

S O R E N      K I E R K E G A A R D

THE CONCEPT OF FAITH  
IN  
THE THOUGHT OF SORÈN KIERKEGAARD

By  
ISAAC JADESIMI, B.A.

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts

McMaster University

May 1970

MASTER OF ARTS (1970)  
(Religion)

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: The Concept of Faith in the Thought of Soren  
Kierkegaard

AUTHOR: Isaac Jadesimi, B.A. (University of Wales)

SUPERVISOR: Professor J. C. Robertson

NUMBER OF PAGES: iii, 124

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The aim of this study is to investigate Soren  
Kierkegaard's concept of faith: more specifically,  
faith in itself, faith in relationship to other human acts and stances,  
and faith in relationship to the human agent. The author, after analyzing  
the problem, attempts to set the problem in the broad context of  
Kierkegaard's literary output and overall intention. He then treats his  
specific subject genetically and topically, trying to show not only what  
Kierkegaard was arguing for but also what he was arguing against (e.g.  
rationalism, historical "objectivism", etc.). Since the author discovers  
that Kierkegaard was above all opposed to reducing faith to "concepts",  
he draws back from a neat set of results, but gives guidelines as to the  
nature of personal act that Kierkegaard was trying to help his readers  
to perform.

## PREFACE

I should like to take this opportunity of acknowledging the help I have received from various people.

My greatest debt is to my supervisor, Dr. J.C. Robertson, whose advice and painstaking guidance I will always value. Dr. J.R. Meyer made many valuable remarks after reading the first draft, and Professor Paul Holmer of Yale University gave me very helpful suggestions. Mrs. Paula Weber was kind enough to type the final draft with great care.

## CHAPTER I

The main object of this thesis is to locate the role and define the status given to faith in the thought of Soren Kierkegaard. We shall see how Kierkegaard tried to answer the question, "What is the nature and function of faith?" The guiding thesis of Kierkegaard is "Truth is subjectivity". He sees subjective truth within the context of a person's (or to use Kierkegaard's most important category - an Individual's) inwardness. Faith is one of the chief conditions of inwardness, along with suffering, (in a special sense) hope and love. Thus faith is a key affirmative element in the make-up of Kierkegaard's guiding thesis. As an existential determinant, faith occupies the foremost position, and it is given such a priority that it seems to be the condition of inwardness in relation to which all other conditions are defined, but curiously enough it eludes definition itself. Although one should not here conclude that Kierkegaard completely avoided the task of defining faith. Significantly, Kierkegaard's work does cover a multitude of themes, (hence various descriptions of him as a man of great genius, an able philosopher, a powerful theologian, an earnest disciple of New Testament Christianity, the Knight of Faith, the philosopher of existence and the poet of the religious), yet he insists that there is one dominant theme in all his work. In the Point of View,<sup>1</sup> he says that he was at all periods of his authorship a religious writer.<sup>2</sup> He sought to answer the question:

what does it mean for me to become a Christian? Here one sees rather fertile ground for studying the main problem of the philosophy of religion, which is that of understanding the nature of religious faith. Kierkegaard was himself an example of what as a philosopher he sought to analyze and describe. The task which he has set himself was that of protesting against the dreadful misrepresentation of Christianity both by the speculative philosopher and the easy going spiritually complacent "nominal" Christian. The protest was made on the basis of what he took to be the correct understanding of the nature and role of faith. It is worthwhile to note that many of Kierkegaard's ideas developed out of particular situations in his life, (e.g. his engagement to Regina Olsen and its break up). However, there is in his work a certain unity which makes the total output the continual development of a single theme. The doctrine of subjectivity is the category which Kierkegaard used to interpret Christianity; it is that factor which gives the total output its unity.

In this thesis we shall see how different concepts are inter-related or opposed to each other, e.g. (a) Indirect communication or Maieutic, Reduplication, Double Reflexion, Infinite Reflexion; (b) Subjectivity, inwardness, passion or pathos; (c) Freedom, "Existence", Actuality (in the sense of what is historical and free); (d) Paradox, Leap; (e) Particular, Individual; (f) Repetition; (g) Subjectivity/Objectivity; (h) Immanence/Transcendence; (i) Speculation/Existence; (j) Universal/Particular; (k) Abstract/Concrete; (l) Immediacy/Mediacy; (m) Absolute/Relative; (n) Actua-

lity/possibility; (o) suffering/joy; and (p) sin/faith not Virtue. References will be made to concepts such as truth, contemporaneity, offense, belief, and reason, as applied existentially.

An attempt will be made to see what Kierkegaard's starting point is as well as his goal and also how the theory of the "Stages" (which is the basis of Kierkegaard's whole authorship) is constructed on the premise that man is a synthesis of two different qualities - "soul and body sustained by spirit"<sup>3</sup> or the finite and the eternal. Kierkegaard used the premise of the synthesis in an amplified form (e.g. the theory of the "Stages") with the result that one sees the consistency and accuracy characteristic of Kierkegaard's thinking. Careful note will be taken to see what and how Kierkegaard saw his task and how he tried, by consistent and logical reasoning, to fathom man's being and unite the different manifestations of human life under a definite and coherent view. Kierkegaard with his creative imagination enters into all the human experiences and adventures which he meets in his reading (e.g. about the Greeks and their philosophy, especially Socrates, the Church fathers, the Christian Mystics, Shakespeare, Faust, Hamann, Schlegel, and Hoffman, etc.) and relives them and tries to find a coherence in them. Kierkegaard read authors and works with the greatest promise of yielding the best and most reliable illumination of man. Kierkegaard's most significant reading was the Bible, the book that portrays the advent of God and how God casts man into the most earnest decision of his existence. Kierkegaard underlines the view that Christianity points out to man

his limitations and sin (in the context of presenting a gift and issuing a summons) and it demands obedience and belief. Man can be related to the Eternal truths only through faith.

Before stating the conclusion concerning what has been learnt about Kierkegaard's understanding of the nature of believing and faith, we shall, in this thesis, look at faith and historical truths, Lessing's Problem, the relation between faith and historical results, the System, the ethical and the religious.

REFERENCES TO CHAPTER I

1. The full title is The Point of View for my Work as an Author. A Direct Communication: A report to History. This book brings to light a unity of purpose running through the highly diverse literature which Kierkegaard had already produced and which he was to go on producing until his death seven years later. Kierkegaard could not bring himself to publish this intensely personal document during his life-time mainly because he doubted "whether anybody has a right to let people know how good he is." (The book was written in 1848 and published posthumously by the author's brother in 1859.) Kierkegaard in the conclusion (the last paragraph of this work) characterizes his whole work as "his own education in Christianity" which "he could not ascribe to any man, least of all to himself". "If I were to ascribe it to anyone it would be to Governance."
2. The Point of View, translated with introduction and notes by W. Lowrie, Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1939 - page 5 ff.
3. The Concept of Dread, translated with introduction and notes by W. Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1957, pages 39, especially page 79.

## CHAPTER II

### THE OVER-ALL PICTURE

#### 1. Soren Kierkegaard's Aim, Method, and Basic Themes

Kierkegaard often declared that from the beginning he was a religious author, desirous of "capturing" his readers for religion. He believed that he must do this by taking them unawares, as it were, just where they stood, and that to succeed in this he must use "indirect communication" or "the maieutic method". Therefore, he used pseudonyms. The Greek word maieutes (*μαϊευτες*) means "midwife". Kierkegaard used its cognate to refer to that pedagogical mode whereby he attempted to be an evoker of ideas, a midwife of the mind and spirit. With regard to where his readers stood, Kierkegaard says that life may be lived at one of the three levels or "stages", namely the aesthetic, the ethical, or the religious level or stage.

Kierkegaard intended to present his thought in such a way that the reader would become involved in the issues at a deeply personal level. The aim of his indirect communication was to make the author a vanishing point and avoid the direct presentation of a system of argument and conclusions, thus making room for the reader's own decisive thought. The writings themselves were to be primarily occasions and not deliverances. Kierkegaard understood it as his task to find that truth which alone might rescue man from spiritual

destruction, and he stressed the Christian understanding that man can be related to the eternal truths only through faith. In a note in his Journal in 1835, Kierkegaard wrote:

The main thing is that I understand my purpose in life and that I see what God really wants me to do. My main concern is to find a truth which is true for me, that I find the idea for which I will live and die.<sup>1</sup>

After he himself has been captured and conquered by Christianity Kierkegaard regards it as his particular calling to draw the attention of men to Christianity as the only way out of the anxiety and hopelessness so innate to the human condition and so manifestly present in the modern age. With the aid of a lively and creative imagination, reflection, and a scrupulously logical mind, and with Christianity as his starting point, Kierkegaard sets himself to the task of understanding human life, in all its stages and in all its relationships, in order that through this understanding it may become clear to him how man may be led to the truth. Kierkegaard attempts to find a link and a line of development in all the contradictory possibilities of human life, and he tries both to find his bearings in human existence and to sketch the boundary of human knowledge. Indeed Kierkegaard says, "I cannot understand the first thing about faith, but I believe. But it is all that understanding and conceiving which is the misfortune."<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard's special interest is man in his existence, and he encompasses the total view of the laws and directions along which man's existence moves (i.e. the total view of human life) in the theory of the "stages" which he is convinced embraces all the

possibilities of human existence. He says in a note in his diary,

My abiding Service in literature will be to have stated the decisive determinants of the whole existential range of life with a dialectical acuteness and primivity not to be found in any other literature, as far as I know; and I have not had any books to guide me.<sup>3</sup>

This total view forms the basis of Kierkegaard's whole authorship, and as the basis for the theory of the "stages" Kierkegaard states that man is a synthesis of two different and antithetical qualities designated by terms such as "time" and "eternity", the "finite" and "infinite", "body" (and soul) and "spirit", "necessity" and "freedom", etc. Kierkegaard derived from Christianity the view that man is of flesh and of spirit, and he tried to include all the possibilities and contradictions of human life under the formula, man is a synthesis. In brief, according to this synthesis, the following basic positions are open to a man's choosing: (a) he may live exclusively in the visible, temporal world and this constitutes the aesthetic stage; (b) he may seek the Eternal, or when the Eternal meets him, he may accept the Eternal and in either event he may try to relate the two components of the synthesis (the temporal and the Eternal) and this constitutes the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical stage and (c) he may proceed beyond this to the religious stage in which there is always the dangerous possibility that a man knows about the Eternal but this knowledge has no meaning for his human existence and he lives in despair over the disrelationship of the two components of the synthesis. This is why Kierkegaard could define despair as "the disproportion between the temporal and the eternal in man."<sup>4</sup>

It is worthy of note that Kierkegaard was convinced that he had to show his Hegelian contemporaries, for instance, that what mattered first and foremost was to "think in existence", i.e. that he should stand guarantee for his thoughts with his own person and life, (so that one could say that Kierkegaard experienced next to nothing from the outside). That, he believed, could best be done by following the Socratic method of leading his readers to the point where they themselves could discover what he wanted them to understand without his having to say it directly. To achieve this purpose he used specific individual figures, whose thoughts and peculiarities he could pursue to their utmost consequences by the method of experimentation.

Kierkegaard has been seen as a poet, prophet, philosopher, and theologian; however he is primarily a religious thinker, a man struggling for his own soul, like the main character in a Pilgrim's Progress. Kierkegaard's central problem is that of becoming a Christian, of realizing personal existence. Faith is Kierkegaard's goal, and prayer is man's sole means of moving toward that goal. Kierkegaard's principle is that true piety emerges from a sense of one's own unworthiness and of the greatness of God and it moves, as it were, in a tension to an understanding of God's love. His life and work are examples of his own principles, e.g. the inner is not the outer and every one is finally impenetrable and the depths of personal existence can not be fully grasped in the realm of the objective. This conviction was the father of his indirect method of discourse.

The continuing problem of Kierkegaard's life and thought is that he is seeking to know himself, for "one must know one's self before knowing anything else."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, knowing himself comes to mean finding himself and being himself and these in turn come to mean finally being found by God. With regard to seeking personal truth Kierkegaard said, "What is truth but to live for an idea."<sup>6</sup> The ultimate answer to Kierkegaard's quest came in terms of Christianity. The idea turns out to be Christ, and integrity involves seeking the kingdom first, whilst the Archimedean point is prayer alone before the Christian God. The meaning of life is to be found in becoming a Christian. However, one should note here that Kierkegaard's life involved a movement from a negative relationship to Christianity, through a positive intellectual interest in and defense of the faith, toward a more inward and existential identification with Christianity. Kierkegaard's goal (of serving the truth) and strategy (of making his readers aware of the truth in such a way that they themselves had to take some decisive stand) remained unaltered throughout the remainder of his life but came to be understood by him in changing terms as his own relationship to the Christian faith deepened. Thus he says

I have chosen to serve the truth - to raise the price (of Christianity) and if possible to whisper to every individual what the demands could be.<sup>8</sup>

Also he says, "All my terrific work as an author is one great thought, and it is; to wound from behind".<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, "My whole life is an epigram, calculated to make people aware".<sup>10</sup> "My task is; to make room that God may come, not authoritatively but through suffering."<sup>11</sup>

In his own person, Kierkegaard thought of himself as "quite a simple Christian", and he wrote,

I have never maintained, and do not maintain, that I am a Christian in any exceptional degree. It has been my task to depict Christianity. I have never maintained that my action was an attempt to be a perfect Christian; this is why I have taken up a poetic attitude in my presentation of Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

Also,

Real Christianity is self-denial, sobriety. It is too exalted for me - I have enjoyed many many pleasures. I can only praise and extol strict Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

The inward movement which Kierkegaard called his "God-relationship" can be described as the process of "becoming a Christian," and in his work as an author he was charting and reflecting on the course of his life. "Becoming a Christian" defines the central movement of Kierkegaard's own life and it was this movement which served to define and determine both the content of his work as an author and his own sense of personal vocation. With regard to Kierkegaard's vocation, a point of interest is the dialectic involved in the affirmative goal of helping people become individuals and Christians, on the one hand, and the fact that this goal would best be reached by shocking people with a realization of how difficult it was to become a Christian, on the other hand. This paradox is well expressed by the conviction that, "it is easier to become a Christian when I am not a Christian than to become a Christian when I am one."<sup>14</sup> However, Kierkegaard spells out in less paradoxical terms that,

What I want, is to spur people on to becoming moral characters, witnesses to the truth, to be willing to suffer for the truth, and ready to give up worldly wisdom.<sup>15</sup>

Kierkegaard tries to clarify the reasons why it was difficult to become a Christian, and writes that:

My purpose is to make it difficult to become a Christian...  
...qualitatively difficult, and essentially difficult for every man  
equally, for essentially it is equally difficult for every man to  
relinquish his understanding and his thinking, and to keep his soul  
fixed upon the absurd.<sup>17</sup>

Kierkegaard's purpose in making it difficult to become a Christian,  
(or in stating Christianity as an either/or) was solely that of  
devising a means by which he could shock professing Christians out  
of their Laodicean state of luke-warmness.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Kierkegaard  
tried to enrich faith by a defense of inner passion and he was  
convinced that wherever passionate, responsible decision was missing,  
both individuality and Christianity were also missing. Indeed  
Kierkegaard himself openly admitted the great difficulties which  
seemed to him inherent in Christian doctrine and says,

In Christianity itself the contradictions are so great that,  
to say the least, they prevent a clear view.<sup>19</sup>

However (by way of a hint at the assertion that Christianity is  
subjectivity) Kierkegaard says, that, "Christianity is not a doctrine  
but an existential communication expressing an existential contra-  
diction."<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Kierkegaard's View of Man

It is very significant to note that Kierkegaard strove  
diligently to tell what it meant to be an individual and a Christian,  
and quite naturally he gave a good deal of attention to the nature  
of man.

Becoming an individual blends with the responsibility of becoming a Christian, because a person does not succeed in becoming an individual until he realizes with his whole heart that he lives and moves and has his being in God as the heavenly person through whom one finds selfhood. Kierkegaard asks,

And how does a man become that individual? Well, unless he has to do with God alone, where the highest matters are concerned, and.....now I weigh the matter as best I can, act upon it that you, O God may be able to seize hold of me, and I therefore speak to nobody at all, I dare not do so - unless he does that he cannot become the Individual.<sup>16</sup>

Thus one finds that Kierkegaard's "Communication"<sup>17</sup> is always directed to the individual, because it forces every man to take a strictly personal stand toward Christianity, and so "the individual" becomes a religious category, conditioned by Kierkegaard's psychological isolation, but at the same time transcending it as a universal determination of the religious consciousness. Kierkegaard regards this category as the most important achievement of his work, the sine qua non of all religion, and in his diary he notes that

This category is the point at which and across which God can come to seize hold of the race. To remove that point is to dethrone God.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Kierkegaard says that,

"The Individual" - that is the decisive Christian category and it will be decisive also for the future of Christianity.<sup>22</sup>

Everyone must rediscover himself as an individual alone before God. Christianity can not be handed down in a tradition; every man who

comes into this world must be shocked anew, and, in this shock, advance to faith, or fall into despair.

It is always only as an individual that one can have the truest relationship with God; for we always have the best idea of our own unworthiness when we are alone.<sup>23</sup>

"Every step forward in man's relation with God is a step backward"<sup>24</sup> and "life can only be understood backward though it must be lived forward."<sup>25</sup> The true experience of being before God never grows into a mystic sense of participation; it remains a feeling of fear and trembling. Therefore to become a "single individual" is the most important task of authentic Christianity for it is only as an individual that one is able to be in a true relationship with God.<sup>26</sup>

In regarding "The Individual" as Kierkegaard's most important category, one notes his remarks that, "It is a category of the spirit and of spiritual awakening."<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the phrase can be used in two senses, namely a proud one and a humble one. The humble sense alone is right, since in humble acceptance of individual responsibility before God lies man's salvation. Kierkegaard says,

It is the peculiarity of the human race that just because the individual is created in the image of God, "the individual" is above the race.<sup>28</sup>

By way of the defense of the individual, Kierkegaard tries to defend the spiritual responsibility of freedom; - "the most tremendous thing which has been granted to man is: the choice, freedom. And if you desire to save it and preserve it, there is only one way: in the very

same second unconditionally and in complete resignation to give it back to God and yourself with it."<sup>29</sup> The prophetic cry of Kierkegaard seems to be, "be a Christian and an Individual" and though far from perfection Kierkegaard says, "yet had I to crave an inscription on my grave I would ask for none other than 'the Individual'"<sup>30</sup>. It is worthwhile to note here that the whole of Soren Kierkegaard's work has its unity in his concept of man, and this is Kierkegaard's distinguished contribution of first-rate significance. Kierkegaard's approach to the study of man is one of introspection and analysis. Since I am the nearest person to myself (if one may dare to put words into Kierkegaard's mouth) my starting point is myself. Hence the need to revive the self as the starting-point. Kierkegaard sought a concept of man entirely in terms of a certain psychology of himself. Kierkegaard's sole field of concern was the living material of man as he found him. Man himself, the reality close at hand and most readily accessible, should be the key to his own mystery and to any other which might lie beyond him. Thus Kierkegaard was more concerned to show how (i.e. subjectivity) to become a Christian rather than showing what (i.e. objectivity) Christianity is. Kierkegaard was convinced that the starting point must be inwardness and says in the Journal entry for July 9th, 1838:

I mean to labour to achieve a more inward relation to Christianity: hitherto I have fought for its truth, while in a sense standing outside it. In a purely outward sense I have carried Christ's cross like Simon of Cyrene.<sup>31</sup>

This is a hint as regards the doctrine of subjectivity. Lessing stated that "Truth is Subjectivity". Kierkegaard turns this

sentence around and asserts that subjectivity is truth. At this point, one should steer clear of the conclusion that Kierkegaard sought truth in the subjective (psychological) sphere and understood it to be mere personal feeling. Kierkegaard means and constantly stresses that only what is apprehended with subjective energy and passion can be truth for the person concerned. If truth is subjectivity, it is upon the subject, upon the individual, that Kierkegaard's stress lies. It concerns the self, not only as it is, but as it is capable of becoming. Thus Kierkegaard says "A self, every instant it exists, is in process of becoming, for the self does not exactly exist, it is only that which it is to become."<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Spirit, the Self, Individuality

Man is Spirit in his essential nature, i.e. there is a dimension in the individual's life which transcends bodily (or physical) and psychical life. This dimension is spirit; it is what gives man "splendour" and it is man's most precious possession. This "splendour" can be summed up in the words of the Holy Scriptures: "God has created man in His own image".<sup>33</sup> God is spirit; He is invisible and it is this invisibility which is the very definition of spirit; man's invisible glory, the image of God in him is spirit and the other name for spirit is self. Spirit is the combining factor in the synthesis of body and spirit.<sup>34</sup> Spirituality is the power of a man's understanding over his life, it is the capacity for holding ideality and actuality together, for reduplication (i.e. "to exist in what one understands" or to reflect the truth in one's life)

for realizing the truth in one's individual existence.<sup>35</sup> Despair is a disproportion within the self. The self is not a substance; it is a dynamic relationship. It is not a simple relationship between two terms but a peculiar kind of relationship between two terms which has the additional positive capacity to relate to itself; it has a reflexive character.<sup>36</sup> The self in reflective self-consciousness creates an ideal self which serves as the goal and guide of its movement. This explains the dictum; the more consciousness, the more self.<sup>37</sup> The more one strives toward the ideal self, the more the tension increases within the actual self. Thus the self is two selves (in the sense of being or containing an actual and an ideal self) and it also is one self (in the sense that only the actual self really exists, for the ideal self is its creation.) So when Kierkegaard writes in Sickness Unto Death that the self is a conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, he is saying that there is a self which relates itself (the actual self) to itself (the ideal self) and the task is to actualize the ideal. The self is the dialectical synthesis of an expansive and a limiting factor. Finitude is the limiting factor and the infinite is the expanding factor expressing itself in man's imagination. Kierkegaard says that the task is to become concrete. Thus "one becomes concrete by moving away from one's self infinitely by infinitizing one's self and then returning to one's self infinitely by finitizing one's self."<sup>38</sup> One infinitizes one's self through the imagination, which constructs an ideal self. But one must not remain in the realm of imagination; one should return to

reality, i.e. the ideal self should be actualized, should be related to the former actual self so that the new self which emerges is the synthesis of the ideal and the actual. Thus Professor Swenson says that "reality for Kierkegaard is the ethical synthesis of the ideal and the actual within the individual".<sup>39</sup> For Kierkegaard, the unifying power of personality is the inmost and holiest thing of all. The main theme of Purity of Heart can be characterized as attaining unity within the self, and Kierkegaard describes the process as that of attaining unchangeableness; rather like his concepts of repetition and reduplication. From the point of view of the ethicist in Either/Or, the self is seen as that which gives unity to the individual. The self gives continuity to becoming; it is personality and freedom. The self is freedom because it is born out of self-choice. Choice of the self brings the self into existence, yet the fact that it could be chosen implies that it was there all the time.<sup>40</sup>

Kierkegaard stresses that the movement toward recognition of one's self as a sinner brings a new depth of self-awareness, a new intensification of inwardness and subjectivity, a further realization of personal existence. This movement can be described in terms of the concepts of spirit, or self or person, and also the category of the Individual, which is their essential equivalent. Kierkegaard sets the "individual" over against abstract universality. The individual, is the category of the spirit, of spiritual awakening; it is the decisive Christian category. Christianity stands or falls with the category of the individual. Self-realization is becoming an individual

and personal existence is existence as a single one, as an individual. The main condition of religiousness is to be a single individual man. In the pseudonymous works, the individual is primarily the pre-eminent individual in the æsthetic sense, the distinguished person. In the Edifying Works, the individual is what every man can be. In this sense the individual might be called the concrete Universal as opposed to the abstract Universal.

It is worthwhile to note that Kierkegaard's emphasis on the role of spirit gives one a very helpful introduction to the meaning of "Truth is subjectivity". The eternal as ethically perceived, is brought into time whenever a concerned human being undertakes the task of existence so seriously that his very selfhood is at stake, i.e. truth becomes part of the subject whenever the subject wholeheartedly wills to be the truth. The central purpose of the term "spirit" is to emphasize the heights and responsibility of human freedom and such freedom implies the necessity of personal, ethical choice, (especially as the ethical sphere is characterized by self-reliance). Whenever the whole self is wholly committed to the task of being a whole self, the mediation of eternity in time results. Spirit succeeds in uniting the eternal and the temporal by operating in and through "the instant".

Kierkegaard says,

The instant, is not properly an atom of time but an atom of eternity. It is the finite reflection of eternity in time, its first effort as it were to bring time to a stop. The instant is that ambiguous moment in which time and eternity touch one another, thereby positing the temporal, where time is constantly intersecting eternity and eternity constantly permeating time.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. Nature, Scope, and Variety of the Literary Output

The works of Kierkegaard can be roughly divided into two categories; the earlier writings and the later writings. We find that, in the former, Kierkegaard uses "indirect communication" in stating the alternatives concretely in such a way that the individual reader is moved through self-activity and decision toward the realization of his own individuality; it is the attempt to bring the reader to the point of choosing himself. This is Kierkegaard's equivalent to Socrates' theme of knowing one's self. It is worthwhile to note here that Kierkegaard has the highest regard for Greek thinkers, especially Socrates, and indeed Kierkegaard says,

There cannot really be the least doubt that what Christianity needs is another Socrates, someone who could existentially express ignorance with the same cunning dialectical simplicity.<sup>42</sup>

Socrates moved among men, putting questions to them, passionately delving into this and that, in order to find out the truth; not by abstract speculation (because here Kierkegaard would say that abstraction discounts the uniqueness of the individual who Kierkegaard upgrades and defends whilst he downgrades the group or the mass) but out of the very midst of life itself. However, Kierkegaard does criticize certain characteristics of Greek thought (especially in the Philosophical Fragments); for example, he says

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.<sup>43</sup>

In his later writings, Kierkegaard abandons indirect communication for direct testimony. In both the earlier and later writings, becoming a Christian is not a matter of knowledge; no one can teach it or do it for another and, since it involves self-realization of the individual at the deepest levels of self existence, it must be lived through by the individual himself. This is one aspect of Kierkegaard's existentialism. When in his later writings Kierkegaard speaks in his own name, his speech is edifying and is directed to the individual in the inner recesses of his being.

The intensely personal character of Kierkegaard's thought constitutes its strength for it gives to his writings a degree of seriousness and depth. Thus we find that by a very complex and subtle analysis of human life, Kierkegaard develops his point of view without resorting to abstract terms; rather he represents the alternatives in concrete, dramatic, personal expressions. With great artistic skill, Kierkegaard describes a person who lives in this way or that. The alternatives presented are concrete and the decisions which are motivated are also concrete. The alternatives are called "stages on life's way" or spheres of existence; and Kierkegaard shows through concrete examples how individual men live and think. Kierkegaard's works are such that they cover the three "Stages"; the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. There are two boundary zones which complete the "picture" of the "stages": Irony (the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical) and humour, (the boundary between the ethical and the religious). These three spheres of

existence and the boundaries between them are ideal types, since no individual is a perfect example of any one type. In every individual the way of life may be mixed and confused, yet the dominant orientation of the life of the individual may be said to be either aesthetic or ethico-religious. The scheme of analysis (with regard to the "Stages") does not constitute an absolutely successive order, yet personal existence is a movement toward the religious sphere of existence: a movement away from the domination of the aesthetic in such a manner that the aesthetic is not rejected but is incorporated in a higher way of life in which the individual realizes himself more fully. Authentic personal existence is constituted in the acts by which the individual moves away from the aesthetic toward the religious (i.e. in the direction of Christian faith) and with regard to this movement we must note here that Kierkegaard was reacting against the reductionism of romanticism and rationalism. The chief enemies of personal existence are romantic aestheticism and rationalistic speculation. The true movement of life is away from the aesthetic and away from speculation, for both stand in the way of self-realization and both result in the disappearance of authentic individuality.

##### 5. Kierkegaard's Starting Point and the Interpretation of His Works

The authorship - as Kierkegaard calls the main body of his writings, - began with the publication of Either/Or, an aesthetic work, but Kierkegaard's pattern resulted in edifying discourses (or religious sermons) being published alongside the aesthetic

works, which formed an independent literature of their own, made up of essays, letters, disputations and fiction. Elaborate measures were taken to remove the aesthetic works from all association with their real author, some of them being pseudonymous two or three times over, and the author or editor of one work appearing sometimes as a character in another. In Stages on Life's Way (edited by Hilarius Bookbinder) in the chapter called In Vino Veritas, five men at a Banquet make speeches on the subject of woman, two of these being Constantine Constantius (author of Repetition) and Victor Eremita (editor of Either/Or), and Judge William, a character from Either/Or. Kierkegaard said that the programme of the authorship was not an arbitrary arrangement of his but was determined for him by Providence and behind it lay a wholly religious purpose.<sup>44</sup> The nature and content of the pseudonymous works go quite a long way in creating difficulties with regard to the interpretation of Kierkegaard's thoughts. On the one hand Kierkegaard refers to the pseudonyms quite objectively, as though they were real persons and warns the reader never to attribute any of their views to him.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand he says that the pseudonymous works are a necessary part of the authorship, intimately related to the religious works, and that both should be read together. Furthermore he says that he himself was deeply involved in the pseudonymous works, and that he came to terms with the aesthetic by means of them and he was only allowed to indulge in them by a special act of Providence.<sup>46</sup> As far as the reasons which led Kierkegaard to write anonymously or pseudonymously are concerned, Professor Lowrie<sup>47</sup> sets out a few points, e.g. (1) Kierkegaard's love

for intrigue in order to mystify people; (2) Kierkegaard's adherence to the Socratic maxim "know thyself" - thus Kierkegaard's pseudonyms were for the most part personifications of aspects or at least of possibilities which he discovered in his own nature.

<sup>48</sup> Lowrie states that Kierkegaard for example says in Repetition "the individual has manifold shadows all of which resemble him, and from time to time have equal claim to be the man himself." - this quotation Dr. Lowrie states, expresses the deepest reason for Kierkegaard's use of a pseudonymity which was also a polynymity. For example, Kierkegaard hints that his choice of the name Victor Eremita for the editor of Either/Or, signifies that he himself was victor in the conflict which resulted in the choice of the ethical life.

(3) Kierkegaard's introversion for a long time inhibited him from using what he called "direct communication", and so, making a virtue of necessity, he practised and extolled "indirect communication", using the pseudonyms as instruments to this end. After 1848, when Kierkegaard experienced a metamorphosis which made it possible for him to speak out clearly, he renounced essentially the use of pseudonyms. In so far as "indirect communication" was imparted by the use of pseudonyms, it was the only way by which Kierkegaard could have accomplished the novel task of "making a map of the emotional cosmos", of delineating the characteristic possibilities of the human soul. Thus Kierkegaard's characters had to be inhumanly consistent, ideal exemplifications of a type, whether in the direction of good or evil, such as human life rarely, if ever, presents. (4) Since Kierkegaard's thought was essentially dialectic, it had to be

expressed in the form of dialogue as was the teaching of Socrates. In Repetition for example, two authors, Constantius and "the young man", were needed to exemplify contrasting attitudes and in the "Stages", Judge William's dissertation on marriage is the answer to the frivolous speeches at the Banquet and Quidam is necessary to carry the movement on in the direction of religion. Dr. Lowrie further points out<sup>49</sup> that Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms in his later works (e.g. Anti-Climacus in Sickness Unto Death, and Training in Christianity) did not mean as it had meant in the past, that the subject of the book was removed to a distance by "double reflection", - on the contrary it meant that the subject was pressed upon the reader objectively, without regard to the authority or the personal character of the author and the reader was left to judge for himself in the light of the New Testament: e.g. as in For Self-Examination. Anti-Climacus meant that Kierkegaard wanted to "draw attention", to "compel people to take notice", of Christianity as it really is.

Pseudonymity in the earlier works was such that the supposed authors through their fictitious characters hold a mirror up to life - a mirror in which every man may see himself and so come to know himself. Kierkegaard used the pseudonyms as a means of private communication with Regina Olsen after he had broken their engagement, and also the pseudonyms met Kierkegaard's inclination to embody the truth not in abstract propositions but in a person, in a concrete situation or in a particular mode of living.

Kierkegaard regarded the pseudonyms as essential to the religious purpose of the authorship, in an attempt to underline the unity of the authorship. Kierkegaard was keen to show that he was not an aesthetic author who had turned religious with advancing years. Thus the Two Discourses were written at the same time as Either/Or and both were published almost simultaneously. Thus the aesthetic works went alongside the religious.

As a turning point, the Postscript appeared, and it was a work which gathered up the aesthetic as well as the religious works and showed how they all served to illuminate the problem of the whole authorship, i.e. "how to become a Christian."

The Postscript was not an aesthetic work, nor yet was it religious. Even after the period of the pseudonyms was over Kierkegaard published an aesthetic essay The Crisis, and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress, to remind the public that he was a religious author from the beginning who yet remained "aesthetically productive" to the last.<sup>50</sup> Kierkegaard states that "the category of my work is: to make men aware of Christianity. My task is to deceive people, in a true sense, into entering the sphere of religious obligation which they have done away with."<sup>51</sup>

The aesthetic always sees life as essentially a matter of the senses, and finally the outcome is despair. The ethical sees everything under the determination of duty and on neither the aesthetic nor the ethical level is unity or consistency of personality

achieved. Thus the purpose of the aesthetic works or "living experimentations" is to show that the view of life they represent, if seen through to the end, always reaches a frontier of unhappy contradiction, and the intrinsic inadequacy can be seen only in what happens to the people themselves.

The entire project, with regard to the authorship, with its successive aesthetic and religious productions was set to a pattern determined in the beginning and designed to achieve a single effect: i.e. to define Christianity in the most radical way possible and to bring the reader to an understanding of himself in relation to it. Kierkegaard's intention from first to last was religious, i.e. to recommend the religious as the sole answer to the human situation which the aesthetic works so profoundly analysed and clarified.

We see that the authorship has the unity of pattern (or production) imposed upon it from the beginning. The works are an organized arrangement in which no work is out of place. Furthermore, we see the unity of intention which lies behind this pattern, determining the precise order of the works, the manner in which they would each complement the other, and above all, the precise religious impact the whole production would achieve. Thirdly, we find the unity of a fundamental theme which shows every work, cut out, as it were, to fit the pattern of the authorship like the stone of a steeple. But one could ask here, how Kierkegaard set about working out in detail the task involved in the authorship. We find that through knowledge of the self, Kierkegaard attempts to prepare the way for the knowledge of

God, and by making clear the essential reality of human nature he attempts to show that God alone can set man free.<sup>52</sup> For this task, the aesthetic works with their analysis of consciousness and its mysterious depths were as necessary as the religious. Thus, Either/Or begins the project. It was a work designed to gain the immediate attention of the public, and through its varied contents runs ostensibly the quite commonplace story of a man who lives at the simplest and least complicated level. His chief ambition is to live happily, as everybody else. Unfortunately, he cannot sustain his happy mood, and he cannot understand why. In order to show what lies behind his being unhappy, Kierkegaard introduces an analysis of the human person. Kierkegaard explains why the man is not happy and why the melancholy he suffers cannot be removed unless he does one thing. In the Second Volume, (the first being Either) OR, the man does thing thing; he takes a stand, he becomes somabody. Although he now decides to take himself in hand, has a wife, a family, a career, a place in the community, strangely enough his peace does not last, and he finds himself becoming more and more aware that he is not happy. Kierkegaard at this point, explains what really constitutes a man and also that the sufferer does not understand himself. The despair he experiences is inevitable and arises from the fact that he is made in a certain way. All he can do (within his present concept of living) is to take this despair seriously and trouble himself to find out where it points. Either/OR ends with the man becoming an individual but not yet the individual and he is not very happy about himself. Thus beside the work Either/OR appear two religious Discourses, addressed to "That Individual" - i.e. to

the man who was concerned about himself.

Seven months after Either/OR was published came Repetition and Fear and Trembling. Both works are a further analysis of the human predicament described in Either/OR to which they are attached, so firmly as to seem like postscripts. In Repetition, Constantina Constantius takes up the problem of the lost happiness, and against a background of the story of Job and Plato's doctrine of recollection, explains how it might be restored ("repeated"). Constantina, points out that the past can never be restored merely by retracing one's steps or by trying to re-create the events which once gave pleasure, for what disappeared were not the "happy events" but the man who enjoyed them. So it is quite useless for him to continue chasing happy experiences to replace those which are lost; what is really lost is himself. As long as he seeks a restoration in terms of conditions outside himself, he will seek forever in vain. He himself must be restored to himself, and then, in a re-established integrity he will find happiness everywhere once again. How this can come about is what the book describes - and it does it on the basis of the very original concept of man's nature already outlined in Either/OR. However the book, Repetition, adds its own new quota of meaning to that concept. Fear and Trembling is a similar discussion but at a deeper level. It corresponds to the more serious issues raised at the close of Either/OR, where a man is on the razor's edge of existence. He must finally take another step, but where? and how? for there are no more roads. The author of the book is Johannes de Silentio, because in the no man's land where normal categories have broken down and all roads

have disappeared, men can talk only "in silence". Through the horror of the Abraham/Isaac story and the continuing polemics against the ethics of Kant, Hegel, and contemporary society, Johannes meditates the next step; the duty beyond all duty. For what is at stake is a man's self, not for some "eternity" at the end of time but now. Conventional moral advice is worthless because the man's plight is outside good and evil, yet it is evil he is in peril of, the ultimate evil of losing himself, so that though he retains all he has fought for, he loses all - in default of the next step. Johannes directs him in silence (he never argues) to the only way, a way that starts in the man's own mysterious being<sup>53</sup>. Both Repetition and Fear and Trembling are inconclusive. They point by design beyond themselves. They talk of repentance, faith, and forgiveness, but these terms still await pentecost, as it were. The frontiers of religion are reached but not crossed. That is left to the reader, who, if he should be interested could read four successive volumes of Discourses (including Job), all of them taking up the same themes.

In June 1844, two very important works appeared, the Fragments (Johannes Climacus) and the Concept of Dread (Vigilius Haufniensis). Both are closely related to Either/OR, and although not religious works, they keep the discussion at the frontiers of religion. The Fragments starts with the open question of the truth that edifies from the end of Either/OR. There are strongly polemical discussions of the validity of historical experience, the proofs of God, Platonism and Cartesianism; but underneath them all goes on the repeated probing into the nature of self-consciousness, and especially,

in this instance, into the process of "Knowing the truth". Man, as he is found, (or in his natural state) is subject to an incalculable self-alienation which profoundly affects his moral integrity and his thinking as he tries to draw from the universe some clue to his own destiny. In the natural world he collides with contradictions which baffle his reason; in the world of encounter with God, he "collides" with a Paradox which offends his reason. Thus in either case he is subject to intolerable ambiguities in his experience. Finally it is shown that what he needs is not an authentic philosophy (of truth) but an authentic self; and finding the former depends upon the latter; furthermore, the secret of the Paradox is that, although it provides no new information about himself, it enables him "to be himself".

The Concept of Dread is an exploration of the insinuating melancholy which plays such a decisive part in the life of man at all levels of his existence. Vigilius first raises the question of the meaning of original sin. He refuses however to discuss it from a metaphysical point of view; he analyses it only in terms of what actually happens within self-consciousness. We are here given again the description of man's nature which is common to all pseudonymous productions, and on its basis he proceeds to explore human freedom and the effect of the forces within it which give it movement and a terrible reality. We are shown how a disturbance within freedom, a predisposing anxiety, is the ground of all good and evil, and is in its turn, the evidence of a self whose nature is freedom. Alongside this discussion are the usual polemics against Hegel and Schelling; but these are so designed as to elucidate further Kierkegaard's main theme and also to emphasize the validity of his fundamental conception of man.

A year later, two more volumes of Discourses were published along with Stages on Life's Road (Hilarius Bookbinder), which revived in a new form the major themes of Either/OR. The stages or levels of existence are discussed with many incidental comments and digressions, but even as it revives past work (as well as past pseudonymous characters) it adds its extra clarification to the continuing analysis of the self, especially in respect of the mysterious drives of the self towards reintegration and self-fulfillment. The religious is also more closely defined, but there is still no sharp religious challenge. Everything is once more contrived to bring the reader to a point where he is left alone with himself and his future.

In February 1846, Kierkegaard published the Postscript, (Johannes Climacus), three years to the month after Either/OR and the start of the authorship. This vast work gathered together the pseudonymous productions into a whole. Kierkegaard's view of philosophy and theology are concentrated and given their final form; the issues raised by human experience, the problem of truth in its various aspects, the elusiveness of God, the nature of reality and of the historical course (or events) of society and above all the meaning of Christianity are all definitively stated. Climacus has no committed religious belief, but he takes the whole field of human concern, defines the way that leads nowhere, exposes the claims without substance and leads the reader deviously but carefully towards God. All this wide-ranging discussion is fundamentally an analysis of human consciousness, of the way it emerges, thinks, gropes for God

and seeks self-authenticity. It is the final elaboration of his doctrine of man, the gathering together of all the preceding analyses and results.

After the Postscript came more Discourses and the Works of Love which is a kind of social ethic, stating the grounds on which alone a community had validity.

In July 1849, Sickness Unto Death appeared, by Anti-Climacus, who was a Christian to an exceptional degree, but was pseudonymous because he was a better Christian than Kierkegaard. Anti-Climacus is the last of the pseudonyms. The theme of this work is closely linked to volume two of Either/OR because it is an analysis of the despair talked about in OR, the despair or frustration which accompanies the more serious (ethical) human activity everywhere. As the Concept of Dread explores the anxiousness (anxiety) at the ground of freedom, so the Sickness Unto Death examines the frustration (or despair) of the individual as he grows in strength and success and which always appears to become worse as the success is more marked. It is explained as a "disease" arising inevitably from man's inner constitution as a person, and Kierkegaard quotes again as the basis for his diagnosis the same description of the structure of man used in all the previous works, but a new factor is introduced: - the "disease" has a cure provided by God, and in default of which, the disease becomes sin.

In September 1850, Training in Christianity (Anti-Climacus) appeared, and this work appears to be Kierkegaard's favourite work because the whole problem of his authorship "turns on the question

of what it means to be a Christian - in Christendom," and in this work Kierkegaard tries to answer this question. The answer takes the form of a single concept - contemporaneousness with Christ in His suffering and humiliation and this is the polar opposite of the historical results of Christ's existence. Contemporaneousness involves the possibility of the Offense; it involves the possibility that Christ and His teaching do not appeal to one and one is positively offended by them for one reason or the other. The idea of the Offense is a generalization and also an intensification of "the Paradox" as found in the Postscript. The "Paradox" may be defined as the offense in the realm of the intellect and the offense is that which repels a man at the very centre of his being, whether it acts as a stumbling block to his intellect, his aesthetic nature, his herd instincts or any other aspect of his "immediacy". Thus Anti-Climacus embraces Christianity as the Way and the Truth.

We have seen (briefly) how the themes of the individual works are all related together and how the pseudonymous works serve a special purpose as being Kierkegaard's analysis of man and of the human condition to which Christianity is the only answer. The three "unities" in the authorship, i.e. (1) the unity of production involving the deliberately designed sequence of publication; (2) the unity of intention, underlining the religious purpose which runs through the authorship from beginning to end, and (3) the unity of a fundamental theme, are worthy of note. The third unity has to do with a certain understanding of man of which all the works are an elaboration but for which the pseudonymous works are used for the

purpose of specific analysis. All Kierkegaard's ideas, even the apparently contradictory ones, have their fitting place in this scheme and his views of sin, faith, reason, ethics, subjectivity, and paradox fall naturally into place, making together a powerful and consistent statement of human self-understanding.

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CHAPTER III  
THE DIALECTIC OF THE ACT OF FAITH

INTRODUCTION:

In this chapter we shall examine some key concepts in Kierkegaard's thought (e.g. subjectivity, and Paradox) and see for example the interrelatedness of one concept to the other, for example the definition of truth closely allied with (if not similar to) the expression for faith. We shall see Kierkegaard's method of progressively building up his presentation, in a logical and consistent manner, especially with regard to how and why the concept of faith occupies such a dominant position in his thought. Furthermore we shall examine Kierkegaard's treatment of what faith is vis-a-vis subjectivity, history, Paradox, and the System. Certain convictions underlie Kierkegaard's concept of faith, the most prominent of which has to do with his understanding of man, as the three stages so adequately show (as we have seen in the preceding chapter).

(I) The dialectic of the Stages (or Inwardness)

(A) The Aesthetic Stage:-

In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel expounded his masterly dialectic of the stages by which the mind awakens to self-consciousness, to universal consciousness and to the standpoint of absolute thought. Kierkegaard also expounds a dialectic but it is radically

different from that of Hegel. In the first place it is the process by which spirit is actualized in the form of individuality, the individual existent, not in the form of the all-comprehensive universal. In the second place, the transition from one stage to the next is accomplished not by thinking but by choice, by an act of the will, and in this sense, by a leap. There is no question of overcoming antithesis by a process of conceptual synthesis. There is a choice between alternatives, (Either/OR) and the choice of the higher alternative, the transition to a higher stage (like a kind of metamorphosis) of the dialectic is a willed self-commitment of the whole man.

The first stage (or sphere of existence), discussed in the first volume of Either/OR and in the first part of Stages on Life's Way is the aesthetic, and it is characterized by self-dispersal on the level of sense. It is life at its simplest and most general level. The aesthetic man is governed by sense, impulse, and emotion. However, this orientation should not be understood as necessarily linked with the gross indulgence and flagrant immoralities conventionally associated with the word "sensualism". It may include this but it also includes the activity of the poet who transmutes the world into an imaginative realm. The essential features of the aesthetic consciousness are the absence of fixed universal moral standards and of determinate religious faith, and the presence of a desire to enjoy the whole range of emotions and sense-experience. The form of life of the aesthetic man is its very formlessness, and self-dispersal on the level of sense. The aesthetic man prefers to dwell (as Kierkegaard says in Sickness Unto

Death) in the cellar rather than in the building of the soulish-bodily synthesis in every man, which is planned with a view to being spirit, i.e. he prefers to dwell within the context of the determinants of sensuousness (in the broad sense of the term). The more aware a man is that he is living in the cellar of the building, the more subject he becomes to "despair", for he finds that there is no remedy, no salvation at the level on which he stands. He is faced therefore with two alternatives; either he must remain in despair on the aesthetic level or he must make the transition to the next level by an act of choice, by self commitment. Mere thinking will not do the trick for him. It is a question of choice, an either/or.

In his various aesthetic writings, Kierkegaard attempts to show the shallowness of life at the aesthetic level in such a way (by indirect communication) that the reader himself will be moved to decide against it and in and through this decision to become aware of himself and realize himself at a deeper level. It is significant to note that Either/OR ends with a little meditation entitled "Ultimatum" and the theme ("the upbuilding truth in the thought that in relation to God we are always in the wrong") with its edifying contents already points in the direction of the religious. The first part of Either/OR ends with the "diary of the seducer" which describes a specific level of the aesthetic stage and Kierkegaard feels that it contains valuable observations concerning human life. The second part of Either/OR in substance introduces the ethical stage and here Judge William, the representative of the ethical stage defines the boundaries for the whole realm of the aesthetic and he is able to do this because he has passed

through the aesthetic and now as ethical man, he can from his new position survey the whole aesthetic stage. Judge William sets up a very completely graded scale of all the possible levels of aesthetic stances. There are a multitude of areas in temporal existence which a man may choose as most important and to which he can relate and this fact provides a multitude of aesthetic viewpoints e.g. health, riches, honour, poetic talent, artistic talent or philosophical talent, may be considered the greatest values in life and one may build one's whole life on these premises, but when no room is left for the spiritual, the result is melancholy. In the first part of the Stages on Life's Way, we see the aesthetic stage also, in the section called "In Vino Veritas," with a series of consistently drawn aesthetic stances all of which represent man's view of woman when he has rejected the Eternal and sees woman only with the eyes of temporal existence. Here, Kierkegaard proceeds, in delineating the aesthetic stage, from the scriptural doctrine that man was created a synthesis of the temporal and the Eternal and the two components of this synthesis originally stood in right relation to each other. Man was obedient to the Eternal and lived in a state of innocence without knowledge of good and evil. The condition of the pure aesthete is one of anxiety and despair. Deliverance will come by making room for the principal component of the synthesis, i.e. the Eternal. Kierkegaard feels that every man begins his life in the aesthetic stage but with the possibility of the Eternal. Kierkegaard stresses that the aesthetic man never comes to grips with the heart of the problem, i.e. himself. Kierkegaard uses as his guiding rule, the dialectic of existence and argues that there is no straight line to better things. In the aesthetic stage, there

is no emerging of a real self and no real development. Although the end of aesthetic man is despair, yet he has to choose despair, i.e. to recognize it for what it is, a sickness of the spirit caused by a defrauded human nature, and it is a symptom of the presence of possibility. Thus Judge William urges the young man to "choose despair", to despair absolutely and thereby tear himself loose from all aesthetic illusions. Kierkegaard says, "Whoever chooses despair paradoxically chooses himself, for the choice of despair is the choice of myself".<sup>1</sup> To choose despair is to choose oneself concretely as a definite individual, to choose oneself as the person one actually is.

#### (B) The Ethical Stage

The second stage is the ethical. Here, a man accepts determinate moral standards and obligations, the voice of universal reason and thus he gives form and consistency to his life. The ethical stage is typified by Socrates. A simple example of the transition from the aesthetic to the moral consciousness is for Kierkegaard that of the man who renounces the satisfaction of his sexual impulse according to passing attraction and enters into the state of marriage, accepting all its obligations, because marriage is an ethical institution, an expression of the Universal law of reason. The ethical stage has its own heroism. It can produce the tragic hero who renounces himself in order to express the Universal. This is what Socrates did and Antigone was prepared to give her life in defence of the unwritten natural law. The ethical consciousness does not understand sin and the ethical man thinks that human

weakness can be overcome by strength and will, enlightened by clear ideas and he believes in man's moral self-sufficiency, yet, in fact, a man can come to realize his own inability to fulfill the moral law as it should be fulfilled and to acquire perfect virtue. He can come to an awareness of his lack of self-sufficiency and of his sin and guilt. He has then arrived at the point at which he is faced with the choice or rejection of the standpoint of faith. Just as "despair" forms the antithesis to the aesthetic consciousness, an antithesis which is overcome or resolved by ethical self-commitment, so consciousness of sin forms the antithesis to the ethical stage and this antithesis is overcome only by the act of faith, by relating one's self to God.

One should note that, for Kierkegaard the ethical means that the Eternal with its claims has impinged upon a man, and he believes in the possibility of fulfilling these claims in the temporal world. Whereas in the aesthetic stage the whole centre of gravity lies in the temporal world and the individual has not and does not will to have an eternal self, an eternal I, in the ethical stage, man with a consciousness of his eternal significance is in the centre. The ethical stage points farther, to the third and last centre of gravity, to the thought of God and his reality. On the ethical level one learns how much or how little one can do by oneself and where the essential goals of human life are to be found. The ethical stage culminates in the understanding of how tenaciously a man is bound to temporality and how little he achieves by his own

endeavours. In this awareness, the centre moves from man to God.

In the story of Abraham, we see a transition from the morality which still lies within the compass of aestheticism (temporality) to the ethical which always has its ground in faith, in the Eternal beyond the boundaries of the visible. After God has called Abraham, his life comes under divine authority and he becomes responsible to a Lord who stands infinitely higher than all the moral laws and customs of this world. Therefore Kierkegaard states in Fear and Trembling<sup>2</sup> that Abraham relates himself to the paradox, i.e. to a Power which exceeds the boundaries of the visible and also that of human understanding. God can issue commands which are contrary to the universally human law and (since He is not accountable either to the individual or to the Universal) God can bring a person into conflict with these laws and can demand their suspension. Abraham moves from a purely moral position through the ethical and crosses the frontier into the religious. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac expresses the ethical-religious position in which man, out of obedience to God, is willing to suspend the moral laws and isolate himself from the community. By this act, Abraham in humble faith, surrenders his own reasonable calculation and enters into the paradox. He has faith in the Eternal and submits his temporal existence to the eternal claims of the laws of God. Within paganism the possibility of an ethical outlook came first with Socrates, who was convinced that in man's inwardness, there was the possibility of a higher knowledge than was to be found by exploring the outer world (i.e. temporal and visible). Every man possesses in his inner self the possibility of a knowledge of eternal

truths and by "recollection" man can discover these truths. This Socratic insight forms the point of departure for man's ethical activity. Socrates' understanding and actualization of the ethical standpoint are formulated in Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript in the sentence: "Subjectivity is truth". This means that a man tries to act in accordance with the eternal truth which he finds in his innermost being. In this way the Eternal, which was only an abstract knowledge acquires a personal meaning for a man. Thus the more enthusiastically one decides to be, the more perfectly one becomes truth and this dialectic of inwardness helps one to gauge one's location within the three "stages" on life's way. We may say therefore that the Eternal is truth or inwardness is truth. But this does not mean that truth is subjective and arbitrary so that every man may decide for himself what is the truth. This precisely is Socrates' significance, that, he points away from the arbitrary understanding of truth which was practised by the sophists. Truth, which Socrates found in his inwardness, is an eternal and universal truth, and it can become a personal and living truth in each individual only by the passionate personal appropriation of the individual self. This is the meaning of the "Socratic Wisdom" as it is called in Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript.<sup>3</sup> However, Socrates still has the untried ethical man's confidence that man can easily fulfill the ethical claims in his life and believes that the chief difficulty lies on the side of self-knowledge, i.e. if a man comprehends the truth, he will act accordingly. Although Kierkegaard values Socrates highly, he admits that at this point Socrates' insight was insufficient.

In Either/Or, Judge William represents an early position in the development of the ethical being. He is inspired by the Socratic confidence that if only one knows the truth one can easily make it valid in one's life. In his letters to the young man, (the aesthete who is supposed to have written the first part of Either/Or) he describes the new life of the ethical stage and tells how one can and must make the leap from the aesthetic to the ethical. The Judge is familiar with Christianity and as an ethical man he understands the claim of Christianity to be that a man must allow the Eternal to pervade all his relationships in life. He also understands that a man is strongly bound to the temporal and that the beginning of finding oneself can only be made by repenting oneself out of rootage in the temporal.<sup>4</sup> The main factor in his position is that he has discovered his eternal self, and has chosen himself. The Judge therefore believes that "the moment one becomes conscious of one's eternal worth is more meaningful than everything else in the world."<sup>5</sup> In a moving way he describes the movement when the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical stage is accomplished.

When all has become silent around one, when the soul becomes alone in the whole world, then before one appears the Eternal Power himself. Then heaven will seem to open and the "I" chooses itself, or more correctly receives itself. Then the soul has seen the ultimate - that which no mortal eye can see - and which never can be forgotten. Then the individual receives the salutation which elevates him forever.<sup>6</sup>

Not until this choice has been made will there be an absolute distinction between good and evil, between an absolute either/or. In the aesthetic stage these differences are only relative. The Judge stresses that marriage, ideally speaking, belongs essentially to

Christianity, and it is the centre of existence. Love and a relationship to God are the two factors making up such a marriage.

In Either/Or, the Judge presents his human ethical views with conviction. In Stages on Life's Way, he is a little older and more experienced and has discovered more difficulties than he imagined at the beginning. He speaks of marriage so warmly:

Marriage is and remains the most important journey of discovery a man can undertake. Every other kind of acquaintance with existence is superficial compared to that acquired by a married man - for he and he alone has thoroughly fathomed the depths of human existence.<sup>7</sup>

The Judge is well acquainted with all the attacks on woman and marriage which the aesthetes expound in "In Vino Veritas" and rejects them energetically, however, he now admits that the way to the ideal is difficult. He still regards marriage as the highest goal in individual human existence,<sup>8</sup> and the marriage resolution can be maintained and the difficulties in marriage can be overcome only if one believes in God "in all dangers and temptations."<sup>9</sup> The Judge is beginning to comprehend the inadequacy of all human endeavours and is on the way to a religious crisis in which the centre of gravity shifts from man (or the human) to God. Finally he says (and the admission shatters his former point of view):

I do not say that marriage is the most sublime life. I know one more sublime. But woe to him who without justification wants to skip over marriage.<sup>10</sup>

In the last pages of his discourse, the Judge investigates what circumstances would justify a transition from the stage he

represents to a higher one, and speaks about the "terror"<sup>11</sup> and sufferings which await the man who becomes involved in the religious life.

#### Brief Summary of the Aesthetic and Ethical Stages

A person who lives on the aesthetic level is not an integral self; such a person lives in immediacy determined by externals.<sup>12</sup> There is no inner integrity, no self determination from within, no real continuity at the base of one's existence.<sup>13</sup> Such persons live for enjoyment.<sup>14</sup> The aesthetical in man is that by which he is immediately what he is.<sup>15</sup> Time is not taken seriously<sup>16</sup>, and the aesthete just is; he never is becoming. In our age it is believed that knowledge settles everything, but to exist and to know are two very different things.<sup>18</sup> To ask with infinite interest about a reality which is not one's own, is faith, and this constitutes a paradoxical relationship to the paradoxical. Aesthetically it is impossible to raise such a question except in thoughtlessness.<sup>19</sup>

Kierkegaard's insistence that man is a synthesis of the finite and the eternal is very relevant here. If the aesthete tends to view himself within the finite, the ethicist tends to view himself within the eternal. The ethicist hopes to reach authentic being by a realization of universal obligation. Ethically the individual subject is infinitely important.<sup>20</sup> The ethical man is involved in a serious shift from indifference to responsibility. The aesthetic in a man is that by which he is immediately what he is; the ethical is that whereby he becomes what he becomes.<sup>21</sup> The act of choosing

is essentially a proper and stringent expression of the ethical.<sup>22</sup>

The ethical stage prepares the way for the religious stage by acquainting the self with that which gives every promise of being a way of salvation for the self. When an individual abandons himself to lay hold of something great outside him, his enthusiasm is aesthetic; when he forsakes everything to save himself his enthusiasm is ethical.<sup>23</sup> Existentially understood, the absolute nature of ethics is a means by which the self, confronted with despair, finds its way to a life of faith and hope. The ethical does not destroy the aesthetic; it transforms it. The individual is on the move; he has chosen despair, and in doing so, he has chosen himself, and crossed the threshold of a new level of existence. He has chosen freedom for he has chosen himself. I choose the absolute which is myself in my eternal validity.<sup>24</sup> As a free spirit I am born of the principle of contradiction or born of the fact that I choose myself.<sup>25</sup> The background to this is Kierkegaard's concept of the self with its dialectical structure and his view that a man is and yet is not until he is "synthesized". The self is only a possibility until it is precipitated by an act of will; but the possibility is there all the time, grounded in the self as its "eternal validity". The ethical can distinguish between his actual (or typical) self and his ideal self, i.e. his own self in a new and more decisively intense quality. The goal he seeks is within him; his task is himself; his ideal self is not outside him. The ethical takes everything up into itself. In his choice, the ethical man becomes himself, paradoxically the same self he was before, yet he has now become another, for his

choice permeates everything. He strives to be an ideal self which is a reality within his own person. His task is to express the ideal (which is himself) in himself<sup>26</sup> by clothing himself in the ideal and permeating himself with it. At this point he has become the "single individual" as well as the Universal man.<sup>27</sup> He is not making a choice between good and evil but is simply choosing "the good thing", i.e. the choice itself (from the aesthetic).<sup>28</sup> The decisive use of will lifts the initial choice into the ethical.<sup>29</sup> Ethics arises from the depths of personality which is an absolute whose telos is in itself. The ethical is not something outside personality<sup>30</sup>. The ethical's ultimate aim is the radical strengthening of personality. The ethical is an existential attitude grounded in the structure of the self. Duty arises from an inner necessity which becomes the direction of one's inmost nature.<sup>31</sup> (Here Kierkegaard is trying to find a formula for living which is grounded alone in the nature innate to the autonomous self. In this respect he is in the tradition of such men as Kant, Schleiermacher, and Nietzsche). Moral conventions are relative but the existential imperative is not,<sup>32</sup> and it is the primitive source of all morality. The overall task of the ethical man is the creation of equilibrium within his total experience. His movement is from himself, through the world back to himself,<sup>33</sup> i.e. a double movement in which he will return to himself enriched in experience and in authenticity. In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard tries to show, through the simple tensions of the Abraham/Isaac story, the existential fallacy of all ethical readings of human existence. Kierkegaard here sees the ethical, not as the last leap of victory

but the prelude to a heart-breaking personal crisis (precipitated by ethics itself) and so, the end of ethics is defeat. The ethical man consequently "gathers himself together" and in the struggle with himself and his environment, the struggle itself is the victory. However, the ethical finally breaks down under the strain of the ambiguities of existence; e.g. moral clashes within the context of conflicting interests and also the fact that the ethical man in seeking himself or the virtue which is himself becomes increasingly aware that his self, his idaal self is always beyond him. The gulf between aspiration and actual achievement grows wider and wider, and guilt gets deeper and deeper. Ethics is as such the Universal, and so is valid for all at every moment.<sup>34</sup> The dilemma is that the man's ethical task is to express himself in the Universal, "to strip himself of his individuality in order to become the universal." If he asserts his individuality he sins, for he is guilty of deviating from the universal; if he does not assert his individuality, he also sins, for he is not manifesting what he is. Guilt is his lot whichever way he moves. If he is a religious man, he feels he is a "sinner" and knows that he is always in the wrong before God.<sup>35</sup> He cannot remove the tension of guilt and if God does not help him he is in worse trouble - guilt and despair worsen. He may feel the opposite of his present plight is virtue<sup>36</sup>, but Kierkegaard says it is not virtue but faith.

The ethical represents the universal demand, i.e. what every man ought to do. In the ethical stage, a man acts, he is concerned, he is interested and he lives seriously. "Despair" affects the whole person, it is itself a choice and is the beginning of the decision

which marks the break with the aesthetic and the leap to the ethical sphere.

(C) The Religious Stage

For Kierkegaard, to affirm one's relationship to God, the personal and transcendent Absolute, is to affirm oneself as spirit. By relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power (i.e. God) which constituted it and this formula is the definition of faith.<sup>37</sup> Considered as infinite, man is not indeed God, but he is a movement towards God, the movement of the Spirit. The man who appropriates and affirms his relationship to God in faith becomes what he really is - the individual before God. In order to emphasize the difference between the second and the third stages, Kierkegaard uses as a symbol Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command. The tragic hero, (e.g. Socrates) sacrifices himself for the universal moral law but Abraham does nothing for the Universal, and thus he stands "in the presence of the Paradox"; he is neither a tragic hero nor an aesthetic hero."<sup>38</sup> Kierkegaard does not mean that religion involves the negation of morality but that the man of faith is directly related to a personal God whose demands are absolute and cannot be measured simply by the standards of the human reason. Kierkegaard's dialectic is one of discontinuity, in the sense that the transition from one stage to another is made by choice, by self-commitment and not through a process of conceptual mediation, and he therefore plays down the role of reason and

emphasizes that of will, when he refers to religious faith. Faith is a leap, an adventure, a risk, a self-commitment to an objective uncertainty, i.e. God, the transcendent Absolute, the Absolute thou, and not an object whose existence can be proved. Man's response to God is a venture, an act of faith in a Being who lies beyond the reach of speculative philosophy. God reveals Himself to the human consciousness in the sense that man can become aware of his Sin and alienation and his need of God. This act of faith has to be constantly repeated. God has revealed Himself in Christ, the God-man, but Christ is the Paradox, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Faith is always a venture, a leap. In one sense, Kierkegaard's account of the standpoint of faith is a vigorous protest against the way in which speculative philosophy, represented principally by Hegelianism, blurs the distinction between God and man, and rationalizes the Christian dogmas, turning them into philosophically demonstrated conclusions. In the Hegelian system, the qualitative distinction between God and Man is "pantheistically" abolished.<sup>39</sup> Kierkegaard believes that, in this life, there can be no higher standpoint than that of faith. The transformation of faith into speculative knowledge is an illusion. The fact that man is held eternally accountable for belief or disbelief shows that belief is not a matter of accepting the conclusions of a demonstrative argument but rather, a matter of will. Kierkegaard deliberately stresses the nature of faith as a leap and his famous interpretation of truth as subjectivity is very significant; "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth,

the highest truth attainable for an existing individual."<sup>40</sup>

Kierkegaard does not deny that there is such a thing as objective, impersonal truth, but mathematical truths, for instance do not concern the "existing individual" as such. They are irrelevant to a man's life of total self-commitment, although he accepts them, he does not stake his whole being on them. That on which a man stakes his whole being is something which he can doubt but which is so important to him that if he accepts it, he does so with a passionate self-commitment, and is in a sense his truth. The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite.<sup>41</sup> Truth thus described is what Kierkegaard means by faith. The definition of truth as subjectivity and the definition of faith are the same.

Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty.<sup>42</sup>

Kierkegaard asserts that the eternal truth is not in itself a paradox, but becomes paradoxical in relation to us. There is, and remains "objective uncertainty", e.g. in Nature, or the Gospels. The idea of the God-man is itself paradoxical for the finite reason. Faith grasps the objectively uncertain and affirms it, maintaining itself, as it were, over a fathomless sea. Religious truth exists only in the "passionate" appropriation of the objectively uncertain. Faith is a self-commitment to the absolute and transcendent Thou, the Personal God, rather than to propositions. Kierkegaard does not

say that there are no rational motives for making the act of faith, but he takes delight in minimizing the rational motives for religious belief, and in stressing the subjectivity of truth and the nature of faith as a leap.

With Judge William's discourse in Stages on Life's Way, we reach the border between the ethical and the religious stages. The Judge discovers there the difficulties of fulfilling the ethical, and realizes the inadequacy of merely human endeavour. He realized also that the goal of human existence lies outside the borders of the visible world. With this insight (since hitherto the centre of gravity for all his efforts was in the temporal world) the centre of gravity in man's spiritual development moves from man to God. The ethical stage, however, does rest upon a religious premise and is impossible without an apprehension of God. Thus Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was a religious act, although Abraham otherwise acted on strictly ethical principles in his daily life and Socrates' ethical position approached the "border of the religious".<sup>43</sup> The Judge tries to find his way into repentance, which expresses a religious outlook, but the religious is still only secondary, since he still believes in the possibility of accomplishing, by himself, a temporal-Eternal synthesis. As long as a man believes in his own ability to do the good and refuses to admit how strongly he is attached to the temporal, he is still in the ethical stage. On the last level of the ethical stage, man doubts his ability to do the good. Through Christianity a man comes to know for the first time how deeply he is grounded in evil, and not until he has this realization is it possible

for a "radical cure" to begin. The religious stage also has many levels, and man comes to the religious position through his unsuccessful attempts to accomplish on his own the ethical demands upon him.

With the Edifying Discourses, we arrive at the central part of Kierkegaard's authorship, in which he characterized the levels in the religious development. The religious stage is in two primary divisions - Religion A, and Religion B. In the former, the individual has realized his own bondage to the temporal and his own insufficiency and now wills to relate himself to all things only through God. Furthermore, in Religion A, the individual will consequently become conscious of his own nothingness in relation to God, but he has not entirely relinquished the action of his own goodness. He still relates himself to Christ only as a prototype, not as Saviour, the relationship characteristic of Religion B. In Religion A the individual expresses his understanding of existence by trying to relate himself absolutely to the Eternal and relatively to the temporal.<sup>44</sup> He begins by making room for God's claims. The main point of the discourses is that eternal life (or faith) involves renouncing all forms of self-reliance and earthly security, i.e. the individual learns in everything to bend his will to God's demands and endure patiently his destiny. The righteous man strives in prayer with God and conquers in that God conquers. One has to risk oneself out upon "the seventy thousand fathoms of water".<sup>45</sup> This daring act is the beginning of the journey on the religious way.

The good must be willed for its own sake, and a person must

be willing to do everything for the sake of the good and be willing to suffer everything for the sake of the good. In this challenge one sees the preparation for Christianity's demands. The goal of human life lies beyond the temporal and a man in relating himself absolutely to the Eternal (which is now greatly stressed) and relatively to the temporal (which a man sooner or later will lose) will inevitably suffer in this world; thus suffering (through free decision) becomes the characteristic mark of the religious life, but its counterpart is joy, which nothing and nobody can take away. For the truly religious man, suffering and joy belong together in the same way that enjoyment and pleasure belong together for the aesthetic man and action and victory for the ethical man. Kierkegaard talks of the "joy in the fact that man in his relation to God always suffers as one who is guilty."<sup>46</sup>

In Repetition, we see Job recognizing his unrighteousness before God, and this theme is more strongly stressed in the last portion of Either/OR, i.e. "Ultimatum"; "The Edification in the thought that in relation to God we are always in the wrong". However, Kierkegaard talks later on, (in the third part of Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits) not of wrong but of guilt, in the relationship to God. In the theoretical survey of the transition from Religion A to B,<sup>47</sup> Kierkegaard says that the leap from A to B is effected when the individual has fully realized his own insufficiency and sets all his hopes on Christ, who now becomes for the individual both the prototype and Saviour. Before going into detail about Religion A and B, we should note that just as the whole edifying literature reveals how the Eternal, the dominant force of the synthesis, (of the temporal and the Eternal) gets increasing power

over man, The Sickness Unto Death describes the disrelationship between the two components of the synthesis. While the rest of the edifying literature deals with man's progress on the way to faith, The Sickness Unto Death describes man's attempts to break away from faith. The condition of the man without faith is one of despair and offense and only faith can conquer and remedy the situation.

Christianity is not a system or a dogma far removed from life, but the Life and the Way itself, (as Training in Christianity stresses), and so there are many levels in the growth of inwardness. Kierkegaard calls Religion A, "immanent", "immediate", and is the religiousness which has always characterized man, and he has the conviction that it has never brought a new man into existence. However, when the individual crosses the guilt-threshold, his only way is through faith to Religion B. Here we get the moment of being born again (the new Adam or the new man as the New Testament calls it). Kierkegaard having seen faith simply as an act of will, (simply as the ultimate volitional act) now probes more deeply into his category of faith in order to analyse its effects on the man who exercises it. Abraham's story along with Isaac, is Kierkegaard's choice of the greatest symbolic expression of faith. In the story, Kierkegaard sees an illustration of a teleological suspension of ethics, through faith. By his act, Abraham goes beyond the ethical stage and he possesses a purpose outside of it in favour of which he suspends ethics.<sup>48</sup> He did it for God's sake and also for his own sake; for God's sake because God demands this proof of his faith; for his own sake because he wanted to furnish this proof. Abraham was tested but he believed.

This is the paradox which keeps him on the summit and which he cannot explain to anyone else; for this paradox consists in setting himself as the Individual in an absolute relationship to the Absolute.<sup>49</sup>

Abraham was justified not by what happened to him, (Isaac's reprieve), but what happened in himself (i.e. what he did). He repossesses his son, but he has expressed himself as an individual over against the Universal. By breaking the law he has fulfilled the law, and he has become himself, an Individual; this cannot be explained rationally; it is a paradox for ever inaccessible to thought.<sup>50</sup> The law was made for man and it expresses God's will, yet paradoxically man must transcend it in order to be saved. Kierkegaard sees in Abraham, an instance of an absolute duty to God which transcends the ethical universal; a duty beyond all duties. Abraham discovered such a duty when he came up against the paradox of ethics, i.e. of the absolute that lies beyond it. God is He who demands absolute love<sup>51</sup> and this love (ethics would say) demanded that Abraham hate Isaac, but the bitterness experienced by Abraham and the greatness of his faith lay in the love he had for Isaac. Hence the distress and dread in the paradox of faith, and this constitutes the "infinite passion" of the existing individual, especially, as such a faith, must be continually exercised.<sup>52</sup> To become an Individual calls for an infinite struggle or endeavour because the object is set in infinity. Kierkegaard furthermore sees in Abraham's story, faith as absolute trust, a trust on the basis of which a man will offer all. In his complete trust, Abraham loved God, thus reflecting an inner

relationship with the unknown. Faith is the creative acceptance of the worst, all the time holding to a good purpose as the end of its trial. Abraham gave up Isaac and himself, in the certain hope that both would be restored to him. He had no "reasonable" proof that this would come about, so he was always in suspense; the suspense that creates the tension of faith. Faith holds to its final goal even in suspense. Thus faith is belief and trust to an absolute degree but it has no validity apart from the object which evokes and sustains it, i.e. the paradoxical God-man. Nothing is so offensive to reason as the concept of the God-man who is Incognito,<sup>53</sup> an Offence and a Paradox before which reason must halt. He is the unity of God with a particular man. He lived two thousand years ago, but asks to be regarded as concretely present just as though the centuries no longer intervened. From the possibility of the offence, a man turns away either to offence or to faith.<sup>54</sup> Christ furthermore, died to save man, and His death is the atonement and satisfaction<sup>55</sup> and this is the infinite guarantee with which the man who is striving starts out - the assurance that infinite satisfaction has been made. We must accept forgiveness on the authority of the God-man, and we are commanded to accept and believe it.<sup>56</sup> This is the Paradox, the mystery of the God-man, whom the individual is commanded to believe as the sine qua non of "being born again". Thus the Individual has reached existence, chosen the Paradox and thereby he has chosen himself. He has made the leap of faith, the intensely personal gesture of belief which has brought him over the brink of death to a new level of life, and he is now forgiven (this process Kierkegaard

calls Repetition, i.e. the restoration of the self, the recovery of possibility and harmony). The movement involved in becoming is the transition to a state that once existed; a movement in virtue of the absurd. The self moves forward by becoming what it once was.<sup>57</sup> Man is unlike God due to his sinfulness, i.e. the loss of real being by his own error, and he needs new being, i.e. existence. As an example of "repetition", Abraham received back his son and himself as elements in the movement of faith, and he repossesses (though in a new way) everything: Isaac, the past, himself and the present, as well as all things else in existence. Abraham (and Job) received back what he had lost together with a "born-again" personality. The individual must copy Christ<sup>58</sup> and be the Knight of Faith and he is committed to trust Christ absolutely. It is faith (passionate and sustained) that saves, not faith plus virtue (even in the midst of a man's sins) for "purity of heart" is to will one thing.<sup>59</sup>

The Individual was born beneath the Paradox and by the Paradox he must remain; for the Paradox is the source of the thinker's passion.<sup>60</sup> Thus the Incarnation (the Paradox of Paradoxes) is used by Kierkegaard to account for how a person brings himself to the place where he succeeds in going beyond Religion A, to the Paradoxical Religion B. By interpreting the Incarnation as the "absolute Paradox", Kierkegaard tries to establish the uniqueness of Christianity, the necessity of a "leap" of faith and the lack of any advantage in being rationally clever.

Brief Summary of the Three Stages.

The normal life-movement for an existing individual is from the aesthetic, through the ethical to the religious. The existing thinker has aesthetic passion enough to give his life content, ethical enthusiasm enough to regulate it, and the religious is the fulfillment. The transition from one stage to the other is a crisis, or a breach of continuity, but the leap by which the religious (or faith) emerges, requires a divine assistance, and is a true creative act of God.

The aesthetic man identifies human happiness with enjoyment but the ethicist identifies it with the realization of an obligatory task, in such an immanent way that it is the realization of his true and given self. The aesthete lives statically, but the ethicist lives dynamically. The religious life begins with a discovery that there is something wrong with the personality and it needs a period of preparation and preliminary transformation before the ethical task can be begun. Here, Kierkegaard distinguishes between Religion A (Religion of Immanence) and Religion E (Religion of Transcendence). The former is characterized by a passive relation to the divine and is accompanied by suffering and a sense of guilt. The latter consists of a transformation of the sense of guilt into the sense of sin, which cuts man off from God. However, with Christianity, a new immediacy or passion is introduced, i.e. the passion of faith. "Conversion" takes place, and through God manifesting Himself in time, outside the individual, a new point of contact between God and man is established.

(II) Objectivity and Subjectivity(A) Contra Hegel

Soren Kierkegaard's theory of faith must be understood as a reaction against Hegel, for whom faith is primarily an undeveloped form of knowledge. For example, Hegel said,

What I believe, that I also know; it is content in my consciousness; faith is a knowledge, but by knowledge one usually understands a mediated cognition.<sup>61</sup>

And

The whole of rational thought is already present in faith, but not in the form of science; it is there only as representation. Faith, therefore, is an immediate stage of thought, the content of which must be made explicit by reflection and ultimately be developed into a science.<sup>62</sup>

For Hegel, faith is an imperfect form of knowledge; it receives its object from without. In order to become truth, the content of faith must first be produced by reason from within itself by means of idealistic philosophy, and the dualism of the act of faith is terminated in the unity of the philosophic "notion".

In 1843, Kierkegaard tried to determine the stages of consciousness leading to faith.<sup>63</sup> In a first moment consciousness is totally immediate, that is, indeterminate. Since there is nothing whatever of relation here, there is likewise no problem of truth; every impression as an immediate datum is "true", but must at the very next moment give way to a new datum, and thus it becomes untrue. The immediate, therefore, is not yet full consciousness, but only a moment in the process of consciousness. According to

Hegel, full consciousness is reached when subject and object are united as two terms of one relationship, which he calls "reflection". But for Kierkegaard, Hegel's reflection only creates the possibility for a relationship which, in order to become real, requires a third element, a passionate interest of the subject in its object. As long as the subject has only a speculative interest in its object, the two terms remain externally related and are not wholly united. The relationship, and consequently also consciousness, is not fully actualized in reflection. Reflection is "dichotomic", while full consciousness is "trichotomic". This distinction is important, as for example in the case of an exact conception of faith and doubt, both of which presuppose a personal involvement of the subject.<sup>64</sup> Reflection is not yet a real relationship between subject and object, and consequently is incapable of doubt and faith. Doubt is situated on a higher level than objective thought and from Kierkegaard's theory of consciousness, it follows that no objective knowledge can ever eliminate the need for faith. In the act of faith we are infinitely interested, because it concerns our eternal salvation, but objective knowledge never appeals to our subjectivity. True (as opposed to immediate) faith is possible only beyond both the stage of reflection and objectivity. In the sphere of faith, arguments for the truth or the probability of faith are useless, for they belong to a lower level of consciousness. The characteristic of faith is commitment by the subject.<sup>64</sup> Kierkegaard regards the true essence of religious consciousness as post-reflective, because religion begins where ordinary reflection ends.

This means that faith "goes further", (contra Hegel) than philosophy and not vice versa. Faith, like thought is a dialectic of subject and object, but in faith the tension acquires infinite potentialities both because the subject is infinitely interested and because the object is not a pure datum of reason itself and thus is not immediately assimilable by the mind. Faith involves an acceptance of something not "given" by reason and never deducible from a previous content of consciousness. Subject and object are fundamentally opposed in faith and the acceptance of its "data" is achieved in a dialectical process which goes deeper by far than pure reflection. A faith which presents itself as objectively true is no faith at all, and Kierkegaard stresses that so-called "scientific proofs" of faith are based on the initial error that faith can be proved. Faith rests ultimately on free decision, and thus it depends in the last analysis exclusively on subjectivity. No possible objectivity can ever relieve man of the responsibility to choose for himself. Kierkegaard maintains that all arguments and proofs and historical evidence of the truth of Christianity must be discarded because Faith or the inner proof is the only proof. One's conviction (which is an inner determination in the direction of spirit) is always stronger than reasons - conviction is what supports the reasons, not the other way around. Conviction represents passion, the passionate or the innermost depth, and it is personal and rather decisive in import. Conviction, means personality and it leads the way; - reasons are relegated to a lower plane and this is the direct opposite of all modern objectivity.<sup>65</sup>

A man's development may start off with some reasons, (but they

represent the lower plane) then he makes a choice, and under the weight of responsibility before God a conviction will be born in him by God's help. Henceforth one cannot defend one's conviction or prove it by reasons - one can only defend one's conviction ethically or personally, through the sacrifices which one is willing to make for it and by the dauntlessness with which one maintains it.<sup>66</sup>

Kierkegaard stresses the point that it is not the reasons that motivate belief in the Son of God, but rather, belief in the Son of God constitutes the evidence -

It is the very motion of the Infinite, and it cannot be otherwise - Reasons do not motivate conviction; conviction motivates the reasons.....All that went before was merely preparatory study, something preliminary, something that will disappear as soon as conviction makes its appearance and transforms everything, or turns the relationship around. Repose, absolute repose in a conviction, in faith, simply mean that faith itself is the evidence, (the witness) and conviction the motivation.<sup>67</sup>

With regard to the question of a person's (or an individual's) free decision, (upon which faith ultimately rests) together with man's responsibility to choose for himself, Kierkegaard remarks that:

Hence we do not here raise the question of the truth of Christianity in the sense that when this has been determined the subject is assumed ready and willing to accept it. No, the question is as to the mode of the subject's acceptance; and it must be regarded as an illusion to assume that the transition from something objective to the subjective acceptance is a direct transition following upon the objective deliberation as a matter of course. On the contrary, the subjective acceptance is precisely the decisive factor; and an objective acceptance of Christianity is paganism or thoughtlessness.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, Kierkegaard states that:

If Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake for the observer to be objective. In every case where the object of knowledge is the very inwardness of the subjectivity of the individual, it is necessary for the knower to be in a corresponding position.<sup>69</sup>

As far as Kierkegaard is concerned, every objective approach to Christianity is illegitimate, and with regard to faith, no speculation is possible, except whether one accepts it or not - and this for Kierkegaard is the crucial question. If one tries to concentrate on the Bible, with a view to giving the truth of faith a historical foundation, Kierkegaard would maintain that historical studies and textual criticism remain in essence approximative, because in matters of faith our eternal salvation is at stake. If one's faith was based on an objectively correct text, the least variant would acquire capital importance, and the smallest doubt about the authenticity of an inspired text would fill one with despair. Kierkegaard underlines the view that:

Faith does not result simply from a scientific inquiry - it does not come directly at all - on the contrary, in this objectivity one tends to lose that infinite personal interestedness in passion which is the condition of faith, the ubique et nusquam (everywhere and nowhere) in which faith can come into being.<sup>70</sup>

Scientific Biblical study has nothing to do with faith, because even if one lived to see:

the last definitive study, (on which the greatest scientists had collaborated) so that not the least vestige of a problem remained concerning the Bible - what then? Would anyone who had no faith before, have come even a step closer to it? Not one! And he who had already been a believer, would he have gained anything? Nothing! On the contrary it would be extremely dangerous for him, because he might then be inclined to confuse faith with science, (knowledge) if he should not hold himself in fear and trembling.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, Kierkegaard says:

I assume now the opposite, that the opponents have succeeded in proving what they desire about the scriptures, with a certainty transcending the most ardent wish of the most passionate hostility - what then? Have the opponents thereby abolished Christianity? By no means, not in the least. Has the opponent made good a right to be relieved of responsibility of not being a believer? Not in the least.<sup>71</sup>

The point here is that, with regard to faith, objective certitude about the Bible can neither add nor detract anything. All the authority of the Bible derives from inspiration, but inspiration presupposes faith and cannot be deduced from the Bible even by the most powerful argument. Faith is not to be founded on the Bible; the Bible is to be founded on faith. Even when some Protestant thinkers took refuge in the notion of the Church, in trying to avoid the difficulties of the historical method inherent in an attempt to ground religion in the Bible, (e.g. Grundtvig) and furthermore tried to eliminate all historical arguments which were approximate, Kierkegaard's reaction was rather predictable. At this point one should note that these Protestant thinkers tried to found faith on a datum belonging not to the past but to the present, i.e. the Church - to demand further proofs here would be like asking a living man to prove his own existence. Thus, the objectivity of the undeniable fact of the existing Church was sufficient once and for all to safeguard one's faith. Kierkegaard maintains that this argument merely postpones the difficulty, for the Church has authority only if it can prove that it is apostolic, i.e. the same as it was eighteen hundred years ago.

(B) Historical Research

This is the same as the historical proof which Kierkegaard had already rejected for the Bible. Consequently, this renewed effort to ground faith objectively turns out to be in vain. The only way out is to accept faith as a primitive fact, irreducible to any objective datum. Kierkegaard gives G.E. Lessing credit for pointing this out, by his repeated attacks against every form of objectively-founded Christianity. Lessing asks whether the historical facts of Christian religion, even supported by an overwhelming scientific certainty, could provide a sufficient foundation on which to build one's eternal salvation. On this point, Lessing's answer is negative, but Kierkegaard (as opposed to the skeptic Lessing) states that if anyone is convinced that there is some reliability in the historical facts, he should act as Socrates did with respect to the soul's immortality. Socrates did not first go about collecting materials to support his point and then live by faith in these proofs; he was absorbed so completely in the question itself that he did not hesitate to stake his life on it. Risking one's whole self is the only possible proof both for immortality and for the truth of the Christian religion. All others are insufficient.<sup>72</sup> In more precise terms, Kierkegaard says:

Carefully used, that may be adapted to the problem of becoming a Christian. First of all, there is, quite rightly the doubt (Lessing's) whether one can base eternal happiness upon something historical. And consequently here is something historical, the story of Jesus Christ. But now, is the historical fact quite certain? To this one must answer: even though it were the most certain of all historical facts

it would be of no help, there cannot be any direct transition from a historical fact to the foundation upon it of an eternal happiness. That is something qualitatively new. Directly I cannot be helped, and so I choose - then I live full of the idea, risking my life for it and my life is the proof that I believe - that is called risking, and without risk faith is an impossibility. To be related to spirit means to undergo a test; to believe, to wish to believe, is to change one's life into a trial; daily test is the trial of faith. Where becoming a Christian is concerned, there is, as compared with Socrates, a dialectical difference, namely, where immortality is concerned man is only related to himself and to the idea, no further. But when a man chooses all at once to believe in Christ, i.e., chooses to stake his life upon him, he is allowed to have immediate (direct) recourse to Christ in prayer. Thus the historical is the cause, yet the object of faith.<sup>73</sup>

Thus Kierkegaard rejects any objective foundation of faith and replaces it by a "pathological proof", (in the etymological sense of pathos) and he states that:

There is only one proof for the truth of Christianity, and that is precisely the pathological proof: when the anguish of sin and the pangs of his conscience force a man to cross the narrow dividing line which separates the despair bordering on madness, and Christianity. There lies Christianity.<sup>74</sup>

Kierkegaard refers to what he called the Archimedean point for faith - pure interiority which, free from every objective datum, becomes capable of lifting this world by placing itself outside it. Faith properly so called can never be alarmed by rational objections. The believer knows that nothing in this world can separate him from Christ. By a leap, faith takes man beyond all rational thought into a new world.

### (3) Subjectivity and Dialectic

What is the nature of this non-objective faith? As a relation to God, faith has a spiritual character. This means, first

of all that the relation lies entirely within subjectivity which for Kierkegaard constitutes the essence of the spirit. The closer our relationship with God, the more we grow within, so that the whole religious life can be viewed as a process of interiorization. Secondly, our relationship with God is necessarily dialectical. The spirit cannot grasp its own essence (subjectivity) without continually objectifying itself; but the resulting objectivity is not proper to the essence of spirit, therefore spirit must always leave it again to turn back to itself. Objectivity is, as it were, a necessary pole for the ascent of the spirit and spirit uses objectivity as the rungs of the ladder to which one clings and from which one loses one's grasp to pull oneself up. At this point one should note Kierkegaard's formula that:

Man is a synthesis of the soulish and bodily. But a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third factor. This third factor is spirit.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore:

Man is spirit; but what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to itself.<sup>76</sup>

Dialectically, man is material yet spiritual, he is determined yet free, and the will is a certain modification of self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness is:

the decisive criterion of the self. The more consciousness the more self; the more consciousness, the more will, and the more will the more self. A man who has no will at all is no self; the more will he has, the more consciousness of self he has also. The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself.<sup>77</sup>

Kierkegaard relates spirit first to the self as self-consciousness, and then to the will as that point at which self-consciousness is most concentrated and most normally itself. What is this self of mine? Kierkegaard asks, In the most abstract and yet the most concrete sense, it is freedom. And what is freedom? Freedom is the will.<sup>78</sup> Thus the self is a highly individualized pattern which has emerged from a synthesis of "the Soulish and the bodily" and the spirit or will, and the decisive factor in this emergence is the will. The self is a synthesis brought about by an act of will, and upon this, Kierkegaard makes two comments corresponding to the two levels of his authorship, i.e. (i) the "deception" along with the aesthetic with its general appeal and (ii) the religious with its more specific appeal.<sup>79</sup> Firstly Kierkegaard comments that because the self is a synthesis, it is paradoxically the most contingent (fragile) and yet the most concrete thing we know. Contingent, because it is not a solid thing like a billiard ball, "rounded and permanent", for its reality is a pattern, a web of relationships which we ourselves have brought about. Concrete because it is the only thing we know with absolute certainty.

The most concrete content consciousness can have is consciousness of itself, not the pure consciousness but the self-consciousness which is so concrete that no author has ever been able to describe such a thing, although such a thing is what every man is. This self-consciousness is not contemplation.<sup>80</sup>

The self is not a completed human entity: it is a "becoming".

The self, every instant it exists, is in process of becoming,

for the self does not actually exist, it is only that which is to

become.<sup>81</sup> We are always "becoming" and are never "finished products",

and the will (as the synthesizing agent) is the main factor in this process. It is the will that makes the difference between man and man, not knowledge, opinion, nor feeling. The will is the power to be. The more will, the more freedom, for freedom is intensity of will; the more will the more consciousness; the more consciousness, the more awareness of self; the more awareness of self, the fuller appreciation and use of all its powers, physically, mentally, and spiritually and consequently the more of a self it becomes. However, this self-progress has a limit which represents the limit of the aesthetic. We always fail through ignorance of what we are and of what we must really do about ourselves, and so Kierkegaard offers the second and "serious and edifying comment": Whatever power originally constituted the self planned it to be a perfect synthesis, i.e. with all its parts in "equilibrium" and with a perfect balance of the "soulish and the bodily" both exerted to their maximum possibility.<sup>82</sup> Until this comes about, the self is in "disequilibrium"; a mutilated and crippled version of the original concept. To "become" is the act by which the self is reconstituted in such fashion that effective "becoming" can now take place by means of a relation to God.<sup>83</sup> This relation is achieved when man's powers are organized and integrated together in one resolve towards God in an act of "conscious" seriousness and deep intent to believe, to choose God as He presents Himself in His "unbelievable" paradoxicalness in the God-man, together with the life-view and the teaching associated with Him. This calls for an absolute act of will, and the strain of willing-to-believe tenses the will to breaking-point, heightens the self-consciousness, and

draws the self into a new synthesis, making it a fully effective basis for all future activity and development. Thus there is here a qualitative change, a decisive choice, an expression of the will, and Kierkegaard calls the re-constituting act of will the "qualifying leap". The reality of the self lies in the balanced unity of its dimensions; a reality which has emerged from the synthesis of the "soulish", "bodily", and "tensed will". Human reality, or (as Kierkegaard calls it) existence is that which stands out or emerges (directly from the Latin verb ex-stare, meaning to stand out from) in the sense of being intimately connected with the environment from which the individual as an individual stands out or emerges. Human reality has to be seen within the context of peculiar singularity and utter aloneness, and absolute difference from anything else on earth or in heaven.

Subjectivity is one of the characteristics of faith, and Kierkegaard concludes that the degree of involvement of the subject increases to the extent that objective certainty diminishes. Subjective interest in the act of faith reaches its peak when every shred of objective certainty disappears. Faith withdraws itself from all objectivity to become purely interior. This process of interiorization does not stop with the act of faith. Faith too rests on sheer faith, i.e. on the belief that I believe. This is why one for example could raise the question, "can one have faith in such a Faith?" Does one here not need to say, as in the New Testament, "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief?" Faith cannot possess the certitude of knowledge. The believer can say only:

I believe that I have faith. This faith has its roots embedded in a world that transcends man. Thus it is not an acquired possession but a continuous striving in fear and trembling. In this sense, faith is only concern about faith, for this very concern, as extreme objective uncertainty, is the sign of complete interiority. Every certainty seduces the believer from his interior existence into objective knowledge".<sup>84</sup>

A further consequence of the subjectivity of our relation to God is that the truth of the act of faith is rather in the bearing of the act on its object than in the object itself. How we believe is more important than what we believe. To know God truly is not to know the true God, but to achieve a true relation to God;<sup>85</sup> not unlike the New Testament text, "I know in whom I have believed." A Christian who does not pray truly to God is in reality praying to an idol, whereas the heathen who kneels before a false God in spirit and in truth, is adoring the true God.<sup>86</sup> While objective thought is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker is an existing individual essentially interested in his own thinking, existing as he is in thought.<sup>87</sup>

The truth of faith consists in this: that one commit oneself and risk one's life for a truth which one does not possess, but which is posited by the commitment itself. A second characteristic of faith is that the subjectivity of faith can be realized only in a dialectical process of ever-increasing interiority. The act of faith necessarily objectifies itself by positing its content as truth, but it can only maintain its distinctive character by returning to the subjective.

Thus faith constantly tends to become objective knowledge, but at the same time it keeps detaching itself from its acquired positions by an ever-renewed inward movement. Only such a dialectical faith is authentic for Kierkegaard. The essential characteristic of faith is personal commitment which so-called "immediate" faith lacks depending as it does upon external circumstances. Dialectical or reflective faith is determined by a subjective attitude which constantly abandons all objective footholds. Here, one needs courage enough to abandon oneself and to place one's life in God's hands.

However, the dialectical character of faith requires the existence of an object. It is the transcendent reality of the object of faith that makes the act purely subjective. Kierkegaard's subjectivity is the subjectivity of the will which essentially depends on an object. But, as soon as the object is "assimilated" by the believer, the object of faith ceases to be transcendent and the act is reduced to an act of cognition. Thus all the emphasis is placed on the subjective involvement. A religious truth depends entirely on the free decision by which we make it our own. Faith cannot affirm its object except by a personal commitment, a choice, a decision.

The truth of faith is never a result; it is the truth of a Way. There is only one method for finding it: to follow the Way from beginning to end, just as our predecessors did,<sup>88</sup> The role of the will is predominant in the act of faith. Kierkegaard says for example:

Faith surely implies an act of the will, and moreover not in the same sense as when I say for instance, that all apprehension implies an act of the will; how can I otherwise explain the saying in the New Testament that whatsoever is not of faith is sin.<sup>89</sup>

All the believer has to do is to be concerned solely with himself and "to become subjective is the most difficult of all tasks".<sup>90</sup> Man always wants to make history, to play a leading role on the stage of life. But to believe is to choose oneself as the absolute - that is, to choose oneself in the sight of God.<sup>91</sup> Faith begins with an agonizing leap, not with an intellectual-dialectical transition. The leap of faith is the risk of love, and the certainty of faith is the trust in the beloved. Thus, Christ said, "I will make myself known to him who loves me."

What Soren Kierkegaard means by "Subjectivity":

We should note that, for Kierkegaard, subjectivity means the activity of a subject, not mere self-centredness or introspection. Subjectivity implies the state of being a self-conscious subject; a consciousness in which the self is known as the active subject which performs the knowing. Kierkegaard defends himself against the criticism of subjectivism by stressing that faith is not a matter of those unaccountable and fantastic forms of subjectivity which everyone possesses in abundance, but it is the subjectivity of the will.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Kierkegaard emphasized that subjectivity is not identical with immanence, and he maintains that the highest subjectivity and the most profound interiority become possible only by reference to a wholly transcendent object. This object of faith is not attainable

through objective knowledge due to its transcendence. Thought remains in the realm of the immanent, but faith leads to the transcendent. The subjectivity of the act of faith is such that the act itself proceeds entirely within the realm of subjectivity, but that does not mean that no objective reality corresponds to it. But how is the act of faith connected with its object? Kierkegaard stresses that the subjectivity of the act of faith ultimately results from the transcendence of its object. Subjectivity is the only way to approach a divine object, and only by the abandonment of all objectivity does our relationship with God become truly objective. If God is the Wholly Other, the only correct attitude toward Him consists in renouncing all objective content to the point where the relation has no content other than itself; thus complete subjectivity is the only objectively correct approach to God. In its term and origin, the act of faith is connected with a transcendent object, and the pure subjectivity of the act is due entirely to the transcendence of its content. The characteristic of faith is not that it has no objectivity, but that the act itself (the appropriation) is disengaged from the objective content. The transcendence of the content of faith implies that it can be communicated only by a revelation. The truth of Christianity entirely transcends the subject.<sup>93</sup> Thus the act of faith does not occur in a vacuum, but is attached at either end to a pole of objectivity. But how, can the act of faith maintain sufficient freedom in respect to its object so that Kierkegaard can call it pure subjectivity? Kierkegaard finds the answer, again, in the very nature of the object of faith. The

object of faith is not given immediately such that it determines assent but it can fail to determine assent only if it (the object of faith) contains itself something paradoxical for the understanding. Kierkegaard says:

When subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, the truth becomes objectively a paradox; and the fact that the truth is objectively a paradox shows in its turn that subjectivity is the truth.<sup>94</sup>

#### (4) Subjectivity and Paradox

Paradox means contrary to appearance, plausibility or probability, and so one could raise the question as regards how one could believe in what is paradoxical or absurd. Kierkegaard would answer by stressing the question, how could one believe anything except the paradoxical? Furthermore, if the object is not paradoxical, we have left the realm of faith for that of knowledge.

The problem here amounts to this: why is the object of religion such that it can not be known, but must be believed? or in other words, why must it be paradoxical? Does the solution lie in the fact that between a divine revelation and human knowledge there is an unbridgeable gap? Kierkegaard feels that a proof for the truth of faith or even for the existence of God ought a priori to be rejected. Only for faith is God existing; is He really present.<sup>95</sup> This existence never can be the object of rational demonstration; it rests on conviction, a notion that goes beyond human proof. In every respect God is the unknown, the limit of our thinking. Nothing divine falls within the scope of human thought,<sup>96</sup> and it

is precisely this paradoxical character of its object which makes the act of faith purely subjective. Subjectivity reaches its height when the object, in which it has infinite interest, becomes pure uncertainty; at that moment the subject is moved to genuine passion. Thus Kierkegaard calls Paradox "the passion of thought". The objective repulsion of the Paradox throws the subject back upon itself and forces it to approach its object from within itself with no other foothold than its own interestedness, i.e. passion. Kierkegaard then defines faith as "objective uncertainty, due to the repulsion of the absurd, held fast by the passion of inwardness."<sup>97</sup>

Kierkegaard uses the category of Paradox in two senses - (a) to describe the logical evaluation of faith and its psychological character. This is a "broad" use of the category, and (b) the "narrow" use is the description Kierkegaard gives of the specifically Christian faith and the object of such faith. Thus he says very often that Christianity is the Absolute Paradox and also that Christian faith is faith in the Absolute Paradox, the God-man. This Paradox is the special stumbling block of Christianity.<sup>98</sup> For Kierkegaard, the object of faith must by definition be something uncertain, i.e. objectively uncertain. The contrasting certitude (inner certainty) and uncertainty (objective lack of certainty) of faith he called the Paradox of faith.<sup>99</sup> Kierkegaard remarks in the Journals, that "Paradox is really the pathos of intellectual life - and Paradoxes are only grandiose thoughts in embryo."<sup>100</sup> Kierkegaard interprets faith as paradox in Fear and Trembling,<sup>101</sup> but in the Philosophical Fragments he deals with the Absolute Paradox.<sup>102</sup>

Kierkegaard's use of the category of paradox in the broader sense as the category for all religious assertions derives from Hamann, and the discussion of the Paradox in the Philosophical Fragments directly refers to him.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Kierkegaard mentions Tertullian,<sup>104</sup> who also probably influenced his idea of the Paradox.

Kierkegaard says that the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion,<sup>105</sup> and the fact that we are wrestling with a paradox is a sure mark of the value of our thinking. But since this thinking contains passion it will end in thought destroying itself. This is the paradoxical passion of reason, that it should seek collision with something when this collision will prove its undoing. This something, the reason collides with, is the "Unknown", which we may call God. It is folly to attempt to prove God, for this would assume, from the outset, the existence of God, and argument moves from, not toward existence. So Socrates would never have dreamed of proving God's existence.<sup>106</sup> Thus reason is forever coming into collision with the Unknown; this is the limit of reason's reach; it cannot go further than this, but yet it comes to it again and again. The Unknown is the limit, the different, the absolutely different.<sup>107</sup> Reason can have knowledge of an absolute unlikeness (which is sin) only as it obtains it from God. The problem of the Fragments is restated with greater force in the Postscript where Kierkegaard maintains that Christianity is a relation of subjectivity towards a paradox. "When subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, the truth becomes objectively a paradox."<sup>108</sup> Thus the paradox is what corresponds to subjectivity which, to balance the equation, is truth, and (since faith is paradoxical) this also corresponds to faith. Since the absurd cannot

be handled objectively, and the truth is objectively a paradox, subjectivity is the truth. The Paradox, is the object of religious faith because it is such that it evokes a decision.<sup>109</sup> In Training in Christianity, Kierkegaard discusses "the offence of the Paradox". He stresses the offence and risk of believing in One whose humiliation during His life on earth was a terrible reality. Furthermore, he insists that the concept of offence is a characteristic note of Christianity in the same way as the concept of faith, and the two concepts are closely related.<sup>110</sup> It is the possibility of offence that makes it necessary to choose either faith or offence. The offence has to do with the God-man, and it can take the form of lowliness or loftiness. There is, for example, the offence at the contradiction that an individual lowly man acts in a way that proclaims he is God, e.g. the "sayings" of Christ, along with his teaching, and particularly His miracles. Faith and the offensive paradox are two sides of the same coin, since, if one is to believe, one cannot avoid the possibility of offence. Believing means having faith, and faith implies the possibility of the offence, and we go through this possibility to the blessed acceptance of this humble man as God.<sup>111</sup>

The challenge which the Paradox must have for us is that it confronts us as a challenging "Thou" to our "I",<sup>112</sup> and it is this challenge that demands faith.<sup>113</sup> Since faith alone can assert that He is the God-man, the Paradox therefore exists only for faith.<sup>114</sup>

Kierkegaard stresses that the historicity of the God-man makes it a paradox of an absolute kind. Kierkegaard regards the paradox as being above every system and says that the concept of the absurd is to understand that one cannot understand. Furthermore, Kierkegaard

distinguishes faith from reason, and stresses that reason can only say of the paradox that it cannot resolve it, since for reason, it is not intelligible. This does not mean that the paradox is nonsense. Faith believes in the Paradox, it believes the Paradox. With regard to things that are above reason; faith is not supported by reason, because faith does not at all understand what it yet believes with all its power and to quote Hugo de St. Victor, "reason can well allow itself be determined to honour faith; for it gains profundity by the negative category of the paradox" - here is something by which reason is determined, to hold faith in honour, and this faith it cannot understand fully.<sup>115</sup> Thus faith is "above" and "beyond" reason, and so the Postscript rightly moves from faith to faith, to the existential and not to speculation. A Christian knowledge can only be based on the principle that faith cannot be understood; thus the Bible affirms, "I know that my redeemer liveth", not in the sense of knowledge "about" a person, i.e. God. Rather this knowledge is of a more direct and personal sort. Only to faith does the paradox reveal its depth of meaning. For the reason and the non-believer, the content of faith is the absurd, but for him who believes it is not the absurd.<sup>116</sup> However for Kierkegaard, the absurdity of the Paradox lies in the fact that it was said of a particular human being that he was God. The Incarnation therefore is paradoxical; it cannot be understood and is not supposed to be. Its meaning is the religious and moral use.<sup>117</sup> For Kierkegaard, the main point is the existential meaning of the content of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Thus the only entrance to Christianity is by way of a practical experience of profound pathos, in which the individual yields himself absolutely in

a devotion analogous to that of a woman's love.

The insistence on the fact that the God-man is Absolute, enables Kierkegaard to safeguard the interpretation of our attitude to Him and thus we are confronted by something we cannot understand and must therefore accept. Furthermore, what Christ was, could not directly be perceived (you do not perceive a contradiction).

The divine character of Christ's person could not have been obvious, hence, the Paradox exists only for faith and Christ was God incognito.<sup>118</sup> So we see that the communication of Christianity is always indirect, since Christ Himself, due to his transcendence, cannot be communicated directly. Kierkegaard was the first person to state and define the problem and the nature of indirect communication which (e.g. the negative category of the Paradox) is a series of negative hints in language designed to drive us away from language and through irony and humour, we are forced from language to a confrontation and a personal appropriation. Communication, to be effective in existence, must be indirect; so, the art of communication at last becomes the art of taking away, of luring something away from someone.<sup>119</sup>

It is interesting to note that Kierkegaard brings out the ethico - religious use of the Paradox by means of the idea of contemporaneity, because one feature of Christian faith is that it is a present relation to a past historical figure. In the Philosophical Fragments, Kierkegaard says that the object of faith is the contemporary,<sup>120</sup>

and then he discusses the disciple at second-hand being not less fortunately situated than the disciple at first-hand. Thus, as far as "Christian experience" or Christian faith is concerned, Christ's contemporaries were no better situated than we are. This faith-relation is contemporaneousness. The man who knows Christ, has faith in Him, is contemporaneous with Him, no matter to what generation he belongs. In regard to the Eternal, the only tense possible is the present. Hence we talk of the "nearness of Christ" or the "living Christ". However, the assertion that Christ is God incarnate carries with it certain ethical and religious directives which are essentially prescriptions as to what I should do now; in this sense I am presently related or contemporaneous with the past.

It is worthwhile to refer to Kierkegaard's point about the immediate knowledge after the break-up of immediacy ("faith is immediacy after reflection").<sup>121</sup> The absurdity of the paradox is not absurd to the believer;<sup>121a</sup> it is an absurd that must be true and must make sense when we have believed. Having taken the leap through the possibility of offence, we see the meaningfulness and truth of the absurd, so that (since we do believe) it is no longer for us the absurd. This meaning and truth is what the Paradox involves, i.e. its ethico-religious use. The lesson here is that the absurd is always a contradiction for the reason which is thought outside of faith, while being truth "for me" in faith. However, we should note that for Kierkegaard reason is valid, but limited in scope, e.g. it cannot deal with existential problems. Thus the Postscript for example, confronts us with the passion of existence in which action as opposed to reason, is the

decisive element; only subjectivity is adequate to meet problems of existence. In this sense, there are no reasons for accepting the Paradox, otherwise the Paradox would be a rational answer to our problem of eternal happiness. Hence one believes against one's reason. Man's quest for eternal happiness is to be met only by Christianity. To be a Christian is to accept the Paradox of Jesus as Christ.

#### Brief Summary of Paradox

The Paradox violates the laws of reason and reason can never accept the Paradox as rational but, reason has its own limits. Since reason is limited to the logical sphere only, it cannot make judgments about the reality or existence of the Paradox but only about its rationality. Faith therefore is above reason in the sense that the Paradox may exist even when found to be irrational. The Paradox is for reason the symbol of its limits. In confronting the Paradox, reason knows it to be irrational but not therefore impossible. Reason finds the Paradox to be against reason since the Paradox is self-contradictory. Reason, must, when confronted with the Paradox, understand that it cannot understand. Reason cannot judge the reality or existence of that which denies reason, e.g. the laws of thought (or reason) are denied in the affirmation of the Absolute Paradox.

Since language is fitted to express what binds man to man, it must break down before the secret which isolates a man and leaves him face to face with his maker. The existence of the Paradox may be marked by terms of possibility, probability, improbability, etc.,

which are not within the sphere of reason.

Kierkegaard talks of religious suffering in the Postscript in more than one sense; one sense is the tension between man's experience of an absolute relation to God, and his inability to find any adequate external expression for this relation, (suffering here is not physical, but is a psychic tension in which the religious individual is pulled in two different directions by conflicting forces within himself). Kierkegaard says:

Here in lies the profound suffering of true religiosity -- to stand related to God in an absolutely decisive manner, and to be unable to find any decisive external expression for this.<sup>122</sup>

Kierkegaard is then able to say that when a man trusts God completely, he also learns that joy which comes through suffering and prepares him for eternal happiness. This is the hard and narrow way, but it is the only way and one must choose it and follow it if he would reach the goal. It is not the way which is narrow, but the narrowness which is the way.<sup>123</sup> Christianity is an existential contradiction;<sup>124</sup> the contradictions are essential for Christianity for they provide the tension, the heightening of passion and the dialectic which are the means by which and through which an individual becomes a Christian. To be in faith means that one expects the impossible while realizing the expectation to be mad. The problem for human knowledge is to see that there is something which it cannot understand, and also to determine what that something is.

T. Haecker, rightly says that there is a strong flavour of

paradox in all religious language and this is as it should be:

The genuine paradox is a form of honourable acknowledgement on the part of human understanding, of the majesty of the divine mysteries, and of the fact that His ways are not our ways. It is an expression of the otherwise indefinable relation between finite man and the infinite creator.<sup>125</sup>

The paradox must always retain its irrationality because it is the sole means by which men are brought into existence, and so God must always be "incognito", and the truth always objectively uncertain. Man's reason always arrives at the unknown and he can only conceive God in impossible terms, consequently all our talk of God is human talk.<sup>126</sup> This is due to man's incapacity to know God and the necessity for giving man something impossible to believe. The paradox is the only gesture of self-disclosure which God can make. The purpose of the paradox demands that it remains offensive forever, an offence which is the opposite of knowledge and the antithesis of a direct approach to God. Kierkegaard uses paradox to safeguard the uniqueness of the Christian's object of interest. Christ seems to be asking that men live by dying, win by losing, and get by giving.

#### Christ, the Absolute Paradox of Faith.

One sees in Kierkegaard's thought two types of religion: Socratic and Christian. For a person whose norm of truth is the subjective, faith is the ground for every deeper understanding. However, since the paradoxical element in Socratic truth (with truth being primarily a personal affair, originating within the existential interiority of the knower, and all truth as the objective correlate

of this interiorization is, paradoxical, since the objective always presents itself as a challenge to a subject which is pure interiority) is due solely to the subject, not to the object in itself as it is in Christian faith, Kierkegaard calls Socratic faith "Knowledge".

Thus Kierkegaard says:

The eternal essential truth is (for Socrates) by no means in itself a paradox; but it becomes paradoxical by virtue of its relationship to an existing individual. The Socratic ignorance gives expression to the objective uncertainty attaching to the truth, while his inwardness in existing is the truth.<sup>127</sup>

For Socrates, paradox is only objective ignorance, but a new element enters into the Christian perspective. At this point, one sees a distinction between simple paradox and what Kierkegaard calls "the absolute paradox", or "the absurd". If the relationship of the eternal truth to an existing subject was already paradoxical in a Socratic perspective, it becomes an absolute paradox in the Christian situation where Eternity and the existing subject are totally disproportionate.<sup>128</sup> The absolute diversity between God and man is due to sin by which man himself deliberately cut off his relation with God in an act of supreme independence.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, it follows that any contact between God and man is not only paradoxical but absolutely paradoxical or absurd. Kierkegaard says:

When Socrates believed that there was a God, he held fast to the objective uncertainty with the passion of his inwardness and it is precisely in this contradiction and in this risk that faith is rooted. Now it is otherwise. Instead of the objective uncertainty there is here a certainty, namely, that objectively it is absurd; and this absurdity held fast in the passion of inwardness, is faith.<sup>130</sup>

The absurdity of faith is that God, despite the total otherness of man (which results from sin) nevertheless enters into a relation with him. Revelation and redemption, by which God comes into contact with man, become contradictions in the situation of sin. With this absolute paradox, faith has reached the summit of interiority. For Socrates, also, subjectivity had been truth, but his very confidence of achieving truth by subjectivity had placed him in constant danger of falling back on objectivism. The Christian concept of sin avoids this danger, and in it, subjectivity becomes untruth. Guilty before God, man becomes untrue to the depths of his being; thus, the last refuge for the objective, which was located in subjectivity, itself, is closed off.<sup>131</sup>

The other side of the coin, as it were, as far as the absolute paradox is concerned, is that God made Himself like man, to reveal man's sinful state and subsequent redemption; the Eternal became incarnate in time. Kierkegaard states that:

Thus our paradox is rendered still more appalling, or the same paradox has the double aspect which proclaims it as the absolute paradox; negatively by revealing the absolute unlikeness of sin, positively by proposing to do away with the absolute unlikeness in absolute likeness.<sup>132</sup>

Man's relationship with God, (despite His otherness) now becomes transcendent and as another man, He takes his place in history beside me and becomes external to me. Here is the depth of the mystery of Christ, that God as a particular individual in time transforms man in his subjectivity. (At this point, Kierkegaard underlines one of the key problems of religious discourse.) Every effort to understand God in His Incarnation, Kierkegaard feels

is vain. Speculative understanding is powerless before this absolute paradox. To explain it is to destroy it; the only valid explanation is that it is inexplicable.<sup>133</sup> Kierkegaard says:

The eternal happiness of the individual is decided in time through the relationship to something historical, which is furthermore of such a character as to include in its composition that which by virtue of its essence cannot become historical and must therefore become such by virtue of an absurdity.<sup>134</sup>

The Paradox of the Incarnation consists in a personal identity of God and this particular man - Christ, who is the subsistent ambiguity of a man who is God. That is why He is necessarily paradoxical and could communicate Himself only as object of faith.<sup>135</sup> Kierkegaard states that: "The coming of Christ is and remains a paradox."<sup>136</sup>

Christ's divinity is impervious to sense and understanding and indeed Kierkegaard says that "the supreme Paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think."<sup>137</sup> The Paradox of the person of Christ, as Kierkegaard understands it, underlines the strictly personal character of the act of faith. Christianity is not a doctrine, but a person to whom I entrust myself without reserve, and the principles of Christianity can never be understood independently of the Person of Christ, and one needs to take account of the element from which Christ's words receive their basic meaning (i.e. the divinity of their speaker) in order to understand, Christ's words. To be understood, Christ's words have to be believed, i.e. to be connected with the living Paradox who proclaimed them and who Himself cannot be understood but only

believed in. Significantly, Kierkegaard says that "the God-man is the paradox, absolutely the paradox, hence it is quite clear that the understanding must come to a standstill before it."<sup>138</sup>

(5) Faith and History

One can fully believe only in a person in the present, in a contemporary. Christ, however, lived and died many hundred of years ago. Therefore, we must bridge the ages which separate us from Him, in order to establish a genuine relation of belief. Since (as the Philosophical Fragments stresses) the very conditions of our faith in Christ cannot be received at secondhand, Christ himself has to create within each of His disciples the conditions necessary for "understanding" Him. History can have no place in the act of faith, and so one finds that, to approach Christ, a trans-historical relationship is required. The Jew of the year A.D. 30 was not closer to Him than we, and we both face the same paradox. Only faith makes one a true contemporary of Christ. As long as there is one believer in the world, Christ remains contemporaneous, and only the contemporary presence of Christ makes true faith possible.

We should note that Philosophical Fragments prepared the way for an understanding of what is meant by contemporaneity, and it stresses the fact that it was just as difficult for Christ's contemporaries to believe in Him as it is for later generations. Christ's contemporaries, as well as later generations, could accept Christ as the Son of God only with the eyes of faith. The incarnation of Christ contains a contradiction for logical thought, and when Christ

came into the world he was "a sign of contradiction" and this will be for all time. Christianity is absurd from a philosophical point of view, and it is improbable from a historical point of view.

Kierkegaard stresses the fact that only in the imitation of Christ does contemporaneousness (this most important category in the dialectic of faith) receive its final existential determination. In faith, we and Christ's contemporaries become contemporaries. True Christianity has no history; it is always present. History, the objective standard par excellence, is totally out of place as far as evaluating religion is concerned, because it knows only results and judges by the past whereas one's relationship with God is realized in the present, in a decision determining the individual's stance in respect to God.<sup>139</sup>

The Postscript stresses that historical proofs are always approximative and therefore insufficient to found an absolute authority. Kierkegaard stresses that all historical communication has to do with "knowledge" but about Christ "nothing can be known; he can only be believed"<sup>140</sup>. Here one sees the force of the distinction between intellectual consideration (objective approximation) and existential commitment (subjective appropriation).

Thus this Person, (Christ) far off in history is contemporaneous with us and we with him. When he speaks to us and we decide for him, the limits of time and distance disappear. Kierkegaard rightly urges and underlines the Christian thought as regards our relation to Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. Only from a standpoint of faith can a genuinely historical interpretation of human life become possible. From history, faith has nothing to

learn and God is the Eternal; history is the field of limitation and temporal sequence.

(6) Philosophical Systems

Although Kierkegaard gave considerable weight to defending the thesis "Truth is Subjectivity", he also tried to refute the main positions which sought to eliminate the subjective character of truth, e.g. Speculation, Hegelianism and Objectivity. The central issue here for Kierkegaard is the fear that much "violence" will be done to the dialectic of inwardness, to the extent that all that is involved for one to be an individual and a Christian will be watered down, thus making it an easy matter rather than one of infinite passion and decisive choice. Kierkegaard sees spiritual complacency as a common factor within the three main positions which he tried to refute.

(A) The Place of Reason

One may wonder whether there is any room left for reason in Kierkegaard's theory of faith, especially a faith which is based entirely on paradox. It is relevant to note here that Kierkegaard's purpose was basically apologetic. He re-examined the stages of consciousness to bring to light the possibility of an authentic act of faith. Kierkegaard tried, to rediscover the commensurability of faith with reflective thought by means of a more profound meditation on the experience of modern man. This commensurability Kierkegaard finds, is based not on a rationalistic coincidence of faith with reason, but on the limitation of reason itself. Kierkegaard is convinced that idealism fails to explain the ultimate ground of the

existential synthesis of the finite and the infinite; (i.e. the infinite) and so he carries through his own reflection, down to the very ground for the experience of the infinite; absolute subjectivity. In contrast with idealism, the dialectic of subjectivity demonstrates that the more profound reflection leads man not to identity, but to opposition with the Divine, resulting in man's awareness of himself as guilty before God. Thus, Kierkegaard bases his procedure on reflection itself but does not justify faith by human thought; he rather tries to show that thought necessarily falls short of responding to the question about the ultimate ground of existence, by means of a deeper reflection on existence itself. Reflection on the essence of the self, the subjectivity, shows that only an act which goes beyond objective thought can reveal man's innermost nature: his relation to the source of his existence. Such an act is faith, and it originates from the depths of the self which lie beyond any objectivation. Thus faith is seen to be beyond reason and accessible only by a reflection that penetrates more deeply into human reality than objective thought ever does. This analysis of faith forces reason to acknowledge that faith proceeds from a more profound reflection on reality than reason.

Kierkegaard very significantly says:

People have always thought that reflection would destroy Christianity, and is its natural enemy. I hope I have shown, with God's aid, that religious reflection can retie the knot which a superficial reflection has unraveled for so many years. The authority of the Bible, and all that belongs to it, have been abolished, and it looks as if one were only waiting for the ultimate stage of reflection to clear up everything. But see how, on the contrary, reflection is going to render service by putting springs under Christianity again, and in such a way that it is able to hold out against reflection. Christianity of course remains completely unchanged; not a jot has been altered. But the struggle has become different; previously it was only between reflection and immediate

simple Christianity; now it is between reflection and simplicity armed by reflection. The real task is not to understand Christianity but to understand that one cannot understand it. That is the sacred cause of faith, and reflection is sanctified by being used for it.<sup>141</sup>

Reason plays its part in the preparation of faith, and also in the reflection upon faith. Since faith is paradoxical, reason is assigned the negative (as being Kierkegaard's reaction against the rationalistic theology of the 19th century) but indispensable task of pointing up the incomprehensibility of faith. Thus reason must know precisely what is and what is not outside its competence, and such knowledge is a prerequisite for defining with accuracy the sphere of faith. Rather than dispel the mysteriousness of faith, reason must set itself the task of making clear the outline (of faith) distinctly and vividly. Kierkegaard says that:

Nonsense therefore he (the believer) cannot believe against the understanding. For precisely the understanding will discern that it is nonsense and will prevent him from believing it; but he makes so much use of the understanding that he becomes aware of the incomprehensible, and then he holds to this, believing against the understanding.<sup>142</sup>

Kierkegaard implies in the above quotation, that reason is required (as part of its task) to be able to distinguish between the contradictory and the incomprehensible.

One sees a kind of ambivalence in Kierkegaard's writings. He is not unwilling to defend the expediency of speculation, (although he was concerned that speculation has drifted away from its true purpose) but at the same time he is of the opinion that the speculator has no fitting place in the assembly of existentially committed lives. However, when Kierkegaard clashed with rational

speculation, he was merely trying to show that the rightful limits of human reason had been exceeded, but this has to be seen within the context of Kierkegaard's vocation -- that of making it difficult to become an individual and a Christian.

Kierkegaard was confident that a right use of reason implies an acknowledgement of reason's limitations, thus opening the way for faith, and he states:

What then is the Unknown? It is the limit to which the Reason repeatedly comes.....it is the different, the absolutely different....the Reason cannot even conceive an absolute unlikeness....<sup>143</sup>

(B) Hegelianism

We do not intend here to go into details with regard to Hegel's thought per se, rather, our main concern is what Hegel's thought meant to Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard denounced Hegel mainly because he felt that the latter failed to relate his rational system to the living responsibility of a finite individual. He says for example, "one thing always escaped Hegel - what it was to live. He could only give a representation of life."<sup>144</sup> However, although Kierkegaard takes a dim view of any attempt to set up an existential system, he deliberately sets up a logical system when dealing with the Christian position as a problem of thought and in the Philosophical Fragments he reduces Christianity to a problem of thought.

Whereas Hegel strove to mediate everything in the category of both/and, Kierkegaard turned to the strenuous and exacting category of either/or and he says that:

If Christianity is the opposite of speculation is it also the opposite of mediation, the latter being a category of speculative thought; what then can it mean to mediate them? But what is the opposite of mediation? It is the absolute paradox.<sup>145</sup>

Professor Swenson<sup>146</sup> points out, that both Kierkegaard's philosophical style and terminology show the influence of Hegel. Furthermore, Dr. Lowrie has uncovered a laudatory passage, part of which states,

I cherish a respect for Hegel which is sometimes an enigma to me; I have learnt much from him, and I know that on returning again to him I could still learn much more.<sup>147</sup>

### (C) Objectivity

Kierkegaard does not deny that the data of Christianity are objective in the sense of existing "out there", but his concern lies on the way professing Christians substituted intellectual assent to these data for the decisive ethical state of being Christians.

Kierkegaard sees the objective as the converse of the subjective, which is character change, spiritual development, personal responsibility, and inner concern and he says,

Here we are again reminded of my thesis that subjectivity is truth; for an objective truth is like the eternity of abstract thought, extraneous to the movement of existence.<sup>148</sup>

By way of contrast here, one notes that Descartes and Hegel had found the reality of man in the imperative nature of reason. Kant had found it in the imperative demand of the moral self. Kierkegaard found it at a more fundamental level - the imperative nature of existence, i.e. the existential imperative to be. Man is a being who makes himself

and he is burdened with ontological responsibility, for his absolute interest is, how to become himself. Kierkegaard for example, says:

But suppose that Christianity is subjectivity, an inner-transformation, an actualization of inwardness, and that only two kinds of people can know anything about it; those with an infinite passionate interest in an eternal happiness base this their happiness upon their believing relationship to Christianity, and those who with an opposite passion, but in passion reject it - the happy and unhappy lovers..... Now if Christianity is essentially something objective, it is necessary for the observer to be objective. But if Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake for the observer to be objective.<sup>149</sup>

#### (7) Faith and Historical Truths

The dialectic of inwardness is supported by the fact that the eternal God assumed the form of a finite person and thus became the God-man at a particular point in time;"The historical assertion is that the Deity, the Eternal, came into being at a definite moment in time as an individual man".<sup>150</sup> Spiritual passion and ethical decision are experienced when the existing individual, by an act of faith, casts himself upon the contradiction involved in basing "an eternal happiness upon the relation to something historical".<sup>151</sup>

Christianity is an existence-communication which makes the thing of existing paradoxical and difficult to a degree it never was before and never can be outside of Christianity, but it is no short cut to becoming incomparably clever.<sup>152</sup>

Furthermore, Kierkegaard states that:

It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists, if it exists at all; objectively, Christianity has absolutely no existence. If its truth happens to be in only a single subject, it exists in him alone; and there is greater Christian joy in heaven over this one individual than over universal history and the System, which as objective entities are incommensurable for that which is Christian.<sup>153</sup>

(A) Lessing's Problem

In Kierkegaard's view, there is:

Only one proof of the truth of Christianity, and that, quite rightly is from the emotions. When the dread of sin and a heavy conscience torture a man into crossing the narrow line between despair bordering upon madness - and Christendom. There lies Christianity.<sup>154</sup>

Thus the state of subjective truth has no reality until the existing individual perceives a relation between the spiritual happiness of the self and the degree to which the self is passionately committed. When the gaining or losing of eternal happiness is at stake, a maximum of inner passion should be expressed, and Kierkegaard is convinced that only Christianity could confront one with such an option. The God-man doctrine is worthless as part of the Christian religion no matter how objectively and historically it may be viewed, until it is passionately perceived as the absolute paradox. Whatever the amount of objective and historical evidence one gathers by combination or addition, (one after the other) the final outcome is never more than probability or an approximation.

If all the angels in heaven were to put their heads together, they could still bring to pass only an approximation, because an approximation is the only certainty attainable for historical knowledge but also an inadequate basis for an eternal happiness.<sup>155</sup>

Here one notes that Kierkegaard quotes approvingly Lessing's dictum; contingent historical truths of reason can never constitute a basis for the eternal truths of reason. This Kierkegaard argues, immediately invalidates the Bible as a basis for certainty since it is composed of historical documents and doubt always arises over the genuineness of one of these documents or about the exegesis of some part of them.

Lessing concluded the above dictum by saying "that God raised a dead man does not prove that God has a Son co-essential with Himself". Kierkegaard is convinced that past and present experience confirm that we shall find no certainty within this field either now or in the future but suffer only recurring crises of faith. Kierkegaard says, "there can be no direct transition from the historical to the eternal".<sup>156</sup> "Nothing historical can become infinitely certain for me except the fact of my own existence."<sup>157</sup>

(B) Relation between Historical Truths and Faith

One finds in the Philosophical Fragments, that Kierkegaard concludes that the relationship between philosophical Idealism and Christianity is one of thorough-going contrast, and he poses the problem which Lessing first raised concerning the relationship between revelation and history and the question on the title page<sup>158</sup> delves into Lessing's question. The historical fact of the Christ-revelation is a unique one and as a historical event it belongs to the category of reason (like ordinary historical events) and that of the Eternal and so it is humanly conceivable only as self-contradictory or paradoxical and it can be apprehended only by faith or belief in the ordinary sense and faith in the unique sense; the faith which is just as paradoxical as its object. The Christ revelation is an absolute historical fact and is the object of the Christian faith. Christ as the Truth incarnate in the Moment (or contemporary situation) meets the "existing individual in his actual situation and challenges him to be either for Him (through faith) or against Him (by way of offence). Thus Lessing's problem is solved by Kierkegaard by his

stressing the truths of revelation which are accessible only when the condition of faith is given by God Himself. Christianity is the truth of revelation, given in a particular place, at a particular time, and in a particular form, i.e. the Incarnation.

Kierkegaard in disparaging historical evidences, stresses that because they are so external they stand in the way of an individual coming to himself inwardly. It requires great faith to resist the temptation of objective complacency. It is disastrous to confuse knowledge with faith, and so Kierkegaard says:

In this objectivity one tends to lose that infinite personal interestedness in passion which is the condition of faith, the ubique et nusquam (the everywhere and nowhere) in which faith can come into being ..... In this voluminous knowledge, this certainty that lurks at the door of faith and threatens to devour it, he is in so dangerous a situation that he will need to put forth much effort in great fear and trembling, lest he fall a victim to the temptation to confuse knowledge with faith. While faith has hitherto had a profitable schoolmaster in the existing uncertainty, it would have in the new certainty its most dangerous enemy; for if passion is eliminated, faith no longer exists, and certainty and passion do not go together.<sup>159</sup>

In the main then, Kierkegaard tries to show that "objective knowledge" is ambiguous and we cannot deduce from things meanings about what lies behind (and beyond) them. The nature of existence is such that it cannot be mastered by reason because living experience is split, as it were, by paradoxes which mark that abyss where all our knowledge drops away into ambiguities. We cannot pass beyond the frontier of the known and even in this sphere of the known our knowledge is never more than "approximate" and an absolute degree of certainty is impossible. Kierkegaard does not deny the laws of thought and logic but uses them as Kant did "to clip the wings of

reason", and he limits it by its own laws, i.e. limiting it to its nature, scope and procedure. Kierkegaard insists that with regard to reason, the frontier is the 'unknown' and the reason cannot say with positive certainty what that 'unknown' is. Kierkegaard says, as regards the question, "what then can I know?" Nothing, i.e. I can know nothing with any degree or real certainty; nothing about God, or the world as it really is. The only thing known with certainty is myself, my own existing self, and even that is not, and never will be fully "transparent" to me. The only reality to which an existing individual may have a relation which is more than cognitive (i.e. more than approximate) is his own reality, the fact that he exists; and this reality constitutes his absolute interest.<sup>160</sup>

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60. Philosophical Fragments, translated by D.F. Swenson, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1936, p. 29
61. G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophie der Religion (Jubilaumausg.) pp. 129-30.
62. Phenomenology of Mind, by G.W.F. Hegel, translated by J.B. Baillie, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1931) pp. 549-58.

63. An unpublished paper, by Johannes Climacus, (1843) or Dæ Omnibus Dubitandum Est, Volume IV, section B, Part I (1843) - A polemic against Descartes and his rationalist successors.
64. The Diary of Soren Kierkegaard, translated from the Danish by G.M. Andersen, edited by P.P. Rohde, published by the Polyglot Press, New York, 1960, pp. 159-65, the third section with the title: "Faith and Doubt".
65. Ibid, pp. 163-64.
66. Ibid, pp. 164-65 - In support of this we see that in the first Epistle General of St. John, (chapter 5, verse 9), the fact that the only proof of the truth of Christianity is the inner proof, is heavily underlined by the words "If we receive the witness of men (that is all the historical evidence and considerations) the witness of God is greater", (that is the inner testimony is greater) - and in verse 10, "He that believeth in the Son of God hath the witness in himself".
67. Ibid, p. 165.
68. Concluding Unscientific Postscript, translated by D.F. Swenson and W. Lowrie - Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1941, pp. 115-116.
69. Ibid, p. 51
70. Ibid, p. 30.

71. Ibid, p. 31.
72. The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard - a selection edited and translated by A. Dru - Oxford University Press, London, 1959, p. 367, entry 1044.
73. Ibid, pp. 367-368, entry 1044.
74. Ibid, p. 314, entry 926.
75. The Concept of Dread, op.cit., p. 39:-  
The Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., pp. 17 ff where the formula is used as a trichotomy of the self-consciousness and not of the wholeness of man.
76. The Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., p. 17.
77. Ibid, pp. 43-44.
78. Either/OR, op.cit., Vol. II, p. 180 - The Concept of Dread, op.cit., pp. 127 ff - (The Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., p. 65)
79. The Point of View, op.cit., p. 123 and pp. 125-126.
80. The Concept of Dread, op.cit., p. 127 - "The pure self-consciousness" refers to the abstract philosopher's consciousness, presumed to be the self-consciousness common to Jones and Smith - This Kierkegaard says is a purely fictitious construct and it is the author's personal conception which he applies to all as a general principle.

81. Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., p. 44.
82. Ibid, pp. 18-19, and pp. 43-44.
83. Ibid, p. 19 (Either/OR, op.cit., Vol. II, pp. 141 ff)
84. Journals, op.cit., Entry 763.
85. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 178.
86. Ibid, p. 180.
87. Ibid, p. 67.
88. Training in Christianity, op. cit., p. 202.
89. Journals, op.cit., entry 10.
90. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 116.
91. Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., p. 77.
92. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 117.
93. Journals, op.cit., entry 809.
94. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 183.
95. Journals, op.cit., entry 605.
96. Philosophical Fragments, op.cit., pp. 55-56.
97. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 540.

98. Ibid, pp. 194-195.
99. Ibid, p. 183; pp. 180-186; p. 187.
100. Journals, op.cit., entry 206.
101. Fear and Trembling, op.cit., p. 52, p. 56, p. 57.
102. Philosophical Fragments, op.cit., p. 29ff.
103. Ibid, p. 34.
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106. Ibid, op. 34.
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108. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 183.
109. Ibid, p. 201 ff and p. 188.
110. Training in Christianity, op.cit., p. 83.
111. Ibid, p. 100, p. 106, p. 107, pp. 122, 140 and 141.
112. Journals, op.cit., entry 975.
113. Training in Christianity, op.cit., p. 143.
114. Ibid, p. 122, Philosophical Fragments, op.cit., p. 80.

115. Journals, op.cit., entries 282, and 1033.
116. Ibid, entry 1084.
117. The Postscript, op.cit., pp. 191, 192, 197, 288 and 290.
118. Training in Christianity, op.cit., pp. 122, 142-143, 127 and 131.
119. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 72.
120. The Philosophical Fragments, op.cit., pp. 84-85.
121. Journals, op.cit., p. 240.
- 121a. Ibid, entry 1084.
122. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 440.
123. The Gospel of Suffering, translated by D.F. Swanson and and L.M. Swanson, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1948, p. 97.
124. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 339.
125. Kierkegaard, the Cripple, by T. Hæcker; Harvill Press, London, 1948, p. 22.
126. Philosophical Fragments, op.cit., p. 36 ff., and Christian Discourses, translated by W. Lowrie, (Oxford University Press, London 1939), p. 299.

127. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 183.
128. Ibid, p. 188.
129. Philosophical Fragments - op.cit., p. 58.
130. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 188.
131. Ibid, p. 188.
132. Philosophical Fragments, op.cit., p. 59.
133. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 197.
134. Ibid, p. 345.
135. Training in Christianity, op.cit., p. 29.
136. Journals, op.cit., entry 417.
137. Philosophical Fragments, op.cit., p. 46.
138. Training in Christianity, op.cit., p. 85.
139. Journals, op.cit., entry 783.
140. Training in Christianity, op.cit., p. 28.
141. Journals, op.cit., entry 183.
142. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 504.
143. Philosophical Fragments, op.cit., p. 55.
144. Journals, op.cit., entry 610.

145. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 338.
146. Something about Kierkegaard, op.cit., p. 11.
147. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 338.
148. Ibid, p. 278.
149. Ibid, p. 51.
150. Ibid, p. 512.
151. Ibid, p. 513.
152. Ibid, p. 501.
153. Ibid, p. 116.
154. Journals, op.cit., entry 926.
155. The Postscript, op.cit., p. 31.
156. Ibid, p. 89.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Just as the main concern of this thesis has to do with the concept of faith in Kierkegaard's thought, (with special emphasis on the third stage of life, i.e. the religious, which is the telos of the aesthetic and ethical stages, and is also closely interlinked with them) one finds that faith is the leading existential determinant for Kierkegaard. Professor Lowrie quite rightly says:

Do not tell me that what I have said about Soren Kierkegaard's notion of faith is inadequate. I know that very well. How could it be adequate, seeing that Soren Kierkegaard without essential exaggeration, affirms that the immense literature he produced had only one theme, namely, faith; and that from beginning to end his whole effort had been to define what faith is.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard defines faith thus; "that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God."<sup>2</sup>

Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, so that the only truth which should passionately concern a Christian is, whether he himself is truth as a living subject. Subjective truth is "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation - process of the most passionate inwardness."<sup>3</sup>

Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty.

If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this, I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep,<sup>4</sup> over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.

The movement toward subjectivity, toward inwardness, is the movement toward eternal happiness. Thus Christianity may be described as the maximum expression of the principle that subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth. The first condition for becoming a Christian is to be absolutely turned inward.<sup>5</sup> Each existing individual needs the promise of eternal life, but this promise can come only from God, the author of life; thus the important position held by faith; for faith reassures the existing individual that his life is held by God in Christ and that consequently he is heir to eternal happiness. An infinite personal passionate interest is related to one's eternal happiness.

Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and, in its maximum, an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness.<sup>6</sup>

Kierkegaard stresses that only two kinds of people can know anything about Christianity - those who have an infinite passionate interest in their eternal happiness and those with an infinite passionate condemnation of Christianity. The speculative philosopher misses the whole meaning of Christianity because he turns it into something objective and dispassionate. We see that Kierkegaard makes much of passion, and it is the source of his critique of rationalism. Kierkegaard says that faith is the highest passion; passion is active, but the action is inward, continuous, and has to be "repeated",

i.e. it is not once-for-all.

The thesis that "Subjectivity is Truth" underlines the fact (for Kierkegaard) that truth has no other organ with which to express itself than the individual. Truth lies not in a what but in a how and the how of truth is precisely truth.<sup>7</sup> Truth can only be apprehended through an inward passion by someone who lies struggling for his life upon seventy thousand fathoms of water. Without risk there is no faith; the more risk, the more faith. The more objective certainty the less inwardness (for inwardness is subjectivity); the less objective certainty, the more deeply is inwardness made possible.<sup>8</sup>

Kierkegaard stresses that Christianity is a personal faith, a unique relationship of the individual to God. It is the way that leads to life and few are they who find it. Christianity is faith in the absolute paradox of a God who came in human form and became man's servant. There is no intellectual proof of Christianity; (and here Kierkegaard stresses that he has nothing against pure thought provided its limitations are realized; although he underlines the inadequacy of reason) it has to be accepted in a subjective way, and it is reached and maintained by subjective faith held with passion. The historical fact on which the salvation of man is based contains in itself an irreconcilable contradiction. The incarnation brings us face to face with something which is impossible for the intellect to accept and only by a leap of faith can one accept this "absurdity" or contradiction. The only way to reach God is by way of subjectivity. God is the object of faith, as He is revealed in the God-man, i.e. Christ, the Absolute Paradox, a stumbling-block to the human mind.

Thus faith belongs to the practical side of human existence, which is the will. The venture of faith in God as revealed in Christ is faith in an absurdity which must be held with the passion of subjective conviction.

Christianity is a religion of the individual, a religion of inwardness, of subjectivity, of faith, of paradox and its truth is subjectively known by individual Christians. It cannot be objectively proved or understood and it is intended to be lived. Indeed Kierkegaard says that we have to choose between "existing subjectively with passion or objectively in distraction".<sup>9</sup> Christ personifies the truth by being the Way, the Truth and the Life, thus (Christianity, being an individual matter) faith is an individual relationship and the truth of Christianity is primarily subjective (personal) truth. So we see that Christianity is a relation of subject to subject, i.e. in the sense of an encounter of man with God. Truth is subjectivity, and subjectivity in the existence-sphere of Christianity is a relationship of faith; a man's grateful acceptance of God's love and passionate commitment to love, trust and obey God. Kierkegaard stresses that speculation deals with objective truth but this (although it has its uses) is irrelevant to faith. The subjective problem is the relation of the individual to the objectively given truth and so we get here an objectivity to which intense subjectivity is the only possible means of approach. For faith to be faith (and one may add, in order to have faith in such a faith) the object must be uncertain. In the religious life, reasons will never amount to proof because this life is one of choice and passionate commitment. Reason (along with contradiction, intelligibility, etc.) belongs to the level of concepts, but, as far as the

religious life is concerned, personal experience is necessary in order to go beyond this level. (At this point one should underline the difference between contradiction and paradox, because paradox involves another sphere or level beyond the scope of reason, - the latter being on the same level with contradiction.) In religion, every assertion to be properly understood must be regarded as having some reference to me, and in this sense, religion is a personal (or as Kierkegaard would say, an "Individual") matter. Faith is a choice and so it cannot be transformed into a demonstration.

Faith is the choice of a way of life or a policy of action, and (in the case of the Christian faith) it is a policy of action based on the assertion of a paradox. Faith is subjectivity, and subjectivity is the truth. If faith is the goal, prayer is the means of moving toward that goal. Only in prayer can we express that God has become everything for us, and, at the same time, infinitely transcends us.<sup>10</sup> Subjectivity is the truth and faith in Christ is the deepest form of subjectivity which fosters the fullest objectivity, for the act of faith begins in a divine revelation. Faith is a datum and does not diminish man's subjectivity. The authority of revelation is paradoxical and it enforces the subjectivity of religious experience.

Some of the lessons one can draw from Kierkegaard's works are:- (i) to be a Christian must cost a person something; it involves sacrifice, and the condition of discipleship is to take up one's cross and follow Christ; (ii) Christianity is the ultimate truth about human existence; a truth which man could not have

discovered for himself. The self-revelation of the infinite God cannot be subjected to finite human standards (e.g. as sanctioned by human reason;) (iii) knowledge and faith are polar opposites - the former is objectively certain, the latter highly uncertain, but by taking the "leap" and exercising it, one comes into contact with actuality - that of one's own being; (iv) only by an act of faith and trust can one know Jesus as Christ, the God-man.

How can one attempt to summarize or draw any conclusions which would do no violence to what Kierkegaard regarded as his task in life? Can any summary really exhaust the whole of what Kierkegaard saw to be his task? Kierkegaard not only tried to show men the occasion for the movement of faith, but also the way whereby a man would be able to understand both himself and his existence.

We see that Kierkegaard forces us to moments of self-examination, rather than abstract conclusions, results, or summaries, and the clarion call is to "be an Individual and a Christian".

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3. Postscript, op.cit., p. 182.
4. Idem.
5. Training in Christianity, op.cit., p. 220.
6. Postscript, op.cit., p. 33.
7. Ibid, p. 181.
8. Ibid, p. 188.
9. Ibid, p. 249.
10. Ibid, p. 369.