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**THE THREE CATEGORIES OF EXISTENCE
ACCORDING TO SØREN KIERKEGAARD**

**A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Philosophy
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity**

by

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June 1954

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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The table of contents lists the main materials of the study. It is seen from the most important works in order to identify what Kierkegaard meant to say when he speaks of any one of the three stages.

Commentators on the subject often speak of Kierkegaard's "copying out of the life of the spirit." As he sets forth the three stages of life's way. One prominent example of this copying of the subject suggests that "he set himself the task of copying out the life of the spirit, the subjective side of the Christian and the will."¹ Another has it

¹Walter E. Houghton, Something about Kierkegaard, edited by W. E. Houghton (Chicago: Augsburg Publishing House, 1913), p. 12.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this thesis is to examine the main materials in which Søren Kierkegaard presents the three stages of existence. The emphasis will be on the chief content of each category of existence, namely the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. We will treat the third category, the religious, according to Kierkegaard's own two-fold division of the religious stage--Religion A and Religion B. It will be apparent in the pages which follow that the scope of this effort is narrowed to only the principal concepts of each category of existence. Material of this thesis does not cover the entire field of Kierkegaard's literary production. But it does draw upon the most important works in order to clarify what Kierkegaard meant to say when speaking of any one of the three stages.

Commentators on the subject often speak of Kierkegaard's "mapping out of the life of the spirit" as he sets forth the three stages on life's way. One prominent example of this phrasing of the subject suggests that "he set himself the problem of mapping out the life of the spirit, the subjective life of the emotions and the will."¹ Another has it

¹David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, edited by Lillian Marvin Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 26.

this way, that Kierkegaard "maps out the field of the existing individual in terms of realms and values . . . the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious."² Both examples indicate that Kierkegaard was something of a pioneer in his concern for the ingredients of the inner life of the individual. He was acutely aware that in the world of intellectual and spiritual endeavor there was an overbalanced emphasis on the domains of metaphysics, epistemology, speculative philosophy, systems of nature, and systems of theology. He set out to counterbalance this with a relentless and passionate cry for the rescue of the individual from all the systems which would claim him and swallow him up in their speculations. His findings remind us, by a thoroughness of execution, and a conscientiousness of workmanship having few parallels in philosophy, "that the life of the spirit has a structure as definite as the law-governed, inorganic, universe, and an organization as specialized as that of the highest living thing. . . ."³ It is our stated goal to follow him through his structural presentation of the three categories of existence.

In this study we shall begin with the aesthetic, continue with the ethical, and then conclude with the two-fold divisions of the religious. This procedure should not be

²Edmund P. Clowney, Jr., "A Critical Estimate of Søren Kierkegaard's Notion of the Individual," The Westminster Theological Journal, V (November, 1942), 45.

³Swenson, op. cit., p. 27.

understood, however, to imply that Kierkegaard invites us to pass from one to the other in smooth fashion. If there is one unified note that Kierkegaardian scholars register, it is this: that the stages are not mutually exclusive and unrelated realities which can be discarded after brief perusal. In progressing from the aesthetic to the religious, the movement is not from the lower to the higher. The movement from one category to another does not mean abolishing one for another, but subordinating one to another.⁴ Another way of saying it is that the normal life-movement for an existing individual is from the aesthetic, through the ethical, to the religious.⁵ The preceding stage is not to be viewed as annulled as we follow along but rather as dethroned and subordinated.⁶

This, too, should be said by way of introduction to the material on the three stages of existence. In transferring from one to the following we are led over no automatic natural process. We are not invited to take a comfortable step but are bidden to make a "leap into the dark."⁷ This leap is the

⁴Ibid., p. 163.

⁵Ibid., p. 117.

⁶J. M. Lloyd Thomas, "The Modernness of Kierkegaard," The Hibbert Journal, XLV (July, 1947), 316.

⁷Reginald Cant, "Søren Kierkegaard," The Church Quarterly Review, CXXVII (January, 1939), 283.

outcome of impassioned decision. The thing that will ultimately be seen is that the power which drives men on to leap from one dimension to another is the unchanging presence, in the background, of God before Whose eyes we live. More concerning the "leap" will follow in Chapter V.

Finally a word of warning at the outset, both to writer and reader. Kierkegaard, or simply "SK" as he is often called, held that the greatest tragedy which could befall him was to have disciples and commentators who could write learnedly about him and be satisfied to assign him some obscure pigeon-hole in history. Hence we must avoid that illusion which would be content with merely an estimate of his historical significance. No matter with what aspect of Kierkegaard's thought one deals, the vital thing is to keep in mind that if a "representation of SK does not call men to Christian truth, then its very genius calls for careful attention and continued refutation."⁸ We shall heed the warning. Kierkegaard did not write in order to supply source material for a thesis dealing with the three categories of existence. He wrote to urge upon men Christian decisiveness. Hence "he must be studied as a bird in flight and in darting movement, not as a stiff and stuffed specimen in a museum."⁹

⁸Clowney, op. cit., p. 52.

⁹Thomas, op. cit., p. 311.

CHAPTER II

THE AESTHETIC CATEGORY

In setting forth Kierkegaard's concept of the aesthetic sphere of existence, we shall follow the suggestion from David Swenson that "the aesthetic sphere receives its chief abstract formulation in the second part of Either/Or, at the hands of ethicist B, and in the comment of Frater Taciturnus upon the third part of "Stages On Life's Way. . . ."¹ We will thus get directly to the problem which SK is dealing with when he speaks of "the aesthetic stage of life." Spier indicates the heart of the problem when he speaks of the outlook of the aesthetic man as one which "views life from a distance." It is the attitude of one who impassionately observes and contemplates life as though he were himself not a part of it. Such a person is a rationalist and a positivist in his thought and in his deeds he seeks his own satisfaction.² Thomte summarizes the problem succinctly: "The aesthetic form of life is that of a poet-existence. He sees the ideals, but he retreats from the world in order to enjoy them."³ A helpful

¹David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, edited by Lillian Marvin Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 166.

²J. M. Spier, Christianity and Existentialism, translated by David Hugh Freeman (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1953), p. 8.

³Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 15.

insight toward a clear understanding of SK's purpose in delineating the aesthetic stage comes from Mackintosh.

The aesthete, as viewed here, need be neither artistic nor lustful; in general terms he is rather the natural [not necessarily sensual] man whose maxim is: Carpe diem, savour the joy of life, and with all thy getting get pleasure. Enjoyment is the thing, and it scarcely matters whether it be enjoyment of spirit or of body. The aesthete is the uncommitted man, who looks on but declines to take a hand. . . . It is an existence without any unity or meaning. . . .⁴

With these three summaries in mind, we shall follow Prof. Swenson's initial suggestion above and hear the characters from the aesthetic works speak for themselves.

In the second volume of Either/Or we have a most comprehensive presentation of the aesthetic sphere in the papers of Judge William, who represents the ethical stage of life and who writes lengthy essays to his young post-aesthete friend, seeking to explain to his friend that this aesthetic life is in all its different forms really a life of despair, whether conscious or unconscious, declared or undeclared.⁵ The fundamental problem, as Judge William sees it, is phrased thus:

⁴Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 231.

⁵Eduard Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 32.

He who says that he wants to enjoy life always posits a condition which either lies outside the individual or is in the individual in such a way that it is not posited by the individual himself.⁶

From this point of departure, Judge William proceeds to develop five varying facets of the aesthete, beginning with a brief sketch of a handsome Count and his extraordinarily beautiful Countess.

Here we have a view of life which teaches that health is the most precious good, that on which everything hinges. The same view acquires a more poetic expression when it is said that beauty is the highest. Now beauty is a very fragile good, and therefore, one seldom sees this view carried through. . . . I remember, however, to have once seen it carried through with rare success. In my student days I sometimes went during the vacation to the residence of a count in one of the provinces. In his younger days the Count had had a diplomatic post, he was now elderly and lived quietly at his countryseat. The Countess had been extraordinarily beautiful as a young girl, as an elderly person she was still the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. . . . Those who had known them in their earlier days declared that this was the handsomest couple they had ever seen, and I . . . found this perfectly natural, for they were still the handsomest couple one could see. Both the Count and the Countess were highly cultivated, and yet the view of life of the Countess was concentrated in the thought that they were the handsomest couple in the whole land. I still remember vividly an occurrence which convinced me of this. It was a Sunday morning. There was a little festival in the church close to the country seat. The Countess was not feeling quite well enough to venture to attend, but the Count went elegantly dressed in his uniform of gentleman-in-waiting, decorated with his orders. The window of the great hall looked out on an allée which led up to the church. By one of them stood the Countess. She was dressed in a tasteful morning gown and was really charming. I had enquired of her health and had entered into conversation about a yachting party which was to come off the following day. Then far down the allée the

⁶Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949), II, 152.

Count was seen. She relapsed into silence, became more beautiful than I had ever seen her, had an expression almost sad, the Count had come so near that he could see the Countess through the window, she threw him a kiss with the utmost grace, then turned to me and said, "Little William, my Detlev can see well enough that he has sunk together a little bit on one side, but no one can see that when I am walking with him, and when we walk together we are surely the handsomest couple in the whole land." No little Miss of sixteen years could be more blissfully happy over her fiancé, the handsomest page at Court, than was her ladyship over the already aged lord-in-waiting.

Both views of life agree in the principle that one must enjoy life, and that the requisite condition lies in the individual himself, but in such a way that it is not posited by the individual himself.⁷

Judge William describes another example of the aesthetic sphere where "wealth, glory, high station, etc., are accounted life's task and its content."⁸ The example cites the case of a young girl obsessed with the notion of being in love,

Her eye knew no pleasure but in seeing her lover, her soul had no thought but him, her heart had no desire but to belong to him, for her nothing in heaven or on earth had any significance except him. Here again we have an aesthetic view of life where the condition is located outside the individual.⁹

The third example centers about

the personality . . . generally determined as talent, a merchantile talent, a practical talent, a mechanical talent, a mathematical talent, a poetical talent, an artistic talent, a philosophical talent. Satisfaction in life and enjoyment is sought in the development of this talent. One does not, perhaps, stop with the

⁷Ibid., pp. 153 f.

⁸Ibid., p. 154.

⁹Ibid.

talent in its immediacy, one cultivates it in all ways, but the condition for satisfaction in life is the talent itself, a condition which is posited by the individual.¹⁰

A fourth picture features Nero,

the imperial voluptuary. Not only when he ascends his throne or marches to the Senate is he surrounded by lictors, but especially when he sallies forth to satisfy his lust, in order that they might clear the way before his gang of robbers. I imagine him somewhat older, his youth is past, the light heart has escaped him, he is already familiar with every conceivable pleasure, satiated with it . . . he grasps after pleasure; all the world's cleverness must devise for him new pleasures, for only in the instant of pleasure does he find repose, and when that is past he gasps with faintness. . . . He burns up half of Rome, but his torment remains the same. Before long such things entertain him no more. There is a still higher pleasure available, he would terrify men. To himself he is enigmatic, and dread [Angst] is his very nature, now he would be a riddle to all and find delight in their dread. . . . People approach his throne, he greets them with a friendly smile, and yet a terrible dread grips them, perhaps the smile is their death sentence. . . . And this dread delights him. . . . He looks like a dying man, his breathing is feeble, and yet he is the Emperor of Rome. . . . His soul is faint, only witty sayings and clever conceits are capable for an instant of giving him breath.¹¹

In each of the foregoing instances, Judge William has pictured to his aesthete friend the fact that the aesthetic view of life proves itself to be despair. The fifth example Judge William gives is the picture of his aesthete friend himself, who is a perfect example of the specific type of despair toward which the aesthetic stage most surely leads. He says it thus:

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 157 f.

You still have in your power all the factors requisite for an aesthetic life view, you have wealth and independence, your health is unimpaired, your mind still vigorous, nor have you yet become unhappy for the fact that a girl would not love you. And yet you are in despair. It is not despair about any actual thing but a despair in thought. Your thought has hurried on ahead, you have seen through the vanity of all things, but you have got no further. Occasionally you plunge into pleasure, and every instant you are devoting yourself to it you make the discovery in your consciousness that it is vanity. So you are constantly beyond yourself, that is, in despair.¹²

Judge William is not content to leave the matter with the mere statement that the aesthetic life view is capable of producing nothing more than a thought-despair. He probes the implications of this judgment upon the aesthetic life and comes up with an imposing list of fundamental defects. Thomte directs us to four aspects of these findings, all taken from the pen of Judge William, the ethicist.¹³ The life of the aesthete has no continuity:

You are a hater of all activity in life. Very reasonably, for before there can be any meaning in activity there must be continuity, and that is what your life lacks. You occupy yourself with your studies, it is true, but it is only for your own sake, and it is done with as little teleology as possible. For the rest you are idle, like the laborers in the Gospel you stand in the market place, you thrust your hands into your pockets and look on at life. . . . You let everything pass you by, it makes no impression, but now suddenly there comes something that grips you, an idea, a situation, a smile from a young girl, and then you are "in it." . . . You behave in life as you say you are accustomed to do in a crowd, working your way into the thickest group, contriving if

¹²Ibid., p. 164.

¹³Thomte, op. cit., p. 35.

possible, to be pressed up above the others, and when you are up you make yourself as comfortable as possible, and so, also, you let yourself be carried through life.

But when the crowd has dispersed and the event is over you stand again at the street corner and look on at the world.¹⁴

The life of the aesthete is either hoping or sentimental recollecting, but, in either case, it is a life apart from the world of realities:

If one were to marry merely in the hope of a silver wedding, and then hoped and hoped again for twenty-five years, one would be in no state to celebrate the silver wedding when the twenty-fifth year came around, for indeed, one would have nothing to recollect, since with all this hoping everything would have fallen apart.¹⁵

The life of the aesthete is marked by a pride in the fact that it only observes, but does not participate:

You have a predilection for the first sensation of falling in love. You know how to submerge yourself in a dreamy and glowing clairvoyance of love. About your entire person you spin as it were a cobweb and then lie in wait. . . . You love the accidental. A smile from a pretty girl in a situation which is interesting, a glance which you entrap, that is what you are on the lookout for, that is a theme for your idle imagination. You . . . always plume yourself upon being an observer. . . .¹⁶

The life of the aesthete is the life of earnest pursuit of every sentiment and every thought--in the abstract rather than in the concrete:

Every mood, every thought, good or bad, cheerful or sad, you pursue to its utmost limit, yet in such a way that this comes to pass rather in abstracto than in concreto;

¹⁴Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 165.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 67.

in such a way that this pursuit itself is little more than a mood from which nothing results but a knowledge of it, not even so much that the next time it becomes harder or easier for you to indulge in the same mood, for you constantly retain a possibility of it.¹⁷

These last three quotations above are taken from the context of the ethicist's views on marriage as he writes to the romantic, imaginative, melancholy and restless aesthete. The ethicist has settled down to happiness in marriage and his profession. He is convinced that he understands both the genius and the unrest of the aesthetic life, and with these lengthy and descriptive essays attempts to alert his friend to the treacherous end of self-destruction to which the aesthetic stage leads.

What is Kierkegaard's purpose as he speaks pseudonymously in both characters of the dialogue? The conclusion must not be hastily reached that the sole purpose is swiftly and completely to condemn the aesthetic category. For in the penetrating exploration of the aesthetic category of life, SK would show its fascination as well as its instability, its charm as well as its restlessness.¹⁸ But the purpose toward which the aesthetic works move have more than a merely literary intent. SK aims to show that the esthetically existing individual "seeks to experience life without existing and finds that

¹⁷Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁸Douglas V. Steere, "Kierkegaard in English," The Journal of Religion, XXIV (October, 1944), 274.

it is no life at all."¹⁹ Kierkegaard points to the basically static character of the aesthetic stage. When one makes enjoyment the highest good, and lives in search of enjoyment, he lives "in and by that in his personality which is already given and completed, essentially speaking. He lives on the basis of that which he already is, taken immediately."²⁰ The man whose view on life is the aesthetic view anchors his quest for meaning in life on enjoyment. But this is basically unsound, for enjoyment finds its fulfillments in uncertain objects as the quotation on Nero above most graphically shows. The principle of such a person's conditional existence, be it good health, wealth, glory, high station, etc., is always beyond his own control.²¹ If he seeks the meaning of his life in the unfolding of a talent within the personality, he is still on relative ground, since the condition is not given in and through his own will merely. It is in the personality, but has not been placed there by the personality.²²

Any treatment of the aesthetic category without reference to the Stages On Life's Way would be incomplete. Hence our attention is directed to another pseudonymous treatment of

¹⁹Edmund P. Clowney, Jr., "A Critical Estimate of Søren Kierkegaard," The Westminster Theological Journal, V (November, 1942), 48.

²⁰Swenson, op. cit., p. 167.

²¹Ibid., p. 168.

²²Ibid.

the whole problem of the aesthetic stage. In the opening section of this book K. describes a splendid banquet. The five men in attendance are each a depiction of a certain phase of the aesthetic type. The Young Person is the first, with an intelligence which has compassed the world in reflection, but he lacks the experience of a decisive personal commitment to anything in life. His formula is reflective melancholy.²³ The five banqueters are well mellowed with wine before any one is allowed to stand up and discourse on the subject of Eros, for the theme of the first section is "In Vino Veritas." The Young Person speaks thus:

To me the thing of chief importance is thought. Or has love perhaps the privilege of being the only thing one is not to think about in advance but only afterwards? If so, what would happen in case I, the lover, were to begin afterwards to reflect that it was too late? This you see, is the reason why I choose to think about love beforehand.²⁴

In another part of his speech, the Young Person boasts:

I have never looked upon any woman to desire her, I have not fluttered about undecidedly until I blindly plunged or swooned away into the most decisive relationship.²⁵

His thought continues along the line of the serious responsibilities of marriage and parenthood. But it becomes clear that he hesitates to enter into love because of an inner

²³Ibid.

²⁴Søren Kierkegaard, Stages On Life's Way, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 47.

²⁵Ibid., p. 59.

unwillingness to undertake the risk. But he later reveals that he has not escaped a paradoxical situation, for:

Since I do not know what the lovable is, how it attacks me, or how it attacks a woman with reference to me, I cannot be sure of knowing whether I have avoided the danger. This is tragic; in a sense, it is profoundly tragic . . . that there is something which exercises its power everywhere and yet cannot be grasped by thought.²⁶

It is significant that his speech ends on a note of restless frustration and bewilderment.

The second speaker at the Banquet is the planner and master of ceremonies, Constantin Constantius. He represents a cold and superior intelligence, who has despaired of the possibility of a successful repetition of life's happiest moments.²⁷ His whole attitude on womankind is summarized as follows:

Just as one man finds his amusement in balancing a cane upon his nose, in swinging a glass of water in a circle without its contents flying out, or in dancing among eggs, and other similar exercises which are as entertaining as they are profitable--so and not otherwise has the lover in commerce with his lady the most incomparable amusement and the most interesting study.²⁸

Following Constantius comes Victor Eremita, whose formula of the aesthetic approach to Eros is sympathetic irony.²⁹ Victor Eremita laments the meaninglessness of the woman's life

²⁶Thomte, op. cit., p. 19.

²⁷Swenson, op. cit., p. 170.

²⁸Kierkegaard, Stages, p. 64.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 67-76.

because she is a woman, and points out that the real tragedy of the matter is that woman as such can never come to realize her significance--because she is a woman. Hence he concludes that:

To be a woman is something so strange, so mixed, so complex, that no predicate expresses it, and the many predicates one might use contradict one another so sharply that only a woman can endure it, and still worse, can enjoy it.³⁰

The entire speech of Victor Eremita indicates that he is aware of real ethical principles, but the dilemma he exhibits is his despair that the ethical can ever be achieved. Hence his reluctant lapse back into a static and melancholy irony concerning the entire situation.

The fourth speaker is John the Seducer, morally the opposite of Victor Eremita and one for whom womankind is sheer material for exploitation, a sort of grim game in which one indulges without being caught. His eroticism runs wild from the moment he opens his mouth on the subject:

What could be more delicious, more pleasurable, more enchanting, than this which the gods as they were fighting for their own power devised as the only thing that could decoy a man? And verily it is so, for woman is the unique and the most seductive power in heaven and on earth. In this comparison man is something exceedingly imperfect. . . . Thus the gods fashioned her, delicate and ethereal as the mists of a summer's night and yet plump like a ripened fruit, light as a bird in spite of the fact that she carried a world of craving, light because the play of forces is unified at the invisible center of a negative relationship in which she is related to herself, slim of stature, designed with definite proportions and yet to the eye seeming to swell with the

³⁰Ibid., p. 68.

wave-lines of beauty, complete and yet as if only now she were finished, cooling, delicious, refreshing as new-fallen snow, blushing with serene transparency, nappy as a jest which causes one to forget everything, tranquilizing as the goal whereunto desire tends, satisfying by being herself the incitement of desire.³¹

Finally the fifth member speaks. He is a Dressmaker, one who "devotes his life to making woman appear as ridiculous as she is. His method is to entice her to a worship of fashion--the crazier the better. This fanaticism is the expression of aesthetic despair."³² To the Ladies' Tailor everything in life, from religion to hoopskirts, is a matter of fashion.³³

A man is fortunate if he never takes up with any woman. In any case she doesn't belong to him. Even if she doesn't belong to any other man, she belongs to that phantom which is formed by the unnatural intercourse of feminine reflection with feminine reflection, i.e., fashion.³⁴

As in the case of the first speaker, the Young Person, each following speaker witnesses in his aesthetic self-hood that which is "highly unstable, moody, changing with fortune and ambition, centered in externals, eccentric since the whole self is channeled into the periphery, given to trivialities."³⁵ In each of the five speakers at the Banquet

³¹Ibid., pp. 84 f.

³²Swenson, op. cit., p. 170.

³³Thomte, op. cit., p. 21.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Myron Madden, "Kierkegaard On Self-Acceptance," The Review and Expositor, XLVIII (July, 1951), 307.

there is a recognition of the ethical, but all either despair of it or refuse to have anything to do with it. The point is this: Kierkegaard is dealing with something greater than five bachelor views on Eros. He is showing five examples of the aesthetic life--men who refuse to assume any obligation or to enter into any binding relationships in life. Thus they express in their lives or existentially the fact "that knowledge about the ethical is not synonymous with the ethical."³⁶ As SK himself interprets these characters, he makes it clear that it is too late for Victor Eremita, Constantine Constantius, The Fashion Tailor, or Johannes the Seducer to be admonished for a decisive existence.³⁷ Hope is held out for the Young Person alone, for he comes the closest to being merely a possibility.³⁸ For he alone is one whose thought is essentially melancholy, and in this SK sees the possibility of his gravitating toward that condition of suspense and indecision which would propel him toward existence instead of mere contemplation of it. Clarification is needed at this point, and there is help for us as we seek to understand the function of melancholy and despair in the aesthetic stage.

Werner Kuhn explains the dilemma of the aesthetic individual who senses this restlessness in his present state

³⁶Thomte, op. cit., p. 22.

³⁷Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscripts, translated by David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 263.

³⁸Ibid., p. 264.

and yet his inability to move on to a new position:

The experimenting mind . . . has no foothold, it cannot stay where it is . . . the only two ways out of its predicament are barred. One way out would consist in surrendering faith altogether and deafen the voice of conscience that is, the desire for a foothold, a leverage to unhinge the world with the loud pleasures of the world. But the voice, with still insistence, makes itself audible through the clamor of affairs and the numbness of surfeited senses. The 'aesthetic life' is not a possible solution. Nor does the other way out seem viable. Our reason, far from leading us along an ascending road to God, shows us only the absurdity of the affirmation of faith. So we are lost and undone, equally unable to believe and not to believe.³⁹

What is to be done? Judge William suggests there is only one answer: despair!

When I counsel you to despair, it is not a fantastical youth who would whirl you away in the maelstrom of the passions, nor a mocking demon who shouts this comfort to the shipwrecked, but I shout it to you, not as a comfort, not as a condition in which you are to remain, but as a deed which requires all the power and seriousness and concentration of the soul, just as surely as it is my conviction . . . that every man who has not tasted the bitterness of despair has missed the significance of life.⁴⁰

This advice needs still further clarification, for the despair that Judge William counsels his aesthete friend is not a despair in a particular thing, or in his multifarious surroundings. In a magnificent parable the point is laid bare:

Imagine a young man as talented as you are, Let him love a girl, love her as dearly as himself. Let him once ponder in a quiet hour upon what it is he has constructed his life and upon what she can construct here. Love they have in common, and yet he will feel that there are differences. She possesses, perhaps, the gift of beauty, but this has no importance for him, and after all it is

³⁹Helmut Kuhn, Encounter With Nothingness (Hinsdale, Ill.: Henry Regnery Co., 1949), p. 15.

⁴⁰Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 175.

so fragile; she has, perhaps, the joyful temper of youth, but that joy has no great significance for him. He possesses the power of the mind and feels the might of it. He desires to love her in truth, and it never occurs to him to attribute this power to her, and her meek soul does not demand it, and yet there is a difference, and he will feel that this must be done away if he is to love her in truth. Then he will let his soul sink into despair. It is not for his own sake that he despairs but for hers, and yet it is for his own sake, too, for he loves her dearly as himself. Then will despair devour everything till he finds himself in his eternal validity, but then he has also found her, and no knight can return more happily and gladly from the most perilous adventures than does he from this fight with flesh and blood and the vain differences of the finite, for he who despairs finds the eternal man, and in that we are all equal.⁴¹

Here then is the function of despair in the aesthetic category, namely that when a man despairs, he chooses himself, not in his immediacy, not as a fortuitous individual; he chooses himself in his "eternal validity."⁴² Despair robs the aesthetic category of its most fundamental structural weakness, namely that the aesthetic man can participate in existence while only knowing about it or contemplating it. Despair halts the aesthete's self-made impression that he is a machine, a force of nature without an individual or moral existence.⁴³ This should be made clear, that it is not particularly significant that one should choose a definite thing, or even that one's choice be objectively right; but that he who chooses should, as Judge William indicates, do so with

⁴¹Ibid., p. 176.

⁴²Ralph Harper, Existentialism, A Theory of Man (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 52.

⁴³Clowney, op. cit., p. 46.

his whole complete being, out of a fundamental earnestness.⁴⁴ Prof. Thomte points out another important distinction in connection with the function of despair in the aesthetic category. When SK uses the term "despair" and "doubt" there is a word play on the two Danish equivalents, fortvivlelse and tvivl.⁴⁵ A parallel would be the German Verzweiflung and Zweifel.

Tvivl is the despair of the intellect, and is always regarded by Kierkegaard as belonging to the realm of logic and therefore subject to necessity. Fortvivlelse is the despair of the personality. Judge William looks forward to the time when the philosophical point of departure in search for the Absolute is no longer doubt [Zweifel] but despair [Verzweiflung]. Such a philosophy would find its starting point not in thought but in existence, that is, in life itself.⁴⁶

It is significant that the Banquet ends without anyone having made any commitments, and Judge William leaves the matter of a choice open to his younger aesthetic correspondent. Although in all the pseudonymous writings Kierkegaard is desirous of functioning in his maieutic role of drawing the reader out into decisive existence, it is the existing individual who must make the decision. Another cannot do it, but, as Clowney indicates, the aesthetic works are clothed in the terms of life and vivid personalities rather than in

⁴⁴Werner Brock, An Introduction to Contemporary German Philosophy (London: Cambridge University Press, 1935), pp. 78 f.

⁴⁵Thomte, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 37.

abstract terminology.⁴⁷ It is the author's goal to confront the reader with the awareness that he must decide. But it is the reader alone who can make the choice. Precisely what does the expression mean, "choosing oneself in one's eternal validity?" This means a conscious act of the total person, led by despair, toward cutting off the ties of his existence from relative ends. When this action is complete, then the individual is ready for exposure to the possibilities of the deeper and ethical level of personality.

That anything so drastic and revolutionary to the individual could take place only on the basis of what has been presented so far is something which Kierkegaard himself realized. Thomte cites a lengthy footnote on Either/Or in which SK acknowledges the imperfection of Judge William's manner of transition from the aesthetic to the ethical stage.⁴⁸ But allowance for Judge William is made in the fact that he speaks as one confined to the ethical category only. Another citation is from the Concluding Unscientific Postscripts, when the pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, points to the same difficulty when he desires to whisper a little secret in Judge William's ear, and he is quite sure

⁴⁷Clowney, op. cit., p. 32.

⁴⁸Thomte, op. cit., p. 37.

that the judge will "concede there are difficulties he did not take into account."⁴⁹

And so in summary of the aesthetic category, Kierkegaard's critique is directed toward the view of life which is committed to relative ends only, and which treats relative ends as though they were absolute. The aesthetic position, characterized by pleasure, is incapable of bringing out the paradoxical and dialectical constitution of man's nature. In Clowney's succinct phrase, "There is no existential expression of the absolute end which is demanded by the infinite side of the synthesis of the eternal and temporal in man."⁵⁰ This leaves us in the ironical situation which separates the aesthetic and the ethical categories, namely, the irony of the fact that an individual is in despair without realizing it. From this borderland situation of irony we turn to the category of the ethical stage of existence.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Clowney, op. cit., p. 45.

CHAPTER III

THE ETHICAL CATEGORY

At the outset of this chapter it is well to recognize that Kierkegaard does not provide us with a clear-cut system of ethics. In setting forth, therefore, his ethical category, one must listen to SK's characters as they speak in his pseudonymous works to confront the reader with an ethical way of living.¹ The point is that SK is more concerned about an existing ethical person than he is about a system of ethics.

It is also important to understand that Kierkegaard's presentation of the ethical category through the characters that speak for him in his writings is a point of view that Kierkegaard himself did not hold.² For in the ideal ethic set forth (see the entire second volume of Either/Or) the possibility of radical evil is ignored, and the assumption is that the individual can actually find within himself the power to achieve the ethical ideal.³

Keeping these points in mind, we shall attempt to see what the difference is between the aesthetic and ethical stage, what the essence of the ethical category is, and hear representative critiques of the ethical category by students

¹Reider Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 38.

²David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 88.

³Ibid.

of the subject. For primary source material, we shall again depend primarily on Either/Or and Stages On Life's Way, and cite other works when necessary.

Professor Swenson offers an excellent summary of the contrast between the aesthetic and ethical categories. We quote it here in order to make the ethical category stand out clearer by its contrast with the aesthetic:

The ethical individual makes real the ideal possibility latent within him. . . . The mood is therefore the mood of action, action with victory assured. Ethical faith is the resolute faith in the victory [the victory of ethical action], and is the direct expression of ethical enthusiasm. Ethical enthusiasm is specifically distinct from all forms of esthetic enthusiasm. Esthetic pathos receives its adequate expression in words or in other forms of art. Ethical pathos has no other expression than in the transformation of existence, in the transition from potentiality to actuality. Esthetic pathos leads a man to forget himself and to lose himself in or fuse with the object or the idea; ethical pathos leads a man to forget the whole world in order solely to attend to himself and his own ethical transformation. Esthetic pathos is essentially imaginative, the pathos of distance; for ethical pathos the imagination and its products are irrelevant. From the standpoint of the personality, all esthetic pathos is immaturity; ethical pathos is maturity. Esthetic pathos is also differential pathos, aristocratic . . . varying in depth and quality with the esthetic endowment of the personality; ethical pathos is equally accessible to all human beings, it is the poor man's pathos. Esthetic pathos is essentially determined by the accidental; ethical pathos has liberated itself from the accidental and the uncertain, and bases itself securely on the essential and the eternal in personality.⁴

In turning to the literature of Kierkegaard for illustration of some of these points of contrast, we note that the essay on "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage" in the second part of Either/Or constitutes a good source. Judge William is the speaker. His argument is that marriage confronts the aesthete

⁴Ibid., p. 172.

with a possibility that must be ethically realized if any lasting happiness is to be achieved. A sample of his argument is the following. Judge William shows that marriage demands more than a first or immediate love, and that an ethical content with religious overtones is vital:

Romantic love shows that it is immediate by the fact that it follows a natural necessity. It is based upon beauty; in part upon sensuous beauty, in part upon the beauty which can be conceived through and with and in the sensuous, yet not as if it came to evidence through a deliberation, but in such a way that it is constantly on the point of expressing itself, peering out through some sensuous form. In spite of the fact that this love is essentially based upon the sensuous, it is noble, nevertheless, by reason of the consciousness of eternity which it embodies; for what distinguishes all love from lust is the fact that it bears an impress of eternity. The lovers are sincerely convinced that their relationship is in itself a complete whole which can never be altered. . . . Romantic love, however, as I have said, presents an analogy to morality by reason of the presumptive eternity which ennobles it and saves it from being mere sensuality. For the sensual is the momentary. The sensual seeks instant satisfaction, and the more refined it is, the better it knows how to make the instant of enjoyment a little eternity. The true eternity in love, as in true morality, delivers it, therefore, first out of the sensual. But in order to produce this true eternity a determination of the will is called for.⁵

Marriage is thus a good analogy to illustrate the difference between the aesthetic and ethical sphere. The aesthete posits the validity of marriage on the external condition of the pleasure which it afforded him in the moment. Johannes the Seducer's maxim indicates this as follows: "The woman is only the moment. This is in its generality the essential aesthetic principle, namely, that the moment is everything. . . ."⁶

⁵Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 18 f.

⁶Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 265.

The ethical man, however, posits the validity of marriage on the consciousness of eternity which it embodies. It is the true eternity in love as in all morality, says Judge William, that delivers it from the sensual (and by this we can understand the aesthetic and sensual to be synonymous). When Judge William speaks of "the eternal consciousness" he is emphasizing the basic category of the ethical, namely, that it is open for all to participate in. It is not eclectic nor limited to a talented few. While secretiveness might be the genius of the aesthetic category, it is the death of the ethical. For the ethical lives on

open-heartedness, candor, publicity . . . this is the life principle of love, and here in the intimate life secretiveness is its death.⁷

Furthermore, this openness requires courage, because the ethical calls for it.

It requires courage to be willing to show oneself as one truly is. . . . It requires courage to want to be wholesome and sound, honestly and candidly to will the true.⁸

With this background of the aesthetic-ethical contrast we are prepared to move on toward a view of the essence of the ethical individual. First, the ethicist takes his place in the social order.⁹ And there are two advantages over the aesthetic view in this understanding that every man must

⁷Kierkegaard, Stages, p. 88.

⁸Ibid., p. 88.

⁹Thomte, op. cit., p. 40.

fill his place in society as he fulfills his duty in his calling:

In the first place it is consonant with reality and explains something universal in it, whereas the aesthetical view propounds something accidental and explains nothing. In the second place, it construes man with a view to his perfection, sees him in his true beauty.¹⁰

So the calling in the social order provides us a medium of determining something essential to the ethical view. The ethicist does not worry over the fact that there are variations and distinctions of human skills, he reconciles individual existence with the social order.¹¹ Over and above the fact of individual differentiation is written the ethical imperative that every man must work and that every man has a calling. This holds true for the genius as well as the most humble workman. Neither stands outside of the universal-human, the abstract in which the individual finds expression.

The ethicist speaks briefly: "It is every man's duty to have a calling." More he cannot say, for the ethical as such is always abstract, and there is no such thing as an abstract calling for all men; he presupposes, on the contrary, that every man has a particular calling.¹²

From this example of the calling, a corresponding ethical view of the rational order of things follows:

The ethical thesis that every man has a calling is the expression for the fact that there is a rational order of things in which every man, if he will, fills his

¹⁰Kierkegaard, Stages, p. 240.

¹¹Thomte, op. cit., p. 40.

¹²Kierkegaard, Stages, p. 245.

place in such a way that he expresses at once the universal-human and the individual.¹³

At this point it is well to register a question mark to the criticism which Marjorie Grene makes to the Kierkegaardian category of the ethical. Her critique accuses the ethical as being unconvincing and highly superficial for "morality is equally meaningless without some conception of a community in which the individual is set."¹⁴ If she is basing her critique of the ethical category on the ethical writings as found in Either/Or and Stages On Life's Way, it is hard to agree with her in the light of the quotation just cited above.

In citing the examples of marriage as indicative of the nature of the ethical, something more is necessary than mere documentation. Mackintosh warns us lest we forget that this new world

where nothing is blasé, no cool or cold detachment, where an endless beauty and promise come to light . . . this is the life for which Kierkegaard himself had longed and whose climax and fruition, marriage, he had put away in tragic renunciation.¹⁵

The significance of these sections dealing with marriage becomes clear only if one appreciates the personal experience of Kierkegaard in his relation to Regine Olsen, for it is the background of his short-lived and tragic engagement to her

¹³Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁴Marjorie Grene, Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 39.

¹⁵Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 231.

which determined SK's ethical issue and its final outcome.¹⁶ Kierkegaard speaks for himself when he states the ethicist's desire:

What I need is a voice as penetrating as the eye of Lynceus, as terrifying as the sigh of giants, as persistent as the sound of nature, as full of derision as a frosty wind-gust, as malicious as Echo's heartless mockeries, of a compass from the deepest bass to the most mellifluous soprano, modulated from the sacred softness of a whisper to the violent fury of rage. This is what I need in order to breathe, to get expression for what is on my mind, to stir the bowels of my compassion and my wrath.¹⁷

It was because he himself has passed through the torturous experience of despair and decision himself, and finally had broken free from Regine that he came to possess in the fullest measure what he speaks of above as the ethicist's need. This it was that made him an imaginative writer.¹⁸ But to get on with the contents of the ethical category, the ethicist reminds us that it is the duty of every man to marry.¹⁹ Kierkegaard continues to explain that

he does not sin who fails to marry, except insofar as he himself is to blame for it, since in that case he offends against the universal-human which is set before him too as a task that must be realized, but that he who marries realizes the universal. . . . The ethicist cannot bring him further than this, for as we have said the ethical is always the abstract; it can only tell him what the universal is.²⁰

¹⁶Swenson, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁷As quoted by Swenson, Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 252.

²⁰Ibid.

Here again, as in the previous example of work and the calling, the ethical man is shown as one who participates harmoniously in the universal order (namely, that which is possible for every man), and to be an exception would be to find oneself in conflict with it.²¹

Friendship follows as still another example of the ethical category and its nature, but with a different twist. For the aesthete can also participate in friendship, but in this way.

He remains concealed, because however frequently and however much he gives himself up to the world, he never does it totally, there always remains something that he keeps back. . . .²²

But the ethicist, on the other hand, finds in friendship the opportunity to fulfill the essence of the ethical category, "to become revealed."²³ Here again, in these two approaches to the function of friendship, the essential difference between the ethical and the aesthetic categories is indicated.

The final word of the ethicist Judge William to his aesthete correspondent comes in the form of a country parson who writes a sermon on the subject of the edification implied in the thought that as against God we are always in the wrong.²⁴ The substance of the sermon to the aesthete is that the solution to life's problems lies in the process of giving oneself without

²¹Thomte, op. cit., p. 41.

²²Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 269.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 283.

reservation toward the highest good. "Recognition of one's own insignificance, and resignation to the absolute superiority and righteousness of God is the solvent."²⁵ The sermon ends with the significant phrase:

Do not check your soul's flight, do not grieve the better promptings within you, do not dull your spirit with half wishes and half thoughts; ask yourself, and continue to ask until you find the answer; for one may have known a thing many times and acknowledged it; one may have willed a thing many times and attempted it, and yet it is only by the deep inward movements, only by the indescribable emotions of the heart, that for the first time you are convinced that what you have known belongs to you, that no power can take it from you; for only the truth which edifies is truth for you.²⁶

And in Kierkegaard's own comment on the words of this quotation we are reminded that the words "only the truth which edifies is truth for you," are to be understood as

an essential predicate relating to the truth as inwardness; its decisive characterization as edifying for you, i.e., for the subject, constituting its essential difference from all objective knowledge, in that the subjectivity itself becomes the mark of the truth.²⁷

With this, we are brought to an understanding of the issue at stake in Either/Or, and, indeed, of the very reason why it is so called. For there are two ways open to the ethically existing individual: either he can direct his life to an absolute and eternal good, or he can completely ignore this possibility. It is either/or. It can, however, never be both/and.

Professor Harper states categorically that in Either/Or we

²⁵Thomte, op. cit., p. 42.

²⁶Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 294.

²⁷Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 226.

have not only "the basically ethical character of his existentialism but practically all the elementary notions and insights of his entire literature ('within a literature').²⁸ This point of view is buttressed by Geismar who indicates that in the existing ethical individual we have

not a philosopher who speculates about the Absolute. He is an acting individual, looking to the absolute for the purpose of shaping his life in accordance with it . . . his task in a world of relativities is to maintain a relative relationship to relative ends and an absolute relationship to absolute ends.²⁹

But alas, the man who fulfills all the requirements for the ethical category, and yet is still honest with himself, realizes that it is not within the realm of the humanly possible for the subject to devote himself relatively to relative ends and absolutely to absolute ends. He soon finds himself mixing the two for he recognizes in himself

something abnormal and pathological, namely an absolute commitment to relative ends. Here is a fundamental imperfection in the self. A change of attitude towards the ends of life is now required, as a pre-condition for the true ethical mode of existence.³⁰

In going back over the territory of the relationship of the individual to absolute ends, we must return to the solution offered to the aesthete, namely that the remedy for his despair was despair! Judge William says that the point of

²⁸Ralph Harper, Existentialism, A Theory of Man (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 48.

²⁹Eduard Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 51.

³⁰Ibid.

departure for the search of the true ethical mode of existence is "when one has willed despair, . . . i.e., oneself in one's eternal validity."³¹ In describing this choice, SK soars off to the heights of his rare literary genius:

Now I wish to state that to choose gives to a human nature a solemnity and a dignity which can never be entirely lost. There are those who attach an extraordinary value to having at some moment seen one or another outstanding world-historical personality face to face. Yet such a moment, however significant, is nothing in comparison to the moment of choice. When everything about one has become quiet and solemn as a starlit night, when the soul is alone in the whole world, there appears over against it, not some distinguished personality, but the eternal power itself. Then as it were, heaven opens itself above the soul, and the "self" chooses itself or rather receives itself. . . . For the great thing is not to be this or that, but to be oneself and this is something which every man can be if he will.³²

But, however convincing Judge William's artistry might be, the reference to the heaven's opening is only of literary significance, for the self still chooses the self, and he does not become another than he was before. We witness here an approach to the religious stage of existence, but an approach that is inadequate, for the Christian concept of the condition requisite to existence (sin and faith) is not touched upon. The entire description has not transcended the realm of human immanence. "God is still immanent in the personality,"³³ and the presupposition that a truly Christian existence can be reached from this category is wrong because the ethical is

³¹Kierkegaard, Either/Or, p. 179.

³²Ibid., p. 149.

³³Geismar, op. cit., p. 52.

not yet induced to break with itself but only to realize itself. Clowney summarizes this inherent weakness of the ethical category thus:

The edification of the ethical sphere is edification, but not the edification which resolves the "misunderstanding," the dialectical tension, but rather the edification which urges the enduring of the misunderstanding. Here is the explanation of the immanentistic, ethical approach of the sermon included by Judge Wilhelm at the conclusion of Either/Or . . . that the ethical spirit enthusiastically undertakes to set aside the finite in favor of the infinite. This is as if to annul the misunderstanding constituted by the dialectic of the infinite and the finite by declaring in favor of the infinite and enthusiastically bearing the misunderstanding. In the ethical therefore there is an expression of becoming: the aim is to realize the universally human, to pass from possibility to actuality. Will in the profoundest sense is the ethical in the personality. But this does not escape immanentism. The categories are still universal, and there is no true expression of the paradox of existence, but rather a retreat from existence into the eternal by a backward movement of recollection. That is, without resolving the paradox of existence by existing, the individual who lives only in ethical categories abstracts, universalizes, and the individual does not come to decisive expression.³⁴

Spier gets at the same basic criticism in a sentence: "The ethical man seeks to overcome his own guilt by finding fixed rules for his actions."³⁵ By this is meant that fixed rules represent some point outside the individual, namely, the universal good, from which the ethical individual seeks to determine his actions.

³⁴Edmund P. Clowney, Jr., "A Critical Estimate of Søren Kierkegaard," The Westminster Theological Journal, V (November, 1942), 46.

³⁵J. M. Spier, Christianity and Existentialism (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1953), p. 35.

What is left, then, for the ethical category? Only the borderline situation between the ethical and the religious category, and this is termed humor.

The farthest advance of the ethical . . . is the concept of humor . . . for the ethical will not come to the moment of paradox decisively but retreats into the eternity of recollection with only humor, with only a smile, for all merely temporal decisions.³⁶

With this borderline concept of humor we are reminded of the similar borderline concept of irony and inquire after the relation between the two. Their content is not qualitatively different, and both take on a semblance of similarity in approach to the religious view--humor perhaps more specifically than irony. For it is irony that constitutes it as humor.³⁷ But both remain only an approach to the category of the existing individual, for neither has succeeded in becoming truly subjective.³⁸

This, then, is the point to which the ethical category leads us: we must break with the presupposition that in its deepest self the subjectivity of the individual contains the Truth. The opposite is the condition for the religious category, namely that the individual is in error and that his subjectivity is not truth but untruth. By this alone can the immanency of human idealism be transcended. And to this problem the central category of Kierkegaard's stages of existence speaks, the religious category to which we now turn.

³⁶Clowney, op. cit., p. 47.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION A

The category of the religious individual is one that Kierkegaard divides into two parts, Religion A and Religion B. Religion A, to which this chapter is addressed, carries immanentism over into the sphere of religion.¹ Religion B, by which Kierkegaard meant Christianity, "gives decisive expression to the synthesis of the eternal and the temporal in the individual. . . ."² Religion B, the subject of the following chapter, is mentioned now and below only insofar as it is in contrast to Religion A.

It would seem at the outset as though there is no essential difference between the ethical category and Religion A, and this is true in the sense that both "have a plus at the foundation of human nature."³ God is still immanent in the human personality. But there are some significant differences, and these can be clearly seen in the peculiarly religious criteria of experience that are to be discussed in this chapter: resignation, suffering, and guilt. The

¹Edmund P. Clowney, Jr., "A Critical Estimate of Søren Kierkegaard," The Westminster Theological Journal, V (November, 1942), 48.

²Ibid.

³Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 87.

ethical category is constructed outside of religious terminology, the religious category turns to religious concepts and, to paraphrase Prof. Collins insight, "supplied the reinforcement for, and the alliance with,"⁴ that which is lacking in the ethical category.

The relation of Religion A to the ethical category is, as has been said above, one which bears out points which both have in common, as well as points of difference. Whatever the case, it has been emphatically declared that one must not regard the progression of the stages from the aesthetic to the ethical and finally to the religious as a progression from the lower to the higher sphere, discarding each stage as one has passed through it. This interpretation, which Prof. Hirsch suggests as one far too common in Germany, "deserves the gold medal in a competition to see who could say the greatest stupidity about Kierkegaard."⁵ This concept of the inter-relationship of the stages which conceives of the aesthetic and ethical presentation solely for the purpose of distinguishing them from the Christian religiosity as being non-Christian, when pressed to its logical end, would eliminate entirely all ethico-religious idealism from the Christian consciousness.⁶ Yet the religious category (throughout this chapter to be

⁴James Collins, The Existentialists (Chicago, Ill.: Henry Regnery Co., 1952), p. 9.

⁵Thomte, op. cit., p. 102.

⁶Ibid.

understood as Religion A unless otherwise designated) does present us with something which Andersen speaks of as "eine Kritik am ethischen Selbstverständnis und an der ethischen Lösung der Existenznot. . . ."7 For the ethical dilemma is revealed in the man who finds himself absolutely committed to relative ends. This dilemma calls for a change. In proscribing this change, the religious category proposes that the change must come from the eternal and the divine, toward which the actual and the imperfect self assumes a passive attitude. "I submit myself passively to the divine, in order that the imperfect in me may be rooted out," is Swenson's summary of the religious goal.8 We shall now take up in detail the threefold results of this passive attitude towards the divine.

Suffering is the first characteristic of the religious category.9 This is something, however, which must not be associated with outward physical ailment, but it is the "soul-suffering" similar to that which Christ experienced. Kierkegaard viewed Christ's suffering as limited not merely to derision and scourging and crucifixion. Rather it is that "soul-suffering of inwardness . . . what one might call the

7Wilhelm Andersen, Der Existenzbegriff und das existenzielle Denken in der neueren Philosophie und Theologie (Gutersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1940), p. 53.

8David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 173.

9Thomte, op. cit., p. 90.

mystery of His unrecognizableness from the moment of His public appearance up to the last,"¹⁰ that SK has reference to. In spite of his sympathy with the whole monastic principle of life, Kierkegaard does not at this point resort to any outward flight from the world to the cloister because of suffering.¹¹ In his own words, "suffering has its ground in the fact that the individual is in his immediacy absolutely committed to relative ends."¹² The religious individual lies fettered in the finite with the absolute conception of God present to him in human frailty.¹³ This calls for a change which consists in a break with relative ends if the God-relationship is to be absolute. By relative ends, Kierkegaard meant everything which binds man to his temporal existence.¹⁴ The change has its religious designation as suffering, or a dying away from the world or from the immediate.¹⁵ Thomte cites the following quotation:

What the conception of God or an eternal happiness is to effect in the individual is, that he transforms his entire existence in relation thereto, and this transformation

¹⁰Søren Kierkegaard, Training In Christianity, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 136.

¹¹Thomte, op. cit., p. 90.

¹²Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscripts, p. 412.

¹³Ibid., p. 432.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 455.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 412.

is a process of dying away from the immediate. This is slowly brought about, but finally he will feel himself confined within the absolute conception of God; for the absolute conception of God does not consist in having such a conception en passant, but consists in having the absolute conception at every moment. This is the check on his immediacy, the death verdict which announces its annihilation.¹⁶

Suffering is brought into the religious experience for another reason, namely, that "an eternal happiness is not something which he can lay hold of in time; he is separated from his eternal happiness, and it is always something to which one has not yet arrived."¹⁷ This is significant because of the implication that one does maintain a relationship to an eternal happiness. No total break between the eternal and the temporal is contemplated. This distinguishes Religion A from Religion B. And another cause for suffering is that the individual cannot find any adequate means of expressing his God-relationship:

Herein lies the profound suffering of true religiosity, the deepest thinkable, namely to stand related to God in an absolute decisive manner, and to be unable to find any decisive external expression for this.¹⁸

This is the religious climate which stifles immediacy and brings religiousness to life. "In suffering religiosity begins to breathe."¹⁹ And it is to this "zero point" of existence,

¹⁶Thomte, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁷Kierkegaard, Postscripts, pp. 405 f.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 439.

¹⁹Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 364.

this sheer unmitigated agony of the spirit, that Grene prefers even the march of the Weltgeist with its indifference to the salvation of the single self.²⁰

Still another earmark of the religious category is that of resignation. As soon as the religious individual sets out to transform his life he runs aground on that in his own nature which is committed absolutely to only relative ends. But religious existence calls for a renunciation in which the relative is done away with. He says it thus:

When it is said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," the goal of eternity is thereby posited as that for which man shall strive. If this is to be done, and done according to the letter . . . it is required, above all, that man seek not first something else. But what is this "something else" which he seeks? It is the temporal. If then he is to seek first God's kingdom, he must freely renounce every temporal goal.²¹

In Thomte's descriptive phrase, resignation calls for the religious individual to possess things of finite value only as one "who has been clothed in borrowed garments. His roots have been severed from the soil of the finite."²² In the life of the religious individual, resignation plays the role of an inspector coming early and late, checking on the lofty solemnity with which the absolute direction toward the absolute telos is maintained.²³

²⁰Marjorie Grene, Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), p. 38.

²¹Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 362.

²²Thomte, op. cit., p. 89.

²³Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 364, 367.

The third mark of the religious category is guilt. The particular quality of this concept of guilt is suggested by Andersen:

Dieses Schuld-verhältnis ist kein empirisches Urteil über den Menschen. Schuldigkeit als Qualitätsbestimmung kann nur vom Individuum selbst erkannt werden, wenn es sich existierend mit dem Verhältnis zur ewigen Seligkeit zusammenbringt.²⁴

Thomte echoes the same thought in the statement: "The guilt of the individual is not determined empirically or as a summa summarum, but as a totality."²⁵ Both are quoting SK in the Postscripts: "By placing guilt in relation to God and an eternal happiness the definition of guilt receives a qualitative determinant."²⁶ The God relationship, because it is being constantly annulled by the consciousness of guilt, is disrupted; hence it is guilt which brings on a disturbance within the personality itself. This disruption is rooted not in the memory of a wrongful act, but rather in a consciousness of "a quality affecting the whole personality, a total and pervasive coloring, which does not admit of differences of degree. . . ."²⁷ Between man and man guilt may be a quantitative thing, but between man and God, "guilt is guilt, and that is the end of it, the quality being essential and the

²⁴Andersen, op. cit., pp. 54 f.

²⁵Thomte, op. cit., p. 92.

²⁶Kierkegaard, Postscripts, pp. 471 f.

²⁷Swenson, op. cit., p. 174.

degree irrelevant; its intrusion into the relation between God and man means that God disappears, or ceases to be God, and becomes a fellow Pharisee."²⁸

With his analysis of suffering, resignation, and guilt, Kierkegaard has outlined the characteristics of Religion A. It speaks emphatically of inward transformation not conditioned by anything but the immanent eternal within the personality. One does not base one's eternal happiness upon one's existence, but rather the relationship to an eternal happiness becomes a determinant for the transformation of one's existence.²⁹ The tie which relates the eternal happiness to human existence is intact despite the tension which guilt, resignation and suffering create, for the assumption is that the eternal happiness is everywhere, and all men have a share in its immanent blessedness.³⁰

²⁸Ibid., pp. 174 f.

²⁹Thomte, op. cit., p. 93.

³⁰Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 515.

CHAPTER V

RELIGION B

Any thorough-going treatment of this category might easily develop into an independent thesis, for when dealing with Religion B we arrive at "the capstone of Kierkegaard's view of the individual. . . ."¹ It is with this category that the whole concept of Existenz deals. "The (existential outlook) is to be found solely in the religious form of life which alone breaks all ties with the universal and with lawfulness."² And as still another critic suggests,

The whole problem for every serious Christian, according to Kierkegaard, lies on the subjective side, in the riddle of his own path to faith . . . the way to eternal blessedness for "my own little I" is every Christian's whole concern.³

And so the weighty evaluations of this stage mount up. But in this chapter we can but map out the essential contents of the category and leave the implications and detailed investigation for another effort more deliberately focused on this area alone.

The scope of this chapter then, shall be first of all a contrast of Religion B with Religion A, after which we shall address ourselves to the vital ingredients of the

¹James Collins, The Existentialists (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), pp. 9 f.

²J. M. Spier, Christianity and Existentialism (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1953), p. 9.

³Marjorie Grene, Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 21.

Religion B category.

The closing sentence of the preceding chapter stated that the tie between eternal happiness and human existence remains intact in Religion A, despite the tension which guilt, resignation, and suffering create. Thus Religion A always presupposes a fundamental kinship or continuity between divinity and humanity. The concept of the existence of the individual is that it is a point within the divine consciousness. Religion B is based on the premise that God as the eternal, qualitatively Other from man can make Himself manifest to man only if the tie between the eternal happiness and human existence is severed, that is to say, when a transcendent relationship has broken in upon the immanent relationship. Religion B confronts man with the fact that the Eternal has entered humanity at a fixed point, namely in Jesus Christ. In Religion A the eternal is considered as immanent within all time. Time is the echo or moving image of eternity.⁴ Eternity is present always within time, and man is always in contact with eternity. But in Religion B, the eternal is posited for man only at a definite time and place, namely in the historical appearance of Jesus Christ in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago. Christianity, according to Religion B, speaks of the time-process as punctured by the impingement upon it from the Eternal.

⁴H. V. Martin, The Wings of Faith (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), p. 56.

This must mean an absolute breach with all immanence-religiousness; and the relationship made possible there and then between God and man becomes one of transcendence, and thus paradoxical to man.⁵

In Religion A the relationship between the individual and the eternal is in essence a relationship only of thought. Religion B takes the position that the individual is related to the eternal not only in thought but in time, in actual reality, "so that the relationship is an event in time and in existence, and not merely a timeless relationship in thought."⁶

Andersen sums up the significance of this comparison thus:

Der entscheidende Schritt über das religiöse Existieren hinaus ist durch die Erkenntnis bedingt, dass das Ewige in der Zeit, "an einer bestimmten Stelle," in Jesus Christus Wirklichkeit geworden ist. . . . Die Dialektik der Existenz meint hier einen Widerspruch nicht innerhalb der Immanenz, sondern mit der Immanenz. Damit ist der Sprung vom religiösen zum christlich-religiösen Existieren bestimmt.⁷

The vast import of this is that it represents a total break with everything that has been described in the three stages of existence. In the presentation of the ethical stage, Judge William had intimated that there might be one exception to the universal demands of ethics--an exception based on the individual's God-relationship: "Such a religious exception will ignore the universal, he will outbid the terms offered

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Wilhelm Andersen, Der Existenzbegriff und das existenzielle Denken in der neueren Philosophie und Theologie (Gutersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1940), p. 56.

by temporal reality."⁸ With Religion B we have arrived at that "religious exception," and the universal is replaced by the Eternal in temporal reality. And it is at this juncture, labeled by Henry Nelson Wieman as "a hash of nonsense . . . a hopeless contradiction. . . ." ⁹ that fundamental understanding of SK stands or falls. For here it is that Kierkegaard asks the key question, "How am I to become a Christian?" The purpose of the massive Postscripts is thus summarized by the pseudonymous author:

I, Johannes Climacus, now thirty years of age, born in Copenhagen, a plain man like the common run of them, have heard tell of a highest good in prospect, which is called an eternal blessedness, and that Christianity will bestow this upon me on condition of adhering to it--now I ask how I am to become a Christian. . . .¹⁰

With this comparison of Religion A and Religion B completed, we now turn to the concept of sin and the important place it plays in the category of Christian Existenz. Professor Swenson writes that for Kierkegaard the problem of sin is to be regarded "as central for every religious view of life, and as the starting point for the Christian consciousness."¹¹

⁸Søren Kierkegaard, Stages On Life's Way, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 170.

⁹Henry Nelson Wieman, "The Interpretation of Kierkegaard," The Christian Century, LVI (April 5, 1939), 446.

¹⁰Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscripts, translated by David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 545.

¹¹David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 178.

Religion B introduces us to a new and profound concept of sin, in contrast to the guilt consciousness of Religion A.

Sin consciousness, as distinguished from the guilt-consciousness of Religion A, represents the breach with immanence, for by coming into being the individual has become another. . . . From eternity the individual is not a sinner, but when the individual who is planned on the scale of eternity comes into the world, he becomes a sinner, and is thereby excluded from every communication with the eternal by means of immanence.¹²

This statement from Professor Thomte is taken from the Postscripts, the complete section reading thus:

From eternity the individual is not a sinner; so when the being who is planned on the scale of eternity comes into the world by birth, he becomes a sinner at birth, or is born a sinner, and then it is that existence, by surrounding this being on all sides so that every communication with the eternal by way of recollection is cut off, and the predicate "sinner" which is then first applied but applied at once at the moment of coming into the world--then it is that existence acquires such overwhelming power that the coming into the world makes this being another.¹³

The last words of the quotation are of prime importance, for it brings us to the insight that sin-consciousness for Kierkegaard has a vital role in Christian existence. It is not simply a concept or doctrine, but is the new "existence medium."¹⁴ For further amplification, we again turn to the

Postscripts:

Sin consciousness . . . is an alteration of the very subject himself, which shows that outside of the individual that power must be which makes clear to him the fact

¹²Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 95.

¹³Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 517.

¹⁴Thomte, op. cit., p. 95.

that in coming into life he has become another than that he was, has become a sinner. This power is the Deity in time.¹⁵

Sin consciousness, then, is something which is closely linked with the paradox of the Divine entering into the temporal and is, in fact, one of the absolutely necessary conditions for the human appropriation of the Eternal by faith. For no consciousness of sin can ever arise in the individual unless his self-consciousness be "so profoundly stirred that it confronts the ideal of an absolute good, an eternal telos, which is identical with its own immortality."¹⁶ The terms, "absolute good," and "eternal telos," are a part of the vocabulary of the religiosity of immanence; but the phrase "identical with its own immortality" points to the paradoxical act of God in the revelation of His Divine Son, Jesus Christ. For SK the only possible event which can so profoundly stir the self that it makes a break with itself is when the Eternal reveals Himself at a particular point in time. For then it is that the individual glimpses something from which he is totally cut off and qualitatively different. Then it is that the individual has "forfeited his highest self, has become another, is now heterogeneous with the Good, has become incapable of fulfilling the ethical requirements."¹⁷ With this insight

¹⁵Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 517.

¹⁶Swenson, op. cit., p. 179.

¹⁷Ibid.

into the relationship between the consciousness of sin and Divine Revelation, Kierkegaard is reproducing the position of both the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II, 13, and the Smalcald Articles, III, Article 1, 3. Both sections underscore the fact that the full extent of hereditary sin is so deep that no reason can understand it, but it must be learned from the revelation of Scriptures. When the individual is brought to the realization of his qualitative otherness from the Eternal manifest in time, the eternal blessedness for which he has longed becomes an object of the utmost certainty to him. "He has lost God."¹⁸ It is in this intense mood, when the only certainty the individual has is the certainty that he has not God, that Kierkegaard leads the individual to recognize existential pathos, which is the matrix for transition to true Christian faith.

The Kierkegaardian literature which covers this area of Christian existence is vast and profound. Both of the more formal works, the Postscripts and Fragments deal with the problem of sin as the condition for Religion B, and the other devotional works such as The Concept of Dread, Fear and Trembling, Training in Christianity, Sickness Unto Death, and Thoughts On Crucial Situations in Human Life, amplify the fullness of the Kierkegaardian presentation of sin-consciousness. We shall select two volumes from the devotional works in order to

¹⁸Martin, op. cit., p. 55.

illustrate two important aspects of sin. The references from Sickness Unto Death and The Concept of Dread which follow are cited by Reidar Thomte.¹⁹

In Sickness Unto Death, the point is made that Christianity begins with the doctrine of sin, that is, with the category of the individual in confrontation with the Eternal which has entered the temporal.

Christianity has secured itself from the very beginning. It begins with the doctrine of sin. The category of sin is the category of the individual.²⁰

In a footnote to the above quotation, Kierkegaard adds an important remark concerning sin and its relation to the individual:

The doctrine of the sin of the human race has often been misused because it has not been noticed that sin, common though it is to all, does not gather men together in a common concept, into a society or a partnership . . . but it splits men into individuals and holds every individual fast as a sinner--a splitting which in another sense is both in correspondence with and teleologically in the direction of the perfection of existence. This men have not observed, and so they have let the fallen race become once for all good again in Christ. And so in turn they have saddled God with an abstraction. . . . But if the individual is to feel himself akin to God [and this is the doctrine of Christianity], the whole weight of this falls upon him in fear and trembling. . . .²¹

A further insight into the nature of sin is in the emphasis upon the continuity of sin instead of upon particular acts of social sins.

¹⁹Thomte, passim, pp. 164-166.

²⁰Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 195.

²¹Ibid., p. 197.

Only in the continuation of sin he [man] is himself, only in that does he live and have an impression of himself. What does this mean? It means that the state of being in sin is that which, in the depth to which he has sunk, holds him together impiously strengthening him by consistency; it is not the particular new sin which [crazy as it sounds to say it] helps him, but the particular new sin is merely the expression for the state of sin which properly is the sin.²²

Thomte points out that Kierkegaard was familiar with the Schlegel and Tieck German translation of Shakespeare. He notes a possible influence of the view of sin expressed in Macbeth (Act III, scene 2), "Sündentsprossene Werke erlangen nur durch Sünde Kraft und Stärke."²³ The insight is vital, for it shows us that sin is not determined by each individual sin, but that it is a reality which steadily grows every instant that one does not get out of it, and that continuity in sin is vastly more serious than any one particular sin expressed in one way or other. According to Sickness Unto Death, "every sin is before God," and hence the sinner stands as one guilty before God.

Nor is it only now and then one sins before God; for every sin is before God; or rather it is this which properly makes human guilt to be sin.²⁴

Kierkegaard regards this the dividing line between the pagan and the individual who would be a Christian. "The pagan and

²²Ibid., p. 177.

²³Thomte, op. cit., p. 166.

²⁴Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 129.

the natural man have as their measure the merely human self."²⁵ But of the individual in the opposite category, he says: "Only when the self . . . is conscious of existing before God, only then is it the infinite self; and then this self sins before God."²⁶

In The Concept of Dread, supplement to the understanding of this category is provided in the statement that sin has its own quality of transcendence.

With the first sin came sin into the world. Exactly in the same way is this true of every subsequent first sin of man, that with it sin comes into the world. . . . The account of the first sin in Genesis has, especially in our age, been regarded rather carelessly as a myth . . . when the understanding takes to mythology there seldom comes out of it anything but twaddle. That account in Genesis is the only dialectically consistent account. Really its whole substance is concentrated in the clause: Sin came into the world by a sin.²⁷

Hence sin is governed in outward appearance by its inward presupposition and origin. It seems to me that this insight is thoroughly New Testamental in its serious recognition of the demonic which is clearly apparent from the Gospels (Matthew 9:33-34) as well as the Pauline epistles (Gal. 4:3; 2 Cor. 4:4). In The Concept of Dread, Kierkegaard presents his own interpretation of the doctrine of inherited sin. The universal corruption of man indeed has special reference to

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 28 f.

Adam, but man's fall also has the quality of an actus perpetuus.²⁸ Through the qualitative leap which constituted the first sin, Adam brought the first sin into the world. Hence whether there be a thousand Adams or merely one is entirely insignificant.

So Adam was created . . . but had not found society for himself. Eve was created, formed from his rib. She stood in as intimate relation to him as possible, and yet this was still an external relation. The existence in this sense of a thousand Adams signifies no more than one. This may be said in view of the descent of the race from one pair.²⁹

This emphasis on the solidarity of the human race--a solidarity marked by the continuity of sin--is further amplified by the identification of Adam with the whole race.

Adam is the first man; he is at once himself and the race. . . . He is not essentially different from the race, for in that case there is no race; he is not the race, for in that case there is no race; he is himself and the race. Therefore what explains Adam explains the race, and vice versa.³⁰

With these references from Sickness Unto Death and The Concept of Dread we have submitted a representative portion of material on SK's concept of sin. In this category, Kierkegaard draws together all of the previous aesthetic and ethical presentations of despair, boredom, anxiety, and dread, and gives them their highest relevance to the human situation as the individual measures himself against the Eternal in the

²⁸Thomte, op. cit., p. 165.

²⁹Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, p. 42.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 26 f.

temporal. "Despair comes about when the self does not know the self as it actually is, and does not accept it that way."³¹ "Boredom is a warning that all the goods of life may turn to ashes in the mouth."³² "Anguished dread is the state of spiritual growing pains of a man who stands poised at the brink of personal exercise of freedom, in the full awareness of its consequences for time and eternity."³³

Upon dread all his [man's] religion rests. From dread comes despair, from despair the sense of sin, from the sense of sin the instant of choice, from the choice of Christ, faith itself and the immortal life of the spirit . . . dread is an alien power which takes hold of the individual . . . as a wholly alien and objective force . . . its nature gives to Kierkegaard's theology its dominant notes of transcendence and individuality.³⁴

We might define Angst as a conscious or semiconscious dread that our existence trembles over an abyss of nothingness. It is a distressed apprehension of the unsupported character of human existence.³⁵

Each of these characteristic summaries gives animation to the dynamic concept of sin-consciousness which is vital to the category of Religion B. A statement from Kierkegaard himself sums up the inclusive importance of it all: "No man can see God without purity and no man can know God without

³¹Myron Madden, "Kierkegaard on Self-Acceptance," The Review and Expositor, XLVIII (July, 1951), 308.

³²Collins, op. cit., p. 8.

³³Ibid.

³⁴N. Channing-Pearce, The Terrible Crystal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 27.

³⁵Howard A. Johnson, "Kierkegaard's Pilgrimage to Faith," Japan Christian Quarterly, XVIII (Summer, 1952), 155.

becoming a sinner."³⁶ Sin, however, must not be identified with the whole Christian existence. It is rather a part without which the decisiveness of Christian existence cannot be grasped. Sin is the opposite, not of virtue but of Faith.³⁷ Sin forces the issue of the "leap" and it is with the leap that we now concern ourselves.

To be a Christian in the New Testament sense means that every individual as an individual shall relate himself personally to Christ in fear and trembling through the leap of passionate decision in the despair of his guilt before God.³⁸

With Martin's correct statement of the decisiveness of the "leap" to the category of Religion B we introduce this concept, but we note that the category of the "leap" is in essence not limited to Religion B alone. For the breach of continuity between all three stages of life, the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious must be traversed by means of the "leap." The transitions are made by a "leap" in the more general sense, that is to say, transitions which come about by a decisiveness rooted in the individual and his immanent choice. But besides these general determinations there is also the leap par excellence by which the religious passion

³⁶Søren Kierkegaard, Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life, translated by David F. Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 9.

³⁷Edmund P. Clowney, Jr., "A Critical Estimate of Søren Kierkegaard," The Westminster Theological Journal, V (November, 1942), 50.

³⁸Martin, op. cit., p. 40.

which in Christianity is called faith, emerges. "This transition requires a divine assistance, and is a true creative act of God, within the framework of a pre-existent creation."³⁹ In speaking of the "leap" in the subsequent discussion, we shall concern ourselves with this latter and distinct useage, in which the "leap" is determined by the Eternal and not the universal, the Transcendent and not the immanent.

In order to begin to be oneself, one must leap to another position, not given by itself, but held before one by the promise of Christ: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."⁴⁰

An important aspect of the nature of the "leap" to Christian faith is cited in the Postscripts:

In making the absolute venture [the leap] he becomes another individual. Before he has made the venture he cannot understand it as anything else than madness. . . . After the individual has made the venture he is no longer the same individual. Thus there is made room for the transition and its decisiveness, an intervening yawning chasm, a suitable scene for the infinite passion of the individual, a gulf which the understanding cannot bridge either forward or backward.⁴¹

The reference to the object of the "leap" as madness gives proportion to Johnson's statement that "the leap of faith did not transport him (SK) to the seventh heaven or to any promised land or to a bed of roses."⁴² What, then, does the "leap" signify? The following parable will help toward understanding.

³⁹Swenson, op. cit., p. 163.

⁴⁰Ralph Harper, Existentialism, A Theory of Man (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 64.

⁴¹Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 379.

⁴²Johnson, op. cit., p. 188.

Let us imagine a son loving his father and loved by him. The son is happy receiving proofs and signs of his father's love. But let us suppose that this father, afraid to spoil his son, becomes more and more chary of those proofs and signs. What will happen? Probably the son will be shocked at his father, because he is able to understand only direct and immediate communications of his father's love. But we can imagine a son, able to develop a deeper understanding to leap, as it were, over the appearance and to gain by and in that leap confidence in his father's love in spite of all appearance. By that leap the impossibility that a loving father would behave in so shocking a manner would be overcome.

But now let us realize the relation between man and God in Christianity. Let us imagine a God, not chary of his utterances, but entirely hidden and disguised and requiring to be believed in--in spite of the manner in which he appears. Here is the basic offense of Christianity; and it is here likewise only by a leap that the offense can be overcome. Christianity, on the contrary, which begins with a "because of" instead of an "in spite of" is no Christianity at all . . . it is a leap which is required to get over the foolishness of Christianity.⁴³

The "leap" thus signifies a tearing away from self and the immanent world in a crisis which puts man under the constraint and claim of the Absolute, "so that a true knower can never say, 'Do according to my words and not according to my deeds, for knowledge and life cannot be separated.'"⁴⁴ Merlan,⁴⁵ Fitzpatrick,⁴⁶ and Harper⁴⁷ each agree that the "leap" has

⁴³Philip Merlan, "Toward the Understanding of Kierkegaard," The Journal of Religion, XXIII (April, 1943), 81.

⁴⁴E. Gomann, "Soeren Kierkegaard and His Message," Lutheran Church Quarterly, XVI (1943), 401.

⁴⁵Merlan, op. cit., p. 89.

⁴⁶Mallory Fitzpatrick, "Kierkegaard and the Church," The Journal of Religion, XXVII (October, 1947), 258.

⁴⁷Harper, op. cit., p. 56.

as its object something which is rationally absurd and totally paradoxical, namely the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and his redemption of man. But Paul Tillich presents a view of the "leap" which cannot be overlooked:

Kierkegaard . . . asks the individual to break away from this society in order to save his existence as a person. . . . Theological existentialism demands the leap of the individual out of his given cultural and intellectual situations into the acceptance of a sacred tradition formulated hundreds of years ago. The leap liberates, but does it not enslave again? . . . the Neo-Orthodox Christian subjects himself through the leap of faith to traditional ecclesiastical dogmas. He is free in the moment of his leap. But this leap into freedom involves the sacrifice of his freedom. . . . The person is lost if rational necessity prevails. He tried to save himself by the leap which, however, leads to new forms of servitude, natural or supranatural ones.⁴⁸

Thomte brings partial rebuttal to Tillich's charge as follows:

If a man is to enter into a religious relationship with God, he must let go of probability and break completely with the temporal world. This does not mean that the religious man becomes an ascetic who withdraws from the common tasks of life, but rather that the powers which the temporal world wields over his personality have been completely annihilated. Religiously speaking this is expressed in the sentence: 'Thou [the Holy Spirit] takest away the power and givest life.'⁴⁹

For the last sentence of the quotation, Thomte has turned to the Pentecost sermon theme in For Self Examination, page 106. The reference from Thomte does not fully meet the charge brought by Tillich, for in a most real and Christian sense the individual who "leaps" is never free, he is ever

⁴⁸Paul Tillich, "The Person in a Technical Society," Christian Faith and Social Action, edited by John A. Hutchison (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 138 f.

⁴⁹Thomte, op. cit., p. 171.

in servitude to the Eternal. One would desire further amplification from Tillich on what he means by freedom. At any rate, Merlan's observations are appropriate here:

Either we can reject Kierkegaard's views entirely because we deny the possibility or necessity of a leap, or we can refuse to accept those views by refusing to leap, or finally we can accept Kierkegaard's views and leap. But there is no fourth way--that is, it is impossible to accept Kierkegaard's views as true and yet not leap.⁵⁰

One more quotation from SK himself will indicate the place which the "leap" occupies in Religion B.

How does God's existence emerge from the proof? Does it follow straightway, without any breach of continuity? Or have we not here an analogy to the behaviour of these toys, the little Cartesian dolls? As soon as I let go of the doll it stands on its head. As soon as I let it go--I must therefore let it go. So also with the proof for God's existence. As long as I keep my hold on the proof, i.e., continue to demonstrate, the existence does not come out, if for no other reason than that I am engaged in proving it; but when I let the proof go, the existence is there. But this act of letting go is surely also something; it is indeed a contribution of mine. Must not this also be taken into the account, this little moment, brief as it may be--it need not be long, for it is a leap.⁵¹

The "leap" then is from the sin-consciousness to the dimension of faith. It is an aspect of Religion B which must be conditioned by all of the implications of the doctrine of original sin, which means that man comes to the anguished knowledge that God is different in essence and quality from

⁵⁰Merlan, op. cit., p. 90.

⁵¹Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, translated David F. Swenson (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1936), p. 33.

him. But this knowledge of God's otherness cannot be a passive knowing: rather it is the magnetic pole which draws man to the Eternal by a leap to the absurd, namely, that the Eternal has invaded the actual and the real. And so from sin-consciousness follows the "leap" and the "leap" points beyond to the absurdity of the Paradoxical Moment, to which the third section of this presentation of Religion B now turns.

The problem [and by this, as has been said, Christianity] is not to mean that fantastic speculations about the unity of God and the world, but to individualize and to God create only for faith.

These two questions form the paradoxical content of the second of Divine Revelation. In this discussion of the preceding chapter, we shall seek to follow the thread of the leap which has already been discussed before, and then examine Kierkegaard's presentation of faith. With these two main subjects of this chapter, the Moment and Faith, we shall follow out the principal ingredients of Religion B.

If one were to draw a picture of the significance of the Moment for Kierkegaard's thought, it might resemble a horizontal line intersecting a vertical line. The vertical line represents the impact of the Eternal upon the

Walter Dill Scott, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (London, N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 1915), p. 100.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Tractate on Christianity*, translated by Walter Dill Scott (London, N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 1922), p. 100.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION B (Continued)

"When Kierkegaard speaks of the Christian Paradox he does not mean a fantastic speculation about the unity of God and man, but an individual man who is God. . . ."1 Thomte's statement is based on the following quotation from Training in Christianity:

The God-Man [and by this, as has been said, Christianity does not mean that fantastic speculation about the unity of God and man, but an individual man who is God] exists only for faith. . . ."2

These two quotations focus the paradoxical content of the Moment of Divine Revelation. In this extension of the preceding chapter, we shall seek to relate the Moment to the leap which has already been discussed before, and then examine Kierkegaard's presentation of faith. With the two main subjects of this chapter, the Moment and faith, we shall round out the principal ingredients of Religion B.

If one were to draw a picture of the significance of the Moment for Kierkegaard's thought, it might resemble a sheer vertical line intersecting a horizontal line. The vertical would represent the impact of the Eternal upon the

¹Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 160.

²Søren Kierkegaard, Training In Christianity, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 122.

temporal in the Person of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. This statement needs further clarification, for SK goes to great ends to emphasize that this impact of the Eternal upon the temporal is always and entirely a paradox, that is beyond the rational endowments of mankind. In the Postscripts, he devotes three separate sections to possible alternatives and false sources of objectivity by which men might endeavor to dull the edge of the paradox. He cites the inspiration of the Bible as one possible alternative to the paradoxical revelation of the Moment:

For whose sake is it that the proof is sought? Faith does not need it; aye, it must regard the proof as its enemy. But when faith begins to feel embarrassed and ashamed, like a young woman for whom her love is no longer sufficient, but who secretly feels ashamed of her lover and must therefore have it established that there is something remarkable about him . . . when faith begins to cease to be faith, then a proof becomes necessary so as to command respect from the side of unbelief.³

The second alternative cited refers to the Church:

If the historical aspect of the confession is urged as decisive [that it derives from the Apostles, and so forth], then each iota must be infinitely stressed; and since a conclusion can be reached only "approximando" the individual will be involved in the contradiction of attaching, i.e., of trying to attach, and yet not being able to attach his eternal happiness to it, because the approximation is never complete. From this again it follows that the individual will never in all eternity attach his eternal happiness to the theory, but only a less passionate something. . . .⁴

³Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscripts, translated by David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 31 f.

⁴Ibid., p. 42.

The third alternative concerns the history of the Church:

This argument can be presented only in rhetorical form. The speaker isolates the deliberating or doubting subject from all connection with others. He confronts the poor sinner with innumerable hosts of past generations, with millions upon millions and then says to him: "Now dare you be so insolent as to deny the truth? Do you really imagine that you are in possession of the truth, and that the eighteen centuries . . . the innumerable generations of men, have lived their lives in error?" Behind the tremendous barrage of the many millions the cowardly-speaker sometimes trembles in his boots when he uses the argument, because he dimly feels that there is a contradiction in his whole procedure.⁵

Instead of any false alternatives, Kierkegaard continually dwells on the utter uniqueness of the paradoxical revelation of God in the Moment. It must be this way, because the Moment involves both man the temporal and God the eternal. When these two meet in the event of Christ's appearing on earth as the God-man, the happening is called the Moment or the Instant. Martin calls attention to this as follows:

If God is to reveal Himself in time, and if man is to become, as an existing being, related to God, it can only be in the Moment of Divine revelation, the paradoxical unity of an atom of time with an atom of eternity. Supremely, that Moment is the coming of Jesus Christ; what St. Paul calls "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4).⁶

Hence the central importance that the Moment plays in Religion B is immediately apparent, for it goes to the heart of this category with its ushering in of Him Who is beyond all human immanence, Jesus Christ, the God-man.

⁵Ibid., p. 47.

⁶H. V. Martin, The Wings of Faith (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), p. 78.

The Moment is directly related to the "leap," for without the Moment the leap would be given no direction. For the Moment of eternity interposes itself between two moments of human time, and hence confronts the individual with a choice, "and that choice is a leap."⁷ The relationship between the "leap" and the Moment cannot be pictured as a slowly progressive evolution of the human soul. Rather, the Moment comes to the individual and conditions him for the "leap." Geismar adds the reminder that the elements of risk and uncertainty are the human passions which mark this invasion of the paradoxical Moment into time.⁸ For it is impossible to safeguard this transition so as to eliminate the sense of risk:

Every calculation of probability is impotent for this reason, is impotent for this purpose, and can serve only to emasculate the decision. We see that subjectivity is a confrontation of the future in uncertainty and risk; this risk and this uncertainty evokes passion; the decision, when normally made, issues in a new determination of the self, and gives a distinctive content to the 'moment.'⁹

In the Philosophical Fragments there are numerous passages of exquisite beauty which amplify the meaning of the paradoxical revelation of God in the Moment. Kierkegaard describes, for example, the Divine Grief which is caused by the frustrating limits of human capacity to receive the

⁷M. Channing-Pearce, The Terrible Crystal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 30.

⁸Eduard Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 46.

⁹Ibid.

Paradox. He compares this to the kingly grief of some regal soul who pours out his love upon an object far inferior to himself and suffers because of the object's limited capacity to grasp such a royal gift.

Thus the king might have shown himself to a humble maiden in all the pomp of his power, causing the sun of his presence to rise over her cottage, shedding a glory over the scene, and making her forget herself in worshipful admiration. Alas, and this might have satisfied the maiden, but it could not satisfy the king, who desired not his own glorification but hers. It was this that made his grief so hard to bear, his grief that she could not understand him; but it would have been still harder for him to deceive her. And merely to give his love for her an imperfect expression was in his eyes a deception, even though no one understood him and reproaches sought to mortify his soul.

Not in this manner then can their love be made happy, except perhaps in appearance, namely the learner's and the maiden's, but not the Teacher's and the king's, whom no delusion can satisfy. Thus God takes pleasure in arraying the lily in a garb more glorious than that of Solomon; but if there could be any thought of an understanding here would it not be a sorry delusion of the lily's, if when it looked upon its fine raiment it thought that it was on account of the raiment that God loved it? Instead of standing dauntless in the field, sporting with the wind, carefree as the gust that blows, would it not under the influence of such a thought languish and droop, not daring to lift up its head? It was God's solicitude to prevent this, for the lily's shoot is tender and easily broken. But if the Moment is to have decisive significance, how unspeakable will be God's anxiety! There once lived a people who had a profound understanding of the divine; this people thought that no man could see God and live.--Who grasps this contradiction of sorrow: not to reveal oneself is the death of the beloved!¹⁰

¹⁰Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, translated by David F. Swenson (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1936), pp. 22 f.

In this brilliant parable one can immediately detect the overtones of Kierkegaard's own love affair and the parallel emotions he experienced in his inability to reveal openly and fully the shadows of his own personal past to Regine Olsen.¹¹

Again turning to the Fragments, there are other parables which sharpen the meaning he intends to convey with the doctrine of the paradoxical Moment. The customary terminology he employs when speaking of the event in which the Moment embraces both the divine and the temporal is already used in the above quotation on the kingly grief. He speaks of the Teacher and the learner. The Teacher is God the Paradox, and the learner is the individual subject to whom the Moment of God's Paradox comes. He employs the figure of Teacher-learner in order to illustrate what the Moment is not:

We have assumed that the Teacher dies; now that he is dead, what will the learner who has been his contemporary do? Perhaps he has sketched some portraits of him . . . depicting and accurately reflecting every change that by reason of age or state of mind may have taken place in the outward appearances of the teacher. When he examines these portraits and assures himself that such and such was his appearance, may he then believe his eyes? Why not? But is he on that account a disciple? By no means. But then he may proceed to form some conception of God. But God cannot be conceived; it was for this very reason that he appeared in the form of a servant. And yet the servant-form is no deception; for if such were the case, this moment would not be the Moment, but an accidental circumstance, a mere appearance,

¹¹For a full treatment of this phase of Kierkegaard's life, see Walter Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1942), pp. 135-144.

which as being an occasion infinitely vanishes in comparison with the eternal.¹²

Another similar parable makes the same point:

Suppose a contemporary who had reduced his hours of sleep to a minimum in order that he might follow this Teacher about, attending him more closely than the pilot-fish the shark; suppose him to keep a hundred spies in his service to watch over the Teacher everywhere, conferring with them each evening in order to obtain a description of the Teacher's movements exact to the minutest detail, accounting for what he had said and where he had been each hour of the day, because his zeal led him to attach importance even to the least trifle--would such a contemporary be a disciple? By no means.¹³

Geismar summarizes the positive presentation of the Moment thus:

The Christian revelation is not a set of propositions, but a creative act in the individual who has been prepared to receive it in part by the very discipline of human idealism, and who through this creative act becomes a new creature.¹⁴

Hence the Moment brings us "God's presence in human form, eye in the humble form of a servant. . . ." ¹⁵ This is the content of the Paradox which Mackintosh indicates is "not just a contradiction that is just a contradiction, but the kind that is the vehicle of the profoundest truth."¹⁶ Every particular Christian category has its connection with this Moment in

¹²Kierkegaard, Fragments, p. 51.

¹³Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁴Geismar, op. cit., p. 57.

¹⁵Kierkegaard, Fragments, p. 44.

¹⁶Rugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 234.

time,¹⁷ and to the particular category of faith in Religion B we now turn for a survey of its essential contents according to Kierkegaard.

The discussion of Kierkegaard's presentation of Christian faith must necessarily be limited to a survey of its principal characteristics. We shall begin by examining the nature of faith and follow with the relation of faith to its object.

Kierkegaard speaks of two kinds of faith, but only for the purpose of contrasting the faith of "first immediacy" (common to all religiosity) and the faith of "second immediacy" (unique to Religion B--i.e., Christian faith). In the aesthetic sphere of life, as well as the ethical, we have observed the presence of a natural endowment, a stronger or weaker spontaneity (or immediacy) which might be classified as faith in general.¹⁸ But this kind of expression, which could be otherwise designated as an intensive confidence in the self or in the orderliness of creation, has no place in Religion B. For in Religion B we have to do with faith understood to be "against understanding and on the other side of death."¹⁹ In this sense, death refers to the death of the individual to himself and to the world:

¹⁷Geismar, op. cit., pp. 53 f.

¹⁸Rhomte, op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 173.

It [the Holy Spirit] brings "faith," that only being in the strictest sense faith which is the gift of the Holy Spirit after death has come between . . . when thou didst die, or didst die to thyself, to the world, thou didst at the same time die to all immediacy in thyself, and also to thine understanding. That is to say, when all confidence in thyself or in human support, and also in God as an immediate apprehension, when every probability is excluded, when it is dark as in the dark night--it is in fact death that we are describing--then comes the life-giving Spirit and brings faith. This strength is stronger than the whole world, it possesses the powers of eternity, it is the Spirit's gift from God, it is thy victory over the world, in which thou dost more than conquer.²⁰

The place of the dialectic essential for Christian faith has been pointed out by Professor Martin as parallel to the dialectic of the Moment in time.

Christian revelation . . . is a unique, once and for-all revelation of God in the historical event of the coming of Jesus Christ. It [the Moment] is of necessity paradoxical to man, because of the qualitative difference between the "being" of God in eternity and the "being" of man in time. The faith by which this Christian revelation is apprehended is equally paradoxical, since it is at one and the same time a response and a decision of the individual, and also a Divine gift and a Divine determination of man.²¹

The individual is the subject of faith, and as such he is confronted with the decision to leap. This is one pole of the dialogue of faith. That the individual is the object of the Divine action by the Holy Ghost and hence receives the gift of faith, this is the other pole of the dialogue. Kierkegaard appears at this point to be reproducing the formula of

²⁰Søren Kierkegaard, For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourselves, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 100 f.

²¹Martin, op. cit., pp. 50 f.

St. Paul: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:12-13). Helmut Kuhn has reference to this paradoxical nature of faith when he speaks of faith which is achieved "by virtue of the absurd."²² The same author continues his characterization of Kierkegaard's concept of faith as follows:

Faith, according to Kierkegaard, consists precisely in the inner movement of the absurd by which man subjects himself to God as the wholly other, the terrible majesty of a power revealed to man only in the extinction of human hopes, the crumbling of human systems of philosophy, theology, and morality, and in the downfall of civilizations. Crisis is the burning bush out of which God speaks to man. The absurd seized upon by faith is an affirmative power and a particular absurdity.²³

It is interesting to compare the formulation of Kuhn with a statement of Professor Gomann on the same subject. The immediate contrast apparent is the result of two varying points of view, one exemplifying an accent on philosophy and the other obviously influenced by the commentator's position as a teacher of Lutheran theology in central Canada. Gomann writes thus:

Faith is believing that what one knows to be unreasonable . . . is actually to take place by the power of God. As divine revelation and way of salvation faith has, of course, its objective and historical side. It is God's working and speaking in the world directly by Himself or through mediation by prophets and apostles and finally through the redemption of Jesus Christ. . . . What Kierkegaard has in mind when he describes this "quia impossibile" is not this objective and historical

²²Helmut Kuhn, Encounter With Nothingness (Hinsdale, Ill.: Henry Regnery Co., 1949), p. 15.

²³Ibid., p. 162.

aspect of it, but rather its nature as an organ of apprehension and application [organon leptikon]. And here he asserts that because it is impossible for man to comprehend the things that lie beyond our world of phenomena [God, soul, Christ, and eternity] therefore God Himself has provided a way for such knowledge, and that way is faith. It is God's own work in the hearts of men through the Holy Spirit and the Bible.²⁴

Kuhn stresses the decisiveness of the human crisis out of which faith emerges, while Gomann clearly underplays the human in emphasizing Kierkegaard's insistence on faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit at work in the Word. Perhaps the middle road is personified in the eminent and late Kierkegaardian scholar, David F. Swenson, who treats the matter thus:

In individual relationship to God becomes a life-necessity, and it is only by a transcendence of the old immediacy, and of the social relationships grounded therein, that the ideal self can be found in its reality. Such a personal relationship between God and the individual is by Kierkegaard identified with the Christian concept of Faith.²⁵

In this same discussion, Swenson suggests that the full clarification of this concept of faith is found in the three successive volumes in which SK systematically treats the psychological motivation of faith, Fear and Trembling, Repetition, and The Concept of Dread.²⁶

Another aspect of Christian faith which belongs in this discussion of its nature is Kierkegaard's frequent assertion

²⁴E. Gomann, "Soeren Kierkegaard and His Message," Lutheran Church Quarterly, XVI (1943), 402.

²⁵David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 87.

²⁶Ibid.; cf. pp. 87-91 for brief summaries of these works.

of faith as contemporaneity with Christ. The Philosophical Fragments contains several sections²⁷ which treat this matter in full. The essence of the point is that no one becomes a believer by being an eyewitness or by means of historical knowledge. For every disciple of Christ, whether he has lived at the time of Christ's earthly activity or whether he has lived nineteen hundred years after, has as the basis for his eternal happiness a historical point of departure. This point of departure is common to them both, for the mere cumulative gathering of historical information has nothing but historical significance. But if the historical information be put to use as a means to some other end, namely as the "swaddling-clothes of eternity," and if the child born in an inn and laid in a manger is God, the historical moment becomes a point of departure for the eternal, and the same paradox presents itself to men of every age.²⁸ When Kierkegaard speaks of contemporaneity with Christ, he does not revert to the company of Enthusiasm, for he will have nothing to do with the prospect of immediate contemporaneity. God cannot be immediately known.²⁹ The contemporary with Christ is the disciple by faith, who receives his relationship with Christ the Teacher by virtue of His bestowal of the required

²⁷Kierkegaard, Fragments, pp. 44-58 and 74-93.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 46-48.

²⁹Thomte, op. cit., p. 162.

condition of faith.³⁰ In comparing the chronologically contemporary believer with the believer who lives centuries after Christ, Kierkegaard can muster only one advantage that the chronologically contemporary might have.

In only one respect could I be tempted to count a contemporary . . . more fortunate than the member of some later generation. For if we assume that centuries intervene between this event and the period of a succeeding generation there will presumably have accumulated much gossip about this thing, so much foolish chatter that the untrue and confusing rumors with which the contemporary . . . had to contend, did not prove nearly so serious an obstacle to the realization of a right relationship.³¹

Hence in order to become a contemporary the individual's task is one of crucial appropriation, with the result that "1800 years are eliminated as though they had not been" and the individual is inwardly a contemporary of original Christianity.³² This is only possible if the general historical reality of Christianity is transposed from a generality into a possibility for every individual man. It is faith which risks this possibility. It is faith which believes the Paradox, and believes in spite of its contradictory nature.³³

In understanding Kierkegaard's concept of faith as related to its object, it is well to begin with the fact that the central problem is not the difficulty of the doctrine,

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Kierkegaard, Fragments, pp. 57 f.

³²Karl Loewith, "On the Historical Understanding of Kierkegaard," The Review of Religion, VII (March, 1943), 233.

³³Martin, op. cit., p. 85.

but rather of coming to the point of a decision in Christ.³⁴ SK's emphasis in dealing with faith is on Christ the Pattern as well as Christ the Redeemer. Accordingly, the Christian life consists in Reduplication; that is, in the transformation of one's existence in the world in accordance with the nature and meaning of Christian faith. To appropriate such a transformation, each individual must enter into a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ which is as existential as it is personal; that is to say, it relates "not to man's understanding but to his very existence and life. . . ."³⁵

Martin cites the following passage for support of the statement that in Christian life, the total man is rooted not to an intellectual proposition but to the reality of God's Being manifest in Jesus Christ:

The object of faith is the reality of another, and the relationship is one of infinite interest. The object of faith is not a doctrine . . . not a teacher with a doctrine. . . . The object of faith is God's reality in existence as a particular individual, the fact that God has existed as an individual human being.³⁶

The term "interest" has been underscored in the above quotation for a purpose. Kierkegaard uses the term deliberately and with special intent to press it to its full etymological

³⁴Ibid., p. 81.

³⁵Ibid., p. 59.

³⁶Kierkegaard, Postscripts, p. 290.

content. Inter--est is the subject of a succinct definition by Anderson:

Er [the true Christian] ist unendlich interessiert an--das bedeutet, er hat seine Existenz in etwas Geschichtlichem, in Christus. Wir haben damit den Zentralpunkt des Kierkegaardschen Verständnisses des Existierens erreicht.³⁷

Hence when faith is comprehended as an infinite interest in relation to its object, it means that the life of the individual is regrouped around a new center, and Jesus Christ is that center. When faith is comprehended as reduplication, it means that Jesus Christ is the object of his life's imitation. "A follower is or strives to be what he admires."³⁸ When Jesus Christ is the object of faith and the pattern, it means that His characteristic earthly existence must be reduplicated; poverty, celibacy, humiliation, loneliness, misunderstanding, persecution and rejection are all necessary ingredients according to Kierkegaard.³⁹ Kierkegaard viewed the entire earthly sojourn of Christ as one of suffering and hence his criticism that "by reason of a human misunderstanding people have abbreviated it in such a way that the last part only is called 'the story of the Passion.'⁴⁰

³⁷Wilhelm Andersen, Der Existenzbegriff und das existenzielle Denken in der neueren Philosophie und Theologie (Gutersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1940), p. 56.

³⁸Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 243.

³⁹Martin, op. cit., p. 109.

⁴⁰Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 168.

The life of Christian faith must reflect the same pattern. His contention was that Protestantism always needs the monastery, for it is "an essential dialectical fact in Christianity, and we need to have it there like a lighthouse to gauge where we are."⁴¹ As far as the certainty of faith in relation to its Object is concerned, Kierkegaard's favorite illustration is that of a swimmer in the deep sea, with seventy thousand fathoms of water beneath him, where there is no possibility of a foothold anywhere.⁴² The significance of this illustration is that faith is not a suspension over a vacuum. The water signifies the despair against which one struggles and hence bears him up in his dialectical relation to the Object of faith, Jesus Christ the God-man. This graphic illustration, accenting the nature of faith as that which is unsupported by any false objectivity, also suggests a final note about faith which should not be omitted. Kierkegaard's concept of the transmission of faith from one individual to another is unique. He is convinced that faith

cannot be handed down from one to another as a finished product; it cannot be inherited from tradition and secured by authorization; it has no substitutes. It is always implicit and unsupported or it is not faith in the pure Christian sense. The Christian, even as a member of the church . . . is always, "the individual before God."⁴³

⁴¹Søren Kierkegaard, Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, translated and edited by Alexander Dru (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 711.

⁴²Martin, op. cit., p. 92.

⁴³Gomann, op. cit., p. 404.

Loewith's summary of the subject includes the term "maieutic" which was SK's favorite for defining the function of a Christian witness:

The communication of Christianity must ultimately end in bearing witness, the maieutic form can never be final. For truth, from the Christian point of view, does not lie in the subject [as Socrates understood it], but in a revelation which must be proclaimed. In Christendom the maieutic form can certainly be used, simply because the majority in fact live under the impression that they are Christians. But since Christianity is Christianity, the maieuticist must become the witness.⁴⁴

The action verb that Kierkegaard employs in speaking of the Christian witness is "to point out" for his point is that communication must be reduced to a mere pointing out in order to enable everyone as an individual to make his own appropriation:

To point out the religious, the Christian, without authority this is the proper category for my work as an author, regarded as a whole.⁴⁵

And so with this final note on the nature of faith and its communication, the main contents of Religion B are indicated. It would diametrically opposed to everything that Kierkegaard ever thought or wrote if this summary were to be regarded in any sense of the term as a systematization of SK's concept of the mechanics of Christian existence. His passionate and life-long reaction against systematized philosophy as

⁴⁴Loewith, op. cit., p. 256.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 255.

exemplified in Hegel and systematized theology as exemplified in Martensen have been shown by numerous commentators on Kierkegaard.⁴⁶ But at the same time, the thought of Søren Kierkegaard is not irrational in the sense that it is chaotic. A very consistent plan of a well-ordered mind characterizes his literary output, and this holds true for the category of Religion B as well.

With these principal concepts--sin, the "leap", the Moment, and the dialect of faith, we have endeavored to lay out the chief themes which occur with greatest frequency and relevance throughout Kierkegaard's treatment of the religious-Christian category. For a critique of this category, as well as the aesthetic, ethical and Religion A stages, we now turn to the final chapter.

⁴⁶See a B.D. thesis on the subject of Kierkegaard and his relation to Hegel by Curtis Huber (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1953).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

If we were to search for some norm from Kierkegaard himself whereby we might establish a criterion for a judgment of the three stages, perhaps the following quotation will suffice:

All interpretations of existence [as represented in the stages] are arranged according to a scale of values based on the degree of dialectical inwardness appropriated by the individual concerned.¹

The technical term, dialectical inwardness appropriated by the individual, is another way of describing the Christian life according to Religion B and it is by this category that any conclusions concerning the literature of Søren Kierkegaard must be determined. We have seen that the different existence-spheres which begin with the aesthetic and finally issue in Religion B are ultimately given their proper place in relation to Religion B. Throughout we have shown that SK was not concerned with aesthetics or ethics or religion as abstractions; instead of being concerned about an ethical or aesthetic system he was more concerned about the aesthetic and ethical action in the individual. Instead of a system of religion, he set forth the peculiar religiosity that is always

¹Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscripts, translated by David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 506.

paradoxical because it comes from Him Who is qualitatively different from fallen man.

In the aesthetic stage Kierkegaard introduces his scale of values. We have seen that its fundamental defect is its failure to bring the individual to break with his eclectic immanence. Because the aesthetic stage has no magnetic star outside of itself and within God in Christ, it consequently has no dialectic and fails to produce the inwardness which decisive Christianity alone can bring. The ethical stage is the next category treated. It does contain a quality superior to the aesthetic, for it at least speaks of the universal and operates on the principle that there are possibilities relevant to every man. But again, the ethical fails because it assumes to deal with the nature of existence without taking seriously the demonic nature of sin and the radical quality of God's visit to this world in the Person of His Divine Son. The first of the religious stages, Religion A is marked by a progression beyond the ethical stage, for it brings the individual to the very extremity of subjectivity with its accent on suffering, resignation, and guilt. Nevertheless all this inward transformation is outlined within the confines of the immanent: the assumption is still basically no different from that of Socrates, namely that the Truth is within the subject and that subjectivity is the Truth. Religion B,

which is the specific Christianity of the New Testament, breaks with all that has been previously set forth, for it is rooted in the historical event of God's interposing Himself on earth in the God-man Jesus Christ. The confrontation with this paradox evokes within the subject the deepest possible inwardness and passion to which Kierkegaard gives the name faith.

With this eloquent mapping out of the inward structure of the Christian existence and its alternatives, does Kierkegaard succeed in reproducing the essence of the New Testament Message regarding the Christian existence? Perhaps the question is premature or even unfair, but in the last analysis it is the only one which counts. We shall hear out the verdicts of various observers, and through their comments gain a representative view of the degree of Kierkegaard's success or failure.

Whether pro or con, one must at least grant that Kierkegaard's presentation of the three stages of existence is in essence a missionary task.² Whether one is prepared to say with Reinhold Niebuhr that Kierkegaard is the greatest interpreter of the psychology of religious life since St. Augustine³ depends on how familiar one is with Christian history. But at least there is no disputing the fact that Kierkegaard was

²Howard A. Johnson, "Kierkegaard's Pilgrimage to Faith," Japan Christian Quarterly, XVIII (Summer, 1952), 183.

³Ibid., As quoted by Johnson.

passionately concerned with driving men away from comfortable Christian illusions and into transforming Christian decisiveness. The Roman Catholic commentator, Cornelio Fabro, states unequivocally that Kierkegaard is a disciple of Christ, and that his work can offer the Catholic theologian precious resources for the preparation of a phenomenology of theological problems, in particular of those related to faith.⁴ Fabro's fellow-churchman, Karl Löwith, cannot agree, however, for the latter finds it difficult to reconcile Kierkegaard's ambiguous attitude toward Christianity. According to Löwith, Kierkegaard attacked the reality of the Christianity of Denmark in the mid-nineteenth century by defending its rigorous meaning.⁵ Steere presents the implications of Löwith's assertion to a more detailed extent thus:

The more basic criticism of Kierkegaard's position insists that, in throwing the entire weight upon the existential decision and removing all scrutiny from the content of the decision, Kierkegaard has been a forerunner of the nihilism that has swept away the concrete Christian values, and that he has inadvertently but genuinely given his blessing to the demonic movements that have not lacked for existential intensity of decision but have directed this torrent of volitional effort toward the destruction of Western civilization. The charge has been most impressively advanced by Karl Löwith . . . and Helmut Kuhn. . . .⁶

⁴Ibid., As quoted by Johnson.

⁵Karl Loewith, "On the Historical Understanding of Kierkegaard," The Review of Religion VII (March, 1943), 233.

⁶Douglas V. Steere, "Kierkegaard in English," The Journal of Religion, XXIV (October, 1944), 273.

This assertion cannot be gainsaid, for a review of the currents prominent in the nihilism of present day thinkers cannot hide direct ties to Kierkegaard. But a decisive gap separates Kierkegaard from much of the thought that has stemmed from him. This is excellently summarized as follows:

Seit den Tagen des Hegelianismus ist alle moderne Philosophie immer wieder dabei, den Menschen von dieser geistigen Mitte der Sorge für die Erfüllung seiner Existenzbestimmung fortzulocken. Es entsteht dadurch stets wieder eine neue Sophistik mit ihrer Auflösung aller Werte in Relativismus, Historismus, Subjektivismus und Individualismus. Der Mensch wird das Mass aller Dinge, indem er sich grössenwahnsinnig mit dem gesamten Weltall und dem Wirken Gottes im Weltprozess identifiziert. Sobald man aus dem Begriff der Existenz die religiöse Mitte, d.h. das Wissen um den unendlichen Abstand zwischen der menschlichen Endlichkeit der Immanenz und der Unendlichkeit der göttlichen Transzendenz herausgebrochen hat, schlägt der Sinn von Existenz in der Widersinn der sophistischen Selbstvergöttlichung des Existentialismus um.⁷

It seems highly questionable to say that nihilism is the only logical end of Kierkegaard's thought, such as Clowney contends as follows:

The force behind Søren Kierkegaard's efforts is indeed despair: it is the despair of the autonomous Individual perishing in his own relativism. There is bitter irony in the fact that his dirge of pagan darkness clothes itself in the language of Christian truth which alone brings light.⁸

For Martin points out that Kierkegaard was always at heart a

⁷Liselotte Richter, "Existentialismus und Christentum," Evangelische Welt, VIII (March 1, 1954), 115.

⁸Edmund P. Clowney, Jr., "A Critical Estimate of Søren Kierkegaard," The Westminster Theological Journal, V (November, 1942), 61.

passionate Christian, and one who was true to the Lutheran standpoint.⁹ He adds furthermore:

Any form of religiousness, whether in Christianity or in Paganism, where faith is commensurate with a natural capacity of man as man, or where the natural knowledge of God is made congruous with the revealed knowledge of God in Christ, is not distinctively Christian [according to SK]. In the New Testament sense, faith is commensurate only with the absolute paradox of the transcendent Unknown God incarnate in the man Jesus Christ.¹⁰

Marjorie Grene comes to the conclusion that Kierkegaard's presentation of the concept of existence according to the three stages reflects a small man in a small society in a small intellectual world:

too exclusively a shaper of paradox and, in the worst sense of that epithet, too 'Hegelian' a thinker to give adequate philosophic implementation to such a new direction, and too small a man, for all his passionate self-torture, to make of the new dialectic more than the passage from aesthetic despair to a love of God equally despairing.¹¹

But Reginald Cant suggests that

his extraordinary powers of psychological analysis bear out his claim that he needed only to know five men for a year and he knew all men. But most of all he knew himself . . . the problems he raised were the problems of his own life, so that he could never stand apart from them.¹²

Brook's lucid statement of the purpose Kierkegaard followed

⁹H. V. Martin, The Wings of Faith (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), p. 52.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 53.

¹¹Marjorie Grene, Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 40.

¹²Reginald Cant, "Søren Kierkegaard," The Church Quarterly Review, CXXVII (January-March, 1939), 272.

in his presentation of the stages of existence adds support to Kant's position as stated above.

His purpose was not to glorify the Christian faith, nor to attack the Danish and European Churches . . . but to emphasize the difficulty of man, with his natural passions and his longing for happiness and reduced, as he is, to a mere unit in the membership of the modern state, to attain the fortitude of religion with the eternal responsibility before God, and thus become truly Christian.¹³

The critical opinions mount on up, but in either of the two directions cited above. Our task is not to carry them further, but to keep them within the range of our subject, which is a survey of the three stages of existence as Kierkegaard set them forth. The British scholar Channing-Pearce strikes the central note of our concern when he says:

Where contemporary criticism of life too often remains at this stage of wholesale demolition or fills the vacant shrines with tribal or fertility gods, Kierkegaard passes, with an agonized intensity of faith and "awareness," to what he conceives to be a more profound and real reconstruction of Christianity. This reconstruction was, for him, the greater part of his task; he had, so he believed, not only to act as a corrective to Christianity, but also to "depict" it.¹⁴

Kierkegaard, when thus estimated, certainly reveals a rare measure of abiding relevance to the human situation. To be sure, there are areas of overbalance as well as areas of complete neglect which can be charged against him. But when one surveys his insights into the nature of non-Christian

¹³Werner Brock, An Introduction to Contemporary German Philosophy (London: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 76.

¹⁴M. Channing-Pearce, The Terrible Crystal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 26 f.

life as well as Christian life, it can well be said that "no account of leading types of theology would be complete or even intelligent, which omitted the work of Søren Kierkegaard."¹⁵ His thought, more than any other man, "has made our generation aware of facts it would gladly pass over or might easily forget."¹⁶ And so one must conclude with the statement which would warn us from any hurried joining up with any one school of thought in regard to the relevance of Kierkegaard and his three categories of existence. It is David Swenson who wisely suggests that Kierkegaard himself is still his own best interpreter. The fact that no thinker has yet succeeded in embalming him in a category which he has not himself suggested and discussed . . . is a tribute to K's greatness and an indirect expression of the fact that he is fitted to play the part of a teacher on the stage of the world's thought.¹⁷ On that vast stage, Søren Kierkegaard will ever proclaim the truth of Luther's ninety-fifth thesis:

Christiani magis per multas tribulationes intrare
coelum quam per securitatem pacis confidunt.

¹⁵Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 218.

¹⁶David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 35.

¹⁷W. G. Moore, "Kierkegaard and His Century," Hibbert Journal, XXXVI (October 1937-July 1938), 581.

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