD* is made manifest in the paradoxical unity of God's word and the human word. Both, according to Barth, are "God's Word...given to us in the concealment of true and authentic human words."<sup>527</sup> Although, *Romans II* attests a lack of Christological expression which lends itself to a very obscure and undeveloped notion of revelation, this deficiency, *Romans II* yet appears to offer the foundation for this new expression even if this foundation is still constrained by Barth's consistent employment of terms such as paradox, incognito,

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 293-4.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid. Barth's notion of "a-historical" relates merely to the ground, or origin of the event of revelation, namely the Ursprung of revelation whereby revelation's historicity is *Urgeschichte*. See, Bruce McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth's Theology, 1921-31*, 295-6.

<sup>527</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 59.

hiddenness in relation to God in Christ. And yet, interestingly, these terms persist in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* in Barth's discussion of the Incarnation. As we shall see, if one unites these terms of negation with an early Church Christology of anhypostasis—enhypostasis, something materializes which parallels Kierkegaard in ways not discussed in our examination of *Romans II*.

Although Kierkegaard's Christology may not bear the explicit marks of the Chalcedonian formula, this in no way detracts from its continuing parallel to Barth. Unlike Barth, Kierkegaard had not encountered the school of liberal theology wherein any discussion of revelation in Christ was given in terms of moral personality or ethical archetype. Rather, Kierkegaard worked under the presupposition of reformation theology from which he took direct aim at the efforts of speculative philosophy and historicism. Therefore, it was only within the context of the presupposition that God became human that Kierkegaard uses terms like paradox, incognito, indirect communication, and leap of faith.

Again, admittedly there is a difference here in Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics* from that of *Romans II*, but what is the nature of this difference? As I will discuss later on, if Barth, as in *Romans II*, still employs the dialectic of time and eternity with the dialectic of veiling and unveiling when describing revelation in history, then we must entertain that the difference relates merely to his conceptualizing the Incarnation in relation to the authority of the Church.<sup>528</sup>

#### *Evidencing a Problem with Kierkegaard*

Nonetheless, seeking parallels between Barth's Göttingen period and Kierkegaard is itself a suspicious task in that it was during this time where Barth

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<sup>528</sup> This discussion will begin on page 183.

betrays a growing suspicion of Kierkegaard. On February 15, 1925, while Barth was still proceeding with his lectures on Dogmatics (from the summer semester of 1924 until the summer semester of 1925), he had reproached Bultmann “for thinking in terms which were too anthropological, too Lutheran, too reminiscent of Kierkegaard and Gogarten.”<sup>529</sup> Interestingly, by way of a side note, Kierkegaard also criticizes Luther for being too anthropological, so it is strange that he should be placed with Luther in Barth’s criticism of Bultmann. Kierkegaard writes, “Luther is the very opposite of ‘the apostle.’ ‘The apostle’ expresses Christianity in God’s interest, comes with authority from God and in his interest. Luther expresses Christianity in man’s interest, is essentially the human reaction to Christianity in God’s interest.”<sup>530</sup>

In light of Barth comments above, it is fair to say that his, 1963, firm rejection of Kierkegaard, Barth’s 1925 reservations about Kierkegaard, are rooted in the rise of the existentialist Kierkegaard, which Barth discusses in his 1923/24 lectures on the theology of Schleiermacher. Barth’s emerging caution about Kierkegaard at this time, therefore, is one that inevitably resulted from his mulling over what he thinks problematic in Schleiermacher’s theology, namely, that it is too anthropomorphic.<sup>531</sup> The connection Barth makes between Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard can be expressed as follows.

Inevitably, Barth’s thoughts on Schleiermacher’s theology foreshadow what will concern him later in his summer lectures, namely, the lack of a “subject-object”

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<sup>529</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 161. Also note that in the introduction it was mentioned that in this same year appeared A. Messer’s book *Søren Kierkegaard und Karl Barth*.

<sup>530</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 3, 104.

<sup>531</sup> Barth, in *The Theology of Schleiermacher* (lectures at Göttingen in the winter semester of 1923/24) directly attributes the emergence of anthropological theology to the theology of Schleiermacher. However, Barth’s attributing here is one that is not aimed directly at Schleiermacher but rather to “a new form which accommodated itself to the ‘contemporary spiritual situation’.” See *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 269.

schema in Schleiermacher. It was by virtue of this lack of subject-object distinction, Barth believed, that theology had gone wrong in seeking to ground itself in the extreme of either an objective or a subjective starting point. To solve this problem, Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics* seeks to articulate a relationship between a true object and a true subject within revelation. Barth's problem with Schleiermacher's theology is that it results in the primacy of the human subject.<sup>532</sup> It is this same expression of theological anthropology which Barth thinks lies hidden in Kierkegaard.<sup>533</sup> Even more, Barth questions why Kierkegaard, in his attack on rational theology, had not taken on Schleiermacher as well as Hegel. Barth states,

And as to Kierkegaard, I must confess that the appeal of the existentialist theologians to him as their great and direct forerunner has made me a little reserved toward him. Why did he actually delimit himself – in his original manner, but yet also in conformity to the spirit of the middle of the nineteenth century – so sharply against Hegel, but hardly at all, to my knowledge, against Schleiermacher?<sup>534</sup>

Still, though Barth questions Kierkegaard, he at least admits that Kierkegaard's theology "included concepts which Schleiermacher certainly would not have cherished – such as Word, encounter, occurrence, cross, decision, limit, judgment, etc."<sup>535</sup>

If Barth's criticisms of Kierkegaard began as early as 1923, by 1925 Barth's opinion of Kierkegaard's thought was that it is too anthropological, something about which Barth would become increasingly suspicious. Furthermore, as we stated

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<sup>532</sup> Although Barth attributes the beginning of anthropological theology to Schleiermacher, Barth does not hold Schleiermacher fully responsible but rather faults the "new form which accommodated itself to the 'contemporary spiritual situation'." See, Barth: *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 269.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 271-77.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid. Barth continues stating, "There was of course the opposing theology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which definitely did not originate with Schleiermacher and is not to be traced back to him. In relation to it we should have to talk about Gottfried Menken and J.T. Beck, Kierkegaard and the elder Blumhardt, the Lutheran Vilmar and the Reformed Kohlbrügge, Lagarde, and Overbeck, the younger Blumhardt and Hermann Kutter", see, introduction to Barth's *Schleiermacher Lectures*, XV. Barth's words here evidence that, in 1923, although he has come to question whether or not Kierkegaard's thought is too anthropomorphic, as is evident by 1925, he yet views Kierkegaard favorably.

earlier, it seems that in light of Barth's correspondence with the likes of Gogarten, Bultmann, Heidegger and perhaps even Brunner, Barth could not reconcile himself with the predominant interpretation of Kierkegaard by Christoph Schrempf.<sup>536</sup>

In sum, Barth fundamentally disagrees with the anthropological orientation of theology in accounting for knowledge of the self and God outside of revealed

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<sup>536</sup> As Schulz notes, due to Schrempf's inadequate reading of Kierkegaard, many came to understand Kierkegaard's writings (in particular the pseudonymous ones) as endorsing religious unbelief or scepticism, which ironically was "the very same unbelief or scepticism that Schrempf enthusiastically subscribes to and practices himself." More importantly, for our discussion here, is the fact that Schrempf had arrived at his superficial reading of Kierkegaard due to his "radicalizing Kierkegaard's principle of "subjectivity as truth"." The outcome of Schrempf's reading of Kierkegaard was one that had minimized any interpretation of Kierkegaard which endorsed a subjective appropriation of what is objectively given. See Heiko Schulz, "Germany and Austria: A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard" in *Kierkegaard's International Reception Tome I: Northern and Western Europe*. Edited by Jon Stewart (Ashgate, 2009), 307-387. What was Barth's overall problem, specifically with the theological anthropology of these thinkers noted above? In answering this question, although this project does not consider the period of time between Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics* and the 1963 speech, much had happened in that time whereby in 1963 Barth exhibits an overt concern with Kierkegaard. Barth, unlike anywhere else, offers in his 1936 first part- volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, his concerns with the rise of the theological anthropology of Gogarten, Bultmann and Heidegger. Preceding Barth's discussion of these figures in relation to the then-current fixation on theological anthropology, he first considers the return to Pietism in the wake of Enlightenment thought. According to Barth, the fact that Pietism calls for a personal striving with regard to conversion is indicative of its "idea that faith is to be decisively regarded as a determination of human reality."(20) It is in connection with this orientation to the human being that Barth thinks, that "the anthropologising of theology was complete."(20) Barth wonders "Whether the same is not to be said of the existential element which is demanded to-day from theological thinking and the utterance under the influence of Kierkegaard, but supremely if sometimes unconsciously in continuation of the Pietist tradition."(20) Reflecting on the dangers of a theological consideration of existence, Barth thinks his colleagues, specifically here, Heidegger, reverse the grounds from where human existence is to be understood. For Barth, human existence is to be understood only in light of revelation, in light of the message of Scripture. (39) In combating the anthropological consideration of human existence prior to faith and revelation, Barth calls upon his brother Heinrich Barth in positing that, "Only in retrospect from revealed truth, i.e., by way of recapitulation and not anticipation, does the philosophical concept of existence seek to be an analogy to the knowledge of God. In no sense, therefore, can it be accepted as an instrument of the knowledge of God."(39) Thus far, it can go without saying that from our examination of Kierkegaard's conception of the self, as a self before God, Barth mistakenly questions Kierkegaard in relation to a human orientation of the self divorced from revelation. With regard to Gogarten, Barth thinks the problem is the same, namely, the human being as the starting place in relation to God.(128) Barth does tell us that Gogarten thinks his anthropology is one in which "man...cannot be thought of apart from the God who has united Himself with man in revelation, 'from the man God became'."(128) However, Barth is quick to point out that for Gogarten, "this does not mean from Jesus, from the one God-man, but from that other man who has ceased to be isolated vis-à-vis God and yet is not identical with the God-man."(128) Against Gogarten's further claim that man is known in relation only to the Gospel, Barth states, "Gogarten frequently speaks of the man who is to be understood in the light of the 'Gospel'. Gospel here, however, is this revelation which is given with creation and which precedes the proclaimed revelation."(129) For more on Barth's discussion, as given above, see, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1.1: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, translated by G.W. Bromiley, edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (T&T Clark, 2004), 20-39.

revelation. Again, it must be stated that, in light of our examination of Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard denies both a natural theology as well as an understanding of human existence outside of the revelation of God in Christ. For Kierkegaard, Christ is the teacher and Savior who gives the individual the truth of the human condition as one separated from God and from within itself, along with the remedy for these separations.<sup>537</sup> But even more, Barth's diagnosis—that the modern age has reinterpreted the divine in Jesus as pertaining to the divine in all of us—is one with which Kierkegaard would agree. Kierkegaard writes,

In the entire modern age, which so unmistakably bears the mark that it does not even know what the issue is, the confusion is something different and far more dangerous. By way of didacticism, the God-man has been made into that speculative unity of God and man *sub specie aeterni* [under the aspect of eternity] or made visible in that nowhere-to-be-found medium of pure being, rather than that the God-man is the unity of being God and an individual human being in a historically actual situation.<sup>538</sup>

Strangely enough, despite Barth's reservations towards Kierkegaard's work, his reposing of the question of the relation between God and humanity continued to echo Kierkegaard in a way which will be demonstrated in what follows.

### **Man as His Question: Human Existence as Contradiction**

#### *A more refined Anthropology*

In *Romans II*, Barth describes humanity in terms of being infinitely qualitatively different from God, infinitely separated from God due to sin. However, as noted earlier in our examination of *Romans II*, the difficulty with Barth's description is its inability to articulate not so much what sin is but to what extent it

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<sup>537</sup> See Chapter One "The Self with/without Self-hood and God," 46-50.

<sup>538</sup> Kierkegaard, *PC*, 123. Kierkegaard continues his criticism of the modern age's attempt to sublimate the divine and human, stating, "Does all the modern thought about the speculative unity of God and man, all this that regards Christianity only as a teaching, does this have the remotest resemblance to the essentially Christian? No, in the modern approach everything is made as direct as putting one's foot in a sock—and the Christian approach is the sign of contradiction that discloses the thoughts of hearts." (126)

relates to the individual in relation to God.<sup>539</sup> Adding to the ambiguity of Barth's understanding of sin in *Romans II*, humanity is there discussed in terms of the corporate dialectic of the old and new man rather than in terms of individual sinfulness, even if Barth thinks the category of sinfulness applies to the individual. In this light, Barth speaks of humanity as the "old Adam" and Christ as the "new" which appears to denote a generality of the whole of human existence in relation to Christ rather than the individual. Thus, his concern in explicating the distinction between the old man and the new does not provide further clarity in regard to an account of individual existence in relation to sin and God. After all, given Barth's use of a very pervasive and broad dialectic of time and eternity in *Romans II*, it seems as if his intention had been merely to separate categories between the divine and human rather than dissect them.

But here in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* something different is present in Barth's discussion of categories such as the human, sin, and God whereby he parallels Kierkegaard immensely. In short, there is a more definite understanding of the self as an individual in relation to God than that given in *Romans II*. This is evident in his juxtaposing of the individual and God, the preacher and the Word, the interpreter of scripture and others. For, example, when Barth addresses the confession that God's Word, as given in scripture, is his Word to us, it is discussed in terms specifically related to the individual. Barth states, "This claim does not come collectively to humanity or even to Christendom but to the individual."<sup>540</sup> God's Word to humanity is the call for individual responsibility, an act of freedom by the individual in relation

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<sup>539</sup> In our examination of *Romans II*, it was argued that Barth's understanding of sin is that of human arrogance which ignores the *IQD* as well as human ignorance which continues to overcome the *IQD* with whatever means available, see pages 110-3 of this thesis.

<sup>540</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 255.

to Him and his revelation. Barth states: “There is no possibility of regarding scripture as merely historical. There is no possibility of folding the arms and adopting the stance of onlookers or spectators. The only possibility is that of seriousness, of decision, of being taken captive, of faithfulness, of an act of supreme spontaneity.”<sup>541</sup>

Each individual is now brought to the point of decision and responsibility with regard to the God-relation. But it is a relation of the individual to God which does not deny the individual’s relation to others. In other words, the individual must account for its existence as one not only before God but also among others who also bear this responsibility.

This relation of one to another is a very important point for Barth, which should not be overlooked. Why? For Barth the problem of revelation (understanding what is meant in claiming that God has spoken and still speaks) is one which becomes wholly problematic if left to individual interpretation and isolation from others as interpreters of scripture. To this concern, Barth states: “Christian preachers are not just individuals, as Kierkegaard depicted them. They are that too – and woe to them if they are not – but they are not just that. In talking about God they place themselves in a series, on the ground of a certain piece of history, under an order.”<sup>542</sup>

Before we commence with an examination of Barth’s affinity to Kierkegaard within the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, I must note that such an endeavor seeks not only to articulate the conceptual parallels here but also to conclude what we had touched on in our examination of the infinite qualitative difference in *Romans II*.

To recall, briefly, the question pervading this project was whether or not Barth’s view of this concept, in both its positive and negative dimension, parallels

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 53.



that of Kierkegaard's own use. We stated that, at least for the Barth of 1963, Kierkegaard's *IQD* was understood as merely negative, one wherein, the individual "is caught in the wheels of a law which can only deaden and makes one sour, gloomy, and sad."<sup>543</sup> However, in light of our brief discussion of this concept in *Romans II*, as we begin, my hope is that Barth 1963 understanding of Kierkegaard now appears questionable. In order to bring this discussion full-circle, an analysis of both Kierkegaard's and Barth's understanding of humanity is needed. The necessity rests in understanding that inasmuch as the *IQD* is descriptive of humanity's relation to God, this relation is one which is directed to humanity in their predicament of human sinfulness – a predicament of contradiction of which we are culpable.

Therefore, we shall proceed in discussing first the nature of humanity's existence, namely, what it means to be "human" in both Kierkegaard and Barth's thought. Second, we shall discuss what measures are taken up in both thinkers in addressing human existence in their contradiction. Finally, our aim will be to establish firmly that although both thinkers hold that human existence is one of sinfulness i.e. contradiction, this contradiction is one which is overcome in the subject's relation to God in whom he or she comes to a true form of human existence. That God is the corrective for our contradiction necessarily points to the reality of grace given in God's revelation offered us in Christ. This examination is important because it offers a corrective to the misperceived notion that Kierkegaard was only concerned with the individual isolated from God.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Barth, "Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille" in the *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11:1, 1965, 6.

<sup>544</sup> McCormack argues that a crucial difference separating Kierkegaard and Barth lies in their differing concerns. According to McCormack, Kierkegaard's concern is that "of guarding the subjectivity of the human individual against its absorption by the Hegelian dialectic of absolute spirit...This is not Barth's problem at all. His problem is that of guarding the divine subjectivity, not

*Barth on the Self as Contradiction*

In continuity with *Romans II*, Barth still maintains that the human is separated from God and, as responsible for this separation, is therefore a “wanderer on the road and abroad.”<sup>545</sup> But in more specific terms, Barth now extends the distance between God and humanity beyond the *IQD* to one existent within the human being itself, which is defined thereby as being in contradiction, existing as one with opposing forces of spirit and nature, finite and infinite, being and thought.<sup>546</sup> Thus, the human subject, in Barth’s estimation, “is always the one under the almost crushing contradiction of the other, so that he cannot be glad about the one because of the other.”<sup>547</sup> Barth stresses that both distances point to human culpability.

Barth states that a man “cannot view the disorder in which he is entangled as his fate. He must view it as his responsible act, his fault.”<sup>548</sup> Furthermore, the contradiction in which the individual exists is one unable to be overcome by its own powers or effort.<sup>549</sup> Barth describes the self’s awareness of its own inability to overcome the “rift” within its existence as one in which the self suffers such

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human subjectivity.” See, McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth’s Theology, 1921-1931*, 126. Although Kierkegaard’s dealing with human existence was a reaction to the Hegelianism of his day, which threatened the significance of the individual, in no way did he seek to establish a notion of the subject without relation to God. For more, See Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, 1:1, 40. Countering Barth’s view, see Kierkegaard’s JP 4:3902. However, given our examination of Kierkegaard in Chapter One, it can also be said as one with the divine subjectivity. What else could we conclude from his efforts to draw the limits of human reason in relation to revelation by means of his concepts of the *IQD*, paradox, indirect communication, sin, offence etc. as seen throughout our study? It is true that Kierkegaard is concerned with the human subject but not in a way different from Barth. The difference rests only within the scope of their respective project. But even this difference dissolves by virtue of the task they share, namely, explicating the individual’s relation to God. As we shall see, Barth is no different from Kierkegaard here.

<sup>545</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 73.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. Note this too is in continuity with *Romans II*.

knowledge. Barth states that “The real trouble is that there are always two. Man has an incurable wound...he suffers from the fact that he is something that has to be overcome and cannot be overcome,”<sup>550</sup> and yet, “man has no possibilities in this direction.”<sup>551</sup>

Just as the human possesses nothing in itself whereby the contradiction may be overcome, so too the human possesses no innate knowledge of this contradiction. The sheer inability of human effort reveals the ever-present force of the time and eternity dialectic which is born out of the human condition. Interestingly, so that one may take seriously the inadequacy of their powers concerning this matter, Barth articulates that contradiction is the human reality. Therefore it is not a logical contradiction that may be overcome. In light of the various attempts throughout history wherein many Christian concepts were subsumed under the powers of human logic in order to be explained, rationally, Barth stresses that, “It will not do to accept the contradiction and then to give the assurance that something which transcends it, a third and higher thing, a synthesis in which the antithesis can come to rest, presses upon us so ineluctably that we cannot avoid positing it as real and thereby overcome the contradiction.”<sup>552</sup>

In fact, without running ahead of us in stating the exact parallels between Barth and Kierkegaard, it is quite apparent at this juncture that Barth has in mind Kierkegaard’s opposition to the use of Hegelian logic which, among Kierkegaard’s

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

contemporaries, sought to overcome the contradictions in Christianity, existence being one of them.<sup>553</sup> Barth states:

From a Christian standpoint the definition of man as a pilgrim is a definition of existence, not merely of thought...He may reflect upon his path, he may find pleasure in the tireless self-movement of the idea, he may erect a system of paradoxes, he may be very comfortable in his humanity. He can do these things, but he is not pilgrim man as he does so. We reach here a point at which Kierkegaard once thought that he should vindicate the interests of Christianity against Hegel. The relation of Hegel's dialectic to the real dialectic seemed to him to be like that of Leporello with his record of his master Don Juan, who in contrast himself drinks and seduces and enjoys life, and hence himself goes to hell. The 'himself' must be asserted...Man is not the subject of mere discussion or clarification but the participant in a battle report who has just emerged from the fray.<sup>554</sup>

However, for Barth, revelation presupposes the human condition as one separated not only within in itself but from God as well. He states: "God's revealing of himself to man, his making himself known out of his hiddenness, presupposes that man is separated from God but should not be so..."<sup>555</sup> Even more, if the human is to gain any knowledge whatsoever of their existence as one in contradiction, whereby the *IQD* is presupposed, it can only be made known to them in relation to revelation "as one who is addressed by God's Word."<sup>556</sup>

In short, Barth wants to stress two aspects of the human existence as a contradiction. First, "God overcomes the contradiction by himself becoming man and by creating faith and obedience in us by his Spirit."<sup>557</sup> Without entering a discussion now of Barth's richer understanding of revelation, we note that it is God who enters human history in the act of self disclosure and who overcomes the distance within ourselves and between us. But once again, lest humanity enter a dangerous relation to the redemptive work of Christ in history, Barth issues forth his dialectical fervour once more distinguishing the Christ of faith from the Christ of history. He states: "In

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<sup>553</sup> Strangely enough, Barth occasionally draws, in his dogmatics, on a figure who was attacked by Kierkegaard in seeking to overcome all such contradictions, namely, Martensen.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 72

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

my view...when all other lights have been put out, we try to retrieve the lost situation by bringing in a visible historical entity, Jesus of Nazareth, in which the contradiction is supposedly overcome.”<sup>558</sup> Barth’s statement is given further clarification: outside the “Divine possibility” the historical person Jesus of Nazareth presents humanity with just another tool to use in their own endeavouring.

Even the Incarnation itself, divorced from humanity’s realization of the divine in the human becomes not a means of overcoming the human situation but rather another obstacle to transcending it. Thus, when Barth states that the “contradiction is final” he means that “no word that man speaks as subject is the word of reconciliation, not even the word ‘Jesus Christ,’ which is not a magical formula. There is room for this word only when God as subject makes room for it.”<sup>559</sup>

Second, due to human inability to understand its own condition or correct it, Barth points us to the centrality of revelation for our solution, concluding that, “We are forced to say that we may not and cannot understand him except in relation to God. If we strongly endorse this view of man in contradiction to the aforementioned Christian definition, then we endorse equally strongly the view that man stands before God.”<sup>560</sup>

As a whole, Barth’s view of the individual can be summed up as follows. First, man is separated from God by an infinite qualitative difference due to sin, for which he is culpable and from which he also exists in a contradiction of the finite and the infinite, namely, in a conflict of opposing forces. Second, as one subsumed under contradiction and thus separated from God, man has no powers to reconcile these

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 80.

forces. Third, man is aware of both the contradiction in himself and between him and God only by virtue of revelation, without which man is utterly helpless. Fourthly, man is only, therefore, truly defined when he or she is defined in relation to God who is able to reveal both his condition and the remedy for the condition. Finally, it is God's revelation in Christ which is able to overcome the distance separating man and God as well as the contradiction in man, even if such a reconciliation is unknown to him except through the eyes of faith. Indeed, in relation to our discussion in *Romans II*, in both of these works Barth still maintains the overcoming of the abyss produced by human sin by means of grace, i.e. revelation.

However, as we noted throughout our investigation of these two thinkers, the problem in aligning the two rests not with an interpretation of Barth but rather with Kierkegaard. Recall that even Barth himself reflects extreme hesitation concerning Kierkegaard's theology. Nonetheless, if we bear in mind what was briefly touched upon in our examination of *Romans II*, that Kierkegaard's dialectic of time and eternity is not one which is merely negative but possesses a positive factor as well, we are now prepared to expound this positive aspect more fully. Therefore, from our examination of Kierkegaard's view of man in relation to our previous discussion of the *IQD*, we will now conclude with a summary of the parallels and differences between Barth and Kierkegaard from our study here.

### *Kierkegaard and Barth on the Self*

Overall, Kierkegaard's conception of the human being (the self or individual), is complex as well as highly controversial. As we noted in Chapter Two, the controversy relates to his understanding of "Subjectivity as the Truth." It is this

specific notion whereby two years after his *Göttingen* lectures, Barth decided to move away from Kierkegaard. He states, “Because I cannot regard subjectivity as being the truth, after a brief encounter I have had to move away from Kierkegaard again.”<sup>561</sup> But as we noted, Barth’s understanding of this principle had been influenced by Bultmann and Gogarten’s interpretation of this Kierkegaardian motif. Furthermore, as also previously noted, the German reception of Kierkegaard was through the lens of Christoph Schrempf, a lens which saw nothing of the Christian Kierkegaard but of only Kierkegaard the sceptic and subjectivist.

In light of the predominating interpretation of Kierkegaard at Barth’s time, it is no wonder that, as early as 1923, he began to reveal a one-sided view of Kierkegaard’s *IQD* as one solely negative in that it resulted in leaving the subject in the abyss of despair without God. However, given what we examined in Chapter One, in conjunction with the present chapter, this is not Kierkegaard’s true position. Indeed, Kierkegaard does endorse that subjectivity is truth, but if we recall, this phrase is one that expresses not the individual as the source of truth but rather how the individual should relate to truth. Even more, “truth”, in Kierkegaard’s use, is a discussion about the truth of Christianity and not some whim of creating one’s own truth.

Barth’s partial view of Kierkegaard’s individual, as one in despair as a result of the *IQD* is correct, but this is only half of Kierkegaard’s intention. In order to understand the whole of Kierkegaard’s meaning of the *IQD*, a more thorough discussion of his view of the human being, specifically in relation to God, is required. Therefore, from what has been stated above concerning Barth’s view of

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<sup>561</sup> Self Portrait, 161.

“man”, we will now briefly recap what has been said previously about Kierkegaard’s in order to better present the parallels between Kierkegaard and Barth concerning individual’s relation to itself and God.

Thus far, from our Chapter on Kierkegaard, we noted the following. First, in *SUD*, Kierkegaard posits that the individual is a composite of the eternal and the temporal, and therefore created to be in relation to God. However, sin has caused a misrelation in the self’s relation to itself and to God.<sup>562</sup> Second, in *PF*, Kierkegaard

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<sup>562</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 13. Here Kierkegaard is discussing his understanding of the self’s own knowledge of its existence as a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal wherefrom a contradiction ensues from these two elements. Therefore, that Kierkegaard uses the word “synthesis” to denote the human existence and Barth “contradiction” is not indicative of a disagreement. It is as a result of this synthesis that the contradiction exists. It is worth noting, that the make-up of the human existence as consisting of these two elements does not imply that the contradiction exits by way of this synthesis. Rather, the eternal and the temporal in the human being belongs to what constitutes his being, specifically as a creature in relation to the Creator. The opposition arising from this synthesis is therefore not in and of itself, but rather as a result of sin. The human, in Kierkegaard’s estimation, does seem to possess, at times, some sort awareness of its existence as one intended to be in relation to God by virtue of its own powers. And in fact, within his *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, Kierkegaard presents, in the clearest of terms, human existence as being in contradiction and the repair of this existence by means of relation to God, for whom the individual was created. In light of having been created by God, the individual has some minute level of insight into his own inability to restore this relationship. His exposition of this discussion is found mostly in the two discourses, *To Need God is a Human Being’s Highest Perfection*, and *To Gain One’s Soul in Patience* and is, in many ways a more developed if not at least direct discussion of the human condition in relation to God. For example, in these discourses, Kierkegaard describes the human condition as one in which the human soul “is the self contradiction between the external and the internal, the temporal and the eternal.” (*To Gain One’s Soul in Patience*, 166) This condition then lends itself for Kierkegaard to also describe the human condition as one wherein, due to the contradiction, the individual is in conflict, “wrestling” with itself. Furthermore, the only correction to this contradiction, to this overcoming of the inward tension, is one which the human himself cannot prescribe in that the highest that the human can achieve is that he is “fully convinced that he himself is capable of nothing, nothing at all.” (*To Need God is a Human Being’s Highest Perfection*, 307) And yet, according to Kierkegaard, “To comprehend this annihilation is the highest thing of which a human being is capable; to brood over this understanding, because it is a God-given good entrusted to him as the secret of truth, is the highest and the most difficult thing of which a human being is capable.” (309) The human, in Kierkegaard’s estimation, therefore does seem to possess, at times, some sort of awareness of its existence as one intended to be in relation to God by virtue of its own powers. However, if we take this subtle notion as Kierkegaard’s true intention, then it becomes inconsistent with what he states in *SUD*. Therefore, no matter what inclinations we may receive from Kierkegaard as to man’s own innate ability to understand its own condition as one of contradiction, his statements always leave us denying the human being any such ability. He states, “Thus man is a helpless creature, because all other understanding that makes him understand that he can help himself is but a misunderstanding.” (309) And lest one is convinced that Kierkegaard at least endorses some view in which the human self knowledge divorced from God’s revelation possesses some intrinsic ability to “look upward or inward”, Kierkegaard is quite clear that such knowledge is useless. He states: “All his self-knowledge was altogether vague, since it involved only the relation between a dubious self and a dubious something else.” (313) In short, if we can attribute to Kierkegaard the view that the human



argues against a Socratic notion of truth (that the individual has the truth within and needs only to be reminded of it by bringing it forth) for that of a Christian notion, namely, that the self is not in the truth. Kierkegaard calls this sin. Furthermore, “Man has to learn what sin is by revelation from God,”<sup>563</sup> states Kierkegaard. This knowledge is one which is given by the Saviour, therefore, he is the one “who gives the condition and gives the truth.”<sup>564</sup> Thirdly, in light of Kierkegaard’s denial of the Socratic notion of truth, our evaluation of Kierkegaard’s notion of subjectivity suggested that it is to be understood as relational rather than creative. In other words, our relation to God is one which has been initiated by God who gives both the means and the capacity to relate to him with the utmost interiority of our being.

Again, in light of Barth’s reading of Kierkegaard, from what has been stated above, Barth’s reading is thus far justified. In other words, if Kierkegaard’s use of the *IQD*, is one wherein the individual “is caught in the wheels of a law which can only deaden and makes one sour, gloomy, and sad,”<sup>565</sup> then Barth’s assessment is correct. But as we observed in Chapter One, this is not the case.

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possesses something of value in discerning the state of his existence it can be only the sheer inclination that something is not right within the self, that some sort of tension exists between a deeper self and the immediate self. This distinction does in fact seem to be the case. Kierkegaard does make a distinction between the “deeper self” and the “first self”, the immediate self. (314) Even more, this subtle distinction seems, for Kierkegaard, to provide the first and necessary step in the self coming to be a self. He states: “But even if the first self and the deeper self have been reconciled in this way and the shared mind has been diverted away from the external, this is still only the condition for coming to know himself.” (317) In short, by means of what powers the human being possesses, he can come to know that one needs God. “Through more profound self-knowledge, one learns precisely that one needs God,” states Kierkegaard. (317) But once again, even this knowledge, this “profound self-knowledge”, is not due to the human’s own powers. If one thinks this, then, as Kierkegaard states it “would be essentially just a misunderstanding.” (318) Indeed, the opposition whereby the distinction may be posited by the human is one that is internal. But the internal voice which the human being hears is not one of human capability but one of incapability, in short, that he is conditioned by sin. (319)

<sup>563</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 95.

<sup>564</sup> Kierkegaard, *PF*, 15,17.

<sup>565</sup> Barth, “Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille,” 6.

As mentioned, in *SUD*, Kierkegaard seeks to understand what it means to be an individual, a self. And what we found is that the self is a composite as well as one in despair because of this dual nature. But what about this dual nature causes the self to despair? To answer this question we must keep in mind some of his arguments in *PF*.

Insofar as Kierkegaard maintains that the human condition is one of sinfulness there arises despair, and herein lies *PF*'s connection with *SUD*. Kierkegaard states, "Despair is the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself...if he [self] were not a synthesis, he could not despair."<sup>566</sup> In short, "despair is a qualification of spirit and relates to the eternal in man."<sup>567</sup> First, according to Kierkegaard, "a human being is spirit" and "spirit is the self."<sup>568</sup> However, most are unaware that they are spirit. Why? In order to be a self, to know that you are a self, you must be in relation to the power that has established you, namely God. Kierkegaard states, "The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can be done only through the relationship to God."<sup>569</sup> In that "despair in man is a misrelationship between the temporal and the eternal, of which his nature is composed,"<sup>570</sup> this misrelation can only be corrected by the self's coming into relation with God.

Inevitably, if one is not aware that their nature is composed of a synthesis, then in no way can one begin to be a true self. In other words, if one understands themselves as merely temporal, then in no way would they look to the eternal in

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<sup>566</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 16.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>570</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 1, 25.

themselves, to their need of the “God-relationship”. Note, the misrelation in the self as well as his or her inability to perceive it, is for Kierkegaard of the individual’s own doing, i.e., sin. He states: “How does this misrelationship happen, then? From man himself, who disturbs the relationship, which is precisely to despair.”<sup>571</sup>

Even more, in order for the self to come to a knowledge of their existence as spirit, they must be given this knowledge. In this context, as a discussion of the human condition in relation to God, Kierkegaard’s *PF* is better understood. The self is in untruth. The truth of their existence, as sinful, as “disturbing this relationship” must be revealed to them by God. Pausing for a moment, given what so many perceive of Kierkegaard, as one who is concerned with the human subject in and of itself, his notions of sin and despair are so powerfully asserted against the individual in all its powers and efforts that all such assertions pertaining to Kierkegaard’s notion of the individual must take heed of his presentation of sin. He states:

But precisely because no human being can by himself come to the idea that God loves him, in like manner no human being can come to know how great a sinner he is. Consequently, the Augsburg Confession teaches that it must be revealed to a man how great a sinner he is. For without the divine yard-stick, no human being is the great sinner (this he is – only before God).<sup>572</sup>

In the absence of revelation, the self cannot become a self and thus does not know that it is in despair.

For Kierkegaard, the second sense of despair exists as a result of revelation. When the self comes to the knowledge that it is spirit, a synthesis, it perceives, for the first time, the *IQD* between itself and God and thus, again, despairs. As revelation makes known the infinite chasm which separates humanity and God, humanity despairs at the impossibility of overcoming this chasm. Left to itself, the

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<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>572</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 2, 49.

individual despairs in its inability “to will to be oneself.”<sup>573</sup> In short, “what is intolerable to him is that he cannot get rid of himself,”<sup>574</sup> no matter how hard he tries.

At this point, the affinity that exists between Kierkegaard and Barth relates to their equal employment of diastasis. However, bearing in mind what was demonstrated in Chapter One concerning Kierkegaard’s overcoming of the *IQD*, the affinity between these two thinkers continues.

Earlier we noted that what Kierkegaard sought to establish was a genuine description of the human response to God’s forgiveness, which unaided by grace, is one of offence. He states:

First of all, Christianity proceeds to establish sin so firmly as a position that the human understanding can never comprehend it [the negative dimension and its relation to the concept of revelation]; and then it is this same Christian teaching that again undertakes to eliminate this position in such a way that the human understanding can never comprehend it.<sup>575</sup>

As a result of investigating Kierkegaard’s *IQD* in connection to the human and God relation, it seems that Barth’s misreading of Kierkegaard’s *IQD* as negative, inasmuch as it lacks grace, is without ground. Of course, Barth cannot be fully blamed for this misreading, many other factors, as we noted, are related. In spite of the problems revolving around Kierkegaard’s conception of Christianity, his employment of the *IQD* was intended to show the primacy of God’s grace by means of his portrayal of the seriousness of the human situation as utterly helpless and thus in need of God and his revelation. He states:

There is an infinite, radical, qualitative difference between God and man. This means, or the expression for this is: the human person achieves absolutely nothing; it is God who gives everything; it is he who brings about a person’s faith, etc. This is grace, and this is Christianity’s major premise.<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 14.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>576</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP* Vol. 2, 59.

In concluding our discussion here of Kierkegaard and Barth's understanding of the human, I shall briefly outline the parallels and differences from my investigation.

First, both thinkers believe the human condition is one of sin. As a result of sin, humanity is separated from God as well as within themselves. Secondly, both thinkers endorse the view that only in the light of revelation can humanity be made aware of the effects of sin in them and in relation to God. In light of revelation, both thinkers maintain that two forms of separation pertain to the individual. One form is the chasm separating them from God, namely the *IQD*. This first form of separation communicates that the intention of both thinkers was to relate the utter negativity of human existence caused by the *IQD*. The second form, which appears, for Barth, here in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, is the contradiction innate within our existence, which Kierkegaard also affirmed.

A third parallel is that revelation, while initially igniting our awareness of the negativity of our existence, offers also the corrective for our existence resulting in the self's being reconciled to both itself and God. This reveals that both thinkers adhere to a theology of grace which rescues the individual from its despair brought on by the *IQD*. The significance given to revelation in the discussion of sin and grace in both thinkers rests in the nature of revelation as being God's objective giving of himself in Christ. In short, the self's separation from itself and God is overcome in God having overcome the abyss in Christ.

## The Objective Possibility of Revelation

For Barth, the question of the possibility of revelation presents two problems. The first, Barth writes, is “How can God come to us without ceasing to be God?”<sup>577</sup> The second, he writes, is “How can we humans stand before God without ceasing to be human?”<sup>578</sup> Both of these questions represent Barth’s present conviction that revelation comprises of both an objective and a subjective component, the former of which is under examination at present. With regard to Barth’s first question, his answer is “That the doctrine of the incarnation has given us an answer.”<sup>579</sup> However, while offering knowledge of God, the Incarnation does not permit a moving beyond the barriers given to human reason and endeavour Barth had offered in *Romans II* given in the time and eternity dialectic. Therefore, I agree with McCormack’s position that “the eschatological reservation which, in the phase of *Romans II*, had been safeguarded by the time-eternity dialectic, *was now built into the very structure of his Christology.*”<sup>580</sup> However, in what follows, I will argue that McCormack’s position, that Barth’s Christology in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* allows for a gradual doing away with the time-eternity dialectic “with no loss of the critical distance between God and humankind, is somewhat confused.”<sup>581</sup>

Earlier, in *Romans II*, Barth had attacked all human means which sought to eradicate this barrier, means which presupposed an unbridled access in relation to God. So relentless was his attack that the result is one which leaves the reader questioning what can, in fact, be affirmed about God. Therefore, by virtue of Barth’s

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<sup>577</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 174.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>580</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, 328.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, 328. I will address this issue mainly in the section, *The Paradox of Revelation*.

terminology in *Romans II*, coupled with the pervasiveness of the dialectics of time and eternity and of veiling and unveiling, the impression is that we cannot presume to have access to God and that we are left, in the end, without such knowledge. And even though Barth sought then to offer knowledge of God via the resurrection, such knowledge is merely ambiguous insofar as revelation is ascertained by the luminous power of the resurrection which casts a light backward to the contradiction of the cross. In *Romans II*, Barth states, “It [this Otherness of God’s speaking or our knowledge of him] is the meaning of all ecclesiastical and religious history, nay, of all history; meaning which, for this reason, cannot be identified with any period or epoch of history or even with any underlying experience in history.”<sup>582</sup>

In that revelation assumes a dialectical relation to time, the temptation may arise to defer to some sort of mystical or transcendent experience, something the Barth of *Romans II* sought to eliminate. It seems, given the lack of historicity *Romans II* presents in his conception of revelation, Barth has worked against himself. Therefore, after the writing of *Romans II*, coupled with his correspondence with Harnack in 1923,<sup>583</sup> Barth realized he had, perhaps, undermined the very thing he was seeking to protect, namely, revelation. And yet Barth’s desire to supplement the obscure and intangible language of *Romans II*’s notion of revelation is one not without bounds. Barth was conscious that he could not go back and fully reopen, if at all, the doors of historicism which he had so forcefully closed earlier. Instead, he would still have to uphold the *IQD* between time and eternity but in a way which would allow full expression of the God revealed in time, an expression which, however, would still safeguard the divine subjectivity. In other words, as

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<sup>582</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 92.

<sup>583</sup> See, H. Martin Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

McCormack notes, Barth must maintain that God is the Subject of revelation who cannot become a mere object.<sup>584</sup> Therefore, as stated in the introduction to this Chapter, Barth's conception of the Incarnation here in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* has its impetus from principles given in *Romans II*: First, God is infinitely qualitatively distinct from humanity.<sup>585</sup> Second, God is not an object like that of ordinary human objects of perception, nor can he be.<sup>586</sup> Third, as Subject God evades the ability of human reason and human effort to make him an object.<sup>587</sup> In short, humanity, by virtue of its own efforts, is entirely helpless in knowing God.<sup>588</sup>

### *God as Object in Jesus Christ*

No matter the extensive limits still given to human knowledge of God, Barth now affirms that in Christ God has made himself known, God has given himself as an intuitable object for human knowing. This given-ness is the means whereby God is revealed, namely, in the taking up of human flesh. In assuming human flesh, God makes himself conformable to our human ways of knowing, i.e. enters into empirical reality. "He shows himself to us, to our eyes, our ears, our feelings, our perception."<sup>589</sup>

As stated in the Introduction to this Chapter, although I question to what extent Barth's reading of Heppel has contributed to his "new" articulation of revelation in history, one thing is clear in this regard. Barth's language in describing the Incarnation, takes on the Chalcedonian language of the hypostatic union when he

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<sup>584</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth's Theology, 1921-31*, 317.

<sup>585</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 134.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, 87, 136.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.



states, that “The real deity and the real humanity must be so united that neither can be changed into the other or mixed with it.”<sup>590</sup> In this light, the dialectic of veiling and unveiling is given new significance by means of Barth’s re-thinking of the notion of the God’s assuming of human flesh as the “medium’ of revelation. Barth writes,

I have not been talking hypothetically about a hypothetical entity but about the actually existent possibility of revelation, about Jesus Christ, about the way that God comes to us as it is known and confessed in the Christian church. I could not speak specifically about the condition without finally, as you have noted, adopting the terms of the Chalcedonian Definition, in which the church gave classical formulation, not to a deduction of Christ a priori, but to an account of the actual reality of Christ.<sup>591</sup>

In light of the relation now between Barth’s understanding of the *morphē theou* and the Chalcedonian formula, the dialectic of veiling and unveiling perhaps marks a point of departure from *Romans II*. In *Romans II*, the Incarnation is discussed in terms of human flesh as the medium, or organ of revelation but not in terms of revelation itself. Therefore, God in Christ is hidden and only revealed by the power of the resurrection whereby we are able to perceive more than mere humanity in Christ. However, although Barth in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* describes the relation of the divine and human in Christ dialectically, paradoxically, and thus in parallel with *Romans II*, he now affirms a far more dialectical conception of revelation: the divine and human are now wholly united, yet utterly distinct. He writes, “For if he were not wholly human, and only in his humanity the organ by which God makes himself perceptible, then he would not be the Revealer at all...God must really meet man, and that means that he himself must be truly and totally human and nothing else.”<sup>592</sup>

By virtue of this formulation, Barth is able to speak more concretely about revelation in history. However, the concreteness with which Barth desires to speak of

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<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

revelation does not permit, as stated, a lessening of the *IQD* by which the divine Subjectivity remains guarded. Rather, this formulation allows for both a more concrete articulation of objective revelation as well as a more concrete resistance to merely human perceptibility. How? Barth writes, “The human being through whom God conceals himself and makes himself comprehensible must be no less fully human. The concealment must be complete, the divine incognito must be total.”<sup>593</sup> Therefore, although Barth writes, “The Incarnation means that God becomes objective and concrete, coming into history, into the circle of human comprehension,”<sup>594</sup> the Incarnation also creates a problem in that “God’s Word becomes complex instead of simple.”<sup>595</sup>

With these words, Barth hints at the complexity of the Incarnation as the solution to the problem: it provides objective knowledge of God while maintaining the impenetrability of his divine Subjectivity. Although affirming that in Christ, “the inalienable subjectivity of God conceals itself in the hard objectivity of revelation,” Barth nevertheless affirms that “No less impregnable [revelation], the divine subjectivity must still triumph as before in the human objectivity in which it has hidden itself.”<sup>596</sup> As we shall now examine, the “triumph as before” denotes that Barth has continued with *Romans II*’s notion of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling of revelation in Christ whereby God remains hidden from and yet can be disclosed to human knowing.

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 138.

*The Paradox of Revelation*

What is apparent in Barth's Chalcedonian language is, again, his unwillingness to compromise the dialectical nature of revelation. The uniting of God and man, for Barth, "must be a striking dialectical union."<sup>597</sup> This means that "the relation must be an open and loose one inasmuch as the deity does not pass into the humanity or the humanity become identical with the deity."<sup>598</sup> The dialectical union of God and man is, for Barth, the key to maintaining the way in which God can both unveil himself for human knowledge all the while hiding himself in the veil of human flesh which provides the means for knowledge to begin with. Since God is not an object, he must become one in order to be knowable. And yet in becoming an object for human knowledge he remains hidden as the Subject. However, as Barth states, "God is hidden then, not because of the relativity of all human knowledge, but because he is the living God who reveals himself as he is, the triune God, inexhaustibly living, immutably the subject, from himself and not from us."<sup>599</sup>

Paralleling *Romans II*, the presentation of God's revelation in Christ in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* is paradoxical by virtue, then, of the object in which God makes himself known. Our acknowledgment of this knowledge of God in Christ is therefore unlike our affirmation of everyday empirical reality. Given the paradox of the God-human, a mere objective adherence to revelation is impossible. Revelation in Christ is knowledge not directly given to human understanding and perception but rather indirectly given despite the divine incognito. Barth writes, "God's revelation in any case means...the complete divine incognito, God's dealings with us

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<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., 135.

exclusively by indirect communication.”<sup>600</sup> As a result, Christ “must not make God so perceptible that anyone can see and perceive at once that here is God.”<sup>601</sup>

Barth, despite his seeking to ground his understanding of eternity’s relation to time within the confines of Chalcedonian language, betrays his ongoing agreement with Kierkegaard with regard to the nature of revelation as being both inaccessible and accessible to humanity. This is evident in Barth’s use of indirect communication and paradox to describe both the dialectic of revelation as well as the dialectical relation with regard to human affirmation. Amidst his affirmation of the objective possibility of revelation, Barth asks us to consider its limits, objectively speaking. He writes, “Let us consider the paradox of this circumstance itself. This *man*, *this* man (we must emphasize both) is God himself who reveals God himself, who by God himself is revealed as God himself.”<sup>602</sup> Moreover, in line with Kierkegaard, Barth’s use of the paradox of revelation prohibits a mere objective consideration of revelation. In other words, the paradox denies rational assent in order to welcome another avenue of human receptivity, namely faith, which I will discuss later. Barth writes, “This paradox, its radical outworking from every angle, its defence against every attempt to weaken it or dissolve it, became the theme of early Christian Christology.”<sup>603</sup>

For Barth, even in revelation there is no lessening of the *IQD* between God and humanity. Barth states, “We have to understand and assert this qualitative distinction so radically that there can be no question of any erasure of the

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

boundary.”<sup>604</sup> Whereas in *Romans II* the distance between God and humanity was maintained by the time-eternity dialectic, now, as McCormack has pointed out, the distance is maintained by revelation itself. Therefore, McCormack is correct in noting a shift in the means from which the distance is maintained. However, this shift does not assume a lessening of the time-eternity dialectic insofar as the Incarnation is the manifestation of time and eternity *in* time. As the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite, the Incarnation presents the paradox to human reason and thus upholds the *IQD*. Thus, given Barth’s attempt to speak of revelation in history, although the means in keeping the *IQD* has shifted in location, i.e., the Incarnation, there is no shift with regard to what the Incarnation seeks to maintain, namely, the difference between time and eternity. In sum, now that revelation is in history, the time-eternity dialectic is relocated in history in safeguarding the eschatological reservation.

Indeed, revelation is for Barth precisely the overcoming of the *IQD* which separates us from God. He writes, “But we must also remember the positive side that revelation means the overcoming of the antithesis between God and the world which through us is entangled in the contradiction with him.”<sup>605</sup> However, according to Barth, although the barrier has been overcome in Christ, the barrier exists in Christ himself. In other words, by virtue of Barth’s attempt to speak more concretely about the reality of revelation *in* history, the result has been the expression of a more concrete notion of the barrier *in* history. Barth writes, “The limit that is thereby set for us has nothing whatever to do with a one-sided emphasis on God’s

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 154.

transcendence, majesty, or negativity.”<sup>606</sup> In other words, like *Romans II*, Barth maintains the *IQD* by virtue both of God’s unknowability as qualitatively and infinitely distinct and of the paradox that marks the incarnation of Christ. Barth’s obvious endeavour to speak of revelation in history brings us to question what this relation means for the historical investigation of God’s revelation in Christ.

*Christ and History:*

Before discussing Barth’s new articulation of revelation’s relation to history, I would first like to revisit Kierkegaard’s position of this relation. In Kierkegaard, the accidental and contingent aspects of revelation are suggestive of what type of relation the event of the Incarnation has to history and, specifically, historical investigation. As I noted earlier, historical events in general are accidental insofar as their coming into existence reveals their contingency, their not being necessary. If something is said to be necessary it denotes that it exists and that it is therefore unable to come into existence in that it already exists. Historical events are not necessary by virtue of their transition from possibility to actuality, in short, from their not existing to coming into existence. Therefore, a historical event is by nature an event which is not necessary. The apparent problem therefore, in speaking of God, who is necessary, as one who comes into existence is that either he is not necessary or he has not really come into history. There appears to be a tension in claiming that historicism cannot speak for an event which is described by Barth as possessing all the attributes of being historical, i.e. contingent, accidental, and concrete. This

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 134.

paradoxical presentation of the historicity of revelation is indicative of the way in which revelation manifested itself historically, namely, as a paradox.

Due to Barth's desire to speak objectively about knowledge of God, about the fact that God has become an object *in* history, Barth had to reconsider the relation between history and revelation in a way that he had not in *Romans II*. There, he had sought, with a voracious dialectic to remove knowledge of God beyond the reach of historical criticism in a way which compromised the adherence to historical revelation. But he now no longer endorses this extreme dichotomy. Why?

Barth had come to a deeper appreciation of the relation between revelation and history as a result of his study of what role the Church and scripture contribute to this relation. But most importantly, what moved Barth beyond his harsh criticisms of history in *Romans II* was, as stated, his new affirmation of God *in* history. What aided Barth's understanding of our relation to this abnormal historical event was his re-evaluation of the Church in terms of its authority in relation to the historical witness of scripture, such that scripture is the witness to God in history. Barth writes, "The authority that the church grants to the historical datum is real, constraining authority. But this means that the historical datum as such can be its historical proclamation but not its source. This source, so to put it spatially, is to be sought further back, in a suprahistorical sphere, beyond the datum."<sup>607</sup> But note: Barth distinguishes the proclamations of the historical event from the source of the event.

For Barth, the Church's authority does not rest in and of itself but rather serves to affirm the historical datum whereby this distinction exists. It is scripture

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<sup>607</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, 56.

that serves as the means whereby we have the proclamation of the historical datum but the historical datum itself has its source in relation to God who gives himself in revelation. However, scripture is nonetheless revelation insofar as it is the witness to the revelation of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Barth writes:

Scripture as God's Word, or of God as its author, is strictly a paradoxical one and must always remain so. Revelation gives rise to scripture and itself speaks in it. This is what makes scripture God's Word without ceasing to be historically no more than the words of the prophets and apostles, sharing the relativity, the ambiguity, and the distance that are proper to everything historical: the letters and words are flesh.<sup>608</sup>

In this statement, Barth's use of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, which usually refers to the Incarnation, now also applies to scripture as well. The authority of the Church is an authority given to it by scripture to which the Church recognises. As the historical witness to God's revelation in Christ, the authority of scripture cannot be found in this historical itself insofar as history is past and, as in the confines of time, questionable. However, for Barth, this is not a problem.

The ground for the authority in both Scripture and the Church rests in the presupposition that God has spoken. In God's speaking, states Barth, "we are directed, not to God himself, but to God communicating himself."<sup>609</sup> However, if the presupposition of revelation serves as the authority for both scripture, as witness to revelation, and the Church as witness to Scripture, to what extent, therefore, does, or does not, Barth's view of revelation in relation to history moves beyond *Romans II*?

In a more direct sense from *Romans II*, revelation is equated with God in Christ, *in* history. However, in and of itself, the discipline of historical investigation, in its unearthing of the past by means of investigation, offers us nothing in regard to our knowledge of revelation. Note, I did not say that history cannot offer anything in regards to the historicity of scripture nor of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The

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<sup>608</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 58.



assumption that historicism mistakenly makes is that, by means of historical investigation and/or speculation, “a ramp is built so that one may easily (‘casually’!) climb up from the general history of spirit and religion to Jesus at the top, that is to revelation. We must [Barth states] smash this ramp, or at least see that revelation is not there at the top.”<sup>610</sup> On the other hand, Barth yet affirms that:

Christian revelation and Christian faith are historical. But they are not so in the way that is commonly depicted today. The stock phrases about a turning point in world history with Christ’s birth, and his supposed historical effects and impact, may well be true, but they have nothing whatever to do with the revelation of God in the incarnation or with faith in it. To me a revelation that is a turning point in world history would be too tidy a revelation.<sup>611</sup>

So, in what sense, then, is revelation to be affirmed as historical on our behalf? Barth writes, in perpetuating the difference:

Revelation and faith are historical in the NT in exactly the same sense as in the OT. They belong to prehistory or primal history, that is, they are historical in such a way that here, where it is a matter of the present or the immediate past, what has happened in time escapes direct observation just as much as there, where the event is still future.<sup>612</sup>

Any attempt to equate mere history with prehistory is, for Barth, to erect an idol in the place of God.<sup>613</sup> Given Barth’s statements thus far, the relation between revelation and history in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* still parallels *Romans II* to the extent that history provides no access in affirming revelation. Therefore, in that revelation is now discussed as historical and yet beyond the reach of historical investigation, there appears to be a dialectical notion of revelation as being both a relaxing and a heightening of human accessibility in knowing God.

In sum, historical investigation and human rationality are useless in permitting us knowledge of God in Christ. Furthermore, as in *Romans II*, Barth maintains scepticism towards historical endeavours in general, insofar as history is

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<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid., 61.

past and therefore denies an immediate relation to those events. And yet, an account must be given for the sheer opposition between history and revelation in that Barth would not deny that humanity had more accessible knowledge to history, in general, than to the historicity of the Incarnation.

By means of this dialectical relation of relaxing and heightening the tension, Barth can, in accord with *Romans II*, yet affirm God's revelation in history, but as an event from eternity, it is "qualified" history.<sup>614</sup> What Barth means by "qualified" is that there are two things we can affirm about the life of Jesus but that each affirmation is grounded differently. What this means is as follows. First, insofar as we affirm the Incarnation we thereby affirm that it has taken place in the person Jesus of Nazareth. Historically, Jesus appears like any other human being of flesh and blood. Thus, the first affirmation is that Jesus of Nazareth is believed to have been a historical figure no different from anyone else in history. Therefore, the claim that someone once lived can be either affirmed or denied by historical report or investigation. Hence, here we have the first affirmation which is that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed a person who lived in first century Jerusalem.

A report of this kind is not controversial and demands no higher assent than that of the historical. However, what Barth also wants to affirm is something which transcends a mere historical witness to the historical existence of the person of Jesus of Nazareth, namely, that in this historical person God entered time. Thus, the second affirmation, that God has become a historical figure, transcends our first affirmation insofar as it transcends historical investigation and human reason. So, the Incarnation is qualified history in that it is both historical and unhistorical. In other words, the

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid., 60.

medium of human flesh permits Barth simultaneously to express that in this object of human flesh, God is both hidden and revealed; God has overcome the barrier of time and eternity and yet has maintained it. This point should become more evident throughout my discussion here, especially when I come to discuss the historicity of the Incarnation in relation to Barth's use of contemporaneity and indirect communication.

### *Indirect Communication and Contemporaneity*

Since, for Barth, God's revelation is his communication to humanity but a communication which is incognito, hidden by means of the medium of flesh in Jesus, God's revelation is therefore indirect communication. In speaking of this indirect means of revelation, Barth writes:

I know that I can never directly communicate that about which I speak, that I can never set it before my hearers as a given thing, that on pain of complete failure from a Christian standpoint, I can never even make the attempt to enforce direct communication ...because this is a denial of revelation, which is always the disclosing of something hidden by God himself, the direct communication from one person to another of something that is already disclosed, of a mystery that is no longer a mystery.<sup>615</sup>

Barth seeks to emphasize the total uselessness of human speech to unveil what God has hidden. Even more, to deny the hiddenness of God's revelation in Christ is, for Barth, a denial of revelation itself. Given the problem of the certainty of history, insofar as history is already past, coupled with the paradox of the God-man, it appears that a direct communication is highly undermined if not wholly impossible in this respect.

Although we, in the present, are unfortunate as to be so far removed from the historical event of the life of Christ, would not, however, Christ's contemporaries fare much better in perceiving God in history? Barth asks:

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<sup>615</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 65.

The question is whether we do well to establish contemporaneity by ignoring or setting aside the problem of time, the ugly ditch, or whether the temporality of revelation does not work itself out and reflect itself in the recognition of a temporality conditioned form of the communication of revelation too. The question is whether in the form of a sure and self-established and triumphant church we can make revelation in concealment into open, direct, and unequivocal revelation, or whether there is not a connection between the inalienable concealment of revelation and a time-related, historical form of its historical propagation and communication to later generations, an unforgettable and unavoidable connection between the cross of Christ and the necessary distance that the church of Christ must keep from the normative historical principle that gives it birth.<sup>616</sup>

Barth's words here are reminiscent of the problem of historicism which he addressed in *Romans II*. For Barth, this problem is still an important one and therefore his question should be taken seriously in light of the era in which he lived. Could not the efforts of eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century theology be seen as seeking to make the inaccessible, the indirect knowledge of God, accessible and direct? Even more, for Barth, the outcome of the Christology of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack, and Herrmann reflect the problem to which he asks this question concerning the dubiousness of historical endeavours.

Barth's questioning of the limits of historicism necessitates his wrestling with, not only the nature of our present relation to the historical event, but also the relation of the historical contemporary to the event of the incarnation. Not only is Christ the indirect communication of God, but so too is scripture insofar as it is the historical witness to revelation and therefore is itself revelation. And just as Jesus Christ exists as both historical and divine, so too is scripture the record which is both historical and divine. Barth describes this relation between Christ and scripture as revelation in an indirect form stating:

To say that scripture is God's Word is to say that we do not know Christ outside or alongside scripture but only in scripture. We also know nothing about the Holy Spirit apart from scripture. We know nothing about a church where there is no scripture... There is a beyond in scripture. This is the Word of God, namely, revelation. But we must insist that revelation meets only indirectly, only in scripture...<sup>617</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 215.

And the authority of the Church can do nothing to remove the indirectness of God's revelation.

Therefore, for Barth, the only means whereby we become a contemporary with Christ is the Holy Spirit.<sup>618</sup> And I must point out, that although Barth again appears critical of historicism in relation to revelation, he yet believes, as he did in *Romans II*, that “the act of historical observation is essential. It is the basis of knowledge of scripture.”<sup>619</sup>

All Barth is doing is articulating the limits of a historical investigation of the Incarnation. In fact, with regard to our interpretation of scripture, Barth believes, “the sharpest historical observation and the most intensive thinking after and thinking with do not help me at all if first and last there does not enter in something of this identification between me and the author, the author and me.”<sup>620</sup> For Barth, this relating of the individual and the author is a process whereby a shift takes place from a merely empirical and reflective sphere into an existential sphere. As a result of this shift, Barth states that the “historical distance and conceptual abstraction are overcome.”<sup>621</sup>

Barth's point here is tricky and one wonders, given his Kierkegaardian language, to what extent Kierkegaard would have agreed with Barth, that historical distance is overcome? It is important to remember that this movement, this relation between the authors of scripture and the reader is one conditioned in faith. Understood this way, Kierkegaard would bear no ill-will to Barth's overcoming of the historical separation. Nonetheless, Barth offers us caution in regard to placing too

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<sup>618</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 257

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

much significance on this immediacy which overcomes the gap between the past and the present. He states:

We must consider that the 'nevertheless' or limitation which has to be set over against the freedom of the individual as well as the authority of the church is valid and efficacious only if it does not come from the world, from the outside, in this case from a human authority but from the source or origin of freedom, so that freedom is held in check by freedom...All freedoms have their source here [in the Spirit]. They also have their limit here. Freed from the freedom of God, all of our freedoms become irrelevant and meaningless liberalism, subjectivism, or spiritualism.<sup>622</sup>

What Barth raises here is the question as to the benefits of being a contemporary with Christ, which is a question related to the impenetrability of revelation. In other words, would not Christ's contemporaries have been ones who were confronted with direct communication rather than indirect insofar as they were historically related to the event? Even more, were not the apostles and those who followed Christ direct witnesses to the God-man and his miracles?

If historical contemporaneity was beneficial in detecting the God-man then historical investigation itself exists quite substantiated in this regard, even if it is a bit inhibited by the issue of the historical gap. Barth's answer to such considerations, which present the possibility that the historical contemporary of Christ had access to a more direct communication, is an adamant no! He writes:

The gap between them [NT Apostles] and revelation is no less great than that between Moses and revelation, nor is their closeness to it any greater than his. The content of the years A.D. 1-30 certainly has the significance of the decision concerning the objective possibility of revelation and therefore faith. But the question of earlier or later, of greater or smaller distance from this period, has no decisive importance, no importance in principle, either for revelation or for faith. Those who think that it has, those who think that we have revelation in direct communication in this background, or at least in the NT, in historical proximity to Jesus, in the radius of his historical action, in the history that came under the influence, have removed in part at least the hiddenness of God and changed it into a simple revealedness.<sup>623</sup>

Thus Barth asks and answers:

What is the direct communication that the first disciples have, according to the Synoptics? Obviously this, that after the brief shining of a new and strange and

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 147.

uncomprehended light in the one whom they followed, they experienced a swift and dreadful catastrophe, the end result being that they 'all forsook him and fled'.<sup>624</sup>

Without regard for time or place, God's revelation is, for Barth, his "revelation in his concealment, the complete divine incognito, God's dealings with us exclusively by indirect communication."<sup>625</sup> In sum, "indirect communication means God's incarnation."<sup>626</sup> In short, the tension in *Romans II* between time and eternity is relocated in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* in revelation by virtue of its being *in* history.

Since Barth now, as I stated, offers a truly objective form of revelation, he reveals that he has come to terms with the relation of revelation to history. As a result, he has to now, like Kierkegaard before him, address both the inaccessibility and the accessibility of historicity in a much more delicate fashion. Barth can no longer, with such dialectical fervour, maintain a one-sidedness which paints the Incarnation in ambiguous strokes. Therefore, like Kierkegaard, Barth has now to discuss those terms which previously related negatively to history as a whole in connection with the Incarnation; terms such as "indirect communication", "paradox", "unhistorical", "contemporaneity", "faith" and "offence". With the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, all such terminology thus requires re-evaluation. And here, I believe, lies the difference and the significance in Barth's new Christology.

Earlier, in the Introduction, I questioned what was new in Barth's Göttingen Christology as a result of his reading Hepppe. I agree that Barth's reading of Hepppe has provided him with the means to conceptualize a fresh take on revelation, a new way of conceptualizing the God-human. The Barth of *Romans II* does not differ from the Barth of the *Göttingen Dogmatics* in terms of affirming the divinity of Christ, the

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 151.

revelation of God in history, even if these were highly undeveloped in the former. However, as a result of the Chalcedonian formula of hypostatic union [note that the anhypostasis-enhypostasis distinction is not Chalcedonian but *post-Chalcedonian*], Barth was in a better position to be able to conceptualize the relation between the human and divine in Christ and from there to conceive of the relation between history and revelation. And given Barth's highly Christological, Chalcedonian language in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* in addressing the issue of our knowledge of God, this seems likely. Notice Barth's own language, "I could not speak specifically about the condition without finally...adopting the terms of the Chalcedonian Definition, [the] classical formulation..."<sup>627</sup> Barth provides us with another example of his coming to construe Kierkegaardian concepts such as the *IQD* in dialogue with Church tradition. It is clear that in *Romans II*, Barth had found the concept of the *IQD* in Kierkegaard. But now, in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth writes,

If we grant the first Christians one little thing, namely, that they understood the distinction between God and man qualitatively and thus posited it as infinite, then we have to concede that we do justice to their thinking only if we see that this first or last step of their Christology, whether it moved from below to above (adoptionism) or from above to below (hypostatizing), this first or last step in which they equate unequal things, precisely in its enigmatic and severely paradoxical nature, is the point of the twofold movement of thinking.<sup>628</sup>

Again, Barth's words here betray that he sought to understand what he holds necessary to understanding the relation between God and humanity, i.e., the *IQD*, as located even in the earliest Christians. But Barth had already explicitly invoked both the Nicene Creed and Chalcedon in *Romans II*. In speaking to the dialectic of God and man in Christ, Barth writes,

He is 'begotten not made'—that is, He is contrasted with every creature familiar to us. Therefore, He is 'born of the Virgin Mary'—that is, He is our protest against assigning eternity to any Humanity or Nature or History which we can observe. Therefore, He is

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<sup>627</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid., 116.



‘very God and very Man’—that is, He is the document by which the original, lost-but-recoverable union of God and man is guaranteed.”<sup>629</sup>

Looking to Kierkegaard, his Christology is one which apparently endorses the union of the divine and the human, hence the paradox, hence the absurdity. Barth’s own Christological expressions also manifest the same endorsement. Indeed, Barth could not have gained the Christological development he expresses in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* from Kierkegaard. But this is not to say that the beginnings were not there in *Romans II* but only that Barth had yet to find a way to articulate this union conceptually. This is where Heppe was useful.

Therefore, Barth’s indebtedness to the early Church formulations is more in light of his attempt to provide new grounds whereby he could understand the relation by means of the old grounds. What I think Kierkegaard offers Barth, then, beyond the early and reformed Church means of articulation, is the means whereby he could discuss the relation of the incarnation to history itself. One could say that Kierkegaard himself relied heavily on this same ground, given his readings of the early Church Fathers, specifically Athanasius who maintained God’s revelation in Christ as being God’s incognito.<sup>630</sup> However, given that Barth had already employed, in *Romans II* and in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, his debt to Kierkegaard is evident. And this being the case, those concepts which Barth equally employs in both works should lead us not to an over appraisal of the influences of the early Church but perhaps a renewal of Kierkegaardian content, even if the form is the traditional language of the early church.

In conclusion of this section, I would like to offer some statements by both Kierkegaard and Barth which reveals Barth’s reliance on Kierkegaardian content

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<sup>629</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans II*, 277.

<sup>630</sup> See, Athanasius *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*.

concerning the accessibility of human knowledge of the historicity of the Incarnation, before moving on to discuss the subjective possibility of revelation. First, Barth states: “This paradox, its radical outworking from every angle, its defence against every attempt to weaken it or dissolve it, became the theme of early Christian Christology.”<sup>631</sup> Furthermore, Barth states, “The life of Jesus does not itself impart the knowledge of God. In itself it is **a riddle**, a mystery, a veiling...All the contemporaries of Jesus, including his most intimate disciples, finally took offense at him.”<sup>632</sup> Kierkegaard states, “The paradox is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense; no, it is a symbol, a riddle, a compounded riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense.”<sup>633</sup>

For both thinkers, Christ as “Paradox” describes the inability of human thinking to either to claim the Incarnation as nonsense or to seek to prove it as such. Neither approach to the paradox is optional; both thinkers maintain that the life of Jesus is a riddle. Even more, both thinkers address not merely the inability of historical investigation to know God in Christ but also the inability of those who were direct/historical contemporaries with Christ to observe anything more than a man by whom they were offended and whom they eventually forsook. Thus not even a direct, historical encounter with the Incarnate God is useful; in fact, the possibility of offence was even greater.

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<sup>631</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 153.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>633</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Volume 1, A-E, 5.

## The Subjective Possibility of Revelation

### *Introduction: Observations*

When I began the discussion of the objective and subjective possibility of revelation, I presented two questions which Barth thinks succinctly characterize the problem of revelation. The first question has to do with the objective possibility of revelation to which Jesus Christ is the answer. In the historical, objective medium of Jesus Christ, God has communicated himself to us, in short, “objectively, the incarnation of the Word is the condition under which revelation takes place.”<sup>634</sup> The second is, “How can we humans stand before God without ceasing to be human?”<sup>635</sup> This question arises in the midst of Barth’s conviction that “We have no organ by which to receive God’s revelation...we have no quality, capacity, or possibility whereby to stand before God.”<sup>636</sup>

Although the *Göttingen Dogmatics* does seek to present knowledge of God as objective, in a way unseen in *Romans II*, due to Barth’s even more intense dialectic of revelation in Christ, it would appear thus far that the human situation is at a loss. However, this is not the case insofar as Barth does hold that God can be known in Christ, in other words, that the human subject is able to come to knowledge of the hidden God in Christ by faith. Faith, as the means whereby we relate to knowledge of God is a point of parallel between *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. And yet, given the historicity of revelation in Christ offered us in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, this point of parallel is also a point of departure; this is how.

In *Romans II*, the human subject knows revelation by faith, but faith in what? Stated differently, the mysteriousness of revelation in *Romans II*, insofar as it heavily

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<sup>634</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 320.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*

evades historical concreteness, results in an ambiguity in what we are, in fact, responding and relating to. But, in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, this ambiguity no longer exists, at least, not in the sense of the “where” and “what” of revelation. On the contrary, the necessity of a clearer human relation to revelation is evident here insofar as Barth notes:

If we have been right about the objective revelation of God in the incarnation of God, then obviously there can be no question of an immediate or direct relation to God in this subjective possibility either. The incarnation means that God becomes objective and concrete, coming into history, into the circle of human comprehension.<sup>637</sup>

The question Barth posits is this, if we can say that God has revealed himself, has become an intuitable object for human knowledge and yet maintains that this knowledge is left unknowable, then whence the claim on behalf of the individual that God is known?

For Barth, the objective possibility of revelation is the incarnation and “the subjective possibility of revelation is human receptivity for it.”<sup>638</sup> In short, subjectively, “revelation is not without human faith and obedience.”<sup>639</sup> Of course, there are some obstacles to overcome in this discussion of the subjective possibility of revelation. First, what demands our attention is the possibility of the human response, meaning, by what means or power can the human subject affirm knowledge of God in Christ? This question is important in light of the degree to which Barth had, earlier in *Romans II*, limited human ability in affirming knowledge of God. Second, in light of Kierkegaard interpretation, a discussion of Barth’s view of the human response is not problematic as is a discussion of Kierkegaard’s view of this same notion. In other words, any discussion of human possibility trends the

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<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid., 320.

dangerous line of stepping too closely to an affirmation of the human subject in and of itself, divorced from God's grace. Therefore, in light of these problems, I intend to do the following.

First, I shall discuss how the human subject relates to the incarnation, meaning, I will note that although there are two possible reactions to the incarnation, namely either faith or offence, it is only faith which overcomes the hiddenness of God in Christ. I will discuss both of these reactions. Second, I will note that Barth here offers us a far more active role in our relating to God in faith than that in *Romans II*, a role that parallels Kierkegaard's notion of subjective appropriation. And finally, I will conclude by giving some parallels between Barth and Kierkegaard in relation to the concept of faith as subjectivity here in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*.

### *Recipients of Revelation*

As I begin this examination, allow me to offer Barth's own questioning and problems in regard to the subjective possibility. Thinking over our relation to revelation, Barth asks, "Let us presuppose that it really is Jesus Christ or revelation that is mediated to us; the question then arises how we know this, how are we to recognize it."<sup>640</sup> He adds, "How can God come to us without ceasing to be God?"<sup>641</sup> For Barth, if the human subject was not able, by any means, to recognise revelation, then revelation would itself be cancelled out. And yet, Barth does presuppose that revelation has come to us. So, why is Barth concerned with the question of recognition in relation to revelation?

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid., 174.

The reason is that when we address the question of human knowing we inevitably address the nature of human reason. As rational creatures, reason is the sole means in understanding, communicating, and knowledge. In other words, we are creatures, by means of reason, who make judgements about ourselves and the world. We are creatures who acknowledge or create norms from which we affirm what is knowable and what is not. Therefore, concerning the Incarnation, we have before us a human being who claimed to have been God and reason is immediately active in evaluating this claim.

The problem for Barth, therefore, is reason itself. For Barth, since reason is fallen, any assertion made by it as to what it can and cannot know is highly questionable. Even more, by virtue of its own conditions, reason is limited to knowledge of the empirical realm. Stated differently, though objects for human knowledge are generally accessible, revelation has appeared in a manner in which the object of which we can claim knowledge has in fact hidden what is essentially to be known. In respect of this, Barth writes,

Reason comes into play, not the reason beyond whose limit we are carried as in faith, but the reason whose limit is definitively set for us: revelation in concealment, the crucified Christ, the strange work of God, the possibility of offence and despair.<sup>642</sup>

In short, the Incarnation affirms our very limits. It is important at this point to recall that, for human reason, the Incarnation is a paradox, a mystery, a riddle. And here, in light of the limits of reason in relation to the paradox, Barth notes that the inevitable human response to this paradox of the God-human is offence.

According to Barth, the human reaction of offence is the natural result of the form in which God has chosen to reveal himself, namely as a human being.<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid., 193.

Therefore, in light of the inevitable result of offence in relation to the Incarnation, Barth writes that “God will have to bear and fill and make good our human incapacity by the capacity, the sufficiency, the adequacy which can be present only in God himself for God himself.”<sup>644</sup> Only then, Barth adds, will there be “revelation, that is, the establishment of fellowship between God and us by God’s communication to us. Revelation will then be subjectively possible, that is, from the standpoint of the recipients.”<sup>645</sup>

However, before moving on to discuss the means by which we are able to affirm knowledge of God in Christ, Barth wants both to offer the highly negative aspect of the incarnation for human knowing and, at the same time, to note how this aspect serves in grounding, not discovering, knowledge of God, namely, it is scripture which serves as the ground wherein we find revelation and thus relate to it in faith. Anticipating the relation of Scripture to knowledge of God, Barth states:

If we are not to pursue a theology of glory, then a real, authenticated, and incontestably superior mediation of revelation which finally answers the question of truth must stand so much above history that in keeping with the concealment of revelation and the cross of Christ, as the mediation of revelation and full of the divine mystery, it stands in history itself. What is demanded at this point is precisely a relative historical entity, that is, human beings and their human words. To eliminate this contingent entity which gives such urgency to the question of faith or offence would be equivalent to eliminating the concealment of revelation and therefore revelation itself.<sup>646</sup>

Scripture, which is revelation only insofar as it bears witness to revelation, is the “contingent entity” wherein we encounter knowledge of God in Christ. At this juncture, in noting the role of scripture in relation to revelation, Barth has simultaneously doubled the barrier in making impossible a direct relation to knowing God.

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<sup>644</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 214.

As I observed earlier, the barrier to our knowledge of God is the means of God's revelation, namely, a human being in the first century. Thus, here we have God's direct communication to humanity indirectly. However, as I noted above, history offers its own limits to our acquiring of historical knowledge any witness to the past is problematic in regard to its certainty. Moreover, I posited that, even though a contemporaneous account of a historical event might suggest a bit more certainty, insofar as the account stands in direct relation to the event, Scripture eliminates this level of certainty with regard to what it is recounting, namely, God in history. Thus Scripture is indirect accounting for revelation not only as being a historical account of revelation but also in what it records.

Scripture is, however, the only place wherein we know Christ, in the sense of a starting point and not in the sense of affirming that God is knowable in Christ.<sup>647</sup> In short, Scripture, not human feeling, culture, or even theology, is the place wherein we find knowledge of God in Christ. But, it seems that our accepting of God in Christ is impossible and therefore offence is the only response in light of all such barriers.

Nonetheless, Barth wants to remind us that all such talk of human impossibility and limitation indicates how we are to affirm knowledge of God amidst the contradictions. Insofar as the limiting, irrational element exists in us, Barth claims that "The irrational element in us is a salutary reminder that in face of revelation the point is not to grasp but to be grasped."<sup>648</sup> And now I come to stating the means whereby humanity may affirm knowledge of God in Christ which is posed in a contradiction of offering real objective knowledge and yet knowledge which is

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 196.



hidden. The means in overcoming the hiddenness whereby revelation is indirect in Christ is the receptivity of this knowledge by God's gift of faith which births the ability to "see" God in Christ. In short, what Barth offers is that "in faith we have to do with revelation in concealment."<sup>649</sup>

Additionally, Barth adds, "Just because revelation is given contingently in Jesus Christ, but given therefore in concealment, the faith that grasps and affirms it is a leap in the dark and never ceases to be so."<sup>650</sup> Note, faith described here as a leap also parallels *Romans II*. Therefore, the subjective possibility of revelation, the possibility of our receiving and affirming what we cannot, takes "the form of faith and obedience."<sup>651</sup> And faith, as the means whereby we perceive God in Christ, is one that unites us, at present, to those of the past, including the contemporaries of Christ. "Thus the way to it [God in Christ] is just the same now as it was then. It is the way of revelation and faith alone."<sup>652</sup>

Moreover, and here is the crux of the matter, Barth argues that it is the Holy Spirit who is responsible for creating in us the ability to both perceive and receive God's revelation in Christ.<sup>653</sup> Concerning this Barth states, "Apart from this reality of the Holy Spirit, the construction of the subjective possibility of revelation is a bridge that ends in the void."<sup>654</sup> And similarly, Scripture, "its self-evidence, that in it which enforces authority, corresponding to the basis of faith and obedience, is itself spirit. By the Spirit scripture bears witness that it is God's Word."<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 222.

### *Faith as Subjectivity*

By faith we come to accept scripture as God's Word and therefore as true witness to God's revelation in Christ. Note, Barth's insistence that faith is God's doing, not ours, aligns itself to his understanding of faith as offered in *Romans II*. Thus for Barth, "the words 'being,' 'becoming,' 'child,' 'servant,' 'faith,' and 'obedience' say nothing about a quantitative or qualitative enrichment, enlargement, development, or out-working of man and his situation. He is man, and he remains man at every point and according to all the definitions."<sup>656</sup> However, although Barth's description of faith is the same in both *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, to the extent that it points to the primacy of God as the one from whom we receive faith, there is a difference between these two works with regard to how faith is actualized in the human subject.

In *Romans II*, faith is described ambiguously by virtue of the lengths to which Barth goes in order to eradicate all human possibility. And yet, although the reality of faith is, in both works, completely removed from human possibility, the *Göttingen Dogmatics* develops the reality of faith by means of discussing it in terms of human actualisation and response. Thus, here, in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth moves beyond *Romans II* in affirming two descriptions of faith, one representing true faith and the other not.

First there is an objective adherence which denotes a sheer lack of concern or ambivalence with regard to Christian living: this is not true faith. Second, there is a subjective appropriation which is true faith inasmuch as the only response to God's revelation can be a passionate interest in light of the risk tied to believing what is

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<sup>656</sup> Ibid., 126.

unbelievable. Thus, for Barth, “In this relation we cannot be mere objects. We must be just as self-conscious subjects as God himself is...we must be actors in the relation.”<sup>657</sup> The significance of this distinction is that, according to Barth, God’s Word as given in scripture is his Word to humanity, but specifically his Word to the individual. Thus God’s Word in scripture is his address to the “I.” As Barth states, “this claim does not come collectively to humanity or even to Christendom but to the individual.”<sup>658</sup> It is God’s call for individual responsibility, for an act of freedom by the individual. Barth states: “There is no possibility of regarding scripture as merely historical. There is no possibility of folding the arms and adopting the stance of onlookers or spectators. The only possibility is that of seriousness, of decision, of being taken captive, of faithfulness, of an act of supreme spontaneity.”<sup>659</sup>

In short, for Barth, knowledge of scripture involves the act of the individual who “thinks with” and “thinks after” in relation to other individuals, i.e., a community of interpreters of scripture. As a whole, Barth’s understanding of the role of the individual in relation, not merely to scripture, but to Christianity is indeed reflective of Kierkegaard. Even more reflective of Kierkegaard is Barth’s demand for individual decision against sheer objective adherence or “folding of the arms.” It is also important to note that, for Barth, the demand for faith in perceiving the hidden God is one which exists not as an irrelevant hiccup resulting from the discrepancies between reason and revelation. On the contrary, since God’s revelation necessitates God’s becoming objective, which in turn results in hiddenness, faith exists as the required response; concealment demands faith alone in order to pierce it.<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid., 148.

It is important to note that since Barth discusses the subjective possibility of revelation in terms of both faith and obedience this marks his intention to steer away from Lutheran dogmatics.<sup>661</sup> This is important in that since Barth is Reformed and Kierkegaard Lutheran, it would seem that here these two thinkers' might part ways. However, this is not the case. Both Kierkegaard and Barth offer criticism of the devaluing of Christian obedience in the Lutheran tradition. For Kierkegaard, Luther's over emphasizing that salvation is by "faith alone" resulted in asceticism. He writes, "The Lutheran emphasis on faith has now simply become a fig leaf for the most unchristian shirking."<sup>662</sup>

As for Barth, he believed both Luther and Lutheranism fail to emphasise the importance of obedience in response to revelation and instead over-emphasise faith.<sup>663</sup> In Barth's estimation, an over-emphasising of faith poses the dangerous tendency to view faith in terms of inaction rather than of action. "We cannot have knowledge in relation to God without action" writes Barth.<sup>664</sup> He adds, "God does not only justify sinners, but in a parallel and simultaneous and not a dependent action he also sanctifies them...With the need for faith there arises the need for repentance, for obedience, for the Christian life."<sup>665</sup> Furthermore, in light of the fact that "objective revelation in the incarnation is not direct revelation but revelation in concealment"<sup>666</sup> Barth maintains that there arises an offence to reason which can only produce an active faith. In fact Barth thinks that the relation between God and

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<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>662</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP*, Vol. 3, 70. For more on Kierkegaard's complaints against Lutheranism, see pages 93-104.

<sup>663</sup> Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 171.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., 194.

the individual who responds in faith and obedience will be one which consists in “a conversation, a drama, a struggle.”<sup>667</sup>

Reflecting Kierkegaard’s own discussion of the struggle of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, Barth writes, “It has to be a wrestling like that of Jacob in which we must risk being lamed so long as we insist that we will not let God go unless he blesses us [Gen. 32:25ff.]. Each moment must be unique and nonrepeatable, for our other partner is God and he demands that we hazard our whole existence.”<sup>668</sup> For Barth, “Revelation can be subjective only in full action.”<sup>669</sup> Interestingly, Barth offers a point of clarification with regard to his use of subjectivity. He earnestly seeks to note that the subjectivity demanded by revelation is one which is responsive and not creative in relation to revelation and what God demands of us. Referencing Schleiermacher as an example of an incorrect notion of subjectivity, Barth writes, “Here [with Schleiermacher] instead the subjective possibility of revelation is that we grasp the divine subjectivity and ascribe it to ourselves.”<sup>670</sup>

In conclusion, Barth believes that even though God’s revelation is one that is incomprehensible and therefore unable to be conceptualized adequately, he nonetheless believes that “revelation is God’s entry into the world of conceptuality.”<sup>671</sup> Thus, Barth states: “The inconceivable God has come into the world of human conceptuality. What can all concepts of God be but elucidations of his inconceivability?”<sup>672</sup> Therefore, Barth’s dialectical conception of revelation here is not accidental insofar as the dialectic exists in order to be comprehended by faith,

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<sup>667</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid., 359.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid., 360.

revelation thereby avoiding the scrutiny of reason. This means that Barth wants to maintain that God has become an object for human knowing, but that this knowing is only possible in light of God who gives faith whereby humanity, as the recipient of faith, knows God. Not to mention, this knowledge is one which for Barth is active and living. It is a faith actualized in the human response of obedience and living in relation to the object of revelation. Insofar as this object hides God from human perception, the human response of faith and obedience expresses the most subjective aspect of human existence. Due to the hiddenness of God's revelation in the medium of human flesh, human concepts cannot have direct access to the object itself, i.e. the Son of God. Thus, by virtue of faith, human knowledge claims the revelation of God hidden in Christ. "In faith" Barth states, "we should speak of God." That outcome of Barth's use of what appears to be a Kierkegaardian dialectic of revelation is one intended ultimately, as McCormack has stated, to guard the divine subjectivity. However, inasmuch as the object itself, Christ, appears under the category of the human being, God is hidden and thus remains subject. "Precisely, as subject, precisely in revelation, God is concealed from us."<sup>673</sup>

And so here, with the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, Barth of the *Göttingen* remains the Barth of *Romans II*. Even more, Barth of *Romans II* and *Göttingen* bears a strong affinity to Kierkegaard's own use of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling. The differences between the Barth of *Romans II* and the Barth of the *Göttingen Dogmatics* rest in Barth's ability, here in the *Dogmatics*, to explicate the relation of God's revelation in history to humanity in a way unknown in *Romans II*.

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 361.

And by way of such explication on behalf of Barth, he has himself offered a more thorough discussion of Kierkegaard's own dialectic.

## Conclusion

In the Introduction to this thesis, I presented Barth's question, "Did not a new anthropocentric system announce itself in Kierkegaard's theoretical groundwork – one quite opposed to that at which we aimed?"<sup>674</sup> It can now be said with confidence that the answer to his question is "No."

The main objective of this project was to offer a conceptual analysis between Kierkegaard and the early Barth of *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics* in order to account for the significant amount of parallels between these two thinkers. This objective becomes significant in light of Barth's mysterious relation to Kierkegaard, a relation which admits the presence of Kierkegaard in his early thought in contrast to his later thought wherein Kierkegaard's name is rarely mentioned, and where so, in a mostly negative tone. As discussed, Barth's gradual move away from Kierkegaard had been the result of his growing suspicion that Kierkegaard's thought was in sum theological anthropology. However, as this project has also endeavoured to show, the existentialist Kierkegaard which Barth believed that he encountered at Göttingen was not the Kierkegaard I have presented here. The Kierkegaard with which Barth then became acquainted was the Kierkegaard of the pseudonymous literature, not the Christian thinker who sought to maintain the *IQD* between God and humanity. As a result of this encounter, Barth had begun to see Kierkegaard's various concepts negatively against the backdrop of his own desire to maintain the *IQD* God.

In sum, in looking at Kierkegaard's understanding of the individual, God, revelation, and the individual's relation to God, in relation to the early Barth of

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<sup>674</sup> Barth, "Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille", (1965), 6.



*Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, my hope is that Barth's reading of Kierkegaard, as expressed in the 1963 Sonning speech, appears wholly unwarranted. In providing this conceptual analysis, the aim was to prove that despite Barth's opinion of Kierkegaard, as seen in 1963, the relation between Barth's early thought in both *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics* with regard to the foundational presence of the time and eternity dialectic and of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, betrays a lack of awareness on Barth's part that although he had announced his distance from Kierkegaard, his thought reveals the contrary. In other words, in light of the presence of these dialectics and concepts, which Barth notes are Kierkegaardian, throughout Barth's thought as a whole, one wonders in what sense Barth has actually moved away from Kierkegaard.

For example, McCormack states, "The time-eternity dialectic thus gives rise to a further sub-class of dialectic, the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in God's self-revelation."<sup>675</sup> Given that Kierkegaard is acknowledged as providing Barth with this dialectic it is logical to think that Barth had also learned from Kierkegaard the implication of the time-eternity dialectic for revelation. In fact, Barth evidences a Kierkegaardian conception of the relation between these two dialectics in his use of Kierkegaardian terms such as paradox, incognito, offence, direct communication, etc. Keeping in mind what has just been stated above, McCormack adds, "The dialectic structuring of God's self-revelation would remain a permanent feature of Barth's thought, leaving its stamp on all works of the 1920's and continuing on into the *Church Dogmatics*."<sup>676</sup> If McCormack is correct, and I think he is, then Kierkegaard remains with Barth up until the end.

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<sup>675</sup> McCormack, *A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Barth's Theology, 1921-31*, 171.

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

In pointing the way forward to a reconsideration of Kierkegaard's presence in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, my research has led to me to the conclusion that much of the foundations in the *Church Dogmatics* have been laid down in *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. Furthermore, if this project has been successful in extracting the parallels between Kierkegaard and Barth with regard to these foundational concepts in *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, it is fair to suggest that Kierkegaard's voice is still heard clearly in Barth's later works. Barth himself admits as much in his 1963 address stating, "His peculiar sound has not become silent, but has been muted by other sounds and has become a strong accompaniment (Unterton) next to others."<sup>677</sup> In short, Barth thought of himself, even then in 1963, as one who has "remained faithful to Kierkegaard's reveille, as we heard it then, throughout my theological life."<sup>678</sup> Of course, what Barth suggests is that he has remained faithful to Kierkegaard's method of diastasis which for Barth always offers a fresh reminder of the distance which separates God and humanity. However, in light of the growing concern of theological endeavour with theological anthropology, Barth believes his path has left much of Kierkegaard behind. And yet, as I have stated, given the parallels between *Romans II*, the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and the *Church Dogmatics*, it appears Barth had remained faithful to Kierkegaard beyond this *reveille*.

Even in the *Church Dogmatics*, God is depicted by Barth as being infinitely qualitatively distinct from humanity and from time. Barth writes, "But inscrutability, hiddenness, is of the very essence of Him who is called God in the Bible. As Creator, this God is different from the world, i.e., as the One he is, He does not belong to the sphere of what man as a creature can know directly. Nor can He be unveilable for

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<sup>677</sup> Barth, "Thank –You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille" in *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XI.I (1965), 5.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

man indirectly in the created world, for He is the Holy One to see whom, even indirectly, other eyes are needed than these eyes of ours which are corrupted by sin.”<sup>679</sup> Barth words here are pregnant with regard to the relation between humanity and God’s revelation. In accord with Barth’s *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth maintains that Jesus of Nazareth “is the self-revealing God,”<sup>680</sup> even if the means whereby revelation is made known separated *Romans II* from the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and the *Church Dogmatics*. Barth, unlike in these earlier two works [there is more of a reluctance in *Romans II* than in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*], never tires of speaking of the God in history, the God who “takes form” by means of human flesh.<sup>681</sup>

With Barth’s highly articulate notion of revelation, he moves beyond his earlier works only to come to parallel Kierkegaard even more than before. In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth continues to speak of the God who has entered human history, who has taken on human flesh in order to become an object of knowledge. Barth writes, “He [Christ] makes Himself present, known and significant to them as God. In the historical life of men He takes up a place, and a very specific place at that, and makes Himself the object of human contemplation, human experience, human thought and human speech.”<sup>682</sup> In short, for Barth, “Revelation in the Bible means the self-unveiling, imparted to men, of the God who by nature cannot be unveiled to men.”<sup>683</sup> Although Barth speaks more directly to God’s unveiling than before, he yet has retained that even in God’s unveiling, God remains veiled in mystery.

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<sup>679</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I:I, 320.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*

The mystery for Barth still exists by virtue of the form of revelation, namely, the *humanitas Christi*.<sup>684</sup> In seeking to maintain the dialectic of veiling and unveiling of revelation, Barth enunciates the relation of this dialectic to revelation very carefully. In maintaining that the humanity of Christ is the form of revelation Barth ask, “Is the *humanitas Christi* as such the revelation?”<sup>685</sup> Barth’s reply to this question is one carefully fashioned in light of the earlier Christologies of his theological and philosophical predecessors. He states:

At this stage we can only reply that when this view [equating the divine sonship of Jesus Christ with the man Jesus of Nazareth] has really been held, there has always been more or less clearly discernible the very thing which, as we have seen, the Old Testament tried to avoid with its concept of the holiness of the revealed God, namely the possibility of having God disclosed Himself through man, of allowing man to set himself on the same platform as God, to grasp Him there and thus to become His master.<sup>686</sup>

Barth words here yet echo Kierkegaard’s *IQD* between God and humanity as well as the maintaining of this difference even in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. In seeking to prevent the confusion of earlier views as to the meaning of the divine in Christ, Barth’s maintaining of the *IQD* in relation to the revelation seeks to articulate that the humanity of God, “the form as such, the means, does not take God’s place.”<sup>687</sup>

In this articulation Barth reveals both a moving away and yet a continuing link with *Romans II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and thus with Kierkegaard. In light of my task in Chapter One to examine Kierkegaard’s understanding of Christianity, one objective this project has sought to accomplish was to offer a correction to

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<sup>684</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid. The danger inevitable when one does not make this distinction between the infinitely qualitatively distinct God and humanity is the one Barth thinks representative of the problem of modern theology in its sublation of God and humanity. Therefore, a neglect of the *IQD*, the uniting of the divine and human in Christ has led, Barth writes, to “The ‘fairest Lord Jesus’ of mysticism, the ‘Saviour’ of Pietism, Jesus the teacher of wisdom and friend of man in the Enlightenment, Jesus the quintessence of enhanced humanity in Schleiermacher, Jesus the embodiment of the idea of religion in Hegel and his school, Jesus a religious personality according to Carlyle’s picture in the theology of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (323).

<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 321.

Kierkegaard's view of the revelation of God in Christ. Kierkegaard's conception of the Incarnation is, as we observed, thoroughly objective in that God has made himself known in history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And yet, amidst his view of the concreteness of revelation, God's taking on of human flesh has allowed for the ultimate veiling of God in his unveiling. Barth, here in the *Church Dogmatics*, continues along this path. Therefore, Barth's *Church Dogmatics* parallels *Roman II* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics* in presenting the mystery of God in Christ, the dialectic of veiling and unveiling. However, the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and the *Church Dogmatics* separate from *Romans II* in light of Barth's appropriation and Christological utterances of the post-Chalcedonian formula.

In this view, Barth and Kierkegaard move closer together after *Romans II* with regard to their views of revelation in Christ. *Romans II*'s used the resurrection in making known the revelation of God in Christ. But here, Barth holds that, "The fact that God takes form does not give rise to a medium, a third thing between God and man, a reality distinct from God that is as such the subject of revelation. This would imply that God would be unveilable for men."<sup>688</sup> In short, Barth continues with Kierkegaard's notion of the mystery of God in Christ's revelation, the inability of the object of revelation to fully disclose the divine Subjectivity. Barth writes,

Mystery is the concealment of God in which he meets us precisely when he unveils Himself to us, because He will not and cannot unveil Himself except by veiling Himself. Mystery thus denotes the divine givenness of the Word of God which also fixes our own limits and by which it distinguished itself from everything that is given otherwise...This means that we cannot establish its distinction.<sup>689</sup>

Barth's continuing use of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling reveals the way in which the limits expressed in God's revelation in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* differ from *Romans II*. In *Romans II*, although the limits of human reason in relation to

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid.,165.

God exist in relation to the Incarnation and the paradox, human limitation was discussed mainly in terms of the *IQD*. However, in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth has moved these limits to the Incarnation itself, a path which finds its extension here in the *Church Dogmatics*.

Nevertheless, Barth's present employment of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling lends itself to another parallel with Kierkegaard in the *Church Dogmatics*, in respect of revelation's relation to history. Indeed, Barth, again, like many of the concepts found in *Romans II* and *the Göttingen Dogmatics*, presents a far richer understanding of these concepts in the *Church Dogmatics* due to his more historical and objective articulation of revelation. Nonetheless, history yet maintains its futility in relation to lessening the paradox of revelation. Barth writes, "Part of the concept of the biblically attested revelation is that it is a historical event. Historical does not mean historically demonstrable or historically demonstrated."<sup>690</sup> Barth here reveals that he has maintained the time and eternity dialectic in its expression between history and sacred history.<sup>691</sup>

Again, the distinction Barth makes between history and Christian history does not seek to undermine the truly historical nature of revelation. Barth writes, "Without God's being historically revealed in this way, revelation would not be revelation."<sup>692</sup> What Barth seeks to undermine is the disintegration of *IQD* between God and humanity even in the midst of a truly historical revelation. In other words, Barth yet, in continuity with *Romans II* and *the Göttingen Dogmatics*, wants to prohibit the revelation of God of becoming "apprehensible by a natural observer or apprehended

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid., 327. Barth uses the phrase "special history."

<sup>692</sup> Ibid., 331.

by such an observer.”<sup>693</sup> Furthermore, in Barth’s considerations of the limits of history in relation to revelation, he echoes Kierkegaard’s scepticism with regard to historical knowledge in general, or to “general history” as approximate knowledge.

Barth writes,

All that might be said is that according to the standards by which “historical” truth is usually measured elsewhere or generally, this story [the biblical story] is one that to some degree eludes any sure declaration that it happened as the narrative says...There is no story in which we do not have to reckon with this aspect, and therefore with elements of saga or legend according to the general concept of ‘historical’ truth. This applies also to the stories told in the Bible. Otherwise they would have to be without temporal form.<sup>694</sup>

We have observed that for Kierkegaard historical knowledge too is an approximation by virtue of its being past as well as temporal, i.e. under the guise of human error. Moreover, if one holds to a truly historical notion of revelation then one must allow for the historical uncertainty which revelation carries with it. This, however, for Kierkegaard, as well as for Barth, is not a problem in that all human knowledge is approximation knowledge.

Insofar as Barth maintains the limits of historical knowledge in relation to the minimization of the paradox of revelation, he also continues with the Kierkegaardian notion of contemporaneity. Barth writes, “The fact that God’s Word is God’s act means first its contingent contemporaneity.”<sup>695</sup> Although Barth understands that

the time of the direct, original speech of God Himself in His revelation, the time of Jesus Christ, the time of that which the prophets and the apostles heard so that they could bear witness to it—that is one time...[and]...the time of this witness, the time of the prophecy and the apostolate...this is another time...estimating the difference along these lines need then be no obstacle to a direct insight into the continuity and unity of the times, to an insight into our contemporaneity with Christ and all His saints.<sup>696</sup>

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<sup>693</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 145-6.

However, to eliminate the distinctiveness of these times in relation to us at present would be, for Barth, to *humanize* the Word of God.<sup>697</sup> Therefore, our contemporaneity with Christ is one not which eliminates the distinctiveness of the particularity of God's revelation in Christ but rather allows for our relation to Christ by faith despite the distinctiveness.

In the end, as in *Romans II* and *the Göttingen Dogmatics*, the continual limitations which Barth gives to time in relation to its access to eternity, exist in order to allow the only means whereby we, as human beings, are able to espouse the relation of time and eternity in Christ, namely, the means of faith. For Barth, faith is the miracle in which we know God.<sup>698</sup> In promoting the primacy of faith as the means whereby humanity knows God and all that pertains to revelation in history, Barth maintains with *Romans II* and *the Göttingen Dogmatics* that, outside of faith, "we have no organ or capacity for God."<sup>699</sup>

But what is more perplexing than anything we have discussed with regard to parallels is that Barth, himself, offers evidence in *Romans II* against his later view of Kierkegaard's thought as one which is centred in the human being rather than God. Outlining his view that in order for the individual to be refashioned as he is meant to be, he must be in relation to God, Barth, in fact, quotes Kierkegaard, stating,

God cannot be refashioned according to thy good pleasure: thou it is that must be refashioned according to His good pleasure...As the arrow, loosed from the bow by the hand of the practiced archer, does not rest till it has reached the mark; so men pass from God to God. He is the mark for which they have been created; and they do not rest till they find their rest in Him.<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>697</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid., 17, 247.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>700</sup> Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 438-9. This quote is from Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, Volume 1, A-E, Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1967, wherein he writes, "Just as the expert archer's arrow leaves the bowstring and has no rest before it reaches the target, so the human being is created by God with God as his aim and cannot find rest before he finds rest in God." (24)



This means that Barth's growing suspicion of Kierkegaard's conception of the self as one in which the self looks to its own resources in defining and understanding the self first, and then, from there, considers itself in relation to God, had developed against Barth's own knowledge of Kierkegaard. It could be that Barth had, then, not paid any attention to the evidence he had encountered in Kierkegaard himself by way of which he could have later counteracted the accusations that Kierkegaard's thought is mere anthropology. Given Barth's questioning of Kierkegaard's relation to the resurgence of theological anthropology in the *Church Dogmatics*, it appears that even at this time, Barth was not yet sure as to where to place Kierkegaard within this movement.

In light of our examination, two periods can be detected with regard to Barth relation to Kierkegaard. The first, as we observed, is the *Romans II* period wherein Barth finds in Kierkegaard an ally in combating the disintegration of the *IQD* between God and humanity which was prevalent in the theological arena of Barth's day. The second period commences while at Göttingen, where Barth had become acquainted with a Kierkegaard who was being interpreted to support anthropological, or existential, concerns, concerns which were very different from "that at which he aimed" in *Romans II*. It is in the context of this second period in which Barth's 1963 speech discloses his final stance on Kierkegaard's thought which had begun in the mid 1920's. The 1963 speech is where we have Barth's "last word" on the matter, where Barth's suspicion has been solidified into a warning of supreme caution for those who encounter Kierkegaard.

What is unfortunate about this relation is that Barth was not fully aware of the

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extent to which Kierkegaard had influenced him or of the parallels which they shared. It seems, in the end, given his resistance to any and every form of theological anthropology which threaten the *IQD* between God and humanity, Barth thought it best wholly to separate from Kierkegaard's thought. This is evident given that in his book, *Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl*, wherein Barth discusses those central figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kierkegaard is not even found.

In the end, Barth's misreading of Kierkegaard can be attributed to two factors which are observed in the respective works of Oh and Podmore. First, as Podmore argues, Barth had only acknowledged the negative side of diastasis in the *IQD* thereby missing the positive aspect of the forgiveness of sin.<sup>701</sup> Second, in light of the forgiveness of sin, Oh notes that Barth had not perceived that the negative aspect of "religiousness A" is, for Kierkegaard, overcome by faith as observed in "religiousness B."<sup>702</sup> Nevertheless, Barth's 1963 declaration of having moved away from Kierkegaard, and his consequent warning to those who encounter Kierkegaard, need not imply that Barth did not find some useful tools in Kierkegaard, regardless of his opinion of the task of Kierkegaard's writings as being centred on human existence.

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<sup>701</sup> Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard & the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*, 10.

<sup>702</sup> Peter S. Oh, "Complementary Dialectics of Kierkegaard and Barth: Barth's Use of Kierkegaardian Diastasis Reassessed", in *GechstraBe*, 81, 509.

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