

JOSHUA FURNAL



CATHOLIC
THEOLOGY
after KIERKEGAARD

OXFORD

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
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First Edition published in 2016

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015940126

ISBN 978-0-19-875467-1

Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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To April, ti amo per sempre . . .

Acknowledgements

Gratefully, I have incurred a number of debts and gained a number of friends along the way; some will inevitably go unmentioned, but have nonetheless made this book possible. The germ of this book began as an experimental essay written for Marcus Pound, who first helped me to see the difference between an experiment and a research proposal. If it wasn't for his abiding assistance and encouragement, this book would have never got off the ground in the first place. I first came to Durham to work with Gerard Loughlin, who has been generous with his time and whose comments have been perceptive. A special thanks goes to Lewis Ayres for his informal guidance, generous hospitality, and unfailing support with sharpening my argument. I am also thankful for a serendipitous meeting in Trieste that led to important friendships with Rosa Goglia, Antonio Russo, Gianluca Trombini, and Elvio Fontana, who all helped me get better acquainted with the person and archives of Cornelio Fabro.

I would like to thank Cullen McKenney, Andrew Brower-Latz, Thomas Lynch, Matt Crawford, and Jonathan Benatti, who all took the time to help me revise earlier drafts. I'd like to thank especially Jeff Byrnes, who first prodded me to pursue graduate studies and continues to be for me a constant inspiration, a source of wisdom, and a friend. Also, I am grateful to Dan Watts, who graciously gave of his time, and whose conversations instilled confidence in my reading of Kierkegaard. I will always be grateful for the encouragement and indelible insight that David Burrell has offered me over the years. Also I am thankful for Susannah Heschel, who championed my work at a vulnerable moment—I stand on the shoulders of giants. Thanks also to Chris Insole and to George Pattison who were gracious PhD examiners and who both encouraged me to publish the book. Finally, I'd like to thank Tom Perridge and two anonymous reviewers at Oxford University Press for seeing this through the revision process. The quality of this book has been much improved through such assistance.

Non posso dimenticare la mia ispirazione spirituale e il sostegno della fede: Marco e Lucilla, Carmen, Alberto e Ricardo, Jose Maria Castillo, e Tony Curren. Devo ringraziare Dio, in questo sentiero di

speranza, per la vostra amicizia che ci fa sperimentare una comunicazione di vita profonda, e che ci fa crescere nella gioia dello Spirito Santo. 'Hasta Siempre'! Finally, I dedicate this labour of love to my beloved April, who accompanied me through this entire journey and who is ever-patient—she never ceases to remind me that with God, all things are possible.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations for Kierkegaard's works are used in parenthetical references throughout the main text:

- CA Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, Kierkegaard's Writings VIII, ed. Reidar Thomte and Albert Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- CUP Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard's Writings I, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- DCF Søren Kierkegaard, *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion, trans. Sylvia Walsh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
- EUD Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, Kierkegaard's Writings V, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- EO Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, Kierkegaard's Writings III, ed. Lillian Marvin Swenson, trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944).
- FSE Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, Kierkegaard's Writings XXI, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- FT Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, Kierkegaard's Writings VI, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, vol. 1, 1967; vol. 2, 1970; vols. 3–4, 1975; vols. 5–7, 1978).
- KRSRR *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, ed. Jon Stewart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005–14).
- NB *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* (KJN), 11 vols., ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007–).

- Pap(irer)* Søren Kierkegaard's *Papirer* (SKP), 2nd enlarged edition by Niels Thulstrup, with index, vols. 14–16 by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968–78).
- PC Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard's Writings XX, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- PF Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy/Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*, Kierkegaard's Writings VII, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- SKS Søren Kierkegaard's *Skrifter*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, and Alastair McKinnon (Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997–).
- SUD Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, Kierkegaard's Writings XIX, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- UDVS Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, Kierkegaard's Writings XV, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- WA Søren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, Kierkegaard's Writings XVIII, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- WL Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard's Writings XVI, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

In my research for this book I have referred to NB (*Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*). Where this translation is not available, I have cited the source by JP volume and entry, along with an accompanying reference to *Pap.* (*Søren Kierkegaard's Papirer*).

The following abbreviations for Aquinas' works are used in parenthetical references throughout the main text:

- SCG Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ed. Joseph Kenny (New York: Hanover House, 1955–7).
- ST I/II/III Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries*, ed. Thomas Gilby [and others] (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1966).

The following abbreviations for de Lubac's works are used in parenthetical references throughout the main text:

- AH Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

- C Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).
- DG Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, Ressourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Thought Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
- MS Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

The following abbreviation for Luther's works is used in parenthetical references throughout the main text:

- AE Jaroslav Pelikan, H. J. Grimm, and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–86).

The following abbreviations for von Balthasar's works are used in parenthetical references throughout the main text:

- DCA Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000).
- ET Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, Explorations in Theology, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).
- GL 1 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, The Glory of the Lord, vol. 1, ed. J. Fessio and J. K. Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).
- GL 4 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, The Glory of the Lord, vol. 4, trans. Brian McNeil, CRV, Andrew Louth, John Saward, Rowan Williams, and Oliver Davies (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989).

Abbreviations for other cited works used in parenthetical references throughout the main text are as follows:

- CASK Arne Grøn, *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard*, 1st edn. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008).
- CC Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- ESV *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, Text Edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).
- HG Encyclical *Humani Generis* of the Holy Father Pius XII, 12 August 1950 (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html.
- IO Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

- KAR George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious: From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image* (London: Macmillan, 1992).
- KEC Daphne Hampson, *Kierkegaard: Exposition & Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- KT Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963).
- KTL Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love*, Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- MK James D. Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- NJB *New Jerusalem Bible*, ed. the Very Revd Henry Wansbrough (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985).
- P Romano Guardini, *Pascal* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992).
- PR Romano Guardini, *Pensatori Religiosi*, 2nd edn. (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001).

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

1 John 3:1-2

As Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* ix), when Holy Writ declares that nothing is like God, it does not mean to deny all likeness to Him. For, 'the same things can be like and unlike to God: like, according as they imitate Him, as far as He, Who is not perfectly imitable, can be imitated; unlike according as they fall short of their cause', not merely in intensity and remission, as that which is less white falls short of that which is more white; but because they are not in agreement, specifically or generically.

St Tommaso d'Aquino (ST I q. 4 a. 4 ad 1)

Just as the ocean, when it lies still this way, deeply transparent, aspires to heaven, so the pure heart, when it is still, deeply transparent, aspires solely to the good; or just as the ocean becomes pure when it aspires only to heaven, so the heart becomes pure when it aspires only to the good . . . If the least thing comes between them, between the sky and the ocean, between the heart and the good, indeed, even if it was impatience in desiring the reflection, then the ocean is not pure, then it does not purely reflect the sky.

Søren Kierkegaard (UDVS 121)

Introduction

Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard

According to the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, Søren Kierkegaard 'was by far the most profound thinker of the last century. Kierkegaard was a saint.'¹ Moreover, upon receiving a letter announcing that one of his former students had converted to Catholicism, Wittgenstein wondered whether he had been partly responsible for the conversion by having this student read Søren Kierkegaard.² At first glance, this might seem like a strange reaction to such news. Upon further examination, however, Wittgenstein's odd response is fitting. In this book, I argue that although he is not always recognized as such, Søren Kierkegaard was an important ally for Catholic theologians in the early twentieth century leading up to the reform and renewal of the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, properly understanding this relationship and its origins offers valuable resources and insights into contemporary Catholic theology.

Of course, there are some negative preconceptions to overcome. Historically, some Catholic readers have been suspicious of Kierkegaard, viewing him as an irrational Protestant irreconcilably at odds with Catholic thought. Nevertheless, the favourable mention of Kierkegaard in St John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (n. 76) is an indication that Kierkegaard's writings are not so easily dismissed. Most philosophers balk at the claim that had Søren Kierkegaard

¹ Rush Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 102.

² Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Cape, 1990), 463–4.

lived longer, he would have become a Roman Catholic.³ Such wild speculation has become synonymous for what is conventionally understood as *the* Catholic interpretation of Kierkegaard's work.⁴ And yet during the twentieth century, Kierkegaard's critique of the established state church was decisive for some scholars in their conversion to Roman Catholicism.⁵ It is well established that although Kierkegaard had studied theology, his experience of Roman Catholicism was limited—not to mention his knowledge of St Thomas Aquinas.⁶ However, this did not deter Catholic readers from receiving Kierkegaard's writings as a resource for grasping the broader catholicity of their own tradition.

To be clear, this book does not seek to rehearse the threadbare debate of whether Kierkegaard *himself* was actually a Protestant or Catholic. Instead, I want to highlight the significance and the extent to which Kierkegaard's *writings* have been disseminated and appropriated by Catholic thinkers. Throughout the twentieth century, a small but representative body of work sporadically appears that attests to the importance of Kierkegaard's writings for Catholic theology.⁷ On the

³ Not long after Kierkegaard's death, Danish scholars began to speculate whether if he had lived longer, he would have become Roman Catholic. See Georg Brandes, *Søren Kierkegaard: Ein Literarisches Charakterbild* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1879), 239. 'Durch ihn ward das dänische Geistesleben zu jenem äußersten Punkte hingedrängt, von wo ein Sprung geschehen muß, ein Sprung in den schwarzen Abgrund des Katholizismus hinab, oder hinüber auf die Landspitze, von welcher die Freiheit winkt.' Later on, Høffding says that Kierkegaard had a 'Sympathie mit dem Katholizismus', Harald Høffding and Christoph Schrempf, *Søren Kierkegaard als Philosoph* (Stuttgart: Frommanns, 1896), 169. See the extensive treatment of Brandes and Høffding in Habib C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 228–82, 319–31.

⁴ For instance, the most cited account endorsing this perspective is Heinrich Roos, *Søren Kierkegaard and Catholicism*, ed. Richard M. Brackett (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1954).

⁵ Roos, *Søren Kierkegaard and Catholicism*, ix–xiii. For more on conversion, see Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard*, especially 130–1, 288, 371–92, 386–7, 396.

⁶ George L. Stengren, 'Thomism', in Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (eds), *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana 6 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1981), 111. However, in his *Journals* Kierkegaard does seem to be somewhat familiar with Johann Adam Möhler; see *Papirer* I A 37–8; II A 304; II C 29–31/SKS, *Papir* 59–60; DD: 178; KK: 5. Regarding Catholicism, see *Papirer* I A 38; II A 265/SKS, *Papir* 60; DD: 132, 157, 162, 166; NB 14:41.

⁷ For an overview of French theological scholarship, see François Bousquet, 'Kierkegaard dans la tradition théologique francophone', in *Kierkegaard Revisited*, Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 339–66. See

face of it, the small number would suggest that this topic in Catholic theology is quite marginal, and even more so when considered in relation to the wider concerns of Kierkegaard studies. However, this book argues that Kierkegaard's reception by Catholic thinkers was nurtured in a wider context of reform and renewal in Catholic theology leading up to the Second Vatican Council (1962–5).

But since there are stereotypes about Kierkegaard that resist a 'Catholic' reading of his writings, the central aim of this book is to provide an account of the wider Catholic reception of Kierkegaard, illuminating in particular the relevance of his writings for the *ressourcement* movement. By 'ressourcement', I have in mind the emphasis on returning to patristic and biblical texts as a resource for the reform and renewal of Roman Catholic theology, which was first contested after the modernist crisis,⁸ but then later endorsed in the decrees of the Second Vatican Council.⁹ During this time, this emphasis was pejoratively referred to as '*la nouvelle théologie*' by critics.¹⁰ I have in mind a non-exhaustive list of Catholic theologians associated with

also, Margaret Teboul, 'La Réception de Kierkegaard en France 1930–1960', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 89 (2005), 315–36. For Kierkegaard's reception in German Catholic theology, see Adolf Darlap, 'Die Rezeption S. Kierkegaards in der katholischen Theologie', in Heinrich Anz, Poul Lübcke, and Friedrich Schmöe (eds), *Die Rezeption Søren Kierkegaards in der deutschen und dänischen Philosophie und Theologie. Vorträge des Kolloquiums am 22. und 23. März 1982 [Text und Kontext, 15]* (Munich: 1983), 225–38.

⁸ For more on the modernist crisis in Roman Catholicism, see Hubert Wolf (ed.), *Antimodernismus und Modernismus in der katholischen Kirche: Beiträge zum theologiegeschichtlichen Vorfeld des II. Vatikanums, Programm und Wirkungsgeschichte des II. Vatikanums Bd. 2* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998). Also see, Darrell Jodock, *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹ For more on the historical and theological background of this seismic development in Catholic theology, see Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012). Jürgen Mettepenning, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London: T&T Clark, 2010). Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). Brian Daley, 'The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (2005), 363–82.

¹⁰ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, 'La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?', *Angelicum* 23 (1946), 126–45.

Jean Daniélou, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Küng, Karol Wojtyła, and Joseph Ratzinger.

Rather than endorsing an anti-modernist retreat from history as that which contaminates purely dogmatic statements, *ressourcement* theologians embraced history as a theological category. At its root, *ressourcement* theology shares a basic aim with Kierkegaard's theological vision: 'the historical is the occasion [for our eternal blessedness], and yet is also the object of faith'.¹¹ Yet as Brian Daley has observed, this fundamental conviction led *ressourcement* theologians to recover not only 'a more social, more culturally inclusive understanding of the reality of the church', but also it led them to recover 'the patristic practice of spiritual or figural exegesis, derived from Israel's habit of continually reinterpreting its own history and historical documents in the light of its present religious experience of God as active in history'.¹²

The aim of this book is to invite both readers of Catholic theology *and* readers of Kierkegaard to a mutually beneficial dialogue about the signature ideas and themes of Kierkegaard. To initiate this dialogue, I identify some of Kierkegaard's signature themes and ideas that are at work in the Catholic reception of his writings, and I suggest that these ideas and themes are beneficial to both groups. As a result, the reader's conventional understanding of the nature of *ressourcement* is broadened from being the sole proprietorship of patristic scholars, to include engagement with more modern thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard. The argumentative strategy in this book is to clarify two issues that should help the reader gain a better sense of what is at stake. First, I re-examine an enduring stereotype about Kierkegaard's theological anthropology that has been shared by Catholic thinkers and Kierkegaard scholars alike, and has prevented more ecumenical readings of Kierkegaard's writings. Caricatures of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology have prevented scholars from appreciating, not only the broader catholicity of Kierkegaard's *ressourcement* of the Christian tradition, but also Kierkegaard's influence upon important Catholic thinkers in the twentieth century. Second, I briefly sketch a historical account of some important events and thinkers that

¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Journal* (NB 15:75).

¹² Daley, 'The *Nouvelle Théologie*', 376.

provides a backdrop for the reader to better understand how the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings carried on in the early twentieth century despite negative stereotypes about him.

The desired outcome of this book can be expressed in a modest threefold proposal: i) In light of the theological reflection on Kierkegaard's writings, and the tradition of Catholic reception offered here, a new centre of gravity will be identified regarding a more ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard, and the deeper catholicity of the Lutheran structure of his thought will be uncovered; ii) This new centre of gravity bears upon the Catholic reception history of Kierkegaard's writings by challenging conventional pre-conceptions about the fruitfulness of Kierkegaard's writings for Catholic theology in general, as well as uncovering a Kierkegaardian strand latent in Catholicism with *ressourcement* theologians in particular; iii) In light of a new ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard and its embodiment in the writings of *ressourcement* theologians, contemporary Catholic theologians laying claim to the legacy of *ressourcement* theologians should read Kierkegaard's writings as a theological resource, especially in the areas of theological anthropology, theological aesthetics, and philosophical theology. In this way, the nature and scope of *ressourcement* could be expanded to include, not just patristic or medieval resources for contemporary Catholic theology, but also more modern sources as well.

RATIONALE OF BOOK: WHY STUDY THE CATHOLIC RECEPTION OF KIERKEGAARD?

In the vast secondary literature on twentieth-century Catholic theology, a nuanced account of the reception of Kierkegaard is notably absent. Long-standing robust accounts of the influence of Heidegger,¹³

¹³ A notable example would be the works of Jean-Luc Marion and Louis-Marie Chauvet. For more on Marion, see Lorenz B. Puntel and Alan White, *Being and God: A Systematic Approach in Confrontation with Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Luc Marion* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011). For more on Chauvet, see Hal St John, *The Call of the Holy: Heidegger—Chauvet—Benedict XVI*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons, T&T Clark Studies in Fundamental Liturgy (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012). Glenn P. Ambrose,

Nietzsche,¹⁴ and Marx¹⁵ make the neglect of Kierkegaard even more striking. Hence, this book provides a new perspective on Catholic theology in general, and in particular, recent literature on *ressourcement*, which is noticeably silent on the influence of Kierkegaard's writings.¹⁶ Prior to this book, only a few explicit attempts have been made in Kierkegaard studies to address Kierkegaard's relation to, and influence upon Catholic theology. However, there is an emerging trend in recent Kierkegaard research that provides—or at least, provides some of the groundwork for—a positive ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard's writings and spirituality.¹⁷

The Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet: Overcoming Onto-Theology with the Sacramental Tradition (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). For more on Heidegger's relation to neo-scholasticism, see Peter S. Dillard, *Heidegger and Philosophical Atheology: A Neo-Scholastic Critique* (London: Continuum, 2008). See also, Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). For Heidegger's theological inheritance, see George Pattison, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Theological Essay* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013a). Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*, Oxford Theology & Religion Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Most Catholic thinkers engaging in discussions about Nietzsche today, confront the following secular/radical theology trajectories exemplified in the following works: Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). John D. Caputo, Gianni Vattimo, and Jeffrey W. Robbins, *After the Death of God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). Lissa McCullough and Brian Schroeder, *Thinking through the Death of God: A Critical Companion to Thomas J.J. Altizer* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004). David Deane, *Nietzsche and Theology: Nietzschean Thought in Christological Anthropology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Bruce Ellis Benson, *Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). It is significant that Nietzsche appears as an interlocutor in Pope Francis' encyclical *Lumen Fidei* §2.

¹⁵ Some trajectories include, but are not limited to the following works: Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror* (London: Verso, 2012). Christopher Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ivan Petrella, and Luiz Carlos Susin, *Another Possible World* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

¹⁶ For instance, Kierkegaard is only mentioned twice in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 273–5. Only once in Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 4. And for all the discussion of paradox, there is no mention of Kierkegaard in the first edition of John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM Press, 2005). Responding to critics in the second edition, Milbank alludes to paradox in Cusanus, Kierkegaard, Chesterton, and De Lubac as a linchpin issue in dogmatic theology (29, n. 22).

¹⁷ For instance, see Joshua Furnal, "Toward a "Catholic" Reading of Kierkegaard", *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 21, no. 4 (2014), 435–43. See also, Gregory R. Beabout,

Nevertheless, the first explicit attempt is by the Italian Archbishop of Chieti, Bruno Forte (b. 1949) with his short book *Fare Teologia dopo Kierkegaard*.¹⁸ Forte's book is geared toward a popular audience and gives a brief thematic reflection upon Kierkegaard's signature concepts like the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity, the singularity of truth and the individual, and even paradox and contemporaneity. Forte's reflections include quotations from Kierkegaard to introduce the reader to some theological aspects of Kierkegaard's writings. My contribution in this book could be read as fleshing out some of these key themes in a deeper, more engaged fashion with those figures who are an important influence on Archbishop Forte.

A second explicit attempt is made by Jack Mulder's *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition*, which comes in the form of a *hypothetical* encounter that identifies *potential* dogmatic conflicts if Kierkegaard's writings were to be taken seriously by Catholics today.¹⁹ Mulder's book creatively envisions potential Kierkegaardian responses to dogmatic topics like purgatory and the salvation of non-Christians, but fails to illuminate the *actual* Kierkegaardian tradition already within Catholicism.

An important collection of essays edited by Jon Stewart entitled *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*, is a third explicit attempt that indexes the actual engagement of Kierkegaard by some prominent Catholic and Jewish thinkers.²⁰ Whilst Stewart's volume brings legitimacy to my enquiry from within Kierkegaard studies, it overlooks the massive contribution of Cornelio Fabro and six (of the eight) additional Catholic thinkers that will be considered in this book.²¹ Although this book is slimmer than Stewart's volume,

'Kierkegaard Amidst the Catholic Tradition', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2013), 521–40.

¹⁸ Bruno Forte, *Fare Teologia dopo Kierkegaard, Il Pellicano Rosso* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1997).

¹⁹ Jack Mulder, *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition: Conflict and Dialogue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 10, tome 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

²¹ One notable exception is Ingrid Basso, 'The Italian Reception of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*', in N. J. Cappelhorn and H. Deuser (eds), *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2005* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005). See also, Ingrid Basso, 'Italy: From a Literary Curiosity to a Philosophical Comprehension', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's International Reception: Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe* (KRSRR 8:2) (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 81–151.

it provides more historical background that helps the reader better understand how *ressourcement* theologians overcame (or set aside) any alleged dogmatic conflicts that they found in Kierkegaard's writings. In the end, the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings was not antagonistic, but rather it was situated in the wider development and renewal of Catholic theology in the twentieth century.

DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

As an essential supplement to Kierkegaard studies and recent literature on *ressourcement* in Catholic theology, this book critically situates the relevance of Kierkegaard's writings in the story of reform and renewal in twentieth-century Catholic theology prior to the Second Vatican Council. Specifically, this book provides an original contribution to recent scholarship by: i) bringing together Kierkegaard studies and Catholic theology in a mutually informative way to offer an account of the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings; ii) investigating a distinctive Protestant influence on a Catholic renewal movement before the Second Vatican Council, to illuminate a shared theological heritage between denominations as a new ecumenical resource; iii) highlighting theological themes in Kierkegaard's writings that have not been adequately integrated with Catholic theology: his Mariology, his conception of anxiety, and his portrayal of a natural desire for the supernatural; iv) engaging with a range of writings from representative Catholic thinkers during the twentieth century like Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, to provide a fresh perspective upon Kierkegaard's writings that seeks to overturn common misconceptions; v) for the first time in English, highlighting Cornelio Fabro as a key figure in what has been heretofore an impoverished account of the vibrant Kierkegaardian tradition within Catholicism; and vi) reaching a new conclusion that Kierkegaard's writings have stimulated reform and renewal in Catholic theology, and should continue to do so today. As a result, this book offers a more constructive and representative account of Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard's thought in the twentieth century, showing what Kierkegaard's

writings *do* for Catholic theology, and what conclusions they pushed Catholic theologians to draw.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Ressourcement theologians working in a post-Tridentine context gravitated toward Kierkegaard because his writings offered a critique of a form of Christianity that Stephen Mulhall describes as having ‘a form of amnesia about its own concepts, a failure to remember and enact the true significance of the Christian form of life’.²² For these Catholic thinkers, Kierkegaard’s writings became attractive not least since they deployed ‘a curative strategy—presenting reminders of the grammar of those concepts through narratives of lives in which they are either embodied or tellingly absent’—that in turn supplied *ressourcement* theologians with a crucial strategy for their own project in modernity.²³ In particular, Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology was a welcome resource for *ressourcement* theologians writing in an era when ‘philosophy cannot say sin’. Yet, these theologians found in Kierkegaard the shared common ground of a scriptural theological heritage: Kierkegaard alerted them to the importance of a renewed emphasis upon human subjectivity in the interpretation of Scripture and a theology of history. In this light then, some important Catholic thinkers saw Kierkegaard as a fellow pilgrim in the modern age who was engaged in a similar task of *ressourcement*. It has been only recently that some Kierkegaard scholars have begun to take note of the way Kierkegaard thinks with the broader Christian tradition at a profound level, and this book offers a historical instance when Catholic thinkers were engaged in this cross-fertilization, and were being formed by this exchange in return.

So, this book investigates the writings of emblematic Catholic thinkers in the twentieth century to assess their substantial engagement with Kierkegaard’s writings. I argue that Kierkegaard’s writings have stimulated reform and renewal in twentieth-century Catholic theology, and should continue to do so today. To corroborate my

²² Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy’s Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994b), 287.

²³ *Ibid.*

argument, some exegetical, historical, and theological work needs to be done. I have set out to do this by dividing the book into two parts: in the first half, I focus on excavating the broader catholicity of the Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, and surveying important moments in the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings in German, French, Italian, and English. In part two, I focus on three representative figures in Catholic theology that put Kierkegaard's thought to work across the domains of theological anthropology, theological aesthetics, and philosophical theology. One of the common threads that keeps resurfacing throughout this book is how the basic aim of 'returning to the sources' in Catholic theology, and Kierkegaard's paradoxical presentation of the Christian faith and divine revelation as equidistant to every epoch, begin to shed light on a new ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard's writings that is mutually beneficial for both Kierkegaard studies and Catholic theology.

In the first chapter, I re-examine one of the most common stereotypes about Kierkegaard for both Kierkegaard scholars and Catholic theologians alike: that the theological anthropology of Kierkegaard's writings simply reiterates Martin Luther's theology. After assessing the validity of this stereotype and arguing for the broader catholicity of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, a new possibility opens up for more ecumenical readings of Kierkegaard's theology, and Kierkegaard's theological anthropology becomes, not an obstacle, but rather a point of contact for readers of Catholic theology and readers of Kierkegaard.

In the second chapter, I build upon the exegetical work of the previous chapter to survey Kierkegaard's relevance in pre-conciliar Catholic theology by examining a number of Catholic thinkers with a reform agenda, paying close attention to their emphases and responses to Kierkegaard. During the early twentieth century, Catholic thinkers attempted to rearticulate their faith for a modern audience, not by separating historical and dogmatic claims, but rather by showing how such claims are intertwined. I set this historical backdrop by investigating the wider Catholic reception of Kierkegaard during the early twentieth century. Specifically, I look at influential figures like Theodor Haecker, Romano Guardini, Erich Przywara, and other Roman Catholic thinkers typically associated with the generation preceding the *ressourcement* movement, as well as those theologians who brought about its advent. Here I sketch the level of awareness that each of

these thinkers had of Kierkegaard's writings at this time, and the debates that ensued in light of this engagement. An entire book could be written on any one of the figures treated in this chapter, and space does not permit an exhaustive index of Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard in Europe. However, this representative historical sketch suggests that Kierkegaard's writings shared important concerns with Catholic thinkers working for reform and renewal in the church, and shows how these thinkers put Kierkegaard's writings to work for that renewal of the Judeo-Christian faith in the modern age.

After setting the exegetical and historical backdrop for a better understanding of the Catholic inheritance of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, and his subsequent impact upon emblematic Catholic thinkers in the twentieth century, I highlight how this Catholic reception of Kierkegaard gets developed by *ressourcement* theologians in unique ways. I have chosen to focus upon the writings of Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the Italian Thomist, Cornelio Fabro. I select these three Catholic thinkers in particular for two reasons: i) because of their importance for debates across theological anthropology, theological aesthetics, and philosophical theology in contemporary Catholic theology, and ii) for their substantial engagement with Kierkegaard, which provides a watershed moment in the Catholic engagement of Kierkegaard's writings in Europe.

In chapter 3, I argue that Henri de Lubac's theology does not represent a departure from Kierkegaard's theological vision, but rather that the writings of both complement one another in important ways. Indeed, one could argue that de Lubac is distinctively shaped by Kierkegaard's writings, and by looking closer at the Kierkegaardian aspects of Henri de Lubac's theology, a new insight into the basic aims of *ressourcement* can be gained. So as not to leave the reader with a unidirectional analysis, I will interpret Kierkegaard's emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist in such a way that illustrates this compatibility with de Lubac's sacramental theology. My argument is that de Lubac and Kierkegaard offer complementary, rather than contradictory theological visions. Indeed, de Lubac is one central *ressourcement* figure who puts Kierkegaard's writings to work in his fundamental theology and his theology of grace in a unique way that develops the previous generation of the Kierkegaardian tradition in Catholicism. I will conclude by suggesting that through such a comparative analysis, a new perspective on the Catholic receptivity of Protestant theological concerns before the

Second Vatican Council is illuminated. Rather than construing *ressourcement* as a purely patristic enterprise, de Lubac's engagement with Kierkegaard shows how the scope of *ressourcement* can be extended to include engagement with modern thought.

In chapter 4, I examine the writings of de Lubac's protégé, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988), to re-evaluate Balthasar's critique of Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics. My argument is that there is a particular Christological problem in Balthasar's thematization of 'distance' in his theology of anxiety and aesthetics, which could be better addressed if Balthasar attended to Kierkegaard's *dialectical* view of anxiety and aesthetics. Alternatively, I suggest that instead of using Kierkegaard as a Protestant foil, Kierkegaard's Christology works as a salutary corrective to Balthasar's theological project. Moreover, readers of Balthasar and Kierkegaard should find that they share more compatible goals than is commonly recognized.

In chapter 5, I survey the constructive theological features of the underexplored writings of the Italian Thomist, Cornelio Fabro (1911–1995). I set the stage of Fabro's historical context to suggest that Fabro's loyalty to the Thomist revival after *Aeterni Patris* should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive with his desire to negotiate the claims of the modern world. Instead, I focus on Fabro's recovery of Kierkegaard's writings as a way into understanding Fabro's wider project of renewal in Catholic theology in the modern age. Specifically, I draw upon Fabro's treatment of Kierkegaard's Mariology and ecclesiology as two counter-intuitive examples of Catholic theological renewal. Fabro draws heavily upon Kierkegaard's account of freedom and attempts to provide concrete examples of Kierkegaard's high regard for Mary and his critique of Christendom in ways that parallel John Henry Newman, and makes Kierkegaard more palatable to Catholic readers. In this chapter, the reader will gain a better sense of Fabro's lifelong engagement with Kierkegaard. Fabro learned Danish and translated Kierkegaard's writings and journals into Italian to overturn a common perception of Kierkegaard as merely a precursor to atheistic existentialism. As a Thomist, Fabro is sensitive to the Platonic and Aristotelian resonances in Kierkegaard's writings. By selecting de Lubac, Balthasar, and Fabro, my aim is not merely to narrate a history of Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard, but also to provide a range of representative entry points for Kierkegaard's writings to continue to stimulate reform and renewal in Catholic theology today in the shadow and spirit of the *ressourcement* movement.

Towards a More Ecumenical Reading of Kierkegaard's Theological Anthropology

Kierkegaardian interiority is fundamentally Catholic.

*Cornelio Fabro*¹

Before diving straight into the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard and the specific *ressourcement* theologians who engaged with his writings, it is necessary that a common stereotype about Kierkegaard be re-examined. A preliminary note is required regarding the compatibility of a 'Catholic' theological anthropology and Kierkegaard's theological anthropology for two reasons: i) some scholars have portrayed Kierkegaard's theological anthropology in an exclusively Protestant fashion, which implies that one should expect a theological impasse with *ressourcement* theologians; ii) one of the desired outcomes of this book is to invite contemporary Catholic theologians drawing on *ressourcement* theology to draw upon the theology of Kierkegaard. If this outcome is to be achieved, then there needs to be a 'point of contact' for such dialogue to take place regarding the signature themes, topics, or ideas that are shared between *ressourcement* theologians and Kierkegaard. My aim in this chapter is to provide some of the important theological and exegetical groundwork for this point of contact.

The common stereotype that I have in mind is the typical attitude towards or caricature of Kierkegaard that sees him as a despairing

¹ S. Kierkegaard and Cornelio Fabro, *Diario*, 2nd edn., vol. 1 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1962), 95. Translation mine. By making such a claim, Fabro indicates that he is critiquing an observation made by Emanuel Hirsch, who claimed that there was an irreconcilable incompatibility between Kierkegaard and Catholicism. See Emanuel Hirsch, *Kierkegaard-Studien*, vol. 2 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1933), 808ff.

individual whose anthropology exhibits an exclusively Lutheran structure which can be detached from any historical, metaphysical, or epistemological commitments beholden to the Christian faith (§1.1). Not only does this stereotype invite other clichés about Kierkegaard, but it also neglects the broader catholicity of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology that buttressed his writings.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first part seeks to open up the possibility of an ecumenical reading of Kierkegaard, and the second part offers a more 'Catholic' approach to Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. In the first part of this chapter, I want to provide a critical-constructive account of the broader catholicity of the Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology in *Works of Love*, and uncover the spirituality latent in his theology of creation and redemption in *The Sickness unto Death* and *Upbuilding Discourses* to overturn a common stereotype (§1.2–1.3). My claim is that the Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's theology invites, rather than precludes ecumenical readings of Kierkegaard's writings. Moreover, the coherence of Kierkegaard's theology of creation and redemption reveals a mystical character that shares an important heritage with Catholic thinkers.

In the second part of this chapter, I want to highlight the ecumenical promise of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology that would have been attractive to *ressourcement* theologians: Kierkegaard's non-historicist emphasis on divine revelation as equidistant to every epoch, and the overlap of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology with the theology of Thomas Aquinas. In this chapter, I read these shared *ressourcement* aims back into Kierkegaard's non-Socratic reintegration of faith and history in his account of divine pedagogy in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (§1.4). As an alternative to a non-ecumenical and historicist reading of Kierkegaard, I offer a more ecumenical reading of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. In light of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology and his theology of creation and redemption, a path is cleared for a more ecumenical reading of Kierkegaard, and the contours of Kierkegaard's theology lay the groundwork for how our understanding of *ressourcement* can be expanded. In this book, my overall argument is that *ressourcement* theologians in the twentieth century did not allow negative preconceptions of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology to stop them from appropriating some of his signature ideas in their own writings. Indeed, like the *ressourcement* theologians, both Catholic

theologians and Kierkegaard scholars today should also discover the ecumenical promise in Kierkegaard's theological anthropology.

1.1. OBSTACLES TO AN ECUMENICAL READING OF KIERKEGAARD'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

If a dialogue between the theological anthropology of Kierkegaard's writings and *ressourcement* theologians hangs on Tridentine stereotypes about the boundary markers of Protestant and Catholic thought (as if we were dealing with monolithic entities), then a dialogue about a shared theological anthropology may seem forlorn or polemical from the start. In fact when reading some Kierkegaard scholars, these polemical stereotypes frequently surface. For instance, Daphne Hampson expresses a familiar picture of Kierkegaard that both Kierkegaard scholars and Catholic readers of Kierkegaard often accept:

Kierkegaard is not a Catholic who thinks in terms of our receiving infused grace, enabling us to do what we could not do unaided. The Lutheran Reformation overturned such ways of thinking, shedding also the Aristotelian metaphysics through which alone it could make sense.²

It is important to pause and assess the assertion that Hampson makes here (and repeatedly throughout her work on Kierkegaard). Following Dan Watts, we can divide Hampson's assertion into two premises:

- 1) Kierkegaard correctly discerned the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of Christianity, on his distinctively Lutheran understanding of the latter.
- 2) 'We today' can no longer find these epistemological and metaphysical doctrines at all credible. Therefore, 'we today' can no longer find (Lutheran) Christianity at all credible.³

To support the first premise, Hampson provides some evidence in support of Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity being

² Daphne Hampson, *KEC*, 56 n. 27.

³ Daniel Watts, 'Recent Work on Kierkegaard', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (2015), 185–92.

distinctively Lutheran. However, Hampson's first premise can leave the reader with the impression that by shoring up the Lutheran aspects of Kierkegaard's theology of faith, grace, and works, more ecumenical readings of Kierkegaard are therefore out of bounds.⁴ For Hampson, a Lutheran theological anthropology entails an extrinsic view of salvation—that is, 'the human being is only able to come "to" himself, to become an integrated whole, as he is based in another (which is God)' (CC 12).⁵ Hence for Hampson, Luther's notion of alien righteousness inaugurates the 'transfer of gravity' of personhood from an ontology of substance to a more relational one.⁶ Although some might argue that this substance/relation dichotomy is anachronistic and the vocabulary in question needs to be contextualized, Hampson argues that Luther's extrinsic soteriology entails the competition between God's action and the autonomous human being. On this restrictive reading, one Tridentine stereotype can be played off against another:

Trent (and Catholicism more generally) as we shall see has a very different sense of 'freedom'. To Catholic ears, the Lutheran position has often sounded deterministic. It belongs to human dignity, to the dignity of the creation which God has made, that God does not simply overwhelm us or control us. The human must be allowed to perform a free act in relation to God. Hence the Tridentine talk of 'freely co-operating' with God's grace. There is present a different sense of freedom. For Catholicism, God respects our freedom. For Luther this would not make sense. To speak of a freedom in relationship to God is, for him, not to understand that God is God. We must rather allow God to deliver us into freedom. For Catholicism we have a 'base' on which to stand (creation) also in relationship to God. For Luther we are falling apart; we must first base ourselves in God through faith before we can begin to speak of human freedom. One could put this difference in the following way: is it that God fulfills a previously given sense of self (the Catholic understanding, leading to a linear model), or is it that God first gives us a new sense of self, which will entail a break with the past (so giving us the dialectical nature of the Lutheran model)? The pre-

⁴ Daphne Hampson, CC, 11–12, 16–18, 39, 51, 85, 90, 263, 284.

⁵ 'instilled in us without our works, by grace alone' (AE 31: 299).

⁶ 'The Christian, therefore, is not righteous *formally*, not righteous according to *substance* or *quality* . . . but righteous according to a relation to something' (AE 12: 329).

supposition of the Lutheran model is that the selves we find ourselves to be 'by nature' do not represent the selves that we were intended to be at all, but rather represent sin. (CC 44–5)⁷

On Hampson's restrictive reading, the self and God directly compete for agency. If it were otherwise, then God 'must be absolutely fundamental to the self being itself', although the 'Christian has a new sense of self, which is not a sense of self as a self-subsisting entity but rather a sense that he lives excentrically to himself' (CC 12).⁸ However, it is worth remembering that in an early ecumenical perspective, like the Second Council of Orange (529) for example, it was stated that there is no natural inclination in the will that would render superfluous the divine initiative of grace or the intervention of the Holy Spirit.⁹ But on Hampson's more competitive understanding of agency, a 'Lutheran' understanding of faith becomes more synonymous with autonomy or consent:

in Luther's case the human being must once and again consent to dependence on God (for the temptation is to set oneself up in the face of God), so also for Kierkegaard there is no constant self. Such an understanding relates sin to the conception of original sin, which is

⁷ For more on Hampson's defence of these Tridentine stereotypes, see Daphne Hampson, 'Reply to Laurence Hemming's Review of *Christian Contradictions*', *New Blackfriars* 86, no. 1001 (2005), 24–47. 'Were it in fact the case—as you imply Laurence—that Catholicism is at one with Lutheran thought, then Catholicism would in itself be schizophrenic. For how could it be both that through grace God "establishes" us in ourselves and that we live "from" the future, the Lutheran sense of excentricity; both that we strain towards that vision which is knowledge, and that basing ourselves *extra se* in God we are turned towards the world; both that it is for us to become deiform, and that, in ourselves nothing, we turn to another?' (p. 36).

⁸ For more, see Daphne Hampson, *Swallowing a Fishbone?: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1996), ch 1.

⁹ Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* [Enchiridion symbolorum: definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum] (Fitzwilliam: Loreto Publications, 2010), 178, Canon 5: If anyone says, that just as the increase [of faith] so also the beginning of faith and the very desire of credulity, by which we believe in Him who justifies the impious, and (by which) we arrive at the regeneration of holy baptism (is) not through the gift of grace, that is, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit reforming our will from infidelity to faith, from impiety to piety, but is naturally in us, he is proved (to be) antagonistic to the doctrine of the Apostles, since blessed Paul says: We trust, that he who begins a good work in us, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus [Phil. 1:6]; and the following: It was given to you for Christ not only that you may believe in Him, but also, that you may suffer for Him [Phil. 1:29]; and: By grace you are made safe through faith, and this not of yourselves; for it is the gift of God [Eph. 2:8]. For those who say that faith, by which we believe in God, is natural, declare that all those who are alien to the Church of Christ are in a measure faithful [cf. St Augustine].

disobedience, hubris (pride). By contrast, to have faith is to consent to that relationship of creature to Creator intended in creation. (KEC 223)

To me, Hampson's competitive reading of divine and human agency seems like an oversimplification of a more complex issue that is debated even in Luther studies. For instance, Hampson notes (but does not seem convinced by) recent developments in the Finnish Lutheran perspective (CC 19ff.). On the Finnish reading of Luther, the presence of Christ in the Christian was something that Luther actually endorsed, and it was his subsequent followers who exaggerated his extrinsic view of the competition between divine and human agency.¹⁰ Hence, the renewed emphasis in Finnish Lutheran scholarship on donated or gifted righteousness by grace and participation in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3–4).¹¹ On my view, the Finnish reading

¹⁰ Cf. AE 26: 129. See also, Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Consider also important sections from the most recent document entitled *From Conflict to Communion* by the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity: 'The image [the joyful exchange, in which we receive Christ's righteousness and Christ takes our sin] shows that something external, namely Christ's righteousness, becomes something internal. It becomes the property of the soul, but only in union with Christ through trust in his promises, not in separation from him. Luther insists that our righteousness is totally external because it is Christ's righteousness, but it has to become totally internal by faith in Christ. Only if both sides are equally emphasized is the reality of salvation properly understood' (§108). 'Thus, our righteousness is external insofar as it is Christ's righteousness, but it must become our righteousness, that is, internal, by faith in Christ's promise' (§112). 'If God declares someone righteous, this changes his or her situation and creates a new reality. God's judgment does not remain "outside" the human being' (§115). <<http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf>> (accessed 10 May 2015).

¹¹ Tuomo Mannermaa and Kirsi Irmeli Stjerna, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010). See also, Tuomo Mannermaa, 'Theosis as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research', *Pro Ecclesia* 4, no. 1 (1995), 37–48. It is also worth noting that this ecumenical theological anthropology is not limited to Lutheran scholarship, but also extends further into Reformed scholarship as well. For more, see John Booty, 'The Spirituality of Participation in Richard Hooker', *Sewanee Theological Review* 38, no. 1 (1994), 9–20. W. J. Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker, Reformer and Platonist* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (eds), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Arnold Huijgen, *Divine Accommodation in John Calvin's Theology: Analysis and Assessment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011). Charles Raith, *Aquinas and Calvin on Romans: God's Justification and Our Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

of Luther appears to be a more charitable way of opening up Kierkegaard's distinctively Lutheran understanding of Christianity to more ecumenical readings.¹² In the next section, I will provide one example of an ecumenical reading of Kierkegaard as an alternative to the restrictive reading that Hampson offers.

1.2. RE-EXAMINING THE LUTHERAN STRUCTURE OF KIERKEGAARD'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN *WORKS OF LOVE*

I turn to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* to resist a commonly held presupposition that Kierkegaard's writings simply reiterate Martin Luther's theology in every instance—a conflation that historically, both Catholic thinkers and Kierkegaard scholars respectively have embraced. One does not have to look far into treatments of Kierkegaard's theology to find preconceptions about the antithetical nature of Kierkegaard's writings to the Catholic faith. For instance, Daphne Hampson claims that Kierkegaard's theology 'stands in a Lutheran tradition of *Nachfolge* and not a Catholic *imitatio* tradition'.¹³ And yet Hampson's claim must be weighed against the evidence in Christopher Barnett's recent work where he argues that Kierkegaard's writings are actually 'a reiteration and advance' of the Catholic *imitatio* tradition.¹⁴ Kierkegaard scholar, Amy Laura Hall also endorses the Lutheran presupposition throughout her concentrated reading of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* (1847).¹⁵ Hall claims that

¹² I'm not attempting to settle the debate about whether or not the Finnish school is faithful to Luther's actual thought. Rather, my claim is that because of the historical connection between Luther and Kierkegaard, the existence of the Finnish Luther interpretation should relax Hampson's restrictive reading of Kierkegaard's Lutheran theology so as not to rule out more ecumenical readings of Kierkegaard's theology.

¹³ Hampson, CC, 266. Hampson frames the difference between these two 'antithetical' spiritual traditions as the difference between viewing the Christian believer as 'a little Christ' (Lutheran) versus becoming like Christ (Catholic), see Hampson, KEC, 270–1.

¹⁴ Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 188. For more, see ch. 6 in Barnett.

¹⁵ Amy Laura Hall, KTL.

Kierkegaard can be read as providing ‘a dense commentary’ on Luther’s treatise entitled the *Freedom of a Christian* (1520).¹⁶ Hall also claims that ‘a productive reading’ of *Works of Love* sees Kierkegaard as deliberately indicting the reader using Luther’s notion of Law and Grace so that the reader might ‘request the radical grace requisite for any work of love’ (KTL 12).

Hall is right to emphasize the importance of *Works of Love* for understanding Kierkegaard’s writings as a whole (KTL 49). However, I propose that in *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard does not offer an endorsement, but rather an indirect critique of Luther’s theology in *Freedom of a Christian*. Where Luther seeks to convince Pope Leo X that faith alone justifies the believer and the merit in good works is merely a deception, Kierkegaard claims that the suspicion of merit in good works can itself lead to self-deception to such an extent that even an expression of love becomes suspect. Alternately, Kierkegaard views human works of love toward others as the expression of our faith in God. But in order to lend support to this claim, I must briefly inspect the first chapter of *Works of Love*, which is entitled ‘The Hidden Life of Love and its Recognisability by its Fruits’.

In part, Kierkegaard takes the title for his reflection directly from Luke 6:44, ‘For each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush’ (ESV). Indeed, it is no coincidence that Luther also comments on this

¹⁶ Hall, KTL, 37. Hall is not the only commentator to adopt the Lutheran preconception. For more, see M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 20–1. See also, Craig Hinkson, ‘Luther and Kierkegaard: Theologians of the Cross’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3, no. 1 (2001), 27–45. Also see Hinkson, ‘Will the Real Martin Luther Please Stand Up! Kierkegaard’s View of Luther versus the Evolving Perceptions of the Tradition’, in Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 21: *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 37–76. Also in the same volume, see Lee Barrett’s ‘Faith, Works, and the Uses of the Law: Kierkegaard’s Appropriation of Lutheran Doctrine’, 77–109. Also Andrew Burgess’ article ‘Kierkegaard’s Concept of Redoubling and Luther’s *Simul Justus*’, in Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 16: *Works of Love* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 39–56. WL is thought to be the ‘first visible result’ of Kierkegaard’s serious interaction with Luther’s theology, see Regin Prenter, ‘Luther and Lutheranism’, in Thulstrup and Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, 131. Joel D. S. Rasmussen and David Yoon-Jung Kim, ‘Martin Luther: Reform, Secularization, and the Question of His True Successor’, in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions: Theology* [KRSRR 5:2] (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 173–217.

same text in his treatise. In fact, Kierkegaard even mentions Luther later on in this reflection (WL 30). This link alone may tempt some hasty readers to interpret it as providing evidence of Kierkegaard's endorsement of Luther's theology. But such a temptation requires more scrutiny. For in order to distinguish good fruit from bad, Luther says in his treatise on Christian liberty that good works necessarily flow from belief, and evil works necessarily flow from unbelief.¹⁷ Here, Luther stakes his analysis on rightly identifying Christ as the *source* of our justification by faith alone and distinguishing that source from the necessary but still deceptive *result* which is good works.¹⁸ Luther implies that in God's economy, we should not trust the result to indicate the presence of the source because living our life as if the merit of our good works could put us in the black, *is merely* to be deceived by a counterfeit accounting practice.¹⁹ Luther illustrates this point with a fable about a 'dog who runs along a stream with a piece of meat in his mouth and, deceived by the reflection of the meat in the water, opens his mouth to snap at it and so loses both the meat and the reflection' (AE 31: 356). In Luther's story, the salvific activity of faith occurs on the riverbank and the reflection in the stream is to be *avoided* since it stands for the deception of merit in good works. This brings Luther back to comment on the gospel passage about good fruit in order to show how good works unmistakably flow from faith:

Fruits do not bear the tree and the tree does not grow on the fruits . . . on the contrary, the trees bear the fruits and the fruits grow on the trees. As it is necessary, therefore, that the trees exist before their fruits and the

¹⁷ M. Luther, *AE, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958). Luther says that 'true faith in Christ is a treasure beyond comparison which brings with it complete salvation and saves man from every evil' (AE 31: 347). And he goes on to say that an unbelieving person 'is not served by anything. On the contrary, nothing works for his good, but he himself is a servant of all, and all things turn out badly for him because he wickedly uses them to his own advantage and not to the glory of God' (AE 31: 355). Henceforth, AE [volume]: [page number].

¹⁸ Luther says 'those who do not recognize the gifts bestowed upon them through Christ, however, Christ has been born in vain; they go their way with their works and shall never come to taste or feel those things' (AE 31: 367).

¹⁹ Quoting Scripture, Luther says "'Thus you will know them by their fruits'" (Matt. 7:20). All this remains on the surface, however, and very many have been deceived by this outward appearance and have presumed to write and teach concerning good works by which we may be justified without even mentioning faith' (AE 31: 362).

fruits do not make trees either good or bad, but rather as the trees are, so are the fruits they bear; so a man must first be good or wicked before he does a good or wicked work, and his works do not make him good or wicked, but he himself makes his works either good or wicked. (AE 31: 361)

From the citation above it can be seen that for Luther, belief is always the source of good works and unbelief is always the source of wicked works.²⁰ Bearing Luther's comments in mind, it is conceivable that Kierkegaard's mention of Luther and the reflection on 'fruit' in *Works of Love* could lead some interpreters to also look for an endorsement of Luther's theological position here. Yet I want to claim that if we look more closely at how Kierkegaard treats this passage of Scripture, we may find a criticism of Luther's theological position.

Where Luther needs to distinguish himself morally from the Pope in his treatise, Kierkegaard actually discourages his reader from Luther's task of busily 'tracking down hypocrites' seeking to 'unmask or even shame every hypocrite who comes near him', because such an endeavour is, according to Kierkegaard, 'hardly the fruits of love' (WL 32). Kierkegaard views the preoccupation with the demand to see other people's fruit in order to judge their interior status with God as a kind of 'merit-scepticism' that mistrusts a person's behaviour in advance. The outworking of such a suspicion of good works is 'that one should believe nothing which he cannot see by means of his physical eyes' (WL 23). According to Kierkegaard, this merit-sceptic 'ought to give up believing in love' for 'fear of being deceived'. Playing with the misrelation of original and copy, Kierkegaard says that 'the one deceived is still related to love, and the deception is simply that it is not present where it was thought to be; but the one who is self-deceived has locked himself out and continues to lock himself out of love' (WL 24). Since the deception is the copy without the presence of the original, eternity is where the original is present and the copy is no more. This is why Kierkegaard says that the one who is self-deceived 'has prevented himself from winning the eternal' because in eternity 'he cannot dispense with love and cannot escape discovering that he has lost everything'. Kierkegaard's claim here is *not* that faith alone 'really binds the temporal and eternal', but rather it is love which is

²⁰ Consider remarks like: 'from faith flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind, that serves one's neighbour willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss' (AE 31: 367).

'before everything else and remains when all else is past'.²¹ Kierkegaard criticizes scepticism because of its posture of mistrust that doubts an expression of love in advance as a deception and risks mistaking even the God of love for a deceiver.

For Kierkegaard, love's revealed fruit gestures toward the *whence* of love.²² Kierkegaard says this source is 'hidden or is in that which is hidden', and may be described as 'a human being's most inward depths' from which 'proceeds the life of love' (WL 26). This source 'withdraws itself into remoteness and hiding; even if you have thrust in as far as possible, the source is still always a bit farther in'. These comments indicate a view that differs substantially from Luther who could identify the source and result of all things whether it is the Creator or wickedness within the creature. But here Kierkegaard implies that the source and result of love repel our grasp, and yet humans still are already addressed by, and respond through the gift of love:

As God dwells in the light from which streams every beam which lights the world and yet no one can penetrate back by these paths to see God, for the path of light changes to darkness when one turns toward the light: so love dwells in the hidden or is hidden in the inmost depths. (WL 26)

To describe this mystery, Kierkegaard compares the hidden life of love to a 'quiet lake' that

is fed deep down by the flow of hidden springs, which no eye sees, so a human being's love is grounded, still more deeply, in God's love. If there were no spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither a little lake nor a man's love. As the still waters begin obscurely in the deep spring, so a man's love mysteriously begins in God's love. As the quiet lake invites you to look at it but the mirror of darkness

²¹ Kierkegaard's position here bears a striking similarity to St Thomas' view of the relation of love and faith as presented in Otto Hermann Pesch, 'Existential and Sapiential Theology: The Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas Aquinas', in Jared Wicks (ed.), *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), 59–82, esp. 74–5.

²² Cf. Søren Kierkegaard. EUD, 127: 'What is the good, where is the perfect to be found? If it exists, where is its source? . . . [can we] find out what the good and perfect is without learning where it came from, would [we] be able to recognize the eternal source without knowing what the good and perfect is?'

prevents you from seeing through it, so love's mysterious ground in God's love prevents you from seeing its source. (WL 27)

Significantly, Kierkegaard urges that 'when you think you are seeing [the source], then it is a reflection which deceives you, as if it were the bottom, this which only conceals the deeper bottom'. Kierkegaard goes on to make the following analogy, just as 'the clever cover to a treasure appears to be the floor, in order to completely hide the treasure, so the reflection deceptively appears to be the depth of the source—but only conceals that which is still deeper'.

In Luther's story about the dog and the reflection, the salvific activity of faith occurs on the riverbank and the reflection in the stream is to be *avoided* since it is the deception of good works, whereas Kierkegaard's analogy, *takes us through* the deception in order to get at the deeper mystery of God's love which generates the love of the human being. In Luther's theology, love of the human being is always a good work which is secondary to, and can even deceive faith;²³ but Kierkegaard says that love is the movement of 'the

²³ Consider the following passages from Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* (1535): 'They [Luther's opponents] teach faith in a way that attributes more to love than to faith; for they imagine that God regards and accepts us on account of the love with which we love God and our neighbour after we have already been reconciled. If this is true, then we have no need whatever of Christ. In this way they serve, not the true God but an idol of their own heart—an idol they have made up for themselves. For the true God does not regard or accept us on account of our love, virtue, or newness of life (Rom. 6:4); He does so on account of Christ. But they raise the objection: "Yet He commands that we love Him with all our heart." All right, but it does not follow: "God has commanded; therefore we do so." If we loved God with all our heart, etc., then, of course, we would be justified and would live on account of that obedience, according to the statement (Lev. 18:5): "By doing this a man shall live." But the Gospel says: "You are not doing this; therefore you shall not live on account of it." For the statement, "You shall love the Lord," requires perfect obedience, perfect fear, trust, and love toward God. In the corruption of their nature men neither do nor can produce this. Therefore, the Law, "You shall love the Lord," does not justify but accuses and damns all men, in accordance with the statement (Rom. 4:15): "The Law brings wrath." But "Christ is the end of the Law, that everyone who has faith may be justified" (Rom. 10:4).' (AE 26: 398); Or consider how Luther comments on Paul's phrase "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6): Luther says that the sophists apply this passage in support of their doctrine that we are justified by love or by works. For they say that even when faith has been divinely infused—and I am not even speaking of faith that is merely acquired—it does not justify unless it has been formed by love. They call love "the grace that makes one acceptable", namely, that justifies, to use our term, or rather Paul's; and they say that love is acquired by our merit of congruity, etc. In fact, they even declare that an infused faith can coexist with mortal sin. In this manner, they completely transfer justification from faith and attribute it solely to love

eternal in itself' and the link between the 'fresh and everlasting life' of God and ours (WL 27).

After his discussion about the recognizability of love's fruit, Kierkegaard recalls Luther's comparison of trees and fruit but adapts it by adding a third element. For Kierkegaard, 'the tree is known by its fruits', but it 'is also known by its leaves' (WL 28). So, if someone could identify the tree by the appearance of its leaves, there is no contradiction between form and content until the fruit season demonstrates whether it 'really was not the tree which according to the leaves it appeared to be' (WL 29). Kierkegaard also says that no one should 'regard [words] as sure marks of love' because 'by such fruits or by their being merely leaves, one should know that love has not had time for growth' (WL 29). Only 'immature and deceitful love is known by the fact that words and techniques of speech are its only fruit' and thus, if a human love 'is really to bear fruit and consequently be recognisable by its fruit, it must *form a heart*'. Indeed for Kierkegaard, having 'a heart in this natural sense is infinitely different from forming a heart in the eternal sense' which is 'the essential condition for bearing love's own fruit by which it is known' (WL 30). Unlike Luther's soteriology²⁴—whereby, the salvific status of a

as thus defined. And they claim that this is proved by St. Paul' (AE 27: 28; cf. AE 24: 321); Or again, Luther says that 'Faith and hope must remain, so that we may be justified by the former and encouraged by the latter to persevere in adversity. Finally, we are servants of one another through love, because faith is not idle even though love is tiny and weak. Thus when I command you to walk by the Spirit, I make it abundantly clear that you are not justified by love. Moreover, when I say that you should walk by the Spirit and should not obey the flesh or gratify the desires of the flesh, I am not requiring of you that you strip off the flesh completely or kill it, but that you restrain it' (AE 27: 68).

²⁴ Consider the dualism of love and faith in Luther's nuptial theology: 'Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; His righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent. By the wedding-ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are His bride's. As a matter of fact, He makes them His own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned; He suffered, dies, and descended into hell that He might overcome them all. Now since it was such a one who did all this, and death and hell could not swallow him up, these were necessarily swallowed up by him in a mighty duel; For His righteousness is greater than the sins of all men, His life stronger than death, His salvation more invincible than hell. Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. So He takes to Himself a glorious bride, "without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph. 5:26-7) of life, that is,

person is *independently established* in faith *prior to* and *distinguishable from* good works—Kierkegaard implies here that the innermost depths of a person's faith is *constitutive of* and *formed through* our participation in the mystery of God through the infused theological virtue of love.

So if, in the search for certainty between belief and good works, Luther mistakes the natural sense for the eternal sense here, and what Luther identifies as fruit may only be leaves, then what shall we make of love's fruit? Kierkegaard says that whether our words or deeds are mere leaves or love's fruit, only time will tell. There is no feasible way to guarantee in advance *that* the saying of a single word or *that* the doing of a single deed will furnish the certainty that we have indeed made love's fruit visible and circumvented deception once for all. No, Kierkegaard says 'it all depends on *how* the deed is done' and 'how the word is said and, above all, how it is meant' (WL 30). But even in admitting the decisive factor of appropriation, Kierkegaard quickly says it still 'holds true that there is nothing, no *in such a way*, of which it can unconditionally be said that it unconditionally proves the presence of love or that it unconditionally proves there is no love' (WL 31). For appropriation in love is not a universal *a priori* but rather it is an individualizing gift of grace that *at once* elicits within us the task and demand of love for others. Thus, Kierkegaard tells his readers that we are not encouraged 'to get busy judging one another', and neither are we to meant 'to work *in order that* love becomes known by its fruits', but rather we are meant 'to work to make love *capable of being* recognised by its fruits' (italics mine). Kierkegaard's subtle distinction here highlights the importance of not mistaking the means for ends, or of instrumentalizing love into some reward. But even here, we are still not meant to 'judgingly demand continually and perpetually to see the fruits in the relationship of love with one another' (WL 32).

In closing, Kierkegaard reemphasizes that instead of being sceptical of love, it is imperative that 'one must believe in love', because only those who mistrust love insist 'upon seeing the fruits'. Here Kierkegaard

by faith in the Word of life, righteousness, and salvation. In this way He marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies, righteousness, and justice (Hosea 2:19–20)' (AE 31: 351–2).

associates love with non-sight and doubt with sight, not in order to reintroduce scepticism, but rather to remind us how faith stands in for sight and how love stands in for mistrust. By insisting on seeing another's fruit, there is always the danger that we might 'see something as less than it actually is', but we must remember that even when it is hidden from view, 'love also can see something as greater than it is' (WL 33). Once 'one has learned to know [love] by its fruits, one again returns to the beginning—to believe in love—and returns to [love] as the highest'. Love is the highest because even though the fruit may 'make it manifest', it is not reducible to that fruit, because 'the life itself is still more' than 'all the fruits which one could enumerate at any moment'. Indeed for Kierkegaard, love itself is 'known and recognised by the love in another', and only 'he who abides in love can recognise love, and in the same way his love is to be known' (WL 33).

In sketching this brief comparison between Luther and Kierkegaard, one may be persuaded to reconsider Hall's original claim about reading *Works of Love* as 'a dense commentary' on, and endorsement of Luther. Upon a closer reading of the text, one might make the counterclaim that Kierkegaard offers instead a *parody* of Luther, which carries within it an implicit criticism of an extrinsicist interpretation of grace. For Kierkegaard, grace names the life of God, the source of all love which does not exact recompense but spares nothing and gives all in love, so much that the 'one who loves is what he is only by being in You!' Here Kierkegaard draws upon an important scriptural passage:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7–12)

Because grace does not compete with human agency, and Christ is the source and goal of the merit of our good works, then God's gracious initiative comes to light. In this respect, Kierkegaard's theology here bears a remarkable affinity with Aquinas who said that charity

'presupposes faith, because the will cannot tend to God with perfect love, unless the understanding has right faith about him' (*Summa Theologica* II–II q. 4 a. 7 ad 5). In short, Hampson's invitation to Catholics to better understand 'the Lutheran structure' of Kierkegaard's thought actually invites the kind of ecumenical reading of Kierkegaard that I have provided (CC 264).

With the distinction between the restrictive and more ecumenical reading of Kierkegaard made clear, it becomes more feasible to be hesitant, indeed suspicious of a widespread assumption that Kierkegaard simply reiterates Luther's *sola fide* theology—which is often used to pigeonhole Kierkegaard as an irrationalist. Seeing this difference demonstrates the need—especially for Catholic readers of Kierkegaard—to reconsider their hasty dismissal of him. In fact, let us not miss (as the English translation unfortunately sets us up to do) the implicit references to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* in part two of Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*.²⁵ There, the English renders the title as 'The Practice of Love by the Church', whereas in German '*das Liebestun der Kirche*' should be translated 'The Work of Love by the Church', in order to better reflect the German translation of Kierkegaard's *Der Liebe Tun*.²⁶ Space does not permit us to explore this here, but suffice it to say that Benedict XVI's emphasis upon love as a work that must be performed by a community *in concreto* is an extension of Kierkegaard's argument for love forming faith. In the next section, I will add further evidence to my argument by uncovering the Catholic inheritance of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology.

²⁵ <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html> (accessed 10 May 2015). Kierkegaard also makes an appearance in Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1969), 39.

²⁶ I am so grateful to Werner Jeanrond for pointing this out to me. See Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 166, n. 108. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, WL, 44–90. For more on Kierkegaard, see Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See also, Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*. M. Jamie Ferreira, 'The Glory of a Long Desire: Need and Commandment in *Works of Love*', in Ingolf Dalferth (ed.), *Ethik der Liebe: Studien zu Kierkegaards 'Taten der Liebe'* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 139–53.

1.3. RE-EXAMINING THE COMPATIBILITY OF KIERKEGAARD'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Just as it would be a mistake to ignore the distinctive contributions of the respective ideas of Luther and Kierkegaard by making one individual's thought a proxy for the other, so one would expect that it would be a mistake to do this with a more distant comparison between Catholic thinkers and Kierkegaard. However, if we follow Hampson's suggestion that it is best to step back from 'Luther the man' and instead examine the Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's thought, then perhaps a case could be made that there are shared presuppositions in Kierkegaard's theological anthropology that are also attractive to Catholic thinkers.

For instance, one shared point of departure in the theological anthropology of Kierkegaard and Catholic thinkers can be found by examining Kierkegaard's writings.²⁷ For instance, in *The Sickness unto Death* Kierkegaard's pseudonym 'Anti-Climacus' describes the human person as both a spiritual and material self-relation that relates itself to both God and neighbour.²⁸ For Anti-Climacus, selfhood is not a brute fact but rather a task or activity that must be achieved by holding together an expansive (infinitude, eternity, freedom) and a limiting (finitude, temporality, necessity) pole (SUD 29, 35, 68). Indeed, striving to become a self is a universal task that also includes the particular gift of divine cooperation in becoming a self 'before God'. For Anti-Climacus then, selfhood is a sacred task that involves both human freedom and divine action.

Louis Dupré rightly says that in Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, one can only become an individual 'in the confrontation with God', but 'the conditions for such a confrontation are lacking' because in modernity there is no proper distinction between God and humanity (SUD 99, 117, 122, 127).²⁹ The obstacle that Kierkegaard faces in

²⁷ C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006).

²⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, SUD, 13.

²⁹ Louis Dupré, 'The Sickness unto Death: Critique of the Modern Age', in Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 19: *The Sickness unto Death* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 85–106, esp. 88.

communicating his theological anthropology is that his reader is caught in the malaise of modernity, and the language of God or divine revelation must be rehabilitated. So Anti-Climacus focuses on the divided self, and divides his book into two parts: the first half treats despair, the finite and infinite, possibility and necessity, whereas the second half transitions from despair and personal responsibility, to sin and our failure to achieve moral perfection. This leads Anti-Climacus to say that despair *is* sin, by which he means the refusal or neglect to be oneself (SUD 77, 81).

In the Lutheran picture, sin separates God from humanity and it is only through a repentant consciousness that one can obtain a correct conception of God. Yet for Anti-Climacus, it is the other way round: repentant consciousness *presupposes* a correct conception of God, rather than a depraved state—hence, one’s awareness of sin hinges upon living one’s life ‘before God’ (SUD 80–2, 89, 101, 106).³⁰ This is an interesting approach when one considers Hegel’s evaluation of the Fall of humanity as a form of progress toward self-consciousness.³¹ However, reading *Sickness unto Death* in isolation from Kierkegaard’s other works gives rise to the false impression that all he offers is a theological anthropology of ‘doom and gloom’.

In this way, George Pattison reminds us how important it is to read Kierkegaard’s *Upbuilding Discourses* alongside his pseudonymous writings if we are to hold together Kierkegaard’s theology of creation, Fall, and redemption in our understanding of his theological anthropology.³² Moreover, Pattison highlights how Kierkegaard’s account of the good is intertwined with his theology of grace.³³ Indeed, Pattison says that for Kierkegaard:

That the possibility of the God-relationship of faith is the gift that God is always, daily giving us is not something that can be known by one who is unconcerned as to whether the gifts of being, consciousness, and volition are for his ultimate good or not.³⁴

³⁰ Dupré, KT, 88.

³¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, One-Volume Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 215ff.

³² George Pattison, ‘Philosophy and Dogma: The Testimony of an Upbuilding Discourse’, in Edward F. Mooney (ed.), *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 155–62.

³³ *Ibid.*, 162.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

But Pattison frames the difference between Kierkegaard and a Thomist view of human creatureliness as the subtle difference between an emphasis upon the ontological status (individual substance of a rational essence) and hyper-ontological freedom (a relation of personal and temporal dependence).³⁵ Indeed, Pattison places the emphasis upon human concern as the locus of the *imago Dei*. Yet, Pattison also says that Kierkegaard and Luther are at odds as well, because for Kierkegaard, 'Existence as such and not merely the religious crisis brought on by our failure to keep divine law is the matrix of the impulse toward the good in which the possibility of faith becomes manifest.'³⁶ Thus in Pattison's view, Kierkegaard offers a distinctive theological anthropology that cannot be equated with a purely Lutheran or Thomist perspective. However, my argument is that by interrogating Kierkegaard's distinctive theological anthropology, there is still much to be shared across confessional lines. In fact, it would be worth looking at a few passages in Kierkegaard's writings that reveal his theology of creation and redemption.

Kierkegaard develops his theological anthropology in concert with the biblical, patristic, and medieval insistence upon seeing the human being as *imago Dei* (*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 192. Henceforth, UDVS). For Kierkegaard, the life we lead as a creature before God invites a posture of gratitude toward the Giver of life for the goodness of life, and orients our lives toward such goodness by virtue of our being there. Kierkegaard's theology of human existence as a gift from God comes from two passages of Scripture:

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:13)

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. (James 1:17-22)

³⁵ Ibid., 161.

³⁶ Ibid.

In light of these two passages, Kierkegaard believes that being a human creature involves being possessed by a natural desire for the Giver of every good and perfect gift. In his own reflection on these passages, Kierkegaard speaks of an Edenic ‘echo’ that summons ‘longing from its secret hiding place’ where the ‘fruit of the knowledge, which the man [Adam] relished, planted the tree of the knowledge in his inner being, which bore its fruits’ (EUD 126–7). For Kierkegaard, this echo signals not only the divided self of original sin, but also the hidden fruit of love and grace, which abounds all the more (Rom. 5:20). Indeed, for Kierkegaard it is the apostle who explains ‘the condition that makes it possible for him [the human being] to receive the good and perfect gift. This condition God himself has given, since otherwise the good would not be a gift’ (EUD 136). Also, Kierkegaard says that this creaturely condition of being toward the good, is also a ‘perfection’, which is not an earthly need or gift, but rather *theo-logical* which comes from God as infused gift (EUD 136). Moreover, Kierkegaard deploys a theological insight here that is central to the theological anthropology of Aquinas:

Infused virtue is caused in us by God without any action on our part, but not without our consent. This is the sense of the words, ‘which God works in us without us’. As to those things which are done by us, God causes them in us, yet not without action on our part, for He works in every will and in every nature. (ST I–II q. 55 a. 4 ad 6)

In his own words, Kierkegaard says that ‘to need the good and perfect gift from God is a perfection; therefore the gift, which is intrinsically perfect, is also a perfect gift because the need is perfect’ (EUD 136, 297–326). So for Kierkegaard:

in a beautiful sense the human heart will gradually (the grace of God is never taken by force) become more and more discontented—that is, it will desire more and more ardently, will long more and more intensely, to be assured of grace . . . [and] the more he [the human being] needs God, the more deeply he comprehends that he is in need of God, and then the more he in his need presses forward to God, the more perfect he is . . . to need God is nothing to be ashamed of but is perfection itself. (EUD 303)

In my view, Kierkegaard’s account of human nature’s path toward perfection bodes well for the Catholic reader looking for a shared theological sensibility. In Kierkegaard’s own words, he speaks of the journey from creation to redemption in terms of a path from a ‘first

self' to a 'deeper self' (EUD 314). Importantly this is not another self, but rather a deepening (perfecting?) of one's nature with a 'new quality and qualification' (SUD 79), which reflects a new understanding of the *kind of God* that one leads one's life 'before'.³⁷ By qualification, Anti-Climacus intends the appropriation of leading one's life before God, and by quality, Anti-Climacus refers to the criteria of the paradox, absurd, offence, which have to do ultimately with divine revelation and the Incarnation of Christ (SUD 83). The offence arises with the awareness of my proximity to God in Christ and God's gracious concern with me (SUD 83, 126). For Anti-Climacus, the Incarnation is an invitation to intimacy and union with God (SUD 85–7). Indeed, despair is the refusal of this personal invitation in the form of conscious rebellion or sheer ignorance (SUD 95–8).³⁸ This refusal has pride at its root: the refusal or fear to embrace forgiveness because forgiveness implies that one has sinned in the first place (SUD 109–11). Moreover, Jamie Ferreira rightly says that for Anti-Climacus, faith integrates the intellect and will with the conscious, imaginative appropriation of the paradoxical.³⁹ Is the paradoxical merely a non-explicit faith? No, for Anti-Climacus it is the acknowledgement of the 'infinite qualitative difference' between creation and the Creator (SUD 99). This means to acknowledge both a *difference* between God and humanity, and a *likeness* between God and humanity in Christ (SUD 126). This difference and likeness is held together in and by the Spirit. So for Anti-Climacus, living the Christian life becomes leading one's life 'before Christ' our 'goal and criterion' (SUD 113–14). Hence Ferreira describes *The Sickness unto Death* as 'ultimately a strong reminder of the possibility of forgiveness and grace'.⁴⁰

There is coherence to Kierkegaard's theology of creation and redemption that invites Catholic readers to pay closer attention. For instance, Pattison says that for Kierkegaard 'to desire the good is to desire God' because

the possibility of coming to be able to do good is, in other words, already present in our living, moving, and having our being in God, that is, in

³⁷ M. Jamie Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, Blackwell Great Minds (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 162.

³⁸ For more, see Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 184ff.

³⁹ Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 164.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

the life we ‘always already’ have as creatures. To be the recipient of God’s good gifts is therefore not something we shall only experience in that Promised Land to which God is leading us, but is the very condition of human existence. The condition that is given as the possibility of redemption is nothing other than the condition by which creation is maintained in being.⁴¹

Pattison’s description here and Anti-Climacus’ view of selfhood as a task, activity, achievement (SUD 13), is a reminder that in Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology our union with God is rooted in the attunement of freely desiring the good in love.

For Kierkegaard, ‘*The expectancy of an eternal salvation will help a person to understand himself in temporality*’ (EUD 259). In his own words, Kierkegaard says that this is because ‘a human being, insofar as he participates in the good, does so through God’ who ‘begins and completes the good work in a person’ (EUD 134). In fact, for Kierkegaard it is God that ‘gives the condition along with the gift’ (EUD 134; cf. *Philosophical Fragments* 14–18, 58–9, 62–9. Henceforth, PF). This principle coheres with Aquinas’ theological anthropology which argues that our ‘will needs to be prepared by God with grace, in order that [we] may be raised to things which are above [our] nature’ (ST II–II q. 6 a. 1 ad 3).⁴² For instance, Aquinas says that

love always precedes hope: for good is never hoped for unless it be desired and loved. Hope also regards the person from whom a man hopes to be able to obtain some good. With regard to this, hope precedes love at first; though afterwards hope is increased by love. Because from the fact that a man thinks that he can obtain a good through someone, he begins to love him: and from the fact that he loves him, he then hopes all the more in him. (ST I–II q. 62 a. 4 ad 3)

Since virtue operates for good, it is necessary for virtue of any kind that it operate well for the good, i.e., voluntarily, readily, with delight and firmly. These are the conditions of virtuous operation which are not found in any operation unless the agent love the good for which he is working, because love is the principle of all the voluntary affective powers. For, that which is loved is desired when it is not possessed; there is pleasure when it is possessed; and those things which prevent one from having what has been loved cause sadness. Also, those things

⁴¹ Pattison, ‘Philosophy and Dogma’, 159.

⁴² For more, see Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 35–40.

which are done out of love are done steadily, rapidly and with delight. Therefore love of the good, for which virtue operates, is necessary for virtue. (*De Caritas* a. 2 ad)

An act of love always tends towards two things; to the good that one wills, and to the person for whom one wills it: since to love a person is to wish that person good. Hence, inasmuch as we love ourselves, we wish ourselves good; and, so far as possible, union with that good. So love is called the unitive force, even in God, yet without implying composition; for the good that He wills for Himself, is no other than Himself, Who is good by His essence. (ST I q. 20 a. 1 ad 3)

Like Kierkegaard, Aquinas says that our basic loving concern is an implicit endorsement of the inherent goodness of creation. In Thomist terms, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* teaches that the priority of Love founds Being as a free gift. As Ferreira notes, in Anti-Climacus' theological anthropology,

the synthesis of soul and body in space and time is a relation, analyzable into the tensions between its dynamic opposing tendencies. This 'synthesis' is not yet a 'self', but it has the potential to relate itself to itself—to become aware of itself and to take charge of itself.⁴³

In this way, Josef Pieper speaks of hope as a basic feature of the pilgrim structure of the human creature, whose essence is composite becoming. In other words, Pieper says that the path one must follow 'is not a directionless back-and-forth between being and nothingness; it leads to realization, not to annihilation, although this realization is "not yet" fulfilled and the fall into nothingness is "not yet" impossible'.⁴⁴ For Aquinas, the pilgrim's 'being on the way' is oriented toward the comprehension of eternal beatitude (ST III q. 15 a. 10). This means that the pilgrim is oriented toward a future good that is both now and not yet fulfilled.⁴⁵ Because of the temporal nature of the pilgrim's journey, both grace and human freedom are involved in achieving this task this side of glory:

Although in the order of nature grace comes midway between nature and glory, nevertheless, in the order of time, in created nature, glory is not simultaneous with nature; because glory is the end of the operation of nature helped by grace. But grace stands not as the end of operation,

⁴³ Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 152.

⁴⁴ Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 97–8. Cf. 'faith does not have certainty' (*De Veritate* q. 14 a. 1 ad 7).

⁴⁵ Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 91–5.

because it is not of works, but as the principle of right operation. Therefore it was fitting for grace to be given straightway with nature. (ST I q. 62 a. 3 ad 3)

This emphasis upon hoping in God's future good for my life is intimately connected to what Aquinas has to say about despair. Indeed, like the theological anthropology of Kierkegaard, Aquinas also says that despair is a sin because 'despair consists in a man ceasing to hope for a share of God's goodness' (ST II-II q. 20 a. 3 ad).⁴⁶ Nevertheless for Pieper, this means that there is an objective uncertainty that is bound up in the pilgrim structure of the human creature.⁴⁷ Hence, simply recognizing that you have been created 'to exist' is not enough: what really matters is when someone says 'it is *good* that you exist; how *wonderful* it is that you are!' However, this requires a 'continuation and perfection by the creative power of human love'.⁴⁸ For St Augustine, coming into existence, being sustained in, and drawn toward true happiness involves being seen by God.⁴⁹ This theological anthropology coheres with Anti-Climacus' emphasis upon the interaction of human freedom and divine initiative in the task of the self 'relating itself to itself, and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it' (SUD 14). For Aquinas, this means that perseverance (or 'striving' in Kierkegaard's terms) becomes the task of the pilgrim: the 'object of hope is the future good considered, not absolutely, but as arduous and difficult of attainment' (ST I-II q. 40 a. 1 ad 2). Commenting on this passage, Pieper says that hope requires prayerful, cooperative patience that looks forward to a new, practically inexhaustible future.⁵⁰

Recently, Lee Barrett has traced the basic features of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology back to St Augustine's theology of the restless heart seeking to rest transparently in God (SUD 14, 30, 49, 82, 131).⁵¹ I would also add that Thomas Aquinas' theology of participation is not far off the mark in this regard. Consider Aquinas' observation:

As Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* ix), when Holy Writ declares that nothing is like God, it does not mean to deny all likeness to Him. For, 'the same

⁴⁶ For more, see Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 116–23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴⁹ Augustine and Henry Chadwick, *Confessions*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxxi (46), 301.

⁵⁰ Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 124.

⁵¹ Lee C. Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), ch. 2.

things can be like and unlike to God: like, according as they imitate Him, as far as He, Who is not perfectly imitable, can be imitated; unlike according as they fall short of their cause', not merely in intensity and remission, as that which is less white falls short of that which is more white; but because they are not in agreement, specifically or generically. (ST I q. 4 a. 4 ad 1)

It is important to remember that Aquinas has a scriptural passage in mind here:

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. (1 John 3:1)

In light of the scriptural tradition and the Thomistic commentary on such a passage of Scripture, Kierkegaard's remark about rest and reflecting the image of God is striking:

Just as the ocean, when it lies still this way, deeply transparent, aspires to heaven, so the pure heart, when it is still, deeply transparent, aspires solely to the good; or just as the ocean becomes pure when it aspires only to heaven, so the heart becomes pure when it aspires only to the good . . . If the least thing comes between them, between the sky and the ocean, between the heart and the good, indeed, even if it was impatience in desiring the reflection, then the ocean is not pure, then it does not purely reflect the sky. (UDVS 121)

Therefore, it is interesting how in an important essay, Christopher Barnett argues that there is a mystical strand in the Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, which can be traced back from Luther to Johannes Tauler, Meister Eckhart, and ultimately to Thomas Aquinas.⁵² For Barnett, there is an unmistakable mystical influence on the formation of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology.⁵³ Indeed, Barnett argues that the mystical character of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology maps onto the *exitus-reditus* itinerary of the German mystical tradition, which is rooted in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and a theology of mystical union with

⁵² Christopher B. Barnett, 'The Mystical Influence on Kierkegaard's Theological Anthropology', in Roman Králik (ed.), *Acta Kierkegaardiana 6: Kierkegaard and Human Nature* (Toronto: Kierkegaard Circle, 2013), 105–22.

⁵³ Barnett, *Kierkegaard*, chs. 2 & 3.

God as the chief end of creation. In fact, Barnett argues that the main source for the 'Lutheran' structure of Kierkegaard's mystical theology is a medieval Catholic by the name of Johannes Tauler.⁵⁴ For instance, Barnett highlights passages in Kierkegaard about 'resting transparently from nothing to nothing', and through them, he illustrates Kierkegaard's mystical theology of union with God through self-dispossession.⁵⁵ In Barnett's view, Kierkegaard's emphasis on our utter dependence upon God and how the human creature receives being from God, is a theological position that can be traced back to Meister Eckhart and Thomas Aquinas.

But one might ask, is Kierkegaard's construal of our movement towards God in terms of 'becoming as nothing before God' at odds with a Thomist or mystical view? Not necessarily. For Anti-Climacus, the self's nothingness has to do with the contrasting elements that must be harmonized with God's help (SUD 13–16). This is not a view that Aquinas rejects: 'Even as creatures are made from nothing, so are they reducible to nothing, if so it pleased God' (*De Potentia*, q. 5 a. 4 ad 9). Indeed, Aquinas draws upon St Augustine for support of this view:

Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei* vii, 30) that God so governs things by his providence that he allows them to exercise their own movements. Now the proper movement of nature since it proceeds from nothing is to return to nothing. Therefore God allows the nature that comes from nothing to return to nothing: and consequently he does not keep things in existence. (*De Potentia*, q. 5 a. 1 n. 16)

Elsewhere Kierkegaard says that because 'God created the human being in his image', we (rather than the lilies and birds) have 'the infinitely more glorious' task of resembling the invisible God (UDVS 192). For Kierkegaard, this theme of 'becoming as nothing' surfaces as the human creature's struggle on the purgative journey toward God (EUD 325). For Augustine and Eckhart, this journey involves the detachment from worldly goods and the renunciation of self-mastery.

⁵⁴ For more, see Steven Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis: A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509–16) in the Context of Their Theological Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1969). Also see, Simon D. Podmore, *Struggling with God: Kierkegaard and the Temptation of Spiritual Trial* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2013).

⁵⁵ For more, see Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), ch. 7. See also, Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 239–64.

This is a view that is not alien to Kierkegaard, especially in passages where he advocates relating *at once* absolutely to the Absolute and relatively to the relative (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 325). Also, Kierkegaard has an emphasis upon maintaining an upbuilding, or sanctifying relationship toward our eternal beatitude as an interior epiphany of God's presence (EUD 321–2). Hence, Kierkegaard can say that

to need God is man's highest perfection, makes life more difficult, it does this only because it wants to view man according to his perfection and bring him to view himself in this way, because in and through this view *man learns to know himself*. (EUD 312)

Now, this leads me to assess Hampson's second premise (from §1.1): 'we today' can no longer find (Lutheran) Christianity at all credible. Readers of *Kierkegaard: Exposition & Critique* (2013), may be familiar with Hampson's earlier critique of Christianity in *After Christianity* (1996) and may detect an echo in the issues that Hampson criticizes in her reading of Kierkegaard:

- An endorsement of an inscrutable God that is beyond ethics or reason (KEC 50).
- An endorsement of a traditional Christology (KEC 85).
- An endorsement of an outdated view of causality (KEC 91).
- An endorsement of sin having a social dimension (KEC 130).
- A disparagement of a historical-critical approach to biblical studies (KEC 86).

Hampson also takes issue with the fact that Kierkegaard is a 'supernaturalist' rather than a 'naturalist' (KEC 4). In other words, Hampson criticizes the view that she sees Kierkegaard endorsing: 'that God is held to intervene once and again, but in a cyclical pattern, bringing his purposes to fulfilment' (KEC 4). In Hampson's view 'there can in this sense be no interventions' because it is unintelligible to claim (as Kierkegaard does) that 'God is actively present in the moment' (KEC 5). Hampson goes on to say that for Kierkegaard, 'in each moment God is quite fundamental to the self being itself. There is no substantial self and no talk of an *analogia entis*. His is a relational, not a Catholic-Aristotelian conception' (KEC 252).

It is unfortunate that the bulk of Hampson's criticism amounts to *either* faulting Kierkegaard for the theological presuppositions of his Christian faith, *or* rehearsing common misconceptions about

Kierkegaard that persist, despite recent attempts by Kierkegaard scholars to disabuse readers of them. Indeed, the bulk of Hampson's second premise hangs on the assertion that Kierkegaard repudiates an 'outdated' Aristotelian metaphysics of substance.⁵⁶ It is true that in his portrayal of the self, Kierkegaard downplays the notion of substance to emphasize agency. Kierkegaard does this because his sources give him a deterministic picture 'of Aristotle treating divine and human agency as parallel phenomena'.⁵⁷ However, it is worth mentioning that just because Kierkegaard downplays Aristotle in this regard, it does not imply that Kierkegaard repudiates Aristotle altogether. In fact, several scholars have shown how Kierkegaard operates 'within an Aristotelian conceptual scheme when he interprets his notions of change, modality, and agency in ways that fit his own purpose'.⁵⁸

An alternative explanation could be that Kierkegaard makes these decisions for theological reasons. In other words, Kierkegaard downplays Aristotle's deterministic view of divine and human agency, because this view contradicts the presuppositions of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. It is also worth mentioning that Aquinas

⁵⁶ One should not dismiss out of hand how, in contemporary philosophy, the topic of hylomorphism has received greater attention, such that one might be led to think of it not as a monolithic theory, but a family of related theories in a philosophical tradition. For more, see M. C. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty (eds), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), ch. 3. Also see, Kit Fine, 'Things and Their Parts', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (1999), 61–74. John Haldane (ed.), *Mind, Metaphysics, and Value in the Thomistic and Analytical Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 125–42. Mark Johnston, 'Hylomorphism', *Journal of Philosophy* 103, no. 12 (2006), 652–98. Kathrin Koslicki, *The Structure of Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Jeffrey E. Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁷ Harvard Løkke and Arild Waller, 'Physics and Metaphysics: Change, Modal Categories, and Agency', in Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun (eds), *Kierkegaard and the Greek World: Aristotle and Other Greek Authors* [KRSRR 2:2] (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 43.

⁵⁸ Løkke and Waller, 45. For more on Kierkegaard's Aristotelian inheritance, see Cornelio Fabro, 'La "Pistis" Aristotelica nell'Opera di Søren Kierkegaard', *Proteus: Rivista di Filosofia* 5, no. 13 (1974), 1–24. See also, Fabro's 'Aristotle and Aristotelianism', in Thulstrup and Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, 27–53. Also see, John Durkan, 'Kierkegaard and Aristotle: A Parallel', *Dublin Review* 213 (1943), 136–48. George J. Stack, 'Aristotle and Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (1974), 1–19. More recently, see Norman Lillegard, 'Passion and Reason: Aristotelian Strategies in Kierkegaard's Ethics', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, no. 2 (2002), 251–73. See also, Ingrid Basso, *Søren Kierkegaard e la Metafisica di Aristotele: un percorso di lettura* (Milan: Albo Versorio, 2014).

scholars have made similar claims about Aquinas employing an Aristotelian grammar to his own distinctive ends because of an operative theology of *creatio ex nihilo*—a view that Kierkegaard shares with Aquinas, but not with Aristotle.⁵⁹ As Cornelio Fabro has shown,⁶⁰ Aquinas often deploys non-Aristotelian elements in his metaphysics, such as his Neo-Platonic notion of ‘participation’—that is, existence does not belong to the essence of what is caused, since it has received its being from something else—precisely because of his theology of creation and redemption. This distinction between ‘Being’ (*ens commune*) and ‘God’ (*ipsum Esse subsistens*) maps onto Thomas’s distinction between the remit of what we would now call metaphysics and theology (cf. ST I q. 1 a. 7). This marks an important difference between Aquinas and other commentators on Aristotle.

It is also worth mentioning that Aquinas has a unique theological anthropology that may be more compatible with Kierkegaard’s model than previously framed. For Aquinas, creatures do not furnish their own *esse*, but rather receive *esse* from God. Aquinas fleshes this idea out in terms of act and potency: ‘that which I call *esse* is the actuality (*actualitas*) of all acts, and for this reason it is the perfection of all perfections’ (*De potentia* 7.2 ad 9). This journey is oriented towards becoming who we *are*: ‘every excellence of any thing belongs to it according to its *esse*. For man would have no excellence as a result of his wisdom unless through it he *were* wise’ (*Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.28). Although Aquinas articulates this journey in terms of ‘causality’, he nonetheless understands it in terms of our absolute dependence upon God. Moreover, it is the Holy Spirit that non-competitively brings about our moral perfection by grace, and enables our capacity to reflect God’s image. Indeed, as St Augustine says, if we are image-bearers of God, then we are also capable of a relationship with God;

⁵⁹ David B. Burrell, ‘Divine Action and Human Freedom in the Context of Creation’, in Thomas F. Tracy (ed.), *The God Who Acts: Philosophical and Theological Explorations* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 103–9. David B. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), ch 1. David B. Burrell, *Creation and the God of Abraham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chs. 2 & 3. David Burrell, ‘Creatio Ex Nihilo Recovered’, *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013), 5–21.

⁶⁰ Cornelio Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d’Aquino* (Rome: EDIVI, 2005). See also, Cornelio Fabro, *Partecipazione e Causalità secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino* [1960], vol. 19 (Rome: EDIVI, 2010).

because of grace and the Incarnation, our God-relationship is utterly gratuitous and non-frustrating (*De Trinitate* 14.8).⁶¹ In accordance with Augustine, Aquinas also believes that by grace through faith and in works of love, the human creature tends toward the good and therefore is on a journey towards union with God, the beginning and end of all things.⁶²

The theological principle here is that no finite creature is *esse*, but receives *esse* from God. This means that there is a non-coincidence between essence and existence as the human creature journeys toward God, for whom essence and existence are transparent. In this way, when speaking of the relation of ‘participation’ in being, Aquinas deploys a philosophical term in a theological manner to talk about the *relation* of creatures to the Creator—‘the unique Good’ (*In III Sent.* d. 23 q. 2. a. 1).⁶³ But for Aquinas (like Augustine and indeed Kierkegaard) the opaque character of this desire to rest transparently in God is necessarily ‘tensed’ as restlessness, since ‘the knowledge of faith does not bring rest to desire but rather sets it aflame, since every man desires to see what he believes’ (SCG 3.40.5). Elsewhere, Aquinas says that even ‘evidence taken from Divine authority does not make a thing apparent in itself, and such is the evidence referred to in the definition of faith’ (ST II–II q. 4 a. 1 ad 5). Yet, despite faith’s restlessness (due to the gap between theological expression and the divine mysteries of faith), the judgement of faith still lays hold of divine truth. As Romanus Cessario says, for Aquinas

Concepts are important for expressing what we believe. But because divine Truth is infinitely more profound than its conceptual

⁶¹ ‘although the human mind is not of the same nature as God, still the image of that nature than which no nature is better is to be sought and found in that part of us than which our nature also has nothing better. But first of all the mind must be considered in itself, and God’s image discovered in it before it participates in him. For we have said that even when it has lost its participation in him it still remains the image of God, even though worn out and distorted. It is his image insofar as it is capable of him and can participate in him; indeed it cannot achieve so great a good except by being his image.’

⁶² ‘Charity loves God above all things in a higher way than nature does. For nature loves God above all things inasmuch as He is the beginning and the end of natural good; whereas charity loves Him, as He is the object of beatitude, and inasmuch as man has a spiritual fellowship with God. Moreover charity adds to natural love of God a certain quickness and joy, in the same way that every *habitus* of virtue adds to the good act which is done merely by the natural reason of a man who has not the habit of virtue’ (ST I–II q. 109 a. 3 ad 1).

⁶³ For more, see Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

expressions, belief incessantly tugs the believer toward a deeper penetration of the divine mysteries. Only the act of love ultimately bridges the gap between concept and reality.⁶⁴

This is why Thomas speaks of faith as imperfect knowledge (ST I–II q. 67 a. 3; *De Veritate* q. 14 a. 2) and an opaque certainty (*De Veritate* q. 14 a. 1 ad 8). Contrary to widespread assumption, there is much here in Aquinas that coheres with Kierkegaard's theology of faith. Indeed in the theological anthropology of Aquinas, God communicates by grace what was incommunicable by nature.⁶⁵ But this generates the question of *how* God communicates our eternal beatitude and saving truth to us. On this point, Aquinas speaks of our perfection in terms of a pupil and teacher:

the perfection of the rational creature consists not only in what belongs to it in respect of its nature, but also in that which it acquires through a supernatural participation of Divine goodness . . . [our] ultimate happiness consists in a supernatural vision of God: to which vision man cannot attain unless he be taught by God, according to Jn. 6:45: 'Every one that hath heard of the Father and hath learned cometh to Me.' Now man acquires a share of this learning, not indeed all at once, but by little and little, according to the mode of his nature: and every one who learns thus must needs believe, in order that he may acquire science in a perfect degree; thus also the Philosopher remarks (*De Soph. Elench.* i, 2) that 'it behooves a learner to believe'. Hence in order that a man arrive at the perfect vision of heavenly happiness, he must first of all believe God, as a disciple believes the master who is teaching him. (ST II–II q. 2 a. 9)

It is interesting that Kierkegaard also maintains this image of pupil and teacher when he speaks of how we come to learn the truth. In the next section, I will provide one example of how Kierkegaard's conception of divine teaching coheres with what Aquinas says above. To sum up the first part of this chapter, I have argued that critical exegesis of Kierkegaard's writings allow for an ecumenical interpretation of them that is not repelled by the Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's

⁶⁴ Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 98. Aquinas also says that 'belief has something in common with science and understanding; yet its knowledge does not attain the perfection of clear sight, wherein it agrees with doubt, suspicion and opinion. Hence it is proper to the believer to think with assent: so that the act of believing is distinguished from all the other acts of the intellect, which are about the true or the false' (ST II–II q. 2 a. 1 ad).

⁶⁵ Cited in Cessario, *Christian Faith*, 108.

theological anthropology, but instead invites us to press through any stereotypical impressions about Kierkegaard to arrive at the deeper catholicity of his theological anthropology. In doing so, I suggested that a common stereotype held by both Catholic thinkers and Kierkegaard scholars should be resisted.⁶⁶ In the second part of this chapter, I investigate Kierkegaard's paradoxical presentation of the Christian faith and divine revelation as equidistant to every historical epoch, and how Kierkegaard's non-historicist view of the Christian faith does not restrict it to either the patristic or the modern period, but rather expands the range of objects for contemplation in such a way that overlaps with the basic aims of *ressourcement* theologians.

1.4. KIERKEGAARD'S NON-HISTORICIST APPROACH TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

One of the basic aims of *ressourcement* theology is to recover a theology of history—that is, an affirmation of God's action in and through history, and an affirmation of human freedom and responsibility.⁶⁷ In Kierkegaard's idiom, one might say a theology of history is concerned with the relation of that which *has* a beginning and end (time), and that which is *without* beginning or end (eternity). The difficulty of such a task is giving an account of the continuity between the historical development of past events and salvation history—that which has a beginning yet does *not* end—in such a way as to retain the decisive character of a single event like the Incarnation. Both the writings of *ressourcement* theologians and Kierkegaard's writings endorse the sacramental character of time—that is, in the words of Jean Daniélou a view that says, 'salvation is no longer merely promised

⁶⁶ Although more recently, Kierkegaard's ambiguous relation to Luther has become a well-known fact in Kierkegaard studies. See Rasmussen and Kim, 'Martin Luther', 173–217.

⁶⁷ Jean Daniélou, 'The Conception of History in the Christian Tradition', *The Journal of Religion* 30, no. 3 (1950), 171–9. I am gratefully indebted to Lewis Ayres for bringing this article to my attention. This view goes back to Hugh of St Victor, a medieval theologian that Kierkegaard deeply admired, see *Journals*, 1850; X² A 353 / SKS NB 15:21–4.

but given, and only its manifestation is awaited'.⁶⁸ Or as Kierkegaard puts it, the eternal 'does not want to have its time but wants to make time *its own* and then permits the temporal also to have its time'.⁶⁹

Although some have scoffed at attempts to show the compatibility of Catholic theology and Kierkegaard's writings,⁷⁰ one obvious Kierkegaardian concept that negotiates continuity amid change is *repetition*.⁷¹ Indeed, this concept does lend itself to appropriation by contemporary heirs of *ressourcement* theologians concerned with the 'non-identical repetition' of moral and doctrinal development.⁷² But I will not treat this concept here because—whether the concept was

⁶⁸ Daniélou, 'The Conception of History', 174. Also see, Joseph S. Flipper, *Between Apocalypse and Eschaton: History and Eternity in Henri de Lubac* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). As a shared basic aim, endorsing a theological view of history sets both Kierkegaard and *ressourcement* theologians apart from Karl Marx's materialist view of history. For more, see 'The German Ideology', in David McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 14. For more on Kierkegaard's importance here, see 'La Salvezza nell'Abbandono alla Divina Provvidenza', in Cornelio Fabro, *Tra Kierkegaard e Per una Definizione dell'Esistenza*, ed. Christian Ferraro (Florence: Vallecchi, 1952), 56–9. Fabro says that 'historical materialism, as a doctrine and praxis, is the most prominent symbol of the sickness unto death that Western civilization suffers from' (p. 15, translation mine).

⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, UDVS, 11. For more, see Arne Grøn's excellent essay on Kierkegaard, time, and history in Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 435–55. Also see, George Pattison, *Eternal God / Saving Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), ch. 8.

⁷⁰ For an ardent dismissal of Catholic readings of Kierkegaard, see Hampson, CC, 263–4. For a legitimization of Catholic appropriations of Kierkegaard, see Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*.

⁷¹ For a full account, see Niels Nymann Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition: A Reconstruction* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000). See also, John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), ch. 1.

⁷² For instance, see John Milbank, 'The Sublime in Kierkegaard', *The Heythrop Journal* 37, no. 3 (1996), 298–321. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edn. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 278–326. Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 60; John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 145–74. See also, Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy, Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 18–35, 109, 160, 221–4. Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Also see, Marcus Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis, Trauma, Veritas Series* (London: SCM Press, 2007), ch. 2. Following Milbank, Clare Carlisle suggests a similar link between Aristotelian virtue ethics, repetition, and *ressourcement* in 'The Self and the Good Life': see Adams, Pattison, and Ward, *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, 19–39.

perhaps too close to Hegel's dialectics,⁷³ or to Freud's interpretation of compulsory behaviour,⁷⁴—*ressourcement* theologians engaging with Kierkegaard's writings during the twentieth century did not reach for this analogue.⁷⁵ Instead, I will get at the meaning of this concept from another route.

In this section, I want to explore Kierkegaard's non-historicist approach to the Christian faith as he confronts the paradoxical problem of endorsing a theological view of history from a contingent perspective in the flux of time. My argument is that Kierkegaard's terms of art, 'autopsy of faith' and 'contemporaneity' are a shorthand way of talking about the epochal equidistance of divine revelation. In my view, Kierkegaard endorses a reintegration of faith and history in the modern age, a task that *ressourcement* theologians also sought to achieve. I contextualize my approach to these Kierkegaardian ideas with an eye towards his non-Socratic presentation of divine pedagogy in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In the end, I suggest that the continuity of faith across the biblical, patristic, medieval, and modern period is a view that both Kierkegaard and *ressourcement* theologians share in common.

1.4.1. The Paradox of Divine Teaching in Kierkegaard's Socratic Thought-Experiment

In *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard's fictive author, Johannes Climacus, claims to present merely a thought-experiment about what Christianity is, and, unlike Kierkegaard himself,⁷⁶ he disavows being a Christian or a religious person (CUP 483, 557, 597, 617). The central problem of Climacus'

⁷³ Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ch. 6.

⁷⁴ 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (1914)', in Steven J. Ellman, *Freud's Technique Papers* (London: Karnac Books, 1991), ch. 3.

⁷⁵ Although many had read *Fear and Trembling*, there is little textual evidence indicating that Catholic theologians during the early 20th century had substantially engaged Kierkegaard's *Repetition*.

⁷⁶ Of his entire project, Kierkegaard says, 'My task is to get persons deceived—within the meaning of truth—into religious commitment', as cited in EUD x, cf. JP VI 6533 (*Pap. X² A 196 / SKS NB 14:31*).

authorship is phrased as a gloss on G. E. Lessing: 'Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?' (PF 1).⁷⁷ In other words, how can one *conceptualize* an encounter between the historical and the eternal without the encounter itself becoming merely a further reflection and reiteration of the historical? The epigraph to Climacus' authorship is referred to as 'Lessing's problem' or Lessing's 'broad and ugly ditch',⁷⁸ and it is meant to problematize dogmatic notions of the Incarnation and our natural desire for God by calling into question the possibility of even conceptualizing a necessary (could not be otherwise) transition from eternity to history without plagiarizing that transition from a contingent (could be otherwise) source.⁷⁹ Throughout Climacus' sprawling authorship, Lessing's problem of the knowledge of God and the anxiety of plagiarizing that idea serve an impetus to the enquiry itself.⁸⁰ Although Climacus takes his point of departure, as well as the terms of the debate from Lessing, Climacus

⁷⁷ Quoting G. W. Leibniz, Lessing says, 'it is not so easy to decide between the three hypotheses, and much further reflection is needed to reach a conclusion', in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Hugh Barr Nisbet, *Philosophical and Theological Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 50. For more on Lessing, see the invaluable introduction by Nisbet on pp. 1–22. For more on Lessing's relation to the Enlightenment and German Idealism, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 61–81. See also, Frederick C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 244–82.

⁷⁸ Lessing and Nisbet, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 87.

⁷⁹ For Hegel, this problem was 'resolved' by the inexplicable necessity of contingency; see George di Giovanni, ed. and trans., *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: The Science of Logic*, Cambridge Hegel Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010b), 478–9. See also, Klaus Brinkmann, and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (eds), *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part 1, Science of Logic*, Cambridge Hegel Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010a), §145, 215–17. For more, see Stephen Houlgate, 'Necessity and Contingency in Hegel's *Science of Logic*', *The Owl of Minerva* 27, no. 1 (1995), 37–49. The dilemma of the relation of necessity and contingency was not unique to German Idealism and is not lost on ancient writers, especially Thomas Aquinas and his Islamic predecessors; see Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, n 59, 76–90.

⁸⁰ My reading of Climacus follows very closely to that of Stephen Mulhall, 'God's Plagiarist: *The Philosophical Fragments* of Johannes Climacus', *Philosophical Investigations* 22, no. 1 (1999), 1–34. See also, Stephen Mulhall, IO, 323–53.

indirectly provides a defence of Christianity in the *form* of an attack—rather than vice versa.⁸¹

With the anxiety of plagiarizing the idea of God, and Lessing's problem of 'the direct transition from historical reliability to an eternal decision' (CUP 96), Climacus begins his thought-experiment with an important question: how can the truth be learned? (PF 9). Climacus calls upon Socrates himself in order to portray the complex question of whether the pupil can be said to actually 'seek' the truth:

a person cannot possibly seek what he knows, and, just as impossibly, he cannot seek what he does not know, for what he knows he cannot seek, since he knows it, and what he does not know he cannot seek, because, after all, he does not even know what he is supposed to seek. (PF 9)⁸²

In order to respond to the problem of seeing the truth (due to the lack of evidence), and the problem of not having a distinct idea of that truth to start with, Climacus distinguishes between two modes of learning the truth: the Socratic and the non-Socratic hypotheses.

For Climacus, the Socratic hypothesis is the possibility that we learn the truth by remembering it. In this way, it is presupposed that the pupil is already in possession of, indeed has the capacity for understanding the truth, but just needs an occasion (or teacher) to remind them of it (PF 24). Importantly, both the teacher and the pupil stand in the same relation to the truth that needs recollecting (PF 23). Hence, it does not matter from *which* teacher the pupil remembers the truth—the teacher is a *contingent* factor in the pupil's remembering the truth that emerges from within them (PF 12). Since the teacher is merely an arbitrary occasion, and since the pupil originally possesses the truth anyway, the pupil owes the teacher nothing: the copyright stays with the pupil.

⁸¹ For a parallel reading of Climacus and Lessing, see Cornelio Fabro, 'La Fenomenologia della Fede: Ambiguità della Fede in Søren Kierkegaard', *Archivio di Filosofia*, 1–2 (1957), 188–97. The notion of a 'leap' is often attributed to Kierkegaard but actually comes from Lessing's *salto mortale*; see Lessing and Nisbet, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 246, 251. For more on Kierkegaard's notion of the 'leap', see Ronald R. Johnson, 'The Logic of Leaping: Kierkegaard's Use of Hegelian Sublation', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1997), 155–70. For Lessing's influence on Johannes de Silentio's *Fear and Trembling*, see Lasse Horne Kjaeldgaard, "'The Peak on Which Abraham Stands': The Pregnant Moment of Søren Kierkegaard's 'Fear and Trembling'", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 2 (2002), 303–21.

⁸² Cf. *Meno*, 80e. Plato, *Meno and Other Dialogues*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 113.

By way of contrast, Climacus sketches the non-Socratic hypothesis, which is the possibility that we learn the truth only from 'the god'. In this way, what the pupil discovers is their untruth and the incapacity to obtain for themselves, not only the truth, but also the condition for understanding it—the god gives both to the pupil (PF 14). Hence, the pupil and the god *do not* stand in the same relation to the truth and it *does* matter from which teacher the pupil learns—the teacher is *necessary* to the pupil's learning and receiving the capacity to understand the truth. The result of an encounter with the god is re-birth: 'the one who is born again owes no human being anything, but owes that divine teacher everything' (PF 19). From this perspective, in so far as the truth *is*, there is indebtedness to *the god*. However, from the Socratic perspective, there is no indebtedness, since the truth originates with the pupil. From the non-Socratic perspective, such a claim is blatant plagiarism (PF 61). Stephen Mulhall puts it this way:

If he has properly absorbed what his teacher teaches, he can help others to learn that lesson only by helping them to learn from his teacher; he must not even present himself as an occasion for them to learn, but rather find a way of removing himself entirely from the scene—a way of bridging other learners to the teacher without allowing them to assign any kind of authority to him, not even the authority of one who prepares the way to the teacher (for the teacher *is* the way). (IO 353)

With the non-Socratic approach to learning the truth, there is an indispensably *indirect* mode of communication alluded to in the quote above.⁸³ Precisely because the pupil is in untruth and stands in a necessary relationship to the god, the communication takes an indirect form so as not to deceive the pupil with the illusion of the god's dispensability as well as to 'maintain the learner's bold confidence' and freely given love (PF 27–8). From the Socratic view, deceit is inevitable and freedom is compromised if the teacher was to 'let the pupil go on thinking that he actually owed him something, whereas the teacher was supposed to assist him to become sufficient unto himself' (PF 30). Alternately, the non-Socratic view links the pupil's indebtedness to the god's *love*—since the god's love 'must be not only an assisting love but also a procreative love by which he gives birth to

⁸³ For more on Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication, see Katherine Ramsland, 'Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48, no. 2 (1987), 327–34.

the learner, or as we have called him, one born again', and so, 'the learner owes him everything' (PF 30).

For the pupil, the difficulty arises in distinguishing untruth from truth, deceit from love, Socrates from the god, innovation from indebtedness. The matter is not decided, as Voltaire suggests, by just 'opening your eyes'.⁸⁴ No, for Climacus the matter becomes rather tricky because with the non-Socratic view, the relation is not merely between the god and the pupil—eternity and history—since 'the god will appear in the form of a *servant*' (PF 31) and 'the form of the servant was not something put on' (PF 32). The god is not identifiable by peeking underneath 'the plebeian cloak, which, just by flapping open would betray the king', but rather the self-revealed formal features of the servant are necessary to know the god of 'love that suffers, love that gives all' (PF 33). For the king cannot directly elicit the poor maiden's love as an unequal without allowing 'understanding and equality [to] disappear', thus making the love unhappy (PF 28). No, the mysterious form which risks misunderstanding from the start is the way that the god leads (or 'misleads?') the pupil into the truth—*despite* the gap of the pupil's infinite and qualitative inequality:

For love, any other revelation would be a deception, because either it would first have had to accomplish a change in the learner (love, however, does not change the beloved but changes itself) and conceal from him that this was needed, or in superficiality it would have had to remain ignorant that the whole understanding between them was a delusion (this is the untruth of paganism). For the god's love, any other revelation would be a deception. (PF 33)

As Climacus later says, the difficulty is not necessarily understanding 'that the God becomes a particular human being' but that 'he becomes a lowly and despised human being', since the 'paradox is that Christ entered into the world *in order to suffer*' (CUP 596–7). For the non-Socratic view, 'it is love that gives rise to all this suffering, precisely because the god is not zealous for himself but in love wants to be the equal of the most lowly of the lowly' (PF 34). So the self-revelation of the god's love *as mystery* is the form that the god's love assumes in and as Christ. And in light of the self-revelation of God's love in

⁸⁴ François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, *Histoire de Jenni, ou le Sage et L'athée* (London: 1775), 61.

Christ, Stephen Mulhall says, 'We are, it seems, dependent on the god for our idea of him as dependent on us' (IO 334).

At this point, Climacus brings the threat of plagiarism that was originally targeted at the Socratic perspective, and rolls the charge back onto the non-Socratic view, casting doubt on the possibility of knowledge of God in general and the Incarnation in particular as merely human invention, a poetic deceit (PF 35). After all, how would the pupil distinguish whether their teacher was Christ or merely Socrates? To this, Climacus says:

Presumably it could occur to a human being to poetize himself in the likeness of the god or the god in the likeness of himself, but not to poetize that the god poetized himself in the likeness of a human being, for if the god gave no indication, how could it occur to a man that the blessed god could need him? (PF 36)

Stephen Mulhall frames the issue this way: 'any modern follower of Socrates who claimed that the non-Socratic hypothesis was a human invention would be committed to claiming that she can not only think, but could also have thought up, what she is committed to regarding as unthinkable' (IO 332). But it is precisely with the difference between the thinkable and unthinkable that Climacus began his thought-experiment. In both approaches, by virtue of the historicity of the pupil and teacher, such an encounter would be *eo ipso* contingent (PF 60). Yet the truth that the pupil obtains is eternal—that is, either by virtue of the immortality of the soul (Socratic) or by the grace of the god (non-Socratic). However with the non-Socratic hypothesis, the teacher and teaching are *necessarily* inseparable (PF 55). Thus, the non-Socratic hypothesis gives rise to the paradox of understanding the relation between contingency and necessity which was previously outlined in the epigraphic reference to Lessing's problem at the beginning of Climacus' authorship.

So, if 'paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without paradox is like the lover without passion' as Climacus suggests, then 'the ultimate paradox of thought' is 'to discover something that thought itself cannot think' (PF 37). Revisiting Lessing's problem of the relation of the historical and the eternal, Climacus grants that the known is what can be thought and says, 'let us call this unknown *the god*. It is only a name we give to it' (PF 39). Now, Climacus sets aside the possibility of 'proofs' for the existence of God as circular, because such arguments tend 'to have assumed that he exists' or does not exist

in advance (PF 40). Instead, Climacus sets out to show how human understanding is ‘continually colliding with this unknown, which certainly does exist but is also unknown and to that extent does not exist’ (PF 44). Moreover, Climacus argues that the

understanding does not go beyond this; yet in its paradoxicality the understanding cannot stop reaching it and being engaged with it, because wanting to express its relation to it by saying that this unknown does not exist will not do, since just saying that involves a relation. (PF 44)

Thus, Climacus draws a crucial distinction between seeing this unknown as ‘a frontier’ or alternately as ‘the absolutely different’. For Climacus, if the unknown is pictured in terms of the latter, then it ‘is continually arrived at, and therefore when the category of motion is replaced by the category of rest it is the different, the absolutely different’ (PF 44). For Climacus, the problem is that ‘this difference cannot be grasped securely’, because ‘at the very bottom of devoutness there madly lurks the capricious arbitrariness that knows it itself has produced the god’ (PF 45). As Mulhall has rightly pointed out, either the non-Socratic view ‘must be itself unthinkable or it must be surreptitiously helping itself to an idea of something other than the absolutely unthinkable—thus collapsing the distinction between human beings and the absolutely different’ (IO 340). So from the Socratic perspective, the non-Socratic claim to know the unknown god *and* the absolutely different helps itself to knowledge that is claimed to be beyond thought—hence, as a product of reflection, ‘the god has become the most terrible deceiver through the understanding’s deception of itself. The understanding has the god as close as possible and yet just as far away’ (PF 46).

But suppose we conceive the unknown instead as a frontier? For Mulhall, then there is no such thing as unthinkable thoughts, and the task becomes not seeing the unknown as ‘the boundary of the thinkable, but at best a boundary within the boundary of the thinkable’ (IO 342). The upshot of thinking the unknown as a frontier then for Climacus raises the question of divine self-revelation in history:

If a human being is to come truly to know something about the unknown (the god), he must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him. The understanding cannot come to know this *by itself* (since, as we have seen, it is a contradiction); if it is going to come to know this, it must come to know this *from the*

god, and if it does come to know this, it cannot understand this and consequently cannot come to know this, for how could it understand the absolutely different? (PF 46; emphasis mine)

In other words, we only come to know the unknown through the god making it known to us, and yet, if we do in fact come to know, we can only say *that* we know because—according to Christian theology—the condition to know has been gifted by the Triune God who is unknowable since God reveals Himself as mystery.⁸⁵ The distinction between God and creation is absolute, and the causal relation between God and creation is non-reciprocal—theologians tend to describe this relation in terms of gift. For the relation between the pupil and the god is a necessary one; however, the relation between the god and the pupil is not, because it is freely given—what theologians refer to as grace. The difference between necessity and grace, then, is the difference between logical derivation and the freely and lovingly, indeed, we might in this sense say ‘unimaginable’ gift of *existing*. Moreover, the tension is not carving up the world in terms of necessity (could not be otherwise) and contingency (could be otherwise), but rather seeing the sheer wonder of creation as that which could-not-have-been-at-all yet *freely-and-lovingly-given-to-be*.⁸⁶ Hence, this relation to the unknown God manifests itself spontaneously as wonder—an immediate incongruity with the way things are supposed to go based on previous experience. And wonder is no respecter of persons, whether believer or unbeliever.

For Climacus, picturing the unknown as absolutely different is a failure to understand analogical language and ‘confuses the difference with likeness’ (PF 46). Moreover, ‘in its paradoxical passion the understanding does indeed will its own downfall’ (PF 47). The problem of the understanding’s own downfall, as Climacus himself observes, is that ‘everything [the understanding] says about the paradox it has learned from the paradox, even though, making use of an acoustical illusion, it insists that it itself has originated the paradox’ (PF 53). For Climacus, such an acoustical illusion repels the understanding and ‘offense *comes into existence* with the paradox’ (PF 51). Indeed, Climacus says that the ‘offense remains outside the paradox—no wonder, since the paradox is the wonder’ (PF 52). Just as Climacus warns of picturing the unknown

⁸⁵ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 207. See also, David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

⁸⁶ Cf. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 179.

as the absolutely different rather than as a frontier, he—who is not a religious thinker—sets out two ways of seeing the paradox: *intellectually*, in terms of offence as a logical contradiction, or *existentially*, in terms of faith as irreducible gift, which Socratically understood ‘is not a knowledge’ (PF 62). Hence, Climacus says that ‘faith itself is a wonder, and everything that is true of the paradox is also true of faith’ (PF 65). For Kierkegaard, faith is paradoxical and it is connected to the unknown. As we have seen, Climacus construes the unknown in spatial terms of a ‘frontier’, and later we will see how Kierkegaard temporalizes this spatial term when he speaks of ‘the autopsy of faith’ or the confluence of eternity and time as ‘the moment of vision’ (*Concept of Anxiety*, 88–9).

‘Suppose’, Climacus hypothesizes, ‘that the difference in intellectual endowment is the difference in being able to state more and more clearly that it is and remains a mystery for existing human beings’ (CUP 213–14). Importantly, in Climacus’ presentation there is the *distinction* between the god and the human being, and there is the non-reciprocal *relation* of dependency between them both.⁸⁷ Climacus says that it is a ‘blessing’ that ‘one relates oneself to this mystery without understanding it, only having faith’, and that ‘the maximum of any eventual understanding is to understand that it cannot be understood’ (CUP 214). Although Kierkegaard has read very little of St Thomas,⁸⁸ what he has his pseudonym say here portrays a remarkable inner unity with the Angelic Doctor.⁸⁹ The affinity with Thomas in respect to the distinction and non-reciprocal causal relation between God and creation can be detected when Climacus speaks of revelation—that is, communicating the truth in such a way that what is said can be appropriated as if it were one’s own:

No one is resigned as God, because he communicates creatively in such a way that in creating he *gives* independence vis-à-vis himself. The most resigned a human being can be is to acknowledge the given independence

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 154 n. 24; cf. ST I. q. 44–6.

⁸⁸ George L. Stengren, ‘Thomism’, in Thulstrup and Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, 98–120. See also, Benjamin Olivares Bøgeskov, ‘Thomas Aquinas: Kierkegaard’s View Based on Scattered and Uncertain Sources’, in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 183–206. For more on Kierkegaard’s engagement with patristic sources, see the rest of Stewart’s volume dedicated to the issue.

⁸⁹ For more, see Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 116, 135, 146, 174.

in every human being and to the best of one's ability do everything in order to truly help someone retain it. (CUP 260)

Here Climacus distinguishes God from creation and observes that this independence is a gift which comes into focus for existing human creatures in their relation to one another. With regard to the paradoxical distinction between the unknown god and creation, Climacus says that 'more understanding goes no further than less understanding' (CUP 607). Thus, what is required to answer Climacus' opening question—Can the truth be learned?—is to not 'confuse the spheres' (CUP 388) by treating an existential challenge as if it were an intellectual problem.⁹⁰ Here, Climacus' view converges with that of Aquinas:

'God is known to men through faith. In comparison with the knowledge that we have of God through demonstration, this knowledge through faith surpasses it, for we know some things about God through faith which, because of their sublimity, demonstrative reason cannot attain' . . . 'the intellect does not grasp the object to which it gives assent in the act of believing' . . . 'the intellect assents through faith to things presented to it, because of an act of will and not because it is necessarily moved by the very evidence of the truth' . . . 'one who believes gives assent to things that are proposed to him by another person, and which he himself does not see. Hence, faith has a knowledge that is more like hearing than vision' . . . 'there is for man some knowledge of God which is higher than the knowledge of faith: either the man who proposes the faith sees the truth immediately, as is the case when we believe in Christ; or he takes it immediately from one who does see, as when we believe the Apostles and Prophets' . . . 'an item of belief is not made perfectly present to the intellect by the knowledge of faith, since faith is of things absent, not of things present'. (SCG 3.40)

From the Socratic perspective, faith always requires a 'crucifixion of the understanding' (CUP 600). For Mulhall, the upshot of Climacus' thought-experiment is that what is difficult about Lessing's problem is not *conceptually* 'recognizing divinity in imperfection, but the practical one of recognizing oneself—a sinner—as nevertheless lovable by god, as having something of the divine that an incarnate god

⁹⁰ Stephen Mulhall, *Faith & Reason, Interpretations* (London: Duckworth, 1994a), 50. See also, Michael Weston, 'Kierkegaard: The Literature of Freedom', in James Giles (ed.), *Kierkegaard and Freedom* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 180.

might redeem' (IO 348). Mulhall's interpretation of faith crucifying the understanding has several theological implications:

First, the understanding suffers through its relation to the god; it must, indeed, undergo a self-inflicted crucifixion if it is to maintain that relationship. Second, an acoustical illusion is central to that relationship—the understanding is unwittingly but ineliminably indebted to the paradox for its words about the paradox. And finally, the understanding needs to step aside—to resign its self-given position of importance in relation to the paradox. (IO 348)

Curiously, the pseudonym Johannes Climacus shares the same name as the saint who is famous for his theological reflection on 'the ladder of ascent'.⁹¹ In a similar way, Kierkegaard's pseudonym has been helping the reader climb up a dialectical ladder by way of his sprawling thought-experiment. But just before the end of the climb, Climacus kicks the ladder out from under the reader:

Just as in Catholic books, especially from former times, one finds a note at the back of the book that notifies the reader that everything is to be understood in accordance with the teaching of the holy universal mother Church, so also what I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only an end but has a revocation to boot. (CUP 619)

Kierkegaard scholars continue to debate the significance of Climacus' revocation since it does not make much sense that an anonymous pseudonym would also feel the need for self-censorship.⁹² But bearing in mind Climacus' comments about wonder and seeing with the eyes of faith, then such a revocation could be seen as

⁹¹ For more on the mystical ladder of the original ascetic, see Jonathan L. Zecher, *The Role of Death in the Ladder of Ascent and the Greek Ascetic Tradition*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). For more on the Wittgensteinian ramifications of this idea, see James Conant, 'Must We Show What We Cannot Say?', in Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (eds), *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 242–83. James Conant, 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense', in Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (eds), *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 195–224. James Conant, 'Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors', in Timothy Tessin and Mario Von der Ruhr (eds), *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 248–331.

⁹² See the respective essays of Jamie Ferreira and Alastair Hannay in Rick Anthony Furtak, *Kierkegaard's 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript': A Critical Guide*, Cambridge Critical Guides (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

being faithful to his ascetic namesake. As Stephen Mulhall astutely observes:

The true teaching of the *Postscript* is that one must stop doing philosophy altogether—not just restrict one's philosophizing to attacks on the impulse to philosophize about faith, but stop philosophizing. It means realizing that even the *Postscript*, with its unremitting attack on philosophical pretensions, still retains philosophical pretensions which must be abandoned or revoked . . . the persona [that Climacus] presents to the reader embodies not the truth but a further version of the misapprehension to which he is opposed, in the hope that we can recognize ourselves in him and so go beyond the perspective he pretends to occupy.⁹³

According to Mulhall, the saintly revocation of Climacus reveals the 'extremity of writerly self-abnegation' that avoids 'the claim to authority apparently in the act of authorship by owning that one's every word is owed to another', hence the revocation should be seen not as 'finding one's way to words hitherto unspoken but as finding a way to mean what one says when one utters even the most common or familiar of words' (IO 353). Thus, Climacus' revocation at the end of his authorship can be seen as putting forward 'old fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity' (CUP 275) as the resource that provides the language to readers to help them mean what they say, even in the most unfamiliar circumstances.

So far, I have suggested that Kierkegaard offers a non-historicist approach to the Christian faith, which overlaps with the basic aims of *ressourcement* theologians. Moreover, I have suggested that Kierkegaard's description of creation, redemption, and the historical character of divine teaching actually coheres with important contours of Thomist thought. In the next section, I will bring the previous discussions to bear upon how Kierkegaard discusses the recovery of 'old fashioned orthodoxy' in terms of an autopsy of faith. Again, my claim is that Kierkegaard actually shares the basic task of *ressourcement* theologians: a paradoxical relation of faith and history in the modern age.

⁹³ Mulhall, *Faith & Reason*, 51–2.

1.4.2. The Epochal Equidistance of Divine Revelation: The Autopsy of Faith and Contemporaneity

When one normally sees the word ‘autopsy’, one thinks of a corpse spread out on an examination table, ready for inspection to see the cause of its demise. But when ‘autopsy’ is juxtaposed to ‘faith’, it becomes unclear what the object of inspection *is*—whether a less-than-living ‘object’ of faith is under scrutiny by more enlightened minds, or whether it is the source of faith that is actually inspecting those of us who take ourselves to be learned. The phrase ‘autopsy of faith’ (*Troens Autopsi*) only appears a few times, and is primarily used by Kierkegaard’s pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. By qualifying this technical procedure with a religious notion of faith, Climacus notes the difficulty of bringing the (deceased?) god before one’s eyes for inspection. What is needed then is an eyewitness: someone who claims to have seen the god. In other words, if an autopsy of faith cannot be reliably performed first hand, then in order to perform it, we must have second-hand evidence from the (third person) perspective of a reliable witness as an occasion for seeing the god for ourselves. And so, Climacus appeals, not only to the practice or act of faith, but also to reflection upon the content of faith (tradition), and notes a similarity between the task of the pathologist and that of the patrologist—one who inspects textual bodies of evidence from the patriarchs of the faith who have long since passed away but whose witness is made contemporary with the reader. But in reflecting upon the act and content of faith, does the gap between first and second hand still remain? Climacus says that to be contemporary in this respect implies seeing ‘with the eyes of faith’, yet not as

an eyewitness (in the sense of immediacy), but as a believer he is a contemporary in the *autopsy* of faith. But in this autopsy every noncontemporary (in the sense of immediacy) is in turn a contemporary. If someone coming later, someone who may even be carried away by his own infatuation, wishes to be a contemporary (in the sense of immediacy), he demonstrates that he is an imposter, recognizable, like the false Smerdis, by his having no ears—namely, the ears of faith—even though he may have the long donkey ears with which one, although listening as a contemporary (in the sense of immediacy), does not become contemporary. (PF 70)

In this passage, Climacus suggests that when conducting an autopsy on the source of faith, it is possible for those who are not immediately

present to be made present and those who are immediately present to be made as if they were not.⁹⁴ The difference is not a matter of curiosity or historical evidence but *faith*. In other words, Climacus draws a distinction between *striving* to see God for oneself, and the theological *reflection* upon the reports of such a practice by those witnesses, thus emphasizing the primacy of the practical over the theoretical. In short, when the striving to see God for oneself is made present to the believer in the autopsy of faith, as Nicholas Lash says, he or she does not 'seek prematurely to behold' because this is to 'substitute credulity for faith'.⁹⁵ The point Climacus makes is quite similar to the one Christ makes regarding salvation in his story about the master of the house locking the door:

You may find yourself standing outside knocking on the door, saying 'Lord, open to us', but he will answer, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will start saying, 'We once ate and drank in your company; you taught in our streets', but he will reply, 'I do not know where you come from; away from me, all evil doers!' (Luke 13:25–7 NJB)

In Kierkegaard's *Journals*, we read that faith is neither fantasy, cognition, historical knowledge, nor tangibility,⁹⁶ but rather that 'all faith is autopsy'.⁹⁷ Kierkegaard continues, 'all knowledge is concerned either with teaching or with historical knowledge about the teacher',⁹⁸ and 'by having merely historical information about the wonder, a person never comes further'.⁹⁹ But striving 'to be a contemporary', Kierkegaard says, is not the same thing as being

⁹⁴ Compare Climacus' remarks with N. F. S. Grundtvig's essay 'Trustworthy and Authoritative Witnesses', in N. F. S. Grundtvig, *What Constitutes Authentic Christianity?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), ch 3. '... it might be expected normally that in the writings of an apostle addressed to the Church, we will be able to discern the Christian articles of faith, regardless of whether they are specifically pointed out or merely presupposed' (p. 71). 'Contemporaneity' or 'simultaneity' is a theme that surfaces also in the work of Baron Friedrich Von Hügel (1852–1925). See Friedrich von Hügel, *Eternal Life: A Study of Its Implications and Applications*, 2nd edn. (London: T&T Clark, 1913). For more, see David Law's essay on von Hügel and Kierkegaard in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 75–96.

⁹⁵ Nicholas Lash, *Theology on Dover Beach* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 163. Earlier in this essay, Lash says that 'To confess the transcendence of the mystery of God is, amongst other things, to acknowledge that our experience and knowledge of God is mediated by those structures of particular meaning in which we order the flow of experience as we seek to discern what is, in fact, the case' (p. 159).

⁹⁶ PF 197; *Pap.* V B 6:7 1844/SKS PS ms.2.

⁹⁷ PF 198; *Pap.* V B 6:8 1844.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*; *Pap.* V B 12:4 1844/SKS PS ms.4.

⁹⁹ PF 199; *Pap.* V B 12:8 1844.

able to say, 'We ate and drank before his eyes, and the teacher taught in our streets', yet without having known the teacher, which, after all, only the believer (the person not immediately contemporary) did, and without being known by the teacher, and if the situation nevertheless is such that the teacher gives the condition, then one of course cannot know him without being known by him, and one knows him only insofar as one is known. (PF 198; *Pap.* V B 12:7 1844)

Here, Kierkegaard suggests that the teacher gives, not only the condition for knowing, but also the opportunity, as if the pupil lacked these two criteria. I will have more to say about this later, but for now, I want to observe that Kierkegaard claims that our knowledge of God must come from God.

But, Kierkegaard asks the reader, 'is this all conceivable? For the single individual does relate himself absolutely to the absolute teacher—that is, to the god—and all faith, as we said before, is indeed *autopsy*'.¹⁰⁰ From the perspective of the one who dissects and inspects, this task is very much an active one, and the passive object of inspection is quite indifferent to the ordeal. But Climacus cautions theoretically interested readers in search of certainty in 'the reliability of autopsy' because if the object of faith is not made 'dialectically clear' then 'rare learning and great acumen are expended on particulars' and 'the issue becomes only more and more difficult' due to the risk of 'changing faith into something else, into another kind of certainty' (CUP 11). However, regarding the seeking and being sought in the autopsy of faith, there is no gap between first and second hand; Kierkegaard and Climacus are on the same page:

there is not and cannot be any question of a follower at second hand, for the believer (and only he, after all, is a follower) continually has the *autopsy* of faith; he does not see with the eyes of others and sees only the same as every believer sees—with the eyes of faith. (PF 102)

In short, the autopsy of faith refers to the discovery of being able to see and do nothing at all on one's own—not even with an outward, retrospective gaze in reflective observation, or through the report of an eyewitness testimony—but nevertheless *being enabled by God with the gift of faith* to see the truth *of, and for* oneself, through one's own introspective and prospective glance in the search for self-knowledge,

¹⁰⁰ PF 215; *Pap.* V B 6:17 1844.

knowledge of God, and the knowledge of the good.¹⁰¹ In other words, it is the capacity of being made to see by virtue of being seen by the god—a gaze that has particular significance in the book of Hebrews:

The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts more incisively than any two-edged sword: it can seek out the place where soul is divided from spirit or joints from marrow; it can pass judgement on secret emotions and thoughts. No created thing is hidden from him; everything is uncovered and stretched fully open to the eyes of the one to whom we must give account of ourselves. (Heb. 4:12–13 NJB)

Seen in this regard, the autopsy of faith is not so much a task to perform by dispassionate observers as much as a procedure that human creatures undergo. For Kierkegaard, this procedure is performed by the Word of God, which refers not just to the divine wisdom found in Scripture, but also to the divine wisdom encountered in Christ himself who sees into the innermost depths of an individual.¹⁰² Indeed, Kierkegaard also speaks of ‘the mirror of the Word’ to refer to Christ who reflects back to us, not our external appearance, but the truth of our innermost self. In fact, the gaze of Christ is often portrayed in Kierkegaard’s reflections on sin and forgiveness—most often with women in the Gospels.¹⁰³ So the autopsy that faith performs upon the human creature involves not only revealing the knowledge of the truth of one’s own self as being capable of nothing at all,¹⁰⁴ but also involves the expectation of being addressed by God’s love, and the transformation of one’s way of seeing that accompanies such an encounter.¹⁰⁵ This ‘autopsy of

¹⁰¹ For more on Kierkegaard’s paradoxical stance (introspective/prospective–retrospective/outward) of self-knowledge, see Daniel Watts, ‘Kierkegaard and the Search for Self-Knowledge’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (2013), 525–49.

¹⁰² For more, see Søren Kierkegaard, FSE, 25–35.

¹⁰³ For instance, see Søren Kierkegaard, DCF, 108–15. The recent encyclical *Lumen Fidei* also uses this image: ‘Christ is the mirror in which [believers] find their own image fully realized’ (§22).

¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard says that the believer ‘continually keeps his eyes on God, that he, although he himself is capable of nothing at all, with God is capable of ever more and more’, in Kierkegaard, EUD, 325. See also, FSE, 76–81, 116, 131–3.

¹⁰⁵ For more treatment of this insight elsewhere in Kierkegaard’s authorship, see M. Jamie Ferreira, ‘Equality, Impartiality, and Moral Blindness in Kierkegaard’s “Works of Love”’, *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 25, no. 1 (1997), 65–85. Arne Gron, ‘Ethics of Vision’, in Ingolf U. Dalferth (ed.), *Ethik der Liebe: Studien zu Kierkegaards ‘Taten der Liebe’* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 111–22.

faith' is what is involved in 'the look', not in a Sartrean sense, but in Kierkegaard's existential *and* theological sense of a life lived 'before God'.¹⁰⁶

One might think that by viewing 'history' as a theological category, one would idealize the past and be nostalgic in the present, refusing to confront issues in the future. However, this is precisely the position that both *ressourcement* theologians and Kierkegaard resisted. A more constructive reading of this *ressourcement* and Kierkegaardian position interprets time, and one's life in and through time as sacramental—that is, not an idealized past but an open stance toward the present and future that humbly receives time as the gift which 'educates us for eternity' in Kierkegaard's idiom.

For Kierkegaard, 'the moment of vision' is not the fixed, timeless gaze of the Greek statue chiselled in stone. Rather, for Kierkegaard, one's life in and through time as a whole is seen as the dynamic, sustained 'moment' or stance in which one learns to see time as 'the atom of eternity', and be fully present in and across time, almost bringing it to a halt, amid the vanishing flux. In this way, Kierkegaard brings human subjectivity back to centre stage to highlight the importance of humility, passion, and how we are attuned to the world as the site of God's activity and oriented toward the future in and with faith, hope, and love. This is the unknown frontier that each one of us must confront, but not as 'a flight from the future' in nostalgia, as Edward Schillebeeckx has argued, but in such a way that we learn properly to see God, the future of humankind.¹⁰⁷ How do we learn to approach the future in the right way? Both *ressourcement* theologians and Kierkegaard point to Christ as the one who leads the way for humanity revealing the eternal in, and the redemption of, time.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ For more, see Walter Lowrie, "Existence" as Understood by Kierkegaard and/or Sartre', in *The Sewanee Review*, 58, no. 3 (1950), 379–401.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968).

¹⁰⁸ For more, see Pattison, *Eternal God / Saving Time*, 123–31. Pattison says that for Kierkegaard, 'eternity does not give us knowledge of or mastery over time, but, in time, detaches us from reliance on and identification with time whilst simultaneously, *qua* suffering and *qua* obedience, guarding against the self-forgetful hubris of identifying ourselves with the eternal and absolute knowledge that is proper solely to God' (128) Consider a remark from Kierkegaard's Journal: 'Christ really relates tangentially to the earth (nor can the divine relate in any other way): He had no place where he could lay his head. A tangent is of course a straight line, it only touches the circle at one single point' (SKS NB 9:49 [1849]).

So the autopsy of faith theologically refers to being addressed and transformed by the Word, the seeing of oneself with one's own eyes before God, and lastly, the death to self that the human creature undergoes in order to be contemporary with the illuminating Word. It's the movement from Voltaire's view, 'In order to know if he is a God, I ask only one thing of you: that is to open your eyes',¹⁰⁹ to St Augustine's, 'It is a further matter to say that when a man sees something which is good, God in him sees that it is good'.¹¹⁰ The difference between the conventional and theological sense of 'autopsy of faith' is the difference between interrogating and being interrogated by that which one set out to interrogate in the first place.¹¹¹ It is also a difference in the act and content of 'seeing'. In the conventional respect, 'seeing' is a judgement that the observer endorses reflectively in the act of judging the object before one's eyes. Whereas in the theological aspect, 'seeing' is hardly a perception but rather reflectively opaque and resists mastery—in other words, the eyes of faith do not 'see', but as the author of Hebrews has it, 'can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen' (Heb. 11:1 NJB). In fact, 'faith', like 'judgement', can refer to both the act and content. So in speaking about either the act or content of faith, it is important not to confuse the secondary place of the latter for the primacy of the former—as if faith were merely a product of one's interrogative deliberation upon clear and distinct perceptions of an idea. It is good to remember that it is the risen Christ who asks St Thomas the doubter: 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe' (John 20:29). For Kierkegaard, the eyewitness and the reader of the eyewitness's report are equidistant from the self-revelation of God. Hence, Kierkegaard says that 'every follower is only a witness, but the latest one is just as good as the first'; this is not to denigrate the value of the Fathers, but rather to show that 'the one

¹⁰⁹ Voltaire, *Histoire de Jenni*, 61.

¹¹⁰ *Augustine and Chadwick, Confessions*, Bk 13, ch. 38.

¹¹¹ For instance, see the relevant discussion in Søren Kierkegaard, WA, 93–108. Kierkegaard says 'To ask whether Christ is profound is blasphemy and is an attempt (be it conscious or unconscious) to destroy him in a subtle way, since the question contains a doubt with regard to his authority and attempts in impertinent straightforwardness to evaluate and grade him, as if he were up for examination and should be catechized instead of being the one to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth' (WA 102).

who comes later believes *through* the contemporary, but not in him, stands in just as free a relation to the god as the contemporary does' (PF 216).

Perhaps now we might be in a better position to see, in a later chapter, the relevance of Kierkegaard's notion of 'autopsy of faith' for a patrologist like Henri de Lubac, who shares a similar concern about retrieving the sources of the Christian faith and yet not being deluded by privileging one epoch above another, as if the self-revelation of God is not equidistant for all. However, what might be less clear to us now is how the autopsy of faith remains a real dilemma for both believers and unbelievers alike. Far from being a 'proof' for the existence of God, the autopsy of faith deprives the believer and unbeliever of objective evidence—that is, a fact which need not be interpreted; hence, from our contingent perspective how might one come to learn the truth or even discern the god's eternal presence in history? This question anticipates later chapters on Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetics and Christology, and Cornelio Fabro's comparison of the ecclesiology of John Henry Newman and Kierkegaard.

1.5. CONCLUSION: RETRIEVING THE BROADER CATHOLICITY OF KIERKEGAARD'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

In this chapter, I have addressed two obstacles to my central argument: i) that Kierkegaard's theological anthropology is antithetical to the Catholic faith (§1.1); and ii) the problem of an historicist reading of Kierkegaard (§1.4). In doing so, I have laid the thematic groundwork to help the reader see how Kierkegaard shares a basic aim with *ressourcement* thinkers: that of recovering a deeper catholicity of a theological anthropology and theology of history in the modern age (§1.2–1.3). In my view, there is still plenty of room for additional ecumenical readings of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, which must be reconsidered in light of the widespread misconceptions that I identified in part one of this chapter. Before, it seemed that there would be much for Catholic theologians to demur regarding Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. However, I have argued

that a more ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard's writings allows for these objections to be forestalled in light of all that is shared in common.

In light of the theological reflection and exegesis of Kierkegaard's writings in this chapter, it is no wonder that *ressourcement* theologians in the twentieth century gravitated toward Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. In fact, Henri de Lubac endorsed Kierkegaard's theological anthropology as 'Pauline', and compared Kierkegaard with Maurice Blondel.¹¹² Moreover, in Cornelio Fabro's introduction to his Italian translation of *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*, Fabro says that these two books 'are close to the kind of "edifying treatises" found in patristic and medieval times about the human misery and torment that stings the sinful soul that wants to escape from the face of God'.¹¹³ Fabro goes on to say that, although Kierkegaard writes under a 'profoundly Lutheran inspiration', this still does not negate the 'realism of Catholic spirituality'.¹¹⁴ There are more examples of Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard's writings, but it is important for both Kierkegaard scholars and contemporary Catholic theologians especially, to recover examples of a post-Tridentine context that sought to overcome significant historical and theological impasses in modernity. My claim in this book is that these Catholic thinkers provide a unique example of this phenomenon, which had important ramifications for the reform and renewal of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent ecumenical developments.¹¹⁵ It would seem that Kierkegaard's writings still continue to escort the reformers today, even within Christian traditions

¹¹² Henri de Lubac, *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 170–1, 188. For more on Blondel's influence on de Lubac, see Antonio Russo, *Henri De Lubac: Teologia e Dogma nella Storia: L'Influsso di Blondel*, La Cultura (Rome: Studium, 1990). In this passage, de Lubac cites as his source Tisseau's French translation of Johannes Hohlenberg's *L'Oeuvre de Søren Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen 1940/Paris 1960), 75, 82–3. Although there were German translations available, Tisseau's French translation of *The Sickness unto Death* was published in 1947, three years after de Lubac published *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*.

¹¹³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Il Concetto dell'Angoscia/La Malattia Mortale*, trans. Cornelio Fabro (Florence: Sansoni, 1965), v. Translation mine.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxii. Translation mine.

¹¹⁵ For more, see Christopher Ruddy, 'Ressourcement and the Enduring Legacy of Post-Tridentine Theology', in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 185–201. See also, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*: <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html> (accessed 20 May 2015).

beyond his own (FSE 211). My overall argument in this book is that Kierkegaard's writings have stimulated reform and renewal in twentieth-century Catholic theology, and should continue to do so today. In the next chapter, I will take up this question in light of the wider Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings. Kierkegaard shares important theological sensibilities that will aid *ressourcement* theologians in renewing Catholic theology in the modern age. In subsequent chapters, I turn to the writings of particular Catholic reformers to offer a representative model of engagement with Kierkegaard's writings.

The Wider Catholic Reception of Kierkegaard's Writings in the Twentieth Century

In the previous chapter, I interrogated the validity of an enduring stereotype regarding the exclusively Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. At first glance, this stereotype resists the possibility of an ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard's writings. However, I suggested that it neglects the broader catholicity of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, which invites more ecumenical readings of Kierkegaard than scholars have previously permitted. As an alternative, I offered an account of Kierkegaard's compatibility with the basic aims of *ressourcement* theologians.

Building upon my constructive account of an ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard's writings, in this chapter* I assess briefly the wider Catholic reception to suggest that stereotypes of Kierkegaard did not prevent many Catholic thinkers from seeing Kierkegaard as an ally, appropriating his writings in their project of reform and renewal during the twentieth century. I will survey the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings across the German-, French-, and English-speaking world to argue that there is significant engagement in the twentieth century, which coincides with the beginnings of theological renewal in Catholic theology *and* the dissemination and translation of Kierkegaard's writings in Europe. With the wider Catholic reception in view, the reader will be better equipped to see how Kierkegaard's influence develops in the writings of particular *ressourcement* theologians examined in later chapters.

* The material in this chapter comes from my PhD dissertation (2013) and review article (2014), which were both written independently of Christopher Barnett and Peter Sajda's chapter on this topic in Jon Stewart, *Blackwell Companion to Kierkegaard* (Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

2.1. THE KIERKEGAARD RENAISSANCE IN EUROPE

After Kierkegaard's death in 1855, it took many years for his writings to emerge in translation outside of Denmark.¹ In his book-length chapter on the German reception of Kierkegaard, Heiko Schulz provides an invaluable bibliographic goldmine.² Importantly, Schulz admits that there were 'only very few' German references to Kierkegaard in his lifetime.³ However, this fragmentary pre-reception stage leading up to the turn of the century does not eliminate common stereotypes about Kierkegaard. For instance, many German scholars during that time exclusively focused on Kierkegaard's post-1850 writings and his critique of the Danish church, enlisting him for 'atheist and sectarian' purposes.⁴ Indeed, one year after Kierkegaard's death, the Catholic historian Joseph Edmund Jörg (1819–1901) seized upon this image and simultaneously praised Kierkegaard for his critique of Protestantism, and yet 'criticiz[ed] him for having failed to draw the appropriate conclusion' of endorsing Roman Catholicism.⁵

This fragmentary picture of Kierkegaard's thought was soon supplemented in Germany by the intellectual concerns of the Tübingen theologian, Johann Tobias Beck (1804–1878).⁶ Beck introduced Kierkegaard's writings to his students Albert Bärthold (1804–1892) and Christoph Schrenpf (1860–1944)—who both would go on to produce some of the first translations of Kierkegaard in Germany. Besides translating excerpts from Kierkegaard's writings, in 1880 Bärthold wrote one of the first books about the theological relevance of Kierkegaard.⁷ By 1902, the Catholic thinker Rudolf Kassner had started his Kierkegaard reading group in Vienna, and Kassner had started to produce articles that popularized Kierkegaard's aesthetics.⁸ Schulz also observes how Kassner played an influential role in introducing Kierkegaard's writings to both Rainer Maria Rilke and Georg Lukács.⁹

¹ Habib Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), xvii.

² Heiko Schulz, 'A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's International Reception* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 307–419.

³ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁷ Albert Bärthold, *Zur theologischen Bedeutung Søren Kierkegaards* (Halle: Fricke, 1880).

⁸ Schulz, 'A Modest Head Start', 322.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 324–6.

As Schulz rightly notes, Bärthold was ‘consistently sympathetic’ towards Kierkegaard, but Schrempf was unable to prevent his own ‘scepticism and malaise’ (after leaving the priesthood) from entering his own presentation of Kierkegaard. Commenting on ‘the dubious quality’ of Schrempf’s translations, Schulz says that his ‘repeatedly revised, highly idiosyncratic, and at times breathtakingly free renditions of the Kierkegaardian texts soon became *the* authoritative voice at least for many German Kierkegaard scholars’—especially, prominent theologians like Barth, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, and philosophers like Heidegger, Jaspers, and Adorno.¹⁰ Schulz says that Schrempf spread ‘his own, highly eclectic, and often polemical message’ privileging Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous writings to ‘promote and justify religious unbelief and/or scepticism’.¹¹ This is a common misconception that feeds into the ‘secular’ Kierkegaard that gets embedded in translation. The ‘secular Kierkegaard’ stereotype will be promoted in the twentieth century by some prominent German philosophers and theologians, and it is appropriated eventually by the ‘death of god’ theology in Anglophone scholarship.

By 1922, less than twelve volumes of Kierkegaard’s writings (out of twenty-eight) were available in Schrempf’s German translation.¹² Between 1923 and 1929, the major (but not the only) secondary literature on Kierkegaard in German was written by Eduard Geismar and Torsten Bohlin. This was also during the time when Karl Barth was moving away from his initial enthusiasm with Kierkegaard, leaving his student Hermann Diem to pick up where Barth left off.¹³ It would not be until the period of the first centenary of Kierkegaard’s death (1950–1969) that Emanuel Hirsch would produce a complete and reliable twenty-eight volume translation of Kierkegaard’s writings in

¹⁰ Schulz, ‘A Modest Head Start’, 316.

¹¹ Schulz, *ibid.*, 317.

¹² Søren Kierkegaard, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Christoph Schrempf, vol. 12 (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1922). Schulz observes that volumes 10–12 were Schrempf’s own ‘infamous Kierkegaard biography’ and his ‘numerous forewords and afterwords’. By 1935, Schrempf’s edition had expanded to sixteen volumes (Schulz: 316). For more on Schrempf, see Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard*, 311–38. For a survey of the theological reception of Kierkegaard in Germany at that time, see Werner Elert, *Der Kampf um das Christentum: Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen dem evangelischen Christentum in Deutschland und dem allgemeinen Denken seit Schleiermacher und Hegel* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2005).

¹³ Hermann Diem, *Philosophie und Christentum bei Søren Kierkegaard* (Munich: Kaiser, 1929).

German. Although Hirsch also wrote ‘the magisterial’ *Kierkegaard Studien* (1930–1933), Schulz says that Hirsch:

productively appropriates the Kierkegaardian framework in such a way as to put his own account of the presuppositions for adequately and convincingly communicating the Christian truth on the agenda—an account, which in part deliberately deviates from the one Kierkegaard had given . . . [that is,] an equally fatal and dangerous mixture of conservative Lutheranism and political decisionism *à la* Carl Schmitt . . . [In fact, Hirsch] was one of the first German theologians who ‘successfully’ integrated the ideas of [Kierkegaard] into the framework of a Nazi-ideology.¹⁴

In Germany, this early reception was known as the *Kierkegaard Renaissance* and it tended to characterize Kierkegaard as either a Romantic literary figure or as the anti-Hegelian forerunner of existentialism. This reception provided the stereotypes that eventually led to the occlusion of the theological import of Kierkegaard’s writings—especially in the work of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Karl Jaspers. Of Karl Jaspers, Schulz says that his ‘whole philosophical enterprise’ was to recover the ‘significance of philosophy under the anti-metaphysical and post-religious conditions and challenges of modernity’—that is, ‘to do away with the specifically Christian presuppositions and intentions which in reality prove indispensable for Kierkegaard’s entire thought’.¹⁵

In comparison with German scholarship, the Italian reception of Kierkegaard’s writings was delayed until the 1930s.¹⁶ One prominent strand of thought in this Italian context was Franco Lombardi’s (1906–1989) work on the ‘new humanism’ of Ludwig Feuerbach and Kierkegaard. According to Ingrid Basso, Lombardi was responsible for the misconception that Kierkegaard’s thought can be reduced to his critique of Hegel, which subsequently results in irrationalism.¹⁷ Another

¹⁴ Schulz, ‘A Modest Head Start’, 346–7. For more on Hirsch’s reception of Kierkegaard, see Matthias Wilke, *Die Kierkegaard-Rezeption Emanuel Hirschs: eine Studie über die Voraussetzungen der Kommunikation christlicher Wahrheit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). For more on Hirsch’s influence on the German reception of Kierkegaard’s Christology, see Schulz, ‘A Modest Head Start’, 375ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹⁶ For more on the Italian dependence on German scholarship, see Giuseppe Mario Pizzuti, *Tra Kierkegaard e Barth, l’Ombra di Nietzsche: La ‘Crisi’ come Odissea dello Spirito* (Venosa: Osanna, 1986), 21–100.

¹⁷ Basso, ‘Italy: From a Literary Curiosity to a Philosophical Comprehension’, in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard’s International Reception: Southern, Central, and*

misconception of Kierkegaard in the Italian reception pertains to Kierkegaard's relation to atheistic existentialism. Several misconceptions and distortions were embedded in the Italian reception of Kierkegaard's writings, which, the Italian Thomist, Cornelio Fabro (1911–1995) worked hard to correct. In response, Fabro also sought to clarify and highlight Kierkegaard's theological relevance for Catholicism—especially, Kierkegaard's critique of rationalism and his soteriological emphasis upon the truth.¹⁸ Basso says that 'Fabro opened a new period of Kierkegaard studies, which brought to an end a phase of vague and mediated works, and moved toward a new critical and philological one.'¹⁹ We will have more to say about Fabro in a later chapter that is dedicated to him.

Most accounts of Kierkegaard's reception in France begin with the momentous influence of Jean Wahl's (1888–1974) *Études Kierkegaardiennes* (1938)—that is of course, after the impact of the German reception in the writings of Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers to name but a few.²⁰ Although Wahl himself criticized the Catholic portrayal of Kierkegaard,²¹ he was closely linked at the Sorbonne to several Catholic thinkers like Jacques Maritain and

Eastern Europe [KRSRR 8:2] (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 87. For more, see Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard in Italia', *Il Veltro* 25, nos. 1–3 (1981), 79–89.

¹⁸ For more, see Giuseppe Mario Pizzuti, 'Cornelio Fabro: Traduttore e Interprete di Kierkegaard in Italia', *Humanitas* 39, no. 2 (1984), 127–38. Giuseppe Mario Pizzuti (ed.), *Veritatem in Caritate: Studi in Onore di Cornelio Fabro* (Basilicata: Ermes, 1991), 7–20. See also, Flavio Capucci, 'Cornelio Fabro Interprete di Kierkegaard', *Studi Cattolici* 256 (1982), 364–7.

¹⁹ Basso, 'Italy', 90.

²⁰ For more, see Edward Baring, 'Anxiety in Translation: Naming Existentialism before Sartre', *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 4 (2015), 470–88. For more on Wahl in relation to Hegel and Heidegger, see Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927–1961* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 85f. For more on Wahl's relation to Lévinas, see Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 177f. See also, D. Parodi, 'Philosophy in France, 1937–1938', *The Philosophical Review* 48, no. 1 (1939), 1–30. Also, see Stephen J. Brown, 'Currents and Cross-Currents in Post-War France', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 36, no. 142 (1947), 211–16. See also, Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism, and Being* (London: Routledge, 1995). Also see, Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), ch. 3. Prior to Wahl, there is the reception in Austro-Hungary (Lukacs, Buber, Kassner, Kraus von Hoffmansthal, Kafka, and Max Brod). Even in France, Wahl's work was already responding to Lev Shestov's anti-rationalist reading.

²¹ Jean Wahl, *Études Kierkegaardiennes* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1938), 380.

Gabriel Marcel.²² Moreover, due to the rise of Heidegger's philosophical influence in Europe, a 'return to the sources' was emphasized among philosophers, and Kierkegaard's popularity is not unconnected from this philosophical *ressourcement*. According to a review of Wahl's book, Theodor Adorno says that, despite the unimpressive role of Kierkegaard in French philosophy to date, Heidegger 'may safely be regarded as a pupil of Kierkegaard', and anyone following in the wake of Heidegger must necessarily '[go] back to the sources of the existential fashion now current in Germany'.²³ Adorno says that Wahl's book 'serves this purpose'.²⁴ For all its contributions to the field, *Études* frames the way subsequent Catholic authors will approach Kierkegaard biographically—and this is not without caricature. For instance, Alejandro Sánchez and Azucena Palavicini say that Wahl is responsible for presenting not only a metaphysical view of Hegel, but also 'a belligerent Kierkegaard, a kind of anti-philosopher, whom [Wahl] sometimes compares to Pascal, an anti-rationalist who defines the limits of knowledge and the starting point of faith'.²⁵ As Eric Pons observes, 'Wahl's reception is flawed because he receives Kierkegaard's *Papirer* through multiple intermediaries'.²⁶ Yet, Wahl says that 'the word "existence" in the philosophical sense that it is used today was employed for the first time and discovered by Kierkegaard'.²⁷ Thomists like Étienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain²⁸ latched on to this observation, but discarded Kierkegaard along the way in exchange for Henri Bergson, in what eventually became known as

²² Alejandro Cavallazzi and Azucena Palavicini Sánchez, 'Jean Wahl: Philosophies of Existence and the Introduction of Kierkegaard in the Non-Germanic World', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard and Existentialism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 395.

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Review: Études Kierkegaardienes by Jean Wahl', *The Journal of Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (1939), 19. For more, see Peter Šajda's 'Theodor W. Adorno: Kierkegaard's Triumphs and Defeats', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Philosophy: German and Scandinavian Philosophy*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 11 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 3–48.

²⁴ Adorno, 'Review', 19.

²⁵ Cavallazzi and Sánchez, 'Jean Wahl', 399.

²⁶ See Eric Pons, 'The French Reception of the *Papirer*', in Niels J. Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and Jon Stewart (eds), *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 353; 346–65.

²⁷ Jean Wahl, *Petite histoire de l'existentialisme: suivie de Kafka et Kierkegaard* (Paris: Limoges, 1947), 12; as cited in Cavallazzi and Sánchez, 'Jean Wahl', 402.

²⁸ For instance, see Nathaniel Kramer, 'Jacques Maritain: Kierkegaard As "Champion of the Singular"', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard and Existentialism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 217–32; esp. pp. 223ff.

‘existential’ Thomism.²⁹ It is undeniable that Wahl’s *Études* is a watershed mark in the French reception of Kierkegaard.³⁰ After Wahl’s contribution, it is not surprising that many Catholic theologians in France would be drawn to Kierkegaard, but read him in light of a Thomistic perspective. Kierkegaard had already become established as a major figure in the German, Italian, and French intellectual traditions. Indeed, it would seem that any account of a Catholic reception of Kierkegaard must begin and end with the *Kierkegaard Renaissance* in Europe—but there is more to the story than that.

2.2. THEODOR HAECKER

Habib Malik’s penetrating analysis of the European impact and transmission of Kierkegaard’s writings concludes with Theodor Haecker (1879–1945). Malik says that after Haecker, ‘there came forth a few individuals who followed his lead in attempting to claim Kierkegaard for the Catholic tradition, and to express Kierkegaardian insights in Catholic terms’.³¹ Malik goes on to say that the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard ‘represents a radical way of raising the legitimate question of Kierkegaard’s relation to Catholicism, both

²⁹ For more on Bergson and the French philosophical context of this era, see Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chs. 3–4. For more on ‘existential Thomism’, see John F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), chs. 6–7; esp. pp. 14–17. Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 80–7.

³⁰ For more, see Bousquet, ‘Kierkegaard dans la tradition théologique francophone’, *Kierkegaard Revisited* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 339–66. See also, Teboul, ‘La Réception de Kierkegaard en France 1930–1960’, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 89, no. 2 (2005), 315–36.

³¹ Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard*, 390. One of these thinkers is Miguel de Unamuno, see Malik’s treatment (pp. 284–7). For more, see Jan E. Evans, ‘Miguel De Unamuno’s Reception and Use of the Kierkegaardian Claim That “Truth Is Subjectivity”’, *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 64, no. 2/4 (2008), 1113–26. See also, George Pattison, ‘Paradox and Mystery: Catholic Existentialism,’ in *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 194–201. Other Catholic thinkers would be Eugen Biser, Friedrich von Hügel, and Thomas Merton, see relevant chapters in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard’s Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 10, tome 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

historically as regards his own acquaintance with it, and theologically in terms of affinities between his positions and Catholic doctrine'.³²

Markus Kleinert says that Haecker was 'one of the dominant figures' who 'advanced and steered' the 'German-language Kierkegaard reception', and the German reception was 'inextricably intertwined with Haecker's "own encounter with Kierkegaard"'.³³ According to Haecker himself, the writings of Kierkegaard were virtually unknown to the French- and English-speaking world at that time.³⁴ In 1913, Haecker wrote his first essay entitled, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Inwardness*.³⁵ After the publication of *Satire und Polemik* (1914–20),³⁶ Haecker was received into the Catholic Church, spending the next several years learning Danish and translating Kierkegaard and Newman into German.³⁷ Haecker was also arrested and banned from speaking either at the university or on the radio because he was an outspoken critic of Nazism.³⁸ On the

³² Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard*, 390.

³³ Markus Kleinert, 'Theodor Haecker: The Mobilization of a Total Author', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Literature, Criticism and Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 91. See also, Karin Masser, *Theodor Haecker: Literatur in theologischer Fragestellung* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986), 339–63. In fact, one sees that at the root of the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard, there is an appropriation of Haecker's/Kierkegaard's critique of modernity and a simultaneous rejection of Kierkegaard as a Protestant foil of irrationality. For more, see Werner Becker, 'Der Überschrift von Kierkegaard zu Newman in der Lebensentscheidung Theodor Haeckers', *Newman-Studien* 1 (1948), 251–70. It is worth noting how Fabro's translation strategy follows that of Haecker, with a comparison of Kierkegaard and Newman, and an emphasis upon the theological writings and *Journals*. However, Fabro does not malign Kierkegaard for being a Protestant.

³⁴ See Theodor Haecker, 'Søren Kierkegaard', in Heinz-Horst Schrey (ed.), *Søren Kierkegaard* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 19. See also Haecker's, *Søren Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit* (Munich: Verlag J. F. Schreiber, 1913), 5–6. For more on the literary reception of Kierkegaard in Germany before 1920, see Christian Wiebe, *Der witzige, tiefe, leidenschaftliche Kierkegaard: zur Kierkegaard-Rezeption in der deutschsprachigen Literatur bis 1920*, vol. 311, *Beiträge zur neueren Literaturgeschichte* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012). For a helpful bibliography and a portrait of Haecker's reception of Kierkegaard, see Kleinert, 'Theodor Haecker', 91–114.

³⁵ Haecker, 'Søren Kierkegaard'.

³⁶ Theodor Haecker, *Satire und Polemik, 1914–1920* (Innsbruck: Brenner-Verl., 1920).

³⁷ Theodor Haecker, *Journal in the Night* (London: Harvill Press, 1950), xiii.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Haecker's journal documents his arrest and his critique of German nationalism. Also, Alexander Dru provides an invaluable introduction to Haecker's work. Dru is perhaps less well known than his English translations of Kierkegaard, Péguy, Burckhardt, Haecker, Blondel, de Lubac, and Balthasar. Dru was introduced to Kierkegaard through Haecker's writings and in turn introduced

dust jacket of the English translation of Haecker's *Journal*, Jacques Maritain said that Haecker was 'a man of deep insight and rare intellectual integrity—a "Knight of Faith" to use Kierkegaard's expression'. Interestingly, Tracey Rowland traces the influence of Haecker's translation of John Henry Newman on Pope Benedict XVI; however, she neglects the impact of Haecker's work on Kierkegaard.³⁹

As Allan Janik suggests, had Haecker not translated and rediscovered Kierkegaard's *Two Ages* in 1914 for the German-speaking world, it is highly unlikely that Theodor Adorno, Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, or Karl Jaspers would have accessed the Dane's notion of 'idle talk' on their own.⁴⁰ That said, Haecker was not the first to translate Kierkegaard into German. However, Janik says that Haecker was (unlike the translations by the Lutheran minister Christoph Schrempf) the first to *reliably* translate 'a major work of Kierkegaard' in such a way that 'set the tone for the reception of Kierkegaard's *oeuvre* generally'.⁴¹ Also it is worth noting that Haecker translated Kierkegaard's theological writings because they had been omitted from Christoph Schrempf's translations. Of the pseudonymous works, Haecker said that Kierkegaard's

Kierkegaard to the English-speaking world. For more, see George Pattison, 'Great Britain: From "Prophet of the Now" To Postmodern Ironist (and after)', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's International Reception* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 250. See also, John Heywood-Thomas and Hinrich Siefken, 'Theodor Haecker and Alexander Dru: A Contribution to the Discovery of Kierkegaard in Britain', *Kierkegaardiana* 18 (1996), 173–90.

³⁹ Tracey Rowland, *Benedict XVI: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 11–12. Rowland does briefly recognize Haecker's 'dedication' to Kierkegaard on p. 20, but only in relation to Alexander Dru and no more.

⁴⁰ For more on Haecker's reception of Kierkegaard and his relation to other German philosophers, see Allan Janik, 'Haecker, Kierkegaard and the Early Brenner: A Contribution to the History of the Reception of *Two Ages* in the German-Speaking World', in Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 14, vol. 14: *Two Ages* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 190, 220. See also, John M. Hoberman, 'Kierkegaard's "Two Ages" and Heidegger's Critique of Modernity', in Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 14: *Two Ages* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 240–1. Supposedly, Martin Heidegger had a 'love-hate' relationship with Haecker for decades, see Theodore J. Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 321. Wittgenstein felt so indebted to Haecker that he donated some of his family money to him, see Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Cape, 1990), 109.

⁴¹ Janik, 'Haecker, Kierkegaard', 191. In 1909, Schrempf left the Lutheran Church and much of his later popularization of Kierkegaard was influenced by this step (his twelve-volume German edition of Kierkegaard's writings appeared between 1909 and 1922).

'really precious theological ideas are not found in *those works*'.⁴² In a posthumous essay that received the unfortunate English title *Kierkegaard the Cripple* (1948), Haecker himself says that:

Kierkegaard's ideas required a different climate if they were to develop harmoniously and fit into the eternal philosophy of being, and the theology of the infallible Church. As a result, they were often confined within wholly heterogeneous elements and did not attain the fruitfulness to which they were entitled by their real meaning and function.⁴³

According to Haecker, Kierkegaard's 'place is to be found in Thomistic philosophy and theology, where it belongs, which language would have shielded him from his absurd philosophy of the absurd as divine truth in the light of human understanding':⁴⁴

It has always proved my greatest disappointment and is incomprehensible to me, not to find in [Kierkegaard] that strong and clear, burning intellectual desire for the unalloyed perfection and purity of the true doctrine so impressively demonstrated in the letters of the apostles, the early fathers, the history of the Church and of the saints, and which at the same period gave Newman no rest until with sorrow he was forced for the sake of truth to abandon the Anglican Church, and return to the Church.⁴⁵

Haecker is right to distinguish Kierkegaard from Newman in ecclesial terms; however, this should not indicate that their commitments or intellectual targets were incongruous.⁴⁶ But we are left with a real question as to whether the Christology and ecclesiology of Kierkegaard and Newman can be reconciled—I will address this topic in a later chapter.

⁴² Kleinert, 'Theodor Haecker', 105 n. 49. For more, see Gerhard Schreiber, 'Christoph Schrempf: The "Schwabian Socrates" as Translator of Kierkegaard', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: German Theology* [KRSRR 10:1] (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 275–319.

⁴³ Theodor Haecker and C. van O. Bruyn, *Der Buckel Kierkegaards* [*Kierkegaard the Cripple*] (London: Harvill Press, 1948), 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20. Haecker is not the only Catholic at this time to compare Kierkegaard to Newman, see Regis Jolivet and W. H. Barber, *Introduction to Kierkegaard* (London: Frederick Muller, 1950), 65. 'Kierkegaard also has a notion of *development* as continuity which exactly corresponds with the reflections Newman had just published in 1845 in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.'

⁴⁶ For a more harmonious view, see M. Jamie Ferreira, 'Leaps and Circles: Kierkegaard and Newman on Faith and Reason', *Religious Studies* 30, no. 4 (1994a), 379–97.

However, what unites Kierkegaard, Newman, and Haecker is an emphasis upon 'wonder' and how it resists conceptual mastery. On the topic of wonder, Haecker says, 'There is one thing that has come to full maturity in me: the understanding that I do not understand God: the sense of the *Mysterium*. That prevents me from misunderstanding the things of this world.'⁴⁷ Acknowledging this comparison of Kierkegaard and Newman, Alexander Dru sums up Haecker's position: 'the ultimate mystery of existence is the safeguard of truth and knowledge, the only safeguard against the inadequate attempts to explain everything, and the absurd denial of meaning'.⁴⁸ In 1949, Dru was preparing translations of Haecker and published two articles⁴⁹ about Haecker's relation to Kierkegaard in the *Downside Review* which appeared alongside one of Hans Urs von Balthasar's first articles printed in English. In one article about Haecker, Dru reminds the reader that 'What Kierkegaard meant by faith, which he so often and misleadingly defines as being "against" reason, is in line with Newman's description of conscience.'⁵⁰

Haecker's foundational place in the Kierkegaardian tradition in Catholicism is important because of his translation of the writings of Newman and Kierkegaard, and his subsequent influence upon important figures. Indeed, Haecker's work on Kierkegaard is also important to signal because it precedes that of Karl Barth⁵¹ and

⁴⁷ Haecker, *Journal in the Night*, 47. For more on Newman, see Gerard Loughlin, 'The Wonder of Newman's Education', *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1038 (2011), 224–42.

⁴⁸ Haecker, *Journal in the Night*, xli, 74. Dru mentions that the context of Newman's sermon 'Implicit and Explicit Reason' is an attempt to articulate a similar point. See John Henry Newman, James David Earnest, and Gerard Tracey (eds), *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 251ff.

⁴⁹ The first article is a condensed version of what appears as the introduction to Dru's translation of Haecker's *Journals*, see Alexander Dru, 'Haecker's Point of View', *Downside Review* 67, no. 209 (1949a), 260–75; Alexander Dru, 'On Haecker's *Metaphysik des Gefühls*', *Downside Review* 68, no. 211 (1949b), 35–45.

⁵⁰ Dru, 'On Haecker's *Metaphysik*', 40.

⁵¹ 'The post-war Catholic recovery of the Fathers would also have been very different without Blondel—but it would have been different too without the immediacy of the challenge of existentialism. Barth's Anselm, Barth's Calvin, even Barth's St Paul, owe a lot to Barth's Kierkegaard', in Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005), 98. Barth's brief exposure to Kierkegaard came in the 1920s during his revision of *Der Römerbrief* (2nd edn., 1922), but his Danish muse had been discarded by the 1930s. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and*

Paul Tillich⁵²—two figures that are often associated with introducing Kierkegaard to the world of theology. During this time period, it was the translations by Theodor Haecker and *Der Brenner* that provided a more accurate picture of Kierkegaard in Germany. Haecker focused on the edifying discourses, the *Journals*, and the *Book on Adler*—books that Schrempf’s translations had overlooked. Being both critical and appreciative of Kierkegaard, Haecker spun Kierkegaard’s critique of the church into a more sympathetic love for the church. This can be seen in his comparison between Kierkegaard and John Henry Newman—an unexpected dialogue partner in a time when Kierkegaard was being compared with Nietzsche. In short, Heiko Schulz rightly indicates that ‘it was not Schrempf, but the *Brenner* circle (Haecker, in particular) which proved instrumental for spreading the Kierkegaardian gospel to a wider German-speaking audience’.⁵³

2.3. ROMANO GUARDINI

The next prominent figure to introduce briefly is the Italo-German Catholic priest and philosopher Romano Guardini (1885–1968). Guardini is significant, not just because of his impact upon influential *ressourcement* theologians,⁵⁴ but also because of his early engagement with Kierkegaard as a mystical thinker.⁵⁵ For Robert Krieg, ‘Guardini

Development, 1909–1936 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 4 n. 10, 217, 235ff. For more, see Sean A. Turchin, ‘Introducing Christianity into Christendom: Investigating the Affinity between Søren Kierkegaard and the Early Thought of Karl Barth’ (University of Edinburgh, 2011 [PhD thesis]). See also, Philip G. Ziegler, ‘Barth’s Criticisms of Kierkegaard—a Striking out at Phantoms?’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 4 (2007), 434–51. Carl S. Hughes, *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Rhetoric and Performance in a Theology of Eros* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 15ff, 195ff.

⁵² Tillich claims to have been exposed to Kierkegaard at university in 1905, however he would not go on to write about Kierkegaard until much later. For more, see Schulz, ‘A Modest Head Start’, 342.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 330. See also, Alessandra Granito, ‘Kierkegaard Contemporaneo: sull’attualità di una recensione letteraria a partire dalla ricezione Haekkeriana’, in Isabella Adinolfi, ed., *Kierkegaard Duecento Anni Dopo* (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2014), 97–131.

⁵⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Romano Guardini: Reform from the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010). See also, Massimo Borghesi, *Romano Guardini: Dialettica e Antropologia* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1990).

⁵⁵ For instance, see *Der Ausgangspunkt der Denkbewegung Soren Kierkegaards* (Kösel, 1927), *Vom Sinn der Schwermut* (1928), and *Unterscheidung des Christlichen* (Mainz, 1935). Of Guardini, Balthasar said that he was ‘profoundly affected by

reiterated Kierkegaard's conviction concerning the singular character of revelation as known within the Judeo-Christian scriptures and tradition'.⁵⁶ As early as Spring 1925, Guardini was teaching courses on Kierkegaard in Berlin, and he had taught prominent students like Hannah Arendt, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Josef Pieper.⁵⁷

When Romano Guardini presents the thought of Kierkegaard, the genre that he often compares Kierkegaard with is that of mystical theology and Christian psychology.⁵⁸ The primary theme that Guardini traces in Kierkegaard's works is that of melancholy or depression, and the primary texts that Guardini engages with are Christoph Schrempf's German translation of *The Sickness unto Death* and *My Point of View as an Author*.⁵⁹ Guardini often reads Kierkegaard in a flat-footed way, taking everything that is presented as autobiography. However for Guardini, Kierkegaard's fictive author Anti-Climacus provides 'the interpretive key' to understanding Kierkegaard's authorship (PR 33). Guardini supports his autobiographical approach to Kierkegaard's writings with relevant passages from Kierkegaard's *Journals*.⁶⁰ Although this approach does not generate a psychologically healthy exemplar for Guardini, he still sees Kierkegaard's writings as useful for Catholic readers.

In his essay entitled *Der Ausgangspunkt der Denkbewegung Søren Kierkegaards* (1927), Guardini says that the usefulness of Kierkegaard's

Kierkegaard' in Balthasar, *Romano Guardini*, 77. For more on Guardini and Kierkegaard, see the excellent essays by Peter Šajda, 'Isolation on Both Ends? Romano Guardini's Double Response to the Concept of Contemporaneity', in Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, H. Deuser, and K. B. Söderquist (eds), *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2010: Kierkegaard's Late Writings* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 201–22. Also see, Peter Šajda, 'The Choice of Onself: Revisiting Guardini's Critique of Kierkegaard's Concept of Selfhood', *Filozofia* 66, no. 9 (2011), 868–78. See also, Peter Šajda, 'Romano Guardini: Between Actualistic Personalism, Qualitative Dialectic and Kinetic Logic', in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 45–74.

⁵⁶ Robert Anthony Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 31.

⁵⁷ Krieg, *Romano Guardini*, 91. The title of Guardini's 1925 course was 'Christianity and Culture in View of Søren Kierkegaard'. He would teach on Kierkegaard again in the autumn of 1925 and autumn of 1927 (Krieg, 222 n. 22).

⁵⁸ Romano Guardini, PR.

⁵⁹ In passing, Guardini will acknowledge snippets from *Either/Or*, *Concept of Anxiety*, *Repetition*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and *Stages in Life's Way*.

⁶⁰ Often, Guardini only cites the first volume of Theodor Haecker's German translation of Kierkegaard's *Journals*.

writings can best be seen by reading him as an exemplar of ‘vitalism’ who develops a theology of personhood in the condition of modernity—an emphasis not dissimilar to Guardini’s own interests (PR 29). In particular, Guardini highlights Kierkegaard’s emphasis upon selfhood as taking up a stance in relation to God and to oneself (PR 35). With Kierkegaard, Guardini finds a way to speak about human creatures as dependent upon God (PR 39). However, as a result of his autobiographical approach, Guardini does fall into some common interpretive traps, such as seeing Kierkegaard fully endorsing Romanticism (PR 54–7), or interpreting Kierkegaard’s notion of a ‘leap’ as a volitional endorsement of logical contradiction (PR 59), or reading Kierkegaard’s notion of ‘indirect communication’ as referring to the ineffable (PR 68), and his notion of ‘paradox’ as irresponsibly embracing incomprehensibility (PR 71).

Although Guardini’s method of reading does not allow him to grasp Kierkegaard’s point fully, this does not stop Guardini from using Kierkegaard to flesh out a theology of melancholy in his essay entitled *Vom Sinn der Schwermut* (1928). Here, Guardini strings together a list of long quotations from Kierkegaard’s *Journals* and *Point of View* in an attempt to portray what depression feels like. Guardini faults Kierkegaard for escaping too often into solitude, which perpetuates such a melancholic state (PR 102). Guardini’s treatment of Kierkegaard’s emphasis on silence raises an interesting question regarding the difference between enclosing reserve, the demonic, and learning silence from the lilies and the birds. On the face of it, a person could be conceivably solitary and silent in all three states. However, it seems that Guardini is only aware of what he calls ‘bad melancholy’ in Kierkegaard’s writings and spends the rest of his essay trying to sketch a theology of ‘good melancholy’. For Guardini, ‘bad melancholy’ leads the person away from God and toward eternal perdition, whereas ‘good melancholy’ leads a person toward God in faith (PR 112–14). From Kierkegaard, Guardini learns that for the finite human creature, melancholy lights up their relation to the Creator God—indeed, Guardini says that melancholy is ‘the call of God’ upon a person’s life and is ‘the cost of eternity’s birth in the person’ (PR 111). Instead of positively endorsing depression as a theological virtue *per se*, Guardini cautions the reader to avoid melancholy, because it can invite the double temptation of reducing one’s life to the infantile by privileging the immediacy of nature and the senses, or by inviting a monastic withdrawal from the world which

privileges the immediacy of religious experience (PR 116). In the end, Guardini says that Kierkegaard offers a theologically informed image of humans as ‘boundary dwellers’ between eternity and time (PR 119). By way of conclusion, Guardini points the reader in search of relief from melancholy to Christ in Gethsemane, and yet Guardini does remind the reader that there is no solution on earth for melancholy (PR 120). There is an interesting connection to be made between Guardini’s account of melancholy here and (his student) Hans Urs von Balthasar’s account of anxiety. In a later chapter, I will sketch the implications of what Guardini leaves unanswered in his theology of melancholy, and how it finds an explicit answer in Balthasar’s theology of anxiety. However, it is worth noting briefly how Guardini connects Kierkegaard to Blaise Pascal and places Kierkegaard into a counter-Enlightenment trajectory (as opposed to Alasdair MacIntyre’s unfortunate portrayal of Kierkegaard as another post-Kantian figure perpetuating Enlightenment ideals in *After Virtue*⁶¹).

In his book on Blaise Pascal (1935),⁶² Guardini suggests that Pascal has solutions to the problems of modernity that Kierkegaard falls prey to as ‘an isolated individual, struggling against the Church’ (P 17). However, Guardini says that Kierkegaard

gains a share in [*guadagna quota*] the capacity of an elevated form of existence; he opens new horizons and he is able to see higher things; a new faculty of judgment is awakened in him and he is able to evaluate and love at a higher level. (P 24)

In this way, Guardini rehabilitates Kierkegaard’s notion of the decisive leap by situating it alongside Pascal’s *Memorial* (1654), which makes good on the perceived shortcomings of Kierkegaard’s religious stage of existence (P 25).

Ultimately, Guardini succumbs to the stereotype that I addressed in the previous chapter, because he detects an overly pessimistic and Lutheran theology (P 301). For instance, when discussing the

⁶¹ For MacIntyre’s account, see Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd edn. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 39–52. For the debate surrounding MacIntyre’s account of Kierkegaard, see John J. Davenport et al., *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001). See also, John Lippitt, ‘Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Some Problems with Narrative’, *Inquiry* 50, no. 1 (2007).

⁶² Romano Guardini, P. All translations are mine.

hiddenness or unknowability of God, Guardini distinguishes Pascal from Kierkegaard saying that Pascal would know nothing of the absolute incommensurability of the holiness of God and sinfulness of humanity which Kierkegaard allegedly poses (P 156).⁶³ Guardini views Kierkegaard's theological anthropology as illustrating a Reformed understanding of total depravity, which regards humanity as not just performing sinful acts but rather *as sinful in itself* (P 207). Guardini's initial concern about Kierkegaard's perspectivism in his account of the stages transforms into suspicious grounds for dismissal when Kierkegaard speaks theologically of the depravity of the human being. Even though Guardini places Kierkegaard in the Pascalian tradition of distinguishing the god of philosophers from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (P 45), Guardini is convinced that Kierkegaard's god is too scandalously 'wholly other' and self-subverting to preserve humanity from being shipwrecked when the individual irrationally relates to an unknown god (P 211–12). Guardini believes that 'in Kierkegaard there is the complete resignation of every logical security' which results in 'the negation of every fruitful aspect of logic in the positive sense and culminates in the concept of the absurd' (P 214).

For Guardini, the positive contribution that Kierkegaard makes to Christian theology is 'to delineate Christian Truth on the basis of the problem of being human' and 'to develop the complexity of that Truth according to the central theme of the stages of human existence' (P 281). It should be noted that although Guardini owned a number of Kierkegaard's works, his reading of Kierkegaard is largely based on only three pseudonymous works: *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and *The Sickness unto Death*.⁶⁴ To be fair, Guardini's evaluation of Kierkegaard is not entirely negative, and he is sympathetic to Kierkegaard's discussion of anxiety and contemporaneity with Christ. Moreover, Peter Šajda notes how Guardini uses Kierkegaard's 'Lutheran' thought to argue for a Catholic ecclesiology by extending what Kierkegaard says about Christ, to apply to the church after the ascension.⁶⁵

⁶³ Recently, Simon Podmore has problematized this 'neo-orthodox' understanding of Kierkegaard's notion of an 'absolute qualitative difference' as pivoting on sin, and argues that this has more to do with grace and forgiveness; see Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

⁶⁴ Šajda, 'Romano Guardini', 52.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

In some respects, Guardini compares Pascal to Kierkegaard as if to grasp a Catholic understanding of a Protestant crisis of faith. In the end, Guardini appreciates Kierkegaard at arm's length but ultimately holds up Pascal as the Catholic exemplar par excellence. However, in a critical review of Guardini's book, Cornelio Fabro re-frames Guardini's treatment of both Pascal and Kierkegaard as religious exemplars that show us:

- i) 'the vanity of abstract reason for knowing the living and true God';
- ii) 'the necessity of Jesus Christ for introducing us to the knowledge of God';
- iii) 'the knowledge of our own suffering in order to orient ourselves in the knowledge of God in Christ'.⁶⁶

For Fabro, the Pascalian 'heart' finds expression in Kierkegaard, and Fabro argues that the emphasis upon the heart is 'not the substitution of the rational sphere but rather its completion, and it hinges upon the Infinite. Even St. Thomas affirmed that God draws nearer to us with love rather than with knowledge, because love draws the beloved directly.'⁶⁷ Fabro continues to explain that the 'heart' is then 'the whole expression of the individual's spiritual life which by now judges everything "before God" as Kierkegaard would say', and is a vital resource for humanity which 'has forgotten God because it has withered at the desiccated fonts of reason'.⁶⁸ I will discuss Fabro more in a later chapter, but it is important that he circumvents Guardini's stereotype of Kierkegaard in this way.

2.4. ERICH PRZYWARA

The next prominent Catholic thinker who needs to be mentioned is Erich Przywara SJ (1889–1972). Przywara is probably best known for his famous dispute with Karl Barth regarding the notion of 'analogy

⁶⁶ Cornelio Fabro, 'Il "Pascal" di Romano Guardini', *Il Fuoco* VI, no. 1 (1958), 3–6. All translations are mine. For more on Pascal's theology, see William Wood, *Blaise Pascal on Duplicity, Sin, and the Fall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶⁷ Fabro, 'Il "Pascal"', 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

of being'.⁶⁹ Indeed, Przywara is also known for presenting Kierkegaard as essentially an anonymous Catholic in his *Das Geheimnis Kierkegaards* (1929)⁷⁰ after spending some time lecturing in Davos with Paul Tillich.⁷¹ Although more comprehensive work still needs to be done on Przywara's actual reception of Kierkegaard, Christopher Barnett has provided a helpful essay that allows readers to obtain a sense of Przywara's engagement with Kierkegaard's writings.⁷² One of the main reasons why Przywara took an interest in Kierkegaard's writings was because Kierkegaard was a modern thinker who illuminated the relationship between human beings and God in terms of difference and presence—something that would feature as a centrepiece in Przywara's understanding of *analogia entis*.⁷³ It should also be noted that in 1930, Karl Barth attended Przywara's lectures on Kierkegaard in Basel.⁷⁴ Przywara writes during the high point of the German reception of Kierkegaard, citing in his preface works by Christoph Schrempf, Theodor Haecker, Romano Guardini, Torsten Bohlin, and Eduard Geismar, among others. Przywara's book discusses the interpretive complexity of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms,

⁶⁹ Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). For more on this dispute, see Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T&T Clark, 2010). Also, see the relevant essays in Thomas Joseph White, *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). For more on Przywara, see Thomas F. O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S. J.: His Theology and His World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). See also, John R. Betz, 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part One)', *Modern Theology* 21, no. 3 (2005), 367–411. John R. Betz, 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part Two)', *Modern Theology* 22, no. 1 (2006), 1–50. Kenneth R. Oakes, 'Three Themes in Przywara's Early Theology', *The Thomist* 74 (2010), 283–310. See also relevant essays in Thomas Joseph White and Bruce L. McCormack (eds), *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

⁷⁰ Erich Przywara, *Das geheimnis Kierkegaards* (Munich and Berlin: Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1929).

⁷¹ O'Meara, n 69, 111. Przywara noted how he grew fonder of Kierkegaard, but how Tillich became more enthralled with Schelling. For more, see Thomas O'Meara, 'Paul Tillich and Erich Przywara at Davos', *Gregorianum* 87, no. 2 (2006), 227–38.

⁷² See Christopher B. Barnett, 'Erich Przywara: Catholicism's Great Expositor of the "Mystery" of Kierkegaard', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 10, tome 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012a), 131–51. See also, Cornelio Fabro, 'Spunti Cattolici nel Pensiero Religioso di Søren Kierkegaard', *Doctor Communis* 26, no. 4 (1973), 251–80.

⁷³ O'Meara, *Erich Przywara*, 77.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 216 n. 24.

spirituality, and his ideas in general. Przywara also has a bit to say about Kierkegaard's 'personal Mariology'⁷⁵—a topic that I will return to in a later chapter.

What is perhaps less known is the extent of Barth's indebtedness to Przywara's presentation of Kierkegaard. Walter Lowrie says in his introduction to Kierkegaard's 'Attack on Christendom' that Przywara's Catholic portrayal of Kierkegaard is partly responsible for Barth's later rejection of Kierkegaard.⁷⁶ Indeed, Barth is quoted as saying, 'If I were to follow Kierkegaard, I might as well go over there [the Vatican]'.⁷⁷ Although it has been argued that the majority of Barth's criticisms of Kierkegaard are misguided,⁷⁸ what Barth says about Przywara's influential portrayal of Kierkegaard remains significant. For instance, Barth's staunch resistance to Emil Brunner is resourced by Przywara's Catholic portrayal of Kierkegaard:

The 'No!' with which we have to oppose Brunner applies even if he should one day return to the form of his doctrine which follows Kierkegaard and Heidegger. There is no fundamental difference between that form and the one which he seems to wish to adopt now . . . Brunner's conception of the Roman Catholic doctrine is insufficient and not authoritative. If he had derived his information from the works of E. Przywara he would have found that this great exponent of the doctrine of analogy long ago used a phrase of the fourth Lateran Council and also the whole Kierkegaardian dialectic to interpret the ability to despair and real despair in a Roman Catholic sense.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Przywara, *Das geheimnis Kierkegaards*, 114.

⁷⁶ For Barth's rejection of Kierkegaard, see 'A Thank you and a Bow—Kierkegaard's Reveille' and 'Kierkegaard and the Theologians', in Karl Barth, *Fragments Grave and Gay*, ed. Eric Mosbacher and Hans Martin Rumscheidt (London: Fontana, 1971), 95–101, 102–4. It should also be noted that Barth had read Przywara's book on Kierkegaard, see Karl Barth, *Karl Barth—Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel, Band II: 1921–1930 (Ga V.4)*, ed. Eduard Thurneysen, Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), 668. For this reference, I am gratefully indebted to Dr Hans-Anton Drewes at the Barth Archive in Basel. Also, Karl Barth famously said that 'Kierkegaard needs occasionally to be corrected with Kant' in reference to Kierkegaard's discussion of placing the individual higher than the universal in *Fear and Trembling*. For more on Barth's Kantian corrective, see David Clough, *Ethics in Crisis: Interpreting Barth's Ethics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 39ff.

⁷⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon 'Christendom', 1854–1855*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), xvi. Lowrie provides only anecdotal evidence of Barth saying this.

⁷⁸ For more, see an excellent article by Ziegler, 'Barth's Criticisms', 434–51.

⁷⁹ Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, and J. Baillie, *Natural Theology: Comprising 'Nature and Grace'* (London: The Centenary Press, 1946), 116. For this reference, I am

What emerges from this citation is the extent to which Barth acknowledges his own indebtedness to Przywara's Catholic portrayal of Kierkegaard. Moreover, what also emerges at this point in the European reception of Kierkegaard is how Barth plays a less constructive and a more reactionary role when his indebtedness to the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard is uncovered. Although Przywara's book tends to be scoffed at today by Kierkegaard scholars, the scope of its influence shows that it should not be so quickly dismissed.

2.5. ERIK PETERSON

Erik Peterson (1890–1960) is a very important theologian whose writings are often neglected in the English-speaking world. Pope Benedict XVI has referred to Peterson as a 'distinguished theologian' who 'never found in his life a true place where he could obtain recognition and a permanent home' (cf. Heb. 13:14). Reflecting upon his first encounter with Peterson's *Theological Tractates*, Benedict says:

I read the book with increasing curiosity and let myself be truly impassioned by it because in it I found the theology I was seeking: it is a theology that uses all the seriousness of history to understand and study texts, it analyzes them with the full gravity of historical research and does not relegate them to the past. Indeed, in his research . . . [Peterson] comes into contact with the One from whom theology itself derives: the living God . . . Thus I learned from him, in a most essential and profound way, what theology really is.⁸⁰

Indeed, the historian John Connelly has argued that Peterson's exegesis of Romans 9–11 in *The Church of Jews and Pagans* (1934) was instrumental in stemming the tide of Catholic anti-Semitism, and would later shape the Catholic reconsideration of Judaism in *Nostra Aetate*.⁸¹ Although it is beyond the scope of this book, the influence of

gratefully indebted to Dr Peter Zocher and Dr Hans-Anton Drewes at the Barth Archive in Basel.

⁸⁰ 'A Foreigner Searching for Eternity', in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 December 2010, number 49, p. 16. The International Symposium on Erik Peterson took place at the Vatican on 25 October 2010.

⁸¹ John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 185–6.

Kierkegaard's writings upon Jewish–Catholic dialogue in the work of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel⁸² and the later views of Johannes Oesterreicher⁸³ is something that scholars have neglected.

In light of such a monumental influence on Catholic theology, it is important to remember Peterson's own admission that ever since his university years, Kierkegaard had been his 'spiritual mentor' who 'saved him making worse errors'.⁸⁴ In fact, Peterson is one of the early Catholic readers of Kierkegaard who sought to overturn misconceptions that would contribute to the Nazi appropriation of Kierkegaard.⁸⁵ As Barbara Nichtweiss recounts, in 1923 Peterson wrote a letter to Theodor Haecker in which he criticized the

⁸² Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel observed that 'Kierkegaard's thought showed a marked leaning to Catholic ideals in its ascetic tendencies' in Abraham Joshua Heschel, *A Passion for Truth* (New York: Farrar, 1973), 260. I am deeply indebted to Professor Susannah Heschel for raising this point with me. For more, see Daniel Berthold-Bond, 'Abraham Joshua Heschel, *A Passion for Truth*', *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 5, no. 2 (2002), 265–78. See also, Jack Mulder's essay on Heschel in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 155–70.

⁸³ Oesterreicher says that Kierkegaard was 'a mentor of my youth' and it was Kierkegaard's book entitled *For Self-Examination*, and particularly Kierkegaard's comments on the parable of the Samaritan where Oesterreicher says he 'first found the counsel to read the Word of God as we ought. To read it with profit, we must say again and again: "It is I who am addressed", "It is I for whom the message is meant"', in John M. Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter between Christians and Jews* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1986), 97–8 n. 33. Although Oesterreicher did not produce a book on Kierkegaard, it is interesting that there are many references to Kierkegaard that appear in the newsletter for Christian–Jewish encounter, *Freiburger Rundbrief*: [Nr. 25/28, 1954] p. 55; [Nr. 37/40, 1957] p. 105; [Nr. 45/48, 1959] p. 12; [Nr. 53/56, 1962] pp. 33, 72; [Nr. 57/60, 1964] p. 18; [Nr. 73/76, 1968] pp. 6–7; [Nr. 81/84, 1970] p. 116; [Nr. 89/92, 1972] p. 104. It should also be noted that Oesterreicher later distanced himself from his earlier proselytizing views. I am deeply indebted to Professor John Connelly for pointing this out to me.

⁸⁴ Barbara Nichtweiss, *Erik Peterson: neue Sicht auf Leben und Werk* (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 99ff.

⁸⁵ Hampson, KEC, 173. Also see, Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), ch 4; esp. p. 121. See also, Dorothy Emmet, 'Kierkegaard and The "Existential" Philosophy', *Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* 16 (1941), 257–71. 'To make Søren Kierkegaard spiritually responsible for the present war would have as little, and perhaps as much, truth in it as the facile explanations which made Hegel responsible for the last one. But it is part of the demonism of policies of power and ambition to be able to pervert to their own ends religious ideas which in their intention are a protest against those very ambitions; and, by so doing, to win a response from people who, in a dim, unconscious way, are feeling after the ideas themselves, but have neither the powers of self-criticism nor of radical thinking to resist travesties of them which appear to justify their own self-assertion. . . . Both Nazi apologists and their Confessional or independent opponents are consciously or unconsciously moved by a way of

questionable presentations of Kierkegaard's theology by Eduard Geismar and Emanuel Hirsch.⁸⁶

For Peterson, the theological issues centred on Kierkegaard's view about the authority of Christian dogma and its relation to the Christian life. Peterson first encountered the writings of Kierkegaard through the German translations at the turn of the twentieth century. Peterson was attracted to Kierkegaard's critique of the 'bourgeois Christianity' of the Danish state church. Like Kierkegaard, Peterson was also formed in a Pietist context and took great interest in Kierkegaard's emphasis upon interiority.⁸⁷ There is much more to be said about Kierkegaard's influence on Peterson's view of the church, sacraments, dogma, martyrdom, history, and Christology, but there is not enough space to do it justice here.⁸⁸ This can be evidenced in an incipient way in one of Peterson's journal entries from 1918:

Kierkegaard and the Catholic Church are the two poles of my spiritual existence. Must I choose only one of them? Subjectively, my life fluctuates back and forth between them, sometimes toward the one, but then it soon yields to the other one. Is this standing-in-between [*Dazwischenstehen*] not essentially Protestant?⁸⁹

In September of 1947, Peterson received a request from a publisher to write the preface for the Italian translation of Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death*, but he never did.⁹⁰ Perhaps this was because Peterson already knew that Cornelio Fabro was working on his own translation of it (eventually published in 1953) as well as Kierkegaard's *Journals* (1948–51).

thinking which puts the *decision* of the individual, made in the concrete moment, above any objective or universal norm of ethics or of reason by which it can be either justified or criticized... I want to try to take some of the ideas, of which Nazi apologists give us a secularized travesty, and look at them as they were struck out of the fire of a religious struggle by that extraordinary poet-prophet Søren Kierkegaard' (pp. 257–8).

⁸⁶ Nichtweiss, *Erik Peterson*, 102. For more on Peterson's correspondence with Hirsch, see eadem, 123ff. For more on Peterson's friendship with Haecker and other German readers of Kierkegaard that were Catholic converts, see eadem, 107–14.

⁸⁷ For more on Peterson's pietism, see Adele Monaci Castagno (ed.), *L'Archivio Erik Peterson all'Università di Torino: Saggi Critici e Inventario, Collana di Studi del Centro di Scienze Religiose* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2010).

⁸⁸ For more, see Nichtweiss, *Erik Peterson*, 99–201.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 126. Translation mine. ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

From 8 to 13 April 1947, Peterson participated (along with Cornelio Fabro, Jacques Maritain, and Étienne Gilson) in a week-long academic conference on existentialism at the Angelicum in Rome.⁹¹ Whereas Maritain and Gilson focused their papers on aspects of existential Thomism, Fabro gave the first conference paper—in the presence of Pietro Parènte and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange—on ‘The Meaning of Existentialism’,⁹² arguing for a shift in focus from Heidegger to Kierkegaard, ‘whose thought converged toward both Aristotelian idealism and Catholicism’.⁹³ Summing up the conference, Charles Boyer SJ said that in the contributions of Fabro and Peterson, ‘a Kierkegaard who is predominantly and purely religious’ had been discovered.⁹⁴

At this conference, Erik Peterson presented a paper about Kierkegaard’s influence on contemporary Protestant theology. In stark contrast to his former Göttingen colleague Karl Barth, Peterson claimed that Kierkegaard’s ‘influence upon nineteenth-century Protestant Theology was significant’.⁹⁵ Peterson says that ‘the current popularity of Kierkegaard still requires an interpretation’ because ‘the indirect communication which was central to Kierkegaard’s thought now seems to have been transformed into direct communication’.⁹⁶ Peterson

⁹¹ A week-long summary of this conference can be found in *L’Osservatore Romano* 9–15 Aprile, 1947.

⁹² Cornelio Fabro, ‘Il Significato dell’Esistenzialismo’, in *Esistenzialismo: Atti della settimana di Studio indetta dall’Accademia di S. Tommaso, 8–13 Aprile 1947, Acta Pont. Academiae Romanae S. Thomae Aq.* (Rome: Marietti, 1947), 9–39.

⁹³ *L’Osservatore Romano*, 12 Aprile 1947, n. 35, p. 2. Translation mine.

⁹⁴ *L’Osservatore Romano*, 15 Aprile 1947, n. 37, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Erik Peterson, ‘Kierkegaard e la Teologia Protestante’, in Carlo Boyer SJ (ed.), *Esistenzialismo: Atti della Settimana di Studio Indetta dall’Accademia di S. Tommaso, 8–13 Aprile 1947*, vol. XIII, *Acta Pont. Academiae Romanae S. Thomae Aq.* (Turin: Casa editrice Marietti, 1947), 127–32; esp. p. 127. All translations are mine. Compare Peterson’s claim with the omission of Kierkegaard in Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background & History* (London: SCM Press, 2001). In the preface of the English translation of this book, Colin Gunton says that ‘Of Kierkegaard, Barth famously said that his was a school in which one must learn but neither remain nor return, in some contrast to his judgment of Schleiermacher. Is that why there is no chapter on him? I suspect that the reasons are rather complex, but centre on the fact that there is a respect in which Kierkegaard did not belong in the century, and certainly has little to offer to the book’s main thesis about Schleiermacher and his dominance’ (xv–xvi). For Peterson’s critique of Barth, see ‘What is Theology?’ in Erik Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, ed. and trans. Michael J. Hollerich, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1–14.

⁹⁶ Peterson, ‘Kierkegaard und der Protestantismus’, in Erik Peterson, *Marginalien zur Theologie* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1956), 128.

continues, ‘everyone knows how to talk about anxiety, paradox, and risk, but the original meaning of Kierkegaard’s thought is slowly falling from view’. Peterson says that we must remember that Kierkegaard himself was a Lutheran theologian and a son of a ‘pietist merchant’. For Peterson, Kierkegaard’s problems with Protestantism begin here, and his economic independence allowed him to be critical of his national church.⁹⁷ Moreover, Kierkegaard’s pietism stands as ‘an immanent critique of Protestantism itself’, which was motivated by the ‘practical consequences of Nominalism in orthodox Lutheran theology’.⁹⁸ For instance, Peterson says that the doctrine of forensic justification ‘eliminates every human activity in regard to divine activity’ and infused grace becomes ‘imputed divine favour’. Indeed, for Peterson this nominalism is exemplified in Lutheran theological anthropology when it asserts a distinction between real existence and ideal existence—that is, the person is ‘a sinner on earth and yet justified before God in heaven’. Hence, Peterson argues that Kierkegaard’s attack on Christendom is reacting against a theology that has turned ‘salvation into an ideal fact, and the faith which saves into an intellectual act based upon a contradiction between the visible (reality of sin) and the invisible (decree of God)’. Peterson’s argument is that Kierkegaard critiques this theology because it renders human works of charity ‘devoid of any meaning before God’ because it ‘threatens the *sola fide* of the grace of Christ’.

In short for Peterson, ‘the Pietist impulse in Kierkegaard against the orthodox theology of his own day, only has a real significance for those Catholics who find themselves before the problem of their own *vocation*’.⁹⁹ Peterson observes that Luther’s theology ‘starts with Adam and only arrives at the ideal salvation of the second Adam’, but that Kierkegaard’s theology ‘begins with the singularity of the God-Man (second Adam), and subsequently asks for the singularity of his followers, bringing them necessarily to asceticism’.¹⁰⁰ This is what Kierkegaard means with his phrase ‘witness to the Truth’, which refers to the martyrs, and marks the infamous controversy between Kierkegaard and his bishop.¹⁰¹ In conclusion,

⁹⁷ Ibid., 129.

⁹⁸ For more on Kierkegaard’s pietism, see Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

⁹⁹ Ibid., 130. ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 130–1 n. 9.

¹⁰¹ Peterson was also fond of this phrase, see his essay ‘Witness to the Truth’, in Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, 151–81. See also, Erik Peterson, *Zeuge der Wahrheit* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1937). Also see, Frithard Scholz, ‘Zeuge der Wahrheit—ein anderer

Peterson says of Kierkegaard that although he himself was not a martyr, Kierkegaard still ‘remained within Protestantism, and became its victim’.¹⁰² For Peterson, ‘the leap’ Kierkegaard had in mind was not merely ‘liberation from the immanence of idealist philosophy’, but also liberation from ‘the iron cage that the dogmatism of Luther had locked humanity within’, which Peterson identifies as ‘a betrayal of human existence’.¹⁰³ Peterson’s analysis here provides an important insight into the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard at this time, but one should not neglect the autobiographical fact that Peterson was received into the Catholic Church after his encounter with Kierkegaard.¹⁰⁴

2.6. JEAN DANIÉLOU

The prominent place Kierkegaard receives in Jean Daniélou’s (1905–1974) manifesto for *ressourcement* theology has been overlooked in secondary literature on *la nouvelle théologie*.¹⁰⁵ In fact, the return to biblical, patristic, and liturgical sources only accounts for the first section of Daniélou’s clarion call for liberation from ‘a rationalised theology that treats God like any other object of thought’.¹⁰⁶ Alongside a retrieval of patristic sources, Daniélou suggests that contemporary philosophical influences must be explored in order to maintain some contact with contemporary life. What was required to engage with contemporary issues was not merely the

Kierkegaard’, in Alfred Schindler (ed.), *Monotheismus als politisches Problem?: Erik Peterson und die Kritik der politischen Theologie*, Studien zur Evangelischen Ethik (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1978), 120–48. For more on the controversy between Kierkegaard and Bishop Martensen, see Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 50–2, 80–7, 401–10. See also, Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Christian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 2.

¹⁰² Peterson, ‘Kierkegaard e la Teologia Protestante’, 131.

¹⁰³ Peterson, ‘Kierkegaard e la Teologia Protestante’, 132.

¹⁰⁴ For more, see Hollerich’s fine introduction to *Theological Tractates*, xi–xxx. For more on Peterson’s view of Kierkegaard, see his essay, ‘Kierkegaard und der Protestantismus’, 17–27. See also, Umberto Lodovici, ‘Il Bacio di Giuda: la recezione di Kierkegaard e Peterson’, in *Kierkegaard Duecento Anni Dopo* (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2014), 315–27.

¹⁰⁵ Jean Daniélou, ‘Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse’, *Études* 249 (1946), 5–21.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. Translation mine.

patristic world-picture as such, but also a critical gesture that could be understood in that contemporary setting. Daniélou specifically mentions Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Kierkegaard as figures whose imaginations 'require theological thought to expand to their scale' by calling theologians to distinguish between 'the garment of truth from the truth itself'. Daniélou says that just because the words of Christ never pass away, this does not 'persuade us to dispense with changing our ways of expression'. So, instead of viewing contemporary figures with suspicion, Daniélou says that Marx, Darwin, and Hegel can 'represent an enlargement of our vision of the external world', and existential philosophy in particular serves as an even more profound resource with an emphasis on human freedom, historicity, and subjectivity.¹⁰⁷ Importantly, Daniélou mentions figures like Pascal, Kierkegaard, Barth, Gabriel Marcel, and Max Scheler as examples of Christian faith which he distinguishes from the atheistic existentialism of Nietzsche and Sartre.¹⁰⁸

Daniélou especially highlights Kierkegaard, rather than Nietzsche or Dostoevsky as a prominent resource for rehabilitating contemporary Catholic theology.¹⁰⁹ In particular, Daniélou mentions Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety* as a robust theological account of original sin, which demonstrates a major role that theology still has to play in contemporary discourse.¹¹⁰ According to Daniélou, Kierkegaard becomes a vital resource for resisting 'a theology that treats God as an object', and for affirming 'the mystery of the personal God, hidden in darkness, where no one can penetrate, but who only reveals Himself by love'. It is precisely here that a vista opens up regarding the extent to which Kierkegaard's influence can be traced in the work of those *ressourcement* theologians who followed in Daniélou's wake.

2.7. YVES CONGAR

It is often overlooked that the French Dominican theologian, Yves Congar (1904–1995) wrote a remarkable essay entitled *Actualité de*

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 13–14. ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰⁹ For more about why Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche appear together at this time in reception history, see George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 10.

¹¹⁰ Daniélou, 'Les orientations', 16.

Kierkegaard (1934).¹¹¹ Congar's essay provides a biographical introduction to Kierkegaard that precedes Jean Wahl's *Études Kierkegaardiennes* (1938)—although Congar is dependent upon a few of Wahl's earlier essays. However, Congar acknowledges that the timeliness of his essay is due to the popularity of the *Kierkegaard Renaissance* in the writings of Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers.¹¹² And yet Congar prefaces his biographical introduction to Kierkegaard by marvelling at the range of Kierkegaard's ecumenical influence upon various figures like Karl Barth, a Catholic convert like Erik Peterson, and a Russian Orthodox thinker like Nikolai Berdyaev.¹¹³

Whatever defects one might find in Kierkegaard's writings, Congar makes a deplorable remark saying that they can be traced back to the 'moral fervour, the dry and scorching *hitlérien* pietism' of his father. The severe childhood upbringing and the break-up with Regine Olsen provide Congar with a psychological rationale that explains why Kierkegaard wrote in pseudonyms which mask his 'profound personality' . . . 'that lacked a total spiritual unity with the author of the literary creation'.¹¹⁴ Although Congar misses the literary and philosophical point of Kierkegaard's fictive authors, Congar's view of the pseudonyms as alibis of a disturbed psyche will allow the biographical approach to continue unreflectively.

Congar also observes that Kierkegaard's work does not represent an 'entire philosophy' but rather it 'constitutes an intersection of vital problems, that imposes a question and engages an attitude', which is

¹¹¹ Additional references to Kierkegaard may be found in, Y. Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1950), 180, 184, 202; Y. Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple, or, the Manner of God's Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse*, trans. R. F. Trevett (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962), 57. Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965), 298, 417; Y. Congar, *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (London: G. Chapman, 1966a), 11; Y. Congar, *Jesus Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966b), 116; Y. Congar, *The Crucial Questions on Problems Facing the Church Today* (New York: Newman Press, 1969), 25; Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. D. Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 150. Y. Congar, *Écrits Réformateurs*, ed. J. P. Jossua (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 273.

¹¹² Yves Congar, 'Actualité de Kierkegaard', *La Vie Intellectuelle* 25 (1934a), 9. For more, see Brother Emile of Taizé, *Faithful to the Future: Listening to Yves Congar* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), ch. 1.

¹¹³ Congar, 'Actualité de Kierkegaard', 11. Both Congar and Daniélou viewed Peterson as 'a guide for the "return to the sources" animating theological renewal prior to the Second Vatican Council', see Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, n 95, xiii.

¹¹⁴ Congar, 'Actualité de Kierkegaard', 14. Translation mine.

'an existential point of view and must be understood, for the most part, as a reaction against the philosophical romanticism of Hegel'.¹¹⁵ With the methodological difference between Hegelian resolution and Kierkegaardian dilemmas in view,¹¹⁶ Congar says that the upshot of Kierkegaard's contribution is the 'primacy of the individual above the "general"' public which gives way to an articulation of 'a philosophy of existence that resigns speculative thought to benefit from an attitude of obedience before God, of conformity to the living God'.¹¹⁷ Congar rightly points out that Kierkegaard offers, not merely a doctrinaire elaboration of an existential point of view, but rather a therapeutic and philosophical *method* 'to be oneself, to exist', which awakens the reader's conscience.¹¹⁸ Unlike Erik Peterson, however, Congar claims that the way Kierkegaard handles the Incarnation betrays his indebtedness to the Lutheran 'watch words' of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, which reiterates Luther's theological view of 'sin' and 'faith' as the foundation of all reality.¹¹⁹

Whatever Congar finds theologically objectionable in Kierkegaard, there is no mistake that for Protestantism, Kierkegaard is 'the precursor of a renewal'.¹²⁰ To his credit, Congar does not restrict Kierkegaard's relevance to *only* Protestantism but also says that for Catholics especially, Kierkegaard cannot be dismissed because he 'reveals a true Gospel', and he offers to Catholics 'the path of a soul mate'.¹²¹ In a prescient manner, Congar discovers in Kierkegaard the resources and language to make the claim that Christianity 'is not wish fulfilment or a last resort that allows us to lead our lives on any other principles, but rather it is that unique demand whereby the *whole* of our lives is oriented'.¹²² Congar concludes his essay by saying that Kierkegaard merits our attention, not because he offers a dogmatic system, but rather because Kierkegaard exhibits an edifying attitude that our times require in order to better understand the present cultural situation in all its complexity.¹²³ In the end, Congar leaves the question open as to whether Kierkegaard's Lutheran-influenced views of sin and faith remain at odds with Catholic theology.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 15. Translation mine.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 19–20. Translation mine.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 26. Translation mine.

¹²¹ Yves Congar, 'Notes Bibliographiques: Kierkegaard et Luther', *Foi et Vie* 57 (1934), 713. This quote also appears in 'Actualité', 31.

¹²² Congar, 'Actualité de Kierkegaard', 32.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 17. Translation mine.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 21. Translation mine.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 30. Translation mine.

¹²³ Ibid., 34.

2.8. JAMES COLLINS

Moving away momentarily from the German and French Catholic reception, I now want to highlight the work of the American philosopher, James D. Collins (1917–1985), who is perhaps the first Thomist to substantively engage the writings of Kierkegaard in English.¹²⁴ The fruit of his labour is expressed in *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (1953), where Collins provides an introduction to Kierkegaard's biography, his use of pseudonyms, stages of existence, his relation to Hegel, faith, social criticism, and his critique of Christendom.

Commenting on the therapeutic role of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, Collins says that they 'remind us that the habit of wisdom is a hard won perfection and in no way identical with the ability to state and defend a scholastic thesis, whether of Hegelian or Thomist origin'.¹²⁵ Here, Collins refers the reader to a similar point that is made by Étienne Gilson in his 1948 Aquinas lecture.¹²⁶ Collins relies upon Étienne Gilson's account of Kierkegaard in *Being and Some Philosophers* but qualifies it as 'somewhat misleading' because Gilson 'formulates the major contrast between Kierkegaard and Hegel as that between subjective existence and objective knowledge' (MK 294 n. 22). For Collins, Gilson's contrast here lacks nuance because 'Kierkegaard directed his fire against "pure thought", rather than against abstract thinking and objective knowledge as such', which indicates that Kierkegaard was 'opposed to philosophical abstraction only when it claimed to give an exhaustive, systematic account of the real' (MK 294 n. 22). In fact, Collins goes on to say that had Kierkegaard 'known the texts, he would have agreed with Aquinas that [logic] is concerned with the universe of being, precisely in its logical status as conceived by the mind, whereas metaphysics is directed primarily and properly toward being in its physical reality and act

¹²⁴ Collins was also published in Italian, see James D. Collins, 'Fede e Riflessione in Kierkegaard', in Cornelio Fabro and Nicola Abbagnano (eds), *Studi Kierkegaardiani* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1957). Another early Thomist to engage Kierkegaard in English is Ralph McInerny, 'Ethics and Persuasion: Kierkegaard's Existential Dialectic', *The Modern Schoolman* 34 (1956), 219–39.

¹²⁵ James D. Collins, MK, 39–40.

¹²⁶ Étienne Gilson, *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1948). See also, Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: PIMS, 1949), 142–53.

of existing' (MK 121). Collins collapses the distance that Gilson puts between Kierkegaard and Aquinas by observing that the

Kierkegaardian distinction between the eternal being of God and the existence of the God-Man bears comparison with St. Augustine's reflections on God as He Who Is—the eternal and immutable being—and as the God of Abraham, the God Who has become incarnate in the temporal, changing order for our salvation. (MK 298 n. 13)

Collins claims that 'Kierkegaard fuses the two questions of whether God exists as a real being (*Deum esse*) and what is the meaning and intrinsic nature of God's existence of real being (*Dei esse*)' in order to make the point that since the 'latter transcends our natural intelligence, [Kierkegaard] disqualifies natural intelligence from demonstrating the former. Added to this is [Kierkegaard's] identification of the latter question with that of the Incarnation of the Son of God' (MK 298 n. 13).

In reflecting on Johannes de Silentio's emphasis upon Abraham and his critique of Kantian ethics, Collins says that 'Abraham's silence calls to mind several doctrines in the moral philosophy of St. Thomas... especially those associated with the disposition of freedom'.¹²⁷ Here Collins corrects Maritain's critique of Kierkegaard 'for separating universal law and individual conscience' by saying that Kierkegaard does not oppose these but rather relates them both to 'God's wisdom and justice' in a way that coincides with 'Maritain's own remarks on the need to interiorize the natural law and appropriate it as the principle of one's individual conduct' (MK 289 n. 23).

Importantly, Collins distances Kierkegaard from being labelled an irrationalist by making the following three points: 1) Kierkegaard 'admitted the rights of reason in the nonexistential fields of the empirical sciences and logic'; 2) Kierkegaard permitted 'some moral and religious understanding of the order of existence and subjectivity'; 3) Kierkegaard 'championed the omniscience of God and the correlative intelligibility of all aspects of being (which are known comprehensively or "systematically" by God and which will be known by us in a systematic way, when we pass from time to eternity)' (MK 293 n. 21). Collins rightly says that Kierkegaard resisted the conflation of points

¹²⁷ MK 96; Collins specifies that he has in mind the passage where 'St. Thomas emphasises that God Himself is the *mensura suprema et excedens* of all human acts and their moral worth (ST II-II, 17, 1, c.)' (MK 289 n. 22).

1 and 3, but criticizes Kierkegaard for overlooking ‘the alternative of a thoroughly finite and realistic way of grasping the order of existence through the *speculative* judgment of existence’ (MK 294 n. 21). Collins identifies this as a weakness that invites the misdirected charge of irrationalism, but it only serves to emphasize the ill-equipped nature of Kierkegaard’s philosophy for a speculative turn in Thomism—Collins concludes this digression by directing the reader to the work of Cornelio Fabro.

Collins also draws on the work of *ressourcement* theologian Henri de Lubac to say that in his *Edifying Discourses*, ‘Kierkegaard’s personal devotion to the thought of our absolute equality before God is comparable to Proudhon’s dedication to the idea of justice’ (MK 302 n. 17).¹²⁸ Collins uses this insight to open up Kierkegaard’s ‘persistent orientation’ toward religious existence and to highlight what it means to become a Christian in Christendom (MK 208). The upshot of Kierkegaard’s understanding of religious existence is that this transformation is not rooted in a philosophical basis but rather in ‘the distinction between natural and revealed religion’, which upholds ‘its non-systematic character but also its connection with faith, as a paradoxical affirmation of the presence of the eternal in time’ (MK 212).

For Collins, what is lacking in Kierkegaard ‘is any sense of the Church as a present actuality, as something more than an ideal to be developed later on in the concrete order, when circumstances are more favourable’ (MK 216). Resisting the temptation to enlist Kierkegaard himself as a Catholic, Collins says that Catholicism was not ‘one of the serious alternatives’ entertained by Kierkegaard; however, Catholicism stands as a virtuous exemplar to Protestantism for showing ‘the communal factor in religious life’ which is needed for sharing ‘the burden of a responsible use of freedom, in regard to an eternal outcome’ and cultivating ‘a genuine church, having authority and a full sacramental order’ (MK 217). Collins also notes how

Kierkegaard’s attack upon Protestant Christendom has led some readers to turn away entirely from Christianity and others to move closer toward Catholicism. He himself followed a much less forthright course, a course which he did not propose as a model for others to

¹²⁸ For more, see Henri de Lubac and Robert Elliott Scantlebury, [*Proudhon et le Christianisme*]. *The Un-Marxian Socialist: A Study of Proudhon* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1948). See also, Simon D. Podmore, ‘Struggling with God: Kierkegaard/Proudhon’, *Acta Kierkegaardiana* 2 (2007), 90–103.

follow. He took his own stand on the dangerous buttress of Protestantism, rather than in the secure building of Catholicism. He preferred to stand *in discrimine rerum*, on the razor edge of the religious situation, pointing out the ‘normality’ of the Catholic teaching on the Church, the sacraments, and religious authority, without inquiring more closely into its claims of truth or sharing visibly in its life. His own vocation was to remain a gadfly among Protestants, reminding them that their only justification is to provide the incorruptibly critical conscience of the Christian community, and that they must not try to convert the reforming principle itself into a counternorm and countertradition. (MK 219)

Here, Collins portrays Kierkegaard’s critique of the Danish state church as no more than ‘a department of the state’ which ‘undermines moral seriousness and the transcendence of Christianity’ by conflating ‘the rights and duties of temporal citizenship and being reborn in Christ’ (MK 218). This is a critique that will be put to use in a later chapter on Cornelio Fabro.

2.9. LOUIS DUPRÉ

Finally, one Catholic thinker who has examined Kierkegaard’s works at length is Louis Dupré (b. 1925). In his book *Kierkegaard as Theologian* (1958), Dupré explores Kierkegaard’s religious upbringing, his understanding of sin, grace, faith, Christology, and ecclesiology.¹²⁹ Dupré begins his book in the shadow of James Collins with a quote about the necessity of investigating Kierkegaard’s religious writings for their enduring relevance to Christianity. Although Kierkegaard lambasted the Protestant Church, Dupré quickly puts to rest any attempt to convert Kierkegaard into a Catholic—although one can discover ‘the apparent relation of many of his ideas with Catholic

¹²⁹ Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1965). This is the English translation of Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaards theologie, of de dialectiek van het Christen-woorden* (Utrecht: Hete Spectrum, 1958). Dupré had published on Kierkegaard as early as 1955, see Louis Dupré, ‘S. Kierkegaard: Schets van zijn innerlijke ontwikkeling’, *Streven* 9 (1955), 217–25. Also see, Louis Dupré, ‘La Dialectique de l’Acte de Foi chez Soeren Kierkegaard’, *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 54 (1956), 418–55. For more, see the bibliography in Paul J. Levesque, *Symbols of Transcendence: Religious Expression in the Thought of Louis Dupré*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs 22 (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1997).

doctrine' (KT x). Dupré also observes that what often attracts both Protestants and Catholics to Kierkegaard is 'his aversion to the idea that Christianity is simply a stabilizing factor of society, a significant ornament of Western civilization, or a conservative force which can save modern man from losing his identity in an impetuous world' (KT x). Moreover, Kierkegaard offers an account 'of the role which freedom plays in the acceptance of faith and grace' as well as 'the reintegration of Christian asceticism in the *sola fide* doctrine of the Reformation', not to mention his 'notion of authority' (KT xi). Drawing on Romano Guardini's treatment of Kierkegaard,¹³⁰ Dupré says that

Only consciousness of sin makes the relation to oneself into a *conscious* relation to God, for the consciousness of a disproportion implies that in reference to which the relation to oneself is disproportionate. Thus consciousness of sin, the beginning of religious experience, brings a new determination into the conscious living of being-a-person. (KT 80)

Here, Dupré rightly uncovers Kierkegaard's theology by emphasizing the revelation of sin as 'the first act of the redemption' which at once alienates us from God but also returns us to Him (KT 81). For Kierkegaard, consciousness of sin is not only necessary for becoming a Christian, but also necessary for becoming authentically human, as Dupré rightly observes: 'God clarifies man to himself; only before God does he realize the infinite meaning of his existence and become fully committed to it' (KT 81). This process of salvation for Kierkegaard does not just happen without resistance but is marked by suffering—which he views as both a gift and task—which Dupré connects to the *imitatio Christi* tradition (KT 171).¹³¹ Hence, Dupré argues that Kierkegaard does not advocate any problematic notion of *natura pura* but rather:

grace has its origin *in* the very humiliation of man, and not *after*. It is in the consciousness of sin itself that God's grace comes to him. As soon, therefore, as a person feels profoundly guilty before God, he has already left sin behind. (KT 92)

I will pick these themes back up in a later chapter on Balthasar and anxiety, but it is important to see how Dupré highlights for Kierkegaard

¹³⁰ Romano Guardini, 'Der Ausgangspunkt der Denkbewegung S. Kierkegaards', in *Unterscheidung Des Christlichen* (Mainz, 1935), 469–72.

¹³¹ For more, see Barnett, *Kierkegaard*, 169f.

the way the ‘*consciousness of sin and forgiveness of sin* evoke each other with the internal necessity of two dialectical moments’ which originate in ‘God’s absolutely free and redemptive intervention’ (KT 92).¹³² Again, Kierkegaard is not advocating that nature stands outside of grace since ‘new life consists not in a rebirth to another nature, but in a new relationship with God, a novelty of faith’ (KT 96). Indeed, ‘faith is at once divine grace and the highest human activity’ (KT 97):

Redemption is not an external *gift* which envelops man without affecting him interiorly, but a God-given *task* which puts his intellectual and volitional life to the decisive ordeal of becoming spirit . . . Only a living faith in God’s redemption can revitalize the past in the present and recall man from fleeting time. (KT 100)

Against the common misconceptions of Kierkegaard’s notion of faith, Dupré rightly says that for Kierkegaard, ‘Faith is at once *act* and *gift*’ to such an extent that it is a ‘result of freedom and grace together’ which is ‘induced by God’ (KT 101). This is an important point that must not be overlooked, and I will come back to it in the next chapter on de Lubac’s engagement with Kierkegaard:

It would be wrong to confine Kierkegaard’s theology of grace . . . to an appropriation of transcendent *truth*. The concept of ‘condition for faith’ implies something much richer than pure *understanding*. Just as faith is not restricted to an act of the intellect (PF IV 254), but involves the whole man, so the condition on which faith depends transforms man in his totality. (KT 102)

For Kierkegaard, ‘the activity of the human will in faith becomes possible only through a choice by God Himself: only *within* the limits of the *datum* of grace, which transcends all freedom, can faith be called free’ (KT 103). For Dupré, this sets Kierkegaard apart from most Reformation theologians because he ‘firmly maintains that each step preparatory to the reception of God’s grace must itself already be grace’ (KT 104). At the same time, Dupré disabuses the reader of any suspicion that Kierkegaard advocates any theory of predestination, but rather establishes the ‘two real terms’ of God’s initiative and gives full weight to our active response (KT 107).

¹³² For more, see Louis Dupré, ‘Of Time and Eternity in Kierkegaard’s Concept of Anxiety’, in Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 8: *The Concept of Anxiety* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 111–32. Also see how this insight relates to ‘the infinite qualitative difference’, in Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self*.

In light of this, Dupré rightly connects Kierkegaard's comments about the individual's God-relation as manifesting love of neighbour. Indeed for Kierkegaard, I am not the one who selects which neighbour receives my charity, but rather '*our duty is to love those whom we see*' (WL 154), such that 'whomever God places in our path becomes of himself an object of love' (KT 162). Thus, Dupré draws from Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, noting that we are not to first ask 'Who is my neighbour?' but rather 'Who is my God?', because the 'answer to this question also defines my neighbour, for every man to whom I have a divine obligation is my neighbour' (WL 30; KT 162). Although Dupré does not make this connection, Kierkegaard virtually repeats the teaching that God gave to Saint Catherine of Siena: 'for love of me [God] and love of neighbour are one and the same thing. Since love of neighbour has its source in me, the more the soul loves me, the more she loves her neighbours.'¹³³ This theological insight, coupled with what Kierkegaard has said about the role of grace and works in the book of James, aligns Kierkegaard with the Catholic teaching of participation—an important Thomist theme that is recovered by Cornelio Fabro. Although Dupré does not frame it in these terms, he does come close when quoting at length a passage from Kierkegaard's *Journals*:

Grace is generally taken to be a dead decision, made once for all; instead it must tend to effort, since it is, to quote Baader, an *anticipation*. But to make an effort is always so difficult that in Christian life the most comfortable state is, in a sense, death, because then there is no longer any question of effort. (as cited in KT 165; cf. *Pap. X*² A 223 / SKS NB 14:49 1849)

In response, Dupré says that: 'Grace truly anticipates only when there is something to follow. Without effort there is no grace, because grace is fulfilled only through effort. This does not imply justification by works, but it does imply *co-operation*' (KT 165). The upshot of Kierkegaard's theological position for Dupré is that: 'Grace frees man only from the worry of saving himself by his own effort: his salvation no longer depends on this effort, but on God's mercy alone. The strain of the effort is removed—but not the effort itself' (KT 166).¹³⁴ In the end, Kierkegaard shows us that 'freedom itself is grace'

¹³³ Saint Catherine of Siena, *St. Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 36.

¹³⁴ For more on the Augustinian inheritance of Kierkegaard's soteriology, see Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), chs. 6 & 8.

and that the Christian 'sees all his efforts as a result of God's meeting with him in Christ' (KT 170).

2.10. CONCLUSION: A KIERKEGAARDIAN TRADITION WITHIN CATHOLICISM

In this chapter, I have sketched the wider context of the early Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings. Again, any one of these figures could merit more exhaustive treatment in a book dedicated to them, but what I have suggested here is that there is a Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard's writings that coincides with the beginnings of theological renewal in twentieth-century Catholic theology *and* the dissemination and translation of Kierkegaard's writings in Europe. It is no coincidence that a significant portion of the labour in the dissemination of Kierkegaard's works is shared by Catholic scholars. In part, it may be inferred that Catholic thinkers were attracted to Kierkegaard's work because of a significant theological and philosophical overlap in the values shared between Kierkegaard and Catholic teaching. For instance, the Catholic translators of Kierkegaard (like Haecker and Fabro) were interested in his contribution toward their own debates concerning the relation of reason and revelation, nature and grace, and the establishment of an anti-totalitarian authority in the wake of modernity. These translators found a rich resource in the writings of Kierkegaard, and both St Thomas Aquinas and the Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman were compared to Kierkegaard at this stage in order to assess Kierkegaard's relevance. For some of these thinkers, Kierkegaard's writings are specifically mentioned as contributing to their conversion to Catholicism (such as Peterson).

As we have seen from the brief survey of eight Catholic thinkers, most of them have been sympathetic towards Kierkegaard despite his life story, radical philosophy, and Protestantism, although this sympathy has been accompanied by harsh judgements in some cases. Some thinkers have fully identified Kierkegaard with Catholicism and others with Luther. However in the previous chapter, I re-examined the Lutheran stereotype about Kierkegaard's writings to suggest that Catholic readers (and some Kierkegaard scholars) should reconsider their assessment of Kierkegaard and the broader catholicity of his theological

anthropology. With this wider context in view, I will go on to consider three particular figures that inherit this mode of early Catholic engagement, and yet develop it in an original way. I will select Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar as two representative theological figures in pre- and post-conciliar Catholic theology who substantially engage with Kierkegaard's writings. I go on to discuss Kierkegaard's influence in the writings of Cornelio Fabro, an important Italian Thomist who provides a watershed moment in the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings in Europe. In short, it is through representative figures like de Lubac, Balthasar, and Fabro that the Kierkegaardian tradition latent within Catholicism uncovers the invitation to contemporary Catholic theologians to engage with Kierkegaard's writings.

The Theologian of Inwardness

Kierkegaard and the Complementary Theological Vision of Henri de Lubac

'God' is, not because our grammar is outworn;
but that grammar lives and generates worlds
because there is the wager on God.

*George Steiner*¹

Revelation gives us the key,
but we may not yet know how to use it;
or perhaps we may fear
to enter that sphere of mystery
which it suddenly opens for us.

*Henri de Lubac*²

In the first half of this book, I argued that the influence of Kierkegaard's writings is not restricted to confessional boundaries, and a more ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard's theological anthropology can challenge enduring stereotypes about the relevance of Kierkegaard's writings to Catholic thought. After setting the exegetical and historical backdrop for a better understanding of the Catholic inheritance of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, and his subsequent

¹ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4.

² Henri de Lubac, MS, 137.

impact upon emblematic Catholic thinkers in the twentieth century, I now turn to Henri de Lubac's theology. In this chapter, I argue that de Lubac does not represent a departure from Kierkegaard's theological vision, but rather that their writings complement one another in important ways. Indeed, one could argue that de Lubac's theology is distinctively shaped by Kierkegaard's writings. In fact, by looking closer at the Kierkegaardian aspects of Henri de Lubac's theology, a new insight into the basic aims of *ressourcement* can be gained.

To support this claim, I will reconstruct Henri de Lubac's theological anthropology and place it in the wider context of the project of *ressourcement* (§3.1). Against this backdrop, I will attempt to establish, not only Kierkegaard's influence upon de Lubac's life story (§3.2), but also offer a close reading of several of de Lubac's important works in order to highlight the convergence of de Lubac's theology with Kierkegaard's writings (§3.3). Moreover, I will interpret Kierkegaard's emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist in a way that illustrates this compatibility with de Lubac's sacramental theology (§3.4). My argument is that de Lubac and Kierkegaard offer complementary rather than contradictory theological visions. Indeed, de Lubac is one central *ressourcement* figure who puts Kierkegaard's writings to work in his fundamental theology and his theology of grace in a unique way that develops the previous generation of the Kierkegaardian tradition in Catholicism. I conclude by suggesting that through such a comparative analysis, a new perspective on the Catholic receptivity of Protestant theological concerns before the Second Vatican Council is illuminated. Rather than construing *ressourcement* as a purely patristic enterprise, de Lubac's engagement with Kierkegaard shows how the scope of *ressourcement* can be extended to include engagement with modern thought.

3.1. DE LUBAC'S HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

After two World Wars, the Roman Catholic Church faced new challenges and opportunities that it was not conversant with because

of its official anti-modernist stance.³ In 1946, de Lubac published *Surnaturel*, a book that initially would lead him to be censored by religious authorities, but he later became one of the most important protagonists animating the reforms and renewal of the Second Vatican Council.⁴ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) once said that encountering de Lubac was ‘an essential milestone on my theological journey’ because de Lubac showed him ‘how much more relevant theology is the more it returns to its center and draws from its deepest resources’. For Ratzinger, de Lubac was ‘deeply sympathetic’ with ‘what is said by our most modern contemporaries’ and even shares their questions as his own to such an extent that ‘the Fathers become our contemporaries’.⁵ Moreover, Brian Daley says that in 1946 Jean Daniélou issued a

manifesto calling for a broad change of emphasis and style in the development and communication of theology within the Catholic Church . . . [which was] permeated by an attitude of worship, as well as governed by rational consistency; it must speak in a language that contemporary non-Christians can at least understand and regard as plausible; and it must be more than simply an intellectual exercise—it must lead a believer to deeper concern for society’s needs, based on the exigencies of faith.⁶

³ For more on the modernist crisis in Roman Catholicism, see Marvin Richard O’Connell, *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994). Lester R. Kurtz, *The Politics of Heresy: The Modernist Crisis in Roman Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), ch. 2. Jodock, *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴ Joseph A. Komonchak, ‘Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri De Lubac’, *Theological Studies* 51, no. 4 (1990), 579–602. Also see, Bruno Forte, ‘Nature and Grace in Henri De Lubac: From *Surnaturel* to *Le Mystere du Surnaturel*’, *Communio* 23 (1996), 725–37.

⁵ Henri de Lubac, C, 11.

⁶ Daley, ‘The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (2005), 362–3. *Ressourcement* theologians wanted to ‘treat God not as an object, but as the Subject *par excellence*, who reveals himself when and as he will; as a result, it must be penetrated, first of all, with a religious spirit. Second, it must respond to the experiences of the modern mind, and take cognizance of the new dimensions which science and history have given to mind and society. Finally, it must become a concrete attitude before existence—one unified response that engages the whole person, the inner light of a course of action in which the whole of life is engaged’, in Daniélou, ‘Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse’, *Études* 249 (1946), 7.

Along with Daniélou, Henri de Lubac had founded *Sources Chrétiennes* earlier in 1943, which provided translations of, and commentary on non-Latin patristic writings. Their goal was to recover the patristic insights of biblical interpretation that had fallen from view in medieval scholasticism and the Counter-Reformation.

Brian Daley says that for *ressourcement* theologians, ‘the work of the theologian is always inseparable from a contemplation of the presence and saving acts of God in history, as presented in the scriptures and interpreted in the continuing, time-bound tradition of the community of faith’.⁷ Rather than an anti-modernist retreat from history as that which contaminates purely dogmatic sentences, *ressourcement* theologians embraced history as a theological category. At its root, *ressourcement* theology shares a basic aim with Kierkegaard’s theological vision: ‘the historical is the occasion [for our eternal blessedness], and yet is also the object of faith’.⁸ For Daley, this fundamental conviction led *ressourcement* theologians to recover not only ‘a more social, more culturally inclusive understanding of the reality of the church’, but also led them to recover ‘the patristic practice of spiritual or figural exegesis, derived from Israel’s habit of continually reinterpreting its own history and historical documents in the light of its present religious experience of God as active in history’, which they believed was ‘the key to the traditional Christian understanding of the church: not simply as an institutional structure, but as the living, corporate Mystery formed by the Holy Spirit to unite all humanity with the redeeming God’.⁹ Moreover, Daley says that for de Lubac, Catholic theology ‘must remain in contact with the whole tradition in which biblical faith has continually sought understanding, rather than being enclosed in an intellectual system, whether scholastic or modern, that has lost sight of its own historical and cultural limitations’.¹⁰

One central aspect of the whole tradition that de Lubac recovers in his theological anthropology is the notion of the soul as the locus of God’s redemptive activity upon the human individual. One might say that de Lubac recovers the doctrine of the soul’s transformation and

⁷ Daley, ‘The *Nouvelle Théologie*’, 372.

⁹ Daley, ‘The *Nouvelle Théologie*’, 376.

⁸ Kierkegaard, *Journal* (NB 15:75).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 377.

purification as a way of speaking theologically about human existence before God. In his own words, de Lubac says that

God did not make us ‘to remain within the limits of nature’, or for the fulfilling of a solitary destiny; on the contrary, He made us to be brought together into the heart of the life of the Trinity . . . [and the Church] is a place where this gathering together of all things in the Trinity begins in this world; ‘a family of God’, a mysterious extension of the Trinity in time, which not only prepares us for this life of union and gives us a sure guarantee of it, but also makes us participate in it already.¹¹

In his early work entitled *Catholicism* (1937), de Lubac says that the soul is given to us by God for the contemplation and imaging of ‘the God whose being is Love’, which is also regulative of human practice (C 117). The central thesis of de Lubac’s book is that ‘in reality Catholicism is essentially social’—even ‘in the heart of its mystery, in the essence of its dogma’ (C 15). Here de Lubac homes in on the historical character of divine revelation as it meets us in word and sacrament (C 141). For de Lubac, God became human in time ‘to deliver us from time, but by means of time’ (C 144). This means that for de Lubac, ‘God acts in history and reveals himself through history’ (C 165).

There are important consequences then for how Scripture is interpreted through the development of history. Indeed, for de Lubac, every created being (including the church) is subject to the law of historical development (C 230). However, de Lubac says that this development is anything but straightforward, since ‘outbursts of sudden energy are followed by long barren periods, and not every promise of progress is followed by fulfilment’ (C 232). This sentiment is echoed in *The Splendor of the Church*, where de Lubac says that even when

diversities do become divergences, [the Catholic theologian] will not start to worry as soon as the Church starts to feel them. He will not have to reflect for very long to see that they have always existed in the Church and always will; and that if they were ever to come to an end it would only be because her spiritual and intellectual life had come to an end.¹²

¹¹ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 237.

¹² *Ibid.*, 252.

Hence, de Lubac says that 'Fidelity to a tradition, moreover, is never servile repetition', but rather comprises 'the two-fold task of restatement and adaptation' (C 306–7). De Lubac speaks of the renewal of the church in terms of 'a continual state of rebuilding' upon 'eternal foundations', which entails 'changes in style' that are 'adapted to our own needs and problems' (C 322). In this way, de Lubac argues that 'a return to the sources of antiquity will be the very opposite of an escape into a dead past' (C 322). Moreover, he claims that this also entails rejecting 'the notion that the modern age has experienced outside the Church only error and decadence' (C 323). Like Kierkegaard's view of the contemporaneity or epochal equidistance of divine revelation, so too for de Lubac, 'humanity is made up of persons who have all the same one eternal destiny in whatever category or century their birth has placed them' (C 232). Now, detecting the Kierkegaardian resonance in de Lubac's theological anthropology is not a straightforward task. For instance, Lewis Ayres has noted that the difficulty of de Lubac's theological method of stacking quotation and allusion with dense footnotes, often

means that isolating his own cast on the material he offers is more likely to involve isolating strategies of quotation, adaptation and compilation than it is a simple process of distinguishing statements which are his from those that are not. At times, however, he also captures with remarkable precision the key common themes of the pre-modern traditions for which he is trying to create a voice within modern Catholic debate.¹³

Moreover, Ayres has argued for the central place of soul in de Lubac's theological anthropology, and how de Lubac wants to 'obtain an accurate description of human life, and the ultimate end of this life is a full maturation of our growth into the vision of God, and our capacity for that growth rests upon the existence of the soul'.¹⁴ Yet it is interesting how the terms of art that Kierkegaard uses (like atom of eternity,¹⁵ or

¹³ L. Ayres, 'The Soul and the Reading of Scripture: A Note on Henri De Lubac', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 2 (2008), 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182 n. 18.

¹⁵ 'The moment is not properly an atom of time but an atom of eternity' (CA 88).

the ocean reflecting the sky¹⁶) also appear in de Lubac's theological descriptions of the soul:

There is in man an eternal element, a 'germ of eternity', which already 'breathes the upper air', which always, *hic et nunc*, evades the temporal society. The truth of his being transcends his being itself. For he is made in the image of God, and in the mirror of his being the Trinity is ever reflected. But it is only a mirror, an image . . . Only by acknowledging himself to be a reflection could he obtain completeness, and only in his act of adoration could he find his own inviolable depths. (C 358–9)

Although de Lubac cites Jacques Maritain's *Integral Humanism* in the footnote here, one might say that de Lubac employs the Kierkegaardian terminology used by Maritain to mediate this Christian heritage in modern parlance. Importantly, de Lubac employs such terms not just because they are in vogue, but rather because he views Kierkegaard as an ally in the resistance against merely materialist accounts of human life that lack reference to the transcendence of the human towards the divine.¹⁷ Nevertheless, there is reason to investigate further the nature of de Lubac's affinity with Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. Especially since it is difficult to ignore the way the encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950) condemns 'dogma being expressed by the concepts of modern philosophy, whether of immanentism or idealism or existentialism' (HG 14–16). Why would such a condemnation be given if all that *ressourcement* theologians were aiming for was a retrieval of the patristic heritage? I want to suggest that the papal condemnation of existentialism (and the subsequent censorship of de Lubac)¹⁸ is also an indication of de Lubac's use of

¹⁶ 'Just as the ocean, when it lies still this way, deeply transparent, aspires to heaven, so the pure heart, when it is still, deeply transparent, aspires solely to the good; or just as the ocean becomes pure when it aspires only to heaven, so the heart becomes pure when it aspires only to the good . . . If the least thing comes between them, between the sky and the ocean, between the heart and the good, indeed, even if it was impatience in desiring the reflection, then the ocean is not pure, then it does not purely reflect the sky' (UDVS 121).

¹⁷ For more on the history of a doctrinal emphasis upon deification before the Second Vatican Council, see Adam G. Cooper, *Naturally Human, Supernaturally God: Deification in Pre-Conciliar Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), ch. 1.

¹⁸ For more, see Joseph Komonchak, 'Humani generis and Nouvelle Théologie', in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, ch. 9.

Kierkegaard in his theology. But this is to get ahead of ourselves. In the following sections, I would like to reconstruct the more explicit references to Kierkegaard in de Lubac's work to emphasize the convergence between these two theological visions.

3.2. ESTABLISHING DE LUBAC'S DEPENDENCE UPON KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS

Most introductions to Kierkegaard's thought and writings¹⁹ identify how Kierkegaard (the Socrates of Christendom), elaborates certain themes and concepts such as paradox, bearing witness to the truth, indirect communication, and the scandal and interiority of faith. In reading secondary literature on Kierkegaard, it does not take long to figure out that the *way* Kierkegaard communicates in his writings becomes just as important as *what* is being said. For Kierkegaard, pedagogy becomes an authorial concern to such an extent that the medium *is* the message—especially for divine pedagogy. However, the problem is that in Christendom everyone is presumed to be a Christian already and knows too much to understand properly how human subjectivity relates to what it means to become a Christian. So Kierkegaard must remove the obstacle of excess knowledge, tricking the reader out of what they think they already know, in order to present anew the scandal of the Christian faith. Now, the claim I am making here is that the pedagogical strategy that Kierkegaard takes up bears an affinity to the way Henri de Lubac presents his theology to his readers. In fact, I argue that in de Lubac's writings there are Kierkegaardian themes and terminology in his account of the relationship between grace and nature, human freedom and divine action.

Although *Humani Generis* expressed an explicit condemnation of existentialism, de Lubac communicated his understanding of a renewed Catholic theology by employing key terms and patterns of

¹⁹ A few good introductions to Kierkegaard's work are: George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). See also, Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, Blackwell Great Minds (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Also see, C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

argumentation from the writings of Søren Kierkegaard. In fact, Christopher Barnett has pointed to Kierkegaard's defence of the validity of religious claims in a secular age, his critical rejection of an historicism that reduces divine transcendence to mere facticity, and his characterization of faith as the paradoxical gift of openness before God, to make the bold claim that Kierkegaard 'makes de Lubac's intellectual enterprise possible'.²⁰ Although there may be an affinity in the way both Kierkegaard and de Lubac offer critical responses to modernity, one still could ask whether de Lubac's work is specifically indebted to Kierkegaard, or whether this affinity indicates a general Christian response to the crises of the interwar years. Thus in this chapter, I want to put forward the best possible case for a specific indebtedness to Kierkegaard's writings. But is the appearance of Kierkegaardian elements *merely* an ornamental feature of de Lubac's theology? I want to suggest that it is not. My claim is that there is a convergence between de Lubac's theology and Kierkegaard's writings which goes much deeper than rhetorical flourish.

To support this claim, I assess some of de Lubac's most important works in order to demonstrate his appropriation of Kierkegaard's writings. The upshot of my argument is to highlight the non-patristic influences upon *ressourcement* theologians in general, as well as the ecumenical role of Kierkegaard's writings in particular, stimulating the reform and renewal of Catholic theology during the twentieth century. In order to assess further *how* de Lubac's theology exhibits Kierkegaardian aspects, I will provide wider support by looking in particular at de Lubac's *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (1944), *Paradoxes of Faith* (1945), *The Discovery of God* (1945), and *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (1965).

3.2.1. Kierkegaard in *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*

By the time de Lubac writes *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, much of the available Kierkegaard scholarship in France was dependent

²⁰ Christopher B. Barnett, 'Henri De Lubac: Locating Kierkegaard Amid The "Drama" Of Nietzschean Humanism', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 10, tome 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012b), 97–110; p. 109.

upon scholarship in Germany.²¹ However, de Lubac's treatment of Kierkegaard shows that he had read not only *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, but that he was also good friends with the French translator of these works, Paul Petit (1893–1944).²² Now, Petit took part in the Christian Resistance and was killed in prison by the Nazis. However, he was one of the early Catholic readers of Kierkegaard who earnestly suggested that had Kierkegaard lived longer, he would have become a Roman Catholic.²³ Although de Lubac does not endorse this view of Kierkegaard himself (AH 111), he says of Petit's work on Kierkegaard, that it was 'not at all for him some literary or speculative pastime. He committed his soul to it, just as he was to commit his life, as a believer, as a magnificent Christian, as a seeker of God.'²⁴

In a similar way to Karl Löwith, de Lubac plays Kierkegaard off against Nietzsche on various subjects in his *Drama*.²⁵ Although the

²¹ For more on the quality of French and German scholarship on Kierkegaard, see Jonathan Judaken and Robert Bernasconi, *Situating Existentialism: Key Texts in Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 89–122, 279–304. Jon Stewart, 'France: Kierkegaard as a Forerunner of Existentialism and Poststructuralism', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's International Reception: Northern and Western Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 421–74.

²² Cf. AH 102, 111. For more on Petit's invaluable contribution to French scholarship on Kierkegaard, see Jacques Lafarge, 'Kierkegaard dans la tradition française: les conditions de sa réception dans les milieux philosophiques', in Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart (eds), *Kierkegaard Revisited*, Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 274–90.

²³ Søren Kierkegaard and Paul Petit, *Post-Scriptum Aux Miettes Philosophiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 8 n. 2. 'Impartialement, il semble bien pourtant qu'elle ait été dans les dernières années de sa vie de plus en plus nettement orientée vers le catholicisme'. Plusieurs critiques 'liber-penseurs' comme Brandès et Höfding ont exprimé l'avis que K., s'il était ne plus tard, aurait été catholique. D'autre part, des convertis et des catholiques éminents comme Th. Haecker, Erick Przywara, Erik Peterson, Heidegger, R. Guardini, Peter Wust, Aloïs Dempf, se réclament de lui. Nous croyons que c'est à juste titre. L'œuvre de K. a en effet ce mérite de faire toucher du doigt l'impossibilité pour l'*Enkelte* (c'est-à-dire l'individu autonome, la personne qui a une conscience) de se passer de l'autorité de l'Église. . . . Loin d'être opposée à la conception catholique de l'église, comme on le croit parfois, la conception kierkegaardienne de l'*Enkelte* en est donc complémentaire.'

²⁴ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri De Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 49f. n. 49.

²⁵ Karl Löwith, *Kierkegaard und Nietzsche; oder, Philosophische und Theologische Überwindung des Nihilismus* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1933). See also, Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1998), 304–11, 341–9, 383–97. For a more recent comparison and bibliography, see Markus Kleinert's chapter entitled 'Kierkegaard and

structure of de Lubac's treatment of Kierkegaard follows on from available assessments by world-renowned philosophers of his day, the content of de Lubac's treatment of Kierkegaard differs dramatically. For instance, Jean Wahl fails to sufficiently distinguish Nietzsche and Kierkegaard in his broad-brush comparison, saying, 'we see that the ideas of existence and transcendence are conjoined in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche'; however, it is just that 'Kierkegaard describes the movement of transcendence as The Eternal whereas Nietzsche describes it as The Eternal Return'.²⁶ Importantly, de Lubac can see a difference between these figures, and Kierkegaard shines through as an ally for Catholic theologians seeking to renew Catholic theology in the twentieth century.

So what does Kierkegaard offer to de Lubac's theology in the *Drama*? In his own words, de Lubac says that Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* presents 'by way of hypothesis, the fact of the Incarnation, that supreme paradox of the incursion of God into history, or of the eternal into time'—in other words, 'a kind of philosophy of dogma'. Whereas Kierkegaard's *Postscript* offers 'a philosophy of faith' that shows 'in what conditions the individual receives the mystery (Kierkegaard calls it the paradox) into himself without stripping it of its essentially mysterious quality' (AH 102–3). De Lubac says that 'the quite simple truth that Kierkegaard is never weary of repeating' is that the 'real individual is face to face with a real God' (AH 103). Both Kierkegaard and de Lubac portray the act and content of faith in the search for God as a kind of 'autopsy', that is an attempt to see the truth *of* and *for* oneself with one's own eyes, and yet faith is very much a disorienting way of seeing in the face of mystery. For both Kierkegaard and de Lubac, faith is irreducibly paradoxical—not in the sense of a logical contradiction but rather as a real dilemma that unbelievers and believers inhabit together (AH 104–5). It is for this reason that de Lubac describes Kierkegaard as 'the philosopher of transcendence' and the 'theologian of *inwardness*' (AH 103). In other words, what Kierkegaard offers to de Lubac's theology is the claim that the knowledge of God is neither illusory nor impossible in modernity, but rather dilemmatic, and

Nietzsche', in John Lippitt and George Pattison (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 402–20.

²⁶ Cf. Jean Wahl's Preface to Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: Introduction à sa philosophie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), 4–5. Translation mine.

wonderfully so (AH 106). Hence, de Lubac venerates Kierkegaard as ‘the herald of transcendence’ in an age ‘carried away by immanentism’ (AH 111).

For de Lubac, the theological task at hand is twofold: i) to diagnose the church’s failure to communicate properly with modern culture; and ii) to defend Catholic doctrine as an answer to a fundamental aspiration of contemporary society.²⁷ Indeed, de Lubac’s method for accomplishing this dual task is often characterized as celebrating marginal and eccentric figures in order to illuminate and integrate traditional forms of philosophical and theological understanding, thus transforming Catholic theology in his wake.²⁸ However, viewing de Lubac’s treatment of Kierkegaard only in terms of the single chapter he devotes to him in the *Drama*, would leave the reader with the sense of a marginal influence (at best) upon de Lubac’s theology, and my original claim could be dismissed as hyperbole. However, if the case could be made that de Lubac continually draws upon Kierkegaard throughout his life then my claim gains better traction.

3.2.2. Kierkegaard in *Paradoxes of Faith*

For instance, Kierkegaard’s presence can be detected in de Lubac’s *Paradoxes of Faith* (1945).²⁹ In this early work, de Lubac organizes a variety of intentionally fragmentary quips around several topics that, when viewed together, shore up important themes in Kierkegaard’s writings: Paradox, Christianity, Witness, Spirit, Truth, Interiority, Faith. In the preface of his book, de Lubac says that since ‘the expression of a thought is inevitably partial, in the sense that it is incomplete, its elaboration in connected discourse may sometimes

²⁷ Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xii.

²⁸ Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 85. For more about the biographical details of de Lubac’s life and how his theology is situated against a neo-scholastic tradition, see Francesco Leopoldo Bertoldi, *De Lubac: Cristianesimo e Modernità*, Collana Lumen (Bologna: Ed. Studio domenicano, 1994), 30–62. Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25–9. David Grumett, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 7–24.

²⁹ Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987). This English translation is a combination of two books by de Lubac that are separated by a decade: Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes* (Paris: Editions de Livre, 1945), and Henri de Lubac, *Nouveaux Paradoxes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955).

mislead and make it appear partial in the other sense of the word'. So, de Lubac decides to present the material in this book in an intentionally fragmentary way so as to assume the misunderstanding of the reader in advance and to 'Let the paradox be' for the reader to decide. Reminiscent of Kierkegaard's decision to write as one without authority through his fictive authors, commonly referred to as pseudonyms, de Lubac says that 'the frequently incomplete reflections' in this book 'are not intended to be the discoveries of a solitary mind'. The last thing that de Lubac reminds his reader of in the preface is that 'the Gospel is full of paradoxes, that man himself is a living paradox, and that according to the Fathers of the Church, the Incarnation is the supreme Paradox'. Here is an instance where de Lubac presents a patristic insight in a Kierkegaardian register. For both Kierkegaard and de Lubac, paradox outstrips conceptual resolution and marks 'the search or wait for synthesis' implicit within theological language: 'the provisional expression of a view which remains incomplete, but whose orientation is ever towards fullness'.³⁰ In fact, de Lubac wonders whether 'all substantial spiritual doctrine must not of necessity take a paradoxical form'.³¹ Although de Lubac explicitly resources much of his theology with materials from the Catholic tradition, he does say in *The Discovery of God* that

It is the philosophy which nourished me, and my thought continues to live in that climate. I should like to be able to show that it is still richer and more nourishing, that it has more sap and is more fertile, than even its adepts imagine. . . . our ambition has been, and still is at this moment, simply to recall some eternal truths in a language that is not too antiquated. (DG 207)

We learn from de Lubac's memoir that it was not philosophy in general, but Kierkegaard in particular that nourished him during his 'dark years' of theological exile. In 1953, de Lubac remembers receiving an encouraging note from a 'faithful friend' that was 'discreetly transcribed for me, without a word of commentary' from Kierkegaard's *Journals*, which de Lubac says 'helped me in the bad days to "hold on"'.³²

³⁰ Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes* (1945), 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³² Henri de Lubac, *At the Service*, 87. 'Each generation prepares someone who will announce Christianity in earnest. The more it persecutes and mistreats him, the more too it detaches his spirit from the world, so completely that God alone remains. And

Although the patristic content of de Lubac's theology is undeniable,³³ it is my claim that Kierkegaard's writings provide the grammar that allows de Lubac to frame his diagnostic and apologetic task as a Catholic theologian in the modern age. I take this *not* to mean that de Lubac could have selected *any* modern thinker to convey his patristic message. Rather that the way Kierkegaard communicates his concerns, and the fact that Kierkegaard shares a similar diagnostic and apologetic task illuminates de Lubac's fundamental theology and his theology of grace. Brian Daley rightly observes that behind the patristic retrieval associated with *ressourcement* theology 'lay *hermeneutical questions* about the significance of theological language'—namely, 'Can language about God ever be understood with the same analytical clarity, the same literal assurance of reference, which common sense normally attaches to scientific statements about worldly experience?'.³⁴ I now turn to reconstruct how Kierkegaard's writings feature for de Lubac at a pivotal stage in his thought, *The Discovery of God* (1945).

3.3. KIERKEGAARD IN DE LUBAC'S FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

After sketching the problem of God's absence in modernity, de Lubac turns to focus on the problem of representing the unrepresentable God in *The Discovery of God*. According to David Schindler, *The Discovery of God* represents 'the original point of departure for de Lubac's thought' (DG ix), which was previously sketched in *Catholicisme* (1937) and *Surnaturel* (1946)—works that eventually led to de Lubac's conflict with Vatican censors.³⁵ Although there are fewer

Christianity begins to be real for this man only when he is so unhappy and so tormented in this world that he seems a killjoy with all his suffering.'

³³ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service*, 317–19. 'The timeliness of the Fathers of the Church is not a superficial timeliness. . . Every time, in our West, that Christian renewal has flourished, in the order of thought as in that of life (and the two orders are always connected), it has flourished under the sign of the Fathers.'

³⁴ Daley, 'The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 4 (2005), 381.

³⁵ For more on de Lubac's censorship, see Joseph A. Komonchak's essay '*Humani Generis* and *Nouvelle Théologie*', in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 138–56. See

explicit references to Kierkegaard, there still remains an implicit presence throughout the structure of the book. For instance, de Lubac tells his reader that the kind of enquiry under way is ‘deliberately fragmentary’,³⁶ like ‘marginal notes’ that are meant to ‘provoke the reader to . . . find God!’ (DG 3). Here de Lubac confronts a theological problem: how can God pervade human thought and language, without being a mere extension of it? Although de Lubac draws upon the ancient Christian tradition as a resource in his response, to safeguard theology from the threat of anthropomorphism, my claim is that the *shape* of de Lubac’s response is an extension of the shape of the argument found in Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*—books that de Lubac described as ‘masterpieces of the philosophical and religious literature of all time’ (AH 102).

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard’s fictive author Johannes Climacus puts forth a controversial argument: if Christianity is true, then essential truth lies beyond the limits of human understanding.³⁷ The controversial aspect of this argument is that Climacus claims to state intelligibly a truth that we are incapable of understanding. Now, Kierkegaard’s authorship repeatedly returns to this issue in various ways and, as a result he draws a distinction between two modes of human understanding. For instance, the epigraph of *The Concept of Anxiety* reads: ‘Socrates was great in “that he distinguished between

also, Antonio Russo, *Henri De Lubac*, vol. 3, Teologi Del 20° Secolo (Milan: San Paolo, 1994), esp. chs. 7–8.

³⁶ John Milbank accounts for the fragmentary aspect of de Lubac’s work by appealing to a *political* motivation behind de Lubac’s text, whereas Reinhard Hütter disagrees and says that this fragmentary aspect occurs because of contradictory claims in the text that indicate de Lubac’s *confusion*. My argument is that the form of de Lubac’s text is neither political stammering nor an indication of confusion, but rather the shape of de Lubac’s theology is deliberately *Kierkegaardian*. For more on the debate between Milbank and Hütter, see Sean Larsen, ‘The Politics of Desire: Two Readings of Henri De Lubac on Nature and Grace’, *Modern Theology* 29, no. 3 (2013), 279–310.

³⁷ For this portrayal of Kierkegaard, I am gratefully indebted to an unpublished paper ‘Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought’ by Dan Watts. It is interesting that David Burrell’s reading of Aquinas fits very well with this reading of Kierkegaard, see David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge, 1979), ch. 2.

what he understood and what he did not understand".³⁸ Or consider Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments*:

Presumably it could occur to a human being to poetize himself in the likeness of the god or the god in the likeness of himself, but not to poetize that the god poetized himself in the likeness of a human being, for if the god gave no indication, how could it occur to a man that the blessed god could need him?³⁹

And later in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus says:

The person who understands the paradox (in the sense of understanding it directly) will, misunderstanding, forget that what he at one time in the decisive passion of faith grasped as the absolute paradox (not as a relative paradox, because then the appropriation would not be faith), that is, as that which absolutely was not his own thoughts, can never become his thoughts (in the direct sense) without changing faith to an illusion. If he does so, he will later come to see that his absolutely believing that it was not his own thoughts was an illusion. In faith, however, he can very well continue to preserve his relation to the absolute paradox. But within the sphere of faith there can never be the circumstance that he understands the paradox (in the direct sense), because, if that happens, then the whole sphere of faith drops out as a misunderstanding.⁴⁰

So, for Kierkegaard, when it comes to stating intelligibly a truth that we are incapable of understanding—such as the task of theology—it becomes necessary to disambiguate what Dan Watts has called 'aesthetic-intellectual understanding' from 'ethical-religious understanding'.⁴¹ In other words, it is the distinction between 'objects that can be grasped in the aesthetic-intellectual mode, which can be contemplated without bearing upon the way one leads one's own life as such'; whereas ethical-religious matters 'resist such disinterested contemplation, and bear directly upon the course of one's own

³⁸ Kierkegaard, CA, 3.

³⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, PF, 36.

⁴⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, CUP, 580.

⁴¹ Daniel Watts, 'Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought' (University of Essex: unpublished paper).

existence'.⁴² There will be more to say about this in the next chapter on Balthasar's theological aesthetics. However, going back to Kierkegaard's original controversial claim, it could be rephrased in this way: 'Christianity is suitably represented *in an ethical-religious way* as incapable of being suitably represented *in an aesthetic-intellectual way*.'⁴³ Or to put it in its classical articulation: faith is always seeking understanding.

Now, the way that de Lubac leads his reader into this disambiguated response to the problem of representing the unrepresentable God is through a parable entitled 'Our Knowledge of God' at the beginning of *The Discovery of God*. De Lubac tells a story of a boy that is caught mocking the preacher's 'abstract formulae and pious platitudes' and is rebuked by the headmaster: 'Hasn't it ever occurred to you that it is the most difficult subject to speak about that you can think of?' (DG 3). Commenting on the story—perhaps indirectly of himself—de Lubac says that this boy could not let go of this question and it was 'his first contact with the twofold mystery, of God and man'—a mystery that St Thomas paradoxically says, we have the capacity to understand, but cannot be understood (DG 12 n. 24).⁴⁴ As we shall see, de Lubac extends Kierkegaard's argument and further illuminates it from within the Christian tradition.

By contrasting two modes of understanding, de Lubac specifically draws upon Kierkegaard's critique of exhaustively defining the infinite so that it becomes the finite:

That does not, strictly speaking, mean that we realize increasingly 'the infinite distance between God and man'—to use Kierkegaard's expression—as though God withdrew his greatness from us in proportion as the infinite grows in us, and as we come the better to see that the divine is not 'simply the superlative of the human'.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid. ⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Cf. ST 1.87.1. References to the *Summa Theologiae* will be abbreviated as ST 1.2.4.5 for part 1, question 2, article 4, reply to objection 5 (if needed) and will be cited from St Thomas Aquinas, ST I, ST II, ST III, edition as shown in the list of Abbreviations.

⁴⁵ DG 117–18; cf. *Journals* JP X¹ A 135 / SKS NB 10:57. De Lubac's references to Kierkegaard are misleading in the English translation and should rather be written in the footnote as JP X¹ A 48 and 679 [1849] / SKS NB 9:48; NB 12:134; X² A 320 [1850] / SKS NB 14:142. One of de Lubac's quotes from Kierkegaard actually comes from JP X⁵ A 98 / SKS NB 28:9.

It is appropriate then that de Lubac identifies a difference between ‘the God of Aristotle and the God of St. Thomas’ which, in turn allows him to resist agnosticism, since ‘the knowledge of God remains concealed beneath the need to criticize any representation of God’, so that if ‘God conceals himself, it is in his very presence’ (DG 92). For de Lubac, transcendence ‘necessarily implies immanence’, such that if ‘God is transcendent, then nothing is opposed to him, nothing can limit him nor be compared with him: he is “wholly other”, and therefore penetrates the world absolutely’ (DG 94). Of course, de Lubac is able to connect these claims back to Augustine, Thomas, and Maximus—but what we have been attending to here is how these claims are an extension of, indeed *shaped* by Kierkegaard.

What is at stake, then, in contemporary debates for de Lubac is that the distinction between Creator and creatures can, and can continue to be made in spite of our ‘tendency to confuse the Author of Nature with the Nature through which he reveals himself obscurely, whose characteristics we cannot help employing in order to think of him’—that is, the danger of ‘what should have been a sign becomes a screen’ (DG 22).⁴⁶ That is why de Lubac says that

The infinite is not a sum of finite elements, and what we understand of it is not a fragment torn from what remains to be understood. The intelligence does not do away with the mystery nor does it even begin to understand it; it in no way diminishes it, it does not ‘bite’ on it: it enters deeper and deeper into it and discovers it more and more as a mystery. (DG 117)

So it makes sense then that following the opening parable, de Lubac inserts an intermezzo entitled *Abyssus abyssum invocat* (Abyss calls to abyss), which separates the first chapter from, and characterizes the formal features of, the mystery alluded to in the opening pages. Interestingly, the image of an abyss remains with de Lubac, even in his later comments on *Vatican II*.⁴⁷ However, a cursory reading of Kierkegaard’s writings would show that the human self-relation is often construed as an abyss, and the individual’s God-relation is also

⁴⁶ For more on analogical knowledge, see Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 64–75.

⁴⁷ See Henri de Lubac and James R. Dunne, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery* (Shannon: Ecclesia Press, 1969), 1.

described—albeit in qualitatively distinct—abysmal terms.⁴⁸ For this abyss imagery, de Lubac draws upon *Sermon 44* by the Dominican mystic Johannes Tauler, who is also an important influence on Kierkegaard (DG 7 n. 9).⁴⁹ Yet, Kierkegaard and de Lubac appropriate this abyss imagery in such a way as to characterize the twofold mystery of the God–human relation as an Abyss-abyss—introducing a doubling effect of vertigo to the problem of representing the unrepresentable God.

De Lubac frames his enquiry with the possibility of self-deception which threatens to subvert, not only his edifying discourse, but also indict his knowledge of God as illusory: ‘Was Moses right, or Xenophanes? Did God make man in his image, or is it not rather man who has made God in his?’ (DG 5). If both the self-relation and the God-relation are characterized as an abyss, then how does one distinguish transcendence from immanence amid the vertiginous heights and depths of our reflection? How does one know that the voice Moses heard was not merely the echo chamber later described by Xenophanes? What is ‘I am who I am’ if not this very kind of maddening reverberation? De Lubac argues that

If the idea of God in the mind of man is real, then no fact accessible to history or psychology or sociology, or to any other scientific discipline, can really be its generating cause. No observable ‘process’ suffices to account for it. And in that sense it has no genesis . . . it cannot be reduced to the result, itself deceptive, of some empirical transformation. (DG 17)⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The best treatment of this aspect of Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology to date is Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

⁴⁹ For more on Tauler’s influence on Kierkegaard, see Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 6–28, 64–95, *passim*. See also, Peter Šajda’s essay, ‘A Teacher in Spiritual Dietethics: Kierkegaard’s Reception of Johannes Tauler’, in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions*, vol. 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 265–88. Also see, Podmore, *Struggling with God: Kierkegaard and the Temptation of Spiritual Trial* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2013).

⁵⁰ Later on, de Lubac says, ‘God is not “a point of origin in the past”: he is a “sufficient reason in the present” (in the past and future as well, and during the passage of time) . . . God is not merely the principle and the term, at the beginning and at the end: the Good of every good, the Life of all living things, the Being of all beings, he is also at the heart of all things . . . the Absolute at the heart of the relative’ (DG 63–5). For more on knowing the unknowable Creator, see Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 20–33. In explaining the formal features of God’s Simplesness and Eternity, Burrell finds Kierkegaard helpful on numerous occasions. Cf. David B. Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974). See

In other words, de Lubac draws attention to the knowledge of God presented suitably in an ethical–religious way which is also incapable of being suitably represented in the disinterested contemplation of the aesthetic–intellectual mode of understanding. Instead of pushing de Lubac toward an endorsement of atheism, the threat of self-subversion opens up this insight for de Lubac:

Every human act, whether it is an act of knowledge or an act of the will, rests secretly upon God, by attributing meaning and solidity to the real upon which it is exercised. For God is the Absolute; and nothing can be thought without positing the Absolute in relating it to that Absolute; nothing can be willed without tending towards the Absolute, nor valued unless weighted in terms of the Absolute. (DG 36)

To be clear, de Lubac says that the knowledge in question is not purely intellectual because ‘our affirmation of God is not the conclusion of an argument’ (DG 38), but rather *existential*—‘I bear the proof within me’ (DG 41). De Lubac explicitly says that ‘we are not dealing here with a natural intuition of God which would be, so to speak, right from the start, a natural or necessary accompaniment of the human spirit. On the contrary, even mystical and supernatural gifts never attain more than a partial and fleeting anticipation’ (DG 45 n. 15). For de Lubac, the nature of this ‘proof’ does not grant certainty, but rather takes on the sense of probing into the depth of mystery, looking for what we do not know, much like in Anselm’s riddle-phrase ‘That-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’.⁵¹ To make this point, de Lubac uses a chimerical image taken from Kierkegaard’s *Journals*: ‘Pure reason is a fantasy’ much like the ‘witch who ended by eating her own stomach’ (NB 15:25). Employing this image, de Lubac says that if the knowledge of God could be suitably represented in an aesthetic–intellectual way, then the knower would be ‘like the witch who ended by devouring her own innards, nothing would remain but the

also, Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

⁵¹ For more on the distinction of a riddle from a proof, see ‘Riddles and Anselm’s Riddle’, in Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 267–89. Of Anselm’s riddle-phrase, de Lubac later says that it ‘shows him, by its recognition of his limitations, the secret of the only way of surmounting them’ (DG 78).

unthinkable equality of nothing to nothing' (DG 69). In light of this discussion, it can be seen how de Lubac explicitly draws attention to the problem of self-subversion that permeates Kierkegaard's writings, and does so in a Kierkegaardian way.

In *The Discovery of God*, de Lubac brings the reader, through wonder and ancient worship, back to consider their own existence as the site of God's presence. De Lubac's extension of Kierkegaard's argument would not be complete without a revocation to boot. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Johannes Climacus refers to the Catholic method of safeguarding church teaching in his revocation (CUP 619), whereas de Lubac ushers the reader straight into the priest's Eucharistic prayer just before consecrating the host—but instead of the host being broken into fragments, the reader is left with an ellipsis as the sign of a more promissory meaning yet to come. It is here that de Lubac echoes the revocation of the original and pseudonymous Johannes Climacus saying, 'No mystical ladder reaches its end unless we renounce it' (DG 156). This revocation in the form of a liturgical fragment directs and transforms de Lubac's previous arguments regarding desire, participation, and the real distinction between Creator and creatures into a prayer to God. And it is with this gnomic revocation that de Lubac opens up the lives of the saints as the concrete moral example in which to 'see' the natural human desire for God:

Perhaps it will be enough to see a man who has seen, and to believe on his testimony. For that is the miracle which is endlessly repeated, generation after generation . . . [that] Through his testimony, through the man who has seen, I really see. (DG 158)

Again, de Lubac extends the argument of Kierkegaard's fictive author, Johannes Climacus, that we covered in an earlier chapter. In Kierkegaard's book, Climacus levels the gap between the first generation of believers and ours, which also levels the gap between the saint and the contemporary follower: 'there is not and cannot be any question of a follower at second hand, for the believer (and only he, after all, is a follower) continually has the *autopsy* of faith; he does not see with the eyes of others and sees only the same as every believer sees—with the eyes of faith (PF 102). The only gap that exists for Climacus is the 'enormous difference between knowing what Christianity is and being a Christian'—the distance between hypothesis and testimony (CUP

380). For Climacus, the qualitative difference between an observer and a participant 'is repelling. It does not make it easy to enter into what it introduces; on the contrary, it makes it difficult' (CUP 381). In short, de Lubac extends Kierkegaard's argument by removing the aura of a neutral hypothesis and transforming his enquiry into a revealing testimony of the Christian faith in the modern age.

One last structural extension of Kierkegaard's writings to note is de Lubac's postscript to *The Discovery of God*. Shortly after the publication of *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* and *The Discovery of God*, de Lubac's critics sought to help him detach his own constructive theology from 'non-Catholic existentialists' like Kierkegaard.⁵² It is significant that Kierkegaard's work received critical reviews, which led him to add at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* a section entitled 'An Understanding with the Reader' (CUP 617). Hence, in later editions of *The Discovery of God*, de Lubac follows Kierkegaard and attaches a similar postscript in order to defend himself against such critics. In this later edition, de Lubac heeded their comments by adding detailed footnotes often at page-length as an indication of his sources—a practice of arguing through one's footnotes that bears a striking resemblance to Kierkegaard (CUP 33–5, 73–4, 206–7, 274–7, 418–19, 514–19). Interestingly, de Lubac notes that this 'supplementary explanation gave rise to new problems, so that the more one explained oneself the more explanation was necessary' (DG 206). In his own defence, de Lubac emphasizes that what has been said is drawn from the 'double treasure' of Scripture and the church's vast tradition (DG 205). In responding to the 'well-intentioned and authoritative' reviewers (DG 206), de Lubac says that 'to speak of God is as dangerous as it is necessary', and if you 'wait to find words worthy of God you would never speak at all' (DG 205). Nevertheless, in his *Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, de Lubac quotes an excerpt from Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death*:

⁵² For an example of Thomist critics, see David L. Greenstock, 'Thomism and the New Theology', *The Thomist* 13 (1950), 567–96. In reference to de Lubac specifically Greenstock proclaims, 'there is no need to go outside Thomism to find a truly existential philosophy; on the contrary, the intellectual realism of Aquinas is the best antidote for the excessive voluntarism of the non-Catholic existentialists such as Kierkegaard and Sartre' (594).

No teaching on earth has ever really brought God and man so close together as Christianity, nor can any do so, for only God himself can do that, and any human fabrication remains just a dream, a precarious delusion. But neither has any teaching ever protected itself so painstakingly against the most dreadful of all blasphemies, that after God has taken this step it should be taken in vain, as if it all merges into one—God and man—never has any teaching been protected in the same way as Christianity, which protects itself by means of the offence. (SUD 117)

Reflecting on this passage, de Lubac argues that

The believer has at his disposal a sure criterion to distinguish the truly sacred from the false, for he is enlightened by God's historic revelation, inaugurated in the Old Testament and fully accomplished in Christ, in whose person remains God even as he reveals himself, not only as close as possible to man, but as becoming man himself.⁵³

To recapitulate, there are only a few explicit references to Kierkegaard in *The Discovery of God*; however, these citations highlight the wider, implicit Kierkegaardian aspects of de Lubac's fundamental theology. I have pointed to the central problem of representing the unrepresentable God in de Lubac's favourite book by Kierkegaard, and I have paid special attention to these references and to the revocation and postscript that is repeated in de Lubac's book. Even though de Lubac does make an attempt to respond to his critics in the postscript of *The Discovery of God*, it would not be until his later book *The Mystery of the Supernatural* that his critics received a robust response.

3.4. KIERKEGAARD IN DE LUBAC'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE

I have been arguing that there is a convergence between Kierkegaard's theological vision and de Lubac's. To support this claim, I have drawn on some of his early works, and now I turn to consider one of de Lubac's most influential books, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (1965). I have drawn attention to the paradoxical claim of Kierkegaard's *Fragments*: if Christianity is true, then essential truth lies

⁵³ Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 298.

beyond the limits of human understanding. I now want to show how de Lubac develops this paradoxical claim in his account of our natural desire for the supernatural—or to use de Lubac’s own words, ‘the Christian paradox of humanity’. Here de Lubac provides the patristic support for a central aspect of Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology—that is, human beings are *at once* temporal and eternal, finite and infinite.⁵⁴ Now, the way de Lubac endorses this theological affirmation is in stark contrast to the position of his critics who advocate a ‘separated theology’—that is, partitioning the world into a semi-detached universe with the order of grace logically and structurally separate from the order of nature. For de Lubac, such a separated theology places theology (and its claims) in dire straits.

David Schindler has framed de Lubac’s paradoxical theology of grace in this way: ‘On the one hand, if grace did not somehow—always already—touch the soul of every human being, the Christian fact would remain an essentially “private” matter of urgent concern only to those who were already believers’ (MS xvi). On the other hand: ‘if the order of grace were not essentially gratuitous—that is, did not really add something to nature that could not be anticipated or claimed by nature itself—then the Christian fact would lose its newness and its proper character as divine gift’ (MS xvi). Either way, severing the order of grace from nature fails to satisfy two important conditions: i) the public witness of Christian martyrdom, and ii) the gratuity of God’s free gift of salvation.

Readers of Kierkegaard may detect in Schindler’s presentation of de Lubac’s theology of grace an extension of Anti-Climacus’ attempt to ‘confess Christ in the midst of Christendom’ in *Practice in Christianity* (PC 220). For Anti-Climacus, once it is established that everyone is already a Christian by virtue of being human, then the struggle to become a Christian is over and we can all carry on with the next novelty as a matter of course. Anti-Climacus calls it a ‘fallacy’ to believe that ‘we as such are all Christians. For if this is taken as given, a militant church seems to be an impossibility’ because ‘wherever it is assumed that there is an established Christendom, there is an attempt to form a triumphant Church’, and for Anti-Climacus, ‘the Church

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, SUD, 13. For another instance of de Lubac’s endorsement of Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology, see de Lubac, *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 170–1.

militant is in the process of becoming, whereas an *established* Christendom *is*, is not becoming' (PC 211).⁵⁵ De Lubac's problem with the established anti-modernist theology of grace and nature is that it actually undermines Christianity in particular, and religious faith in general, as Anti-Climacus says: 'In the Church militant, it was piety to confess Christianity; in established Christendom, it is piety to conceal it' (PC 217).⁵⁶ So, Schindler rightly says that de Lubac is left with the theological problem of 'how human persons in the natural order can be interiorly directed to the order of grace that fulfils them, without in the least possessing this grace in anticipation, and without being able at all to claim it for themselves' (MS xvii). As we shall see, de Lubac's reply to this question is to affirm the real value of the natural order of creation *and* highlight creation's destiny for communion with God in freedom and love (MS 19). On the face of it, there is nothing that immediately suggests a Kierkegaardian shape to de Lubac's theological problem. Moreover, a glance through the index of *The Mystery of the Supernatural* would not furnish any explicit references to Kierkegaard. However, there is a convergence between Kierkegaard's thought-experiment in *Philosophical Fragments* and de Lubac's book. The clue is best seen by comparing the table of contents of both books.

In the 'thought-project' of the first chapter of *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard begins with the paradoxical claim about how Christianity intelligibly asserts a truth-claim that is incapable of being suitably represented in an aesthetic-intellectual mode of understanding. The other key convergence is with the third chapter and its appendix: 'The Absolute Paradox' and 'Offense at the Paradox'. A similar structure emerges in de Lubac's *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, with its opening chapters dedicated to 'The Two Tendencies of the [Inadequate] Hypothesis' and chapters 6 to 9 regarding 'The Christian Paradox' and its rejection by common sense. Although de Lubac has come under fire from his critics and religious superiors for his engagement with thinkers like Kierkegaard, it seems that he has removed the explicit references but left the argument intact for those

⁵⁵ Anti-Climacus uses the medieval terminology of the militant Church—which struggles against sin and the principalities and powers on earth—and triumphant Church, which is in heaven after the final judgement. Today, the term of the militant Church is replaced with 'the pilgrim people of God'.

⁵⁶ For more on this discussion, see de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis*, 191ff.

with eyes to see. This observation is borne out in remarks made by de Lubac, such as,

If we begin by disassociating the two orders completely, in order to establish the existence of a natural order that could be fully and finally self-sufficient, we are all too likely to end up by seeing not so much a distinction as a complete divorce. And we may risk also losing the profound sense of their 'infinite qualitative difference'. (MS 35)

Here is an unmistakable reference to Kierkegaard that de Lubac has used earlier in his writings, but without naming its source. Prior to *Humani Generis* (1950), de Lubac would not hesitate to drop Kierkegaard's name here, but afterwards, he leaves it to the reader to make the connection. De Lubac does this again later on:

Between nature as it exists and the supernatural for which God destines it, the distance is as great, the difference as radical, as that between non-being and being: for to pass from one to the other is not merely to pass into 'more being', but to pass to a different type of being. It is a crossing, by grace, of an impassable barrier. (MS 83)

Here de Lubac makes an explicit reference to Lessing's problem as it is discussed in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

the transition whereby something historical and the relation to this becomes decisive for an eternal happiness is a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλω γένος*; [shifting from one genus to another] . . . a leap for both the contemporary and the one who comes later . . . [Lessing made] an illusory distinction between contemporaneity and noncontemporaneity. (CUP 98)

Now for de Lubac, the claim of a 'pure nature' in a separated theology of grace repeats the problem that Kierkegaard confronts in his writings. In de Lubac's theological register, the dilemma of *natura pura* is that of having to bite the bullet for either Pelagianism or Baianism. In other words, in order for 'pure nature' to reach the moral perfection of grace, it either has to attain it actively (autonomy) or passively (heteronomy). De Lubac says that

in either case, we arrive at a hypothetical creature who has no kind of relationship of love with God; at a 'beatitude' which the creature requires and which God owes him. In the 'purely natural world' where this creature lives, all idea of God's free gift is lost. (MS 48)

In both cases, de Lubac says that moral perfection is construed in terms of an extrinsic finality and 'not a destiny inscribed in a man's very nature, directing him from within, and which he could not

ontologically escape, but a mere destination given him from outside when he was already in existence' (MS 68–9). The problem with this separated theology of grace is that it posits a 'purely natural' universe from which we can obtain 'natural' happiness and imagines a parallel universe that happens to be 'supernatural', which equally requires us to obtain happiness by implication. De Lubac rightly says that 'whether we add the two together or set them up against each other, we can hardly hope to find in them the gratuitousness we are looking for' (MS 62). And it is precisely the gratuity of God's free gift of grace that is at stake here for de Lubac. In defence of his own position, de Lubac charitably cites the infamous encyclical *Humani Generis* that was allegedly written in protest against his own earlier theological position, which he now claims was written in haste (MS 50 n. 57).

In this book, de Lubac extends Climacus' paradox in terms of the scholastic tradition. For Climacus, the paradox was whether Christianity could be thought, and remain outside of thought. But de Lubac draws this somewhat abstract question into the neo-scholastic interpretation of a pure nature, which, according to him, would be the equivalent of endorsing the undesirable Socratic position: that the truth of Christianity comes from within, rather than without human thought. Hence, there is no such thing as revelation, only wish fulfilment. So when de Lubac characterizes the rejection of the paradox of Christian revelation in terms of 'offence', he specifically targets Cajetan as the 'unfaithful Thomist' who gives rise to the modern anthropological turn by 'blurring the paradox of faith' (MS 166). For de Lubac, the limits of nature are absolutized when Cajetan says that 'reasonable nature is a closed whole within which the active capacities and tendencies are in strict correspondence', such that 'natural desire does not extend itself beyond the faculty of nature' (MS 140).

[W]e are dealing with an 'understanding of faith', which must always presuppose at its base, as a first and permanent condition, the gift of faith itself. We are dealing with a search which is constantly guided by that faith. With such a guide it cannot take a false turning. It never tries to get beyond it . . . Faith has its own light, which can be far brighter in the intellect of a simple believer than in that of the finest theologian. The effort of 'understanding' cannot be directed to anything but a better reflective realization of the gift of faith—something not only of value in itself, but fulfilling a need in this. For both reasons such an effort is fully

justified. But, let me say again, it develops wholly within that gift, and at every stage will be measured closely against it in its results. (MS 165)

In light of de Lubac's description here, it is helpful to remember that for Kierkegaard, the Christian mystery calls for 'a crucifixion of the understanding', since the understanding is 'continually colliding with this unknown, which certainly does exist but is also unknown and to that extent does not exist. The understanding does not go beyond this; yet in its paradoxicality the understanding cannot stop reaching it and being engaged with it' (PF 44). But again, de Lubac refers to Kierkegaard's paradox between the clashing form of two modes of understanding: the 'idea of mystery is perfectly acceptable to reason once one has admitted the idea of a personal and transcendent God. The truth we receive from him about himself must exceed our grasp, simply because of its superior intelligibility: understood, it can never be grasped' (MS 171). This sheds a bit more light on de Lubac's remark that 'the whole of dogma is thus but a series of paradoxes, disconcerting to natural reason and requiring not an impossible proof but reflective justification' (C 327). Indeed, de Lubac goes on to observe that

People frequently reason as though all the mystery were on God's side, and there was nothing in man that eludes the grasp of common experience or natural reasoning. Our whole nature should, in theory at least, be comprehensible to us, and we have the key to understanding all its manifestations. But this is somewhat illusory. . . . When we have said everything the mind can take in, everything definable that is to be said about ourselves, we have as yet said nothing, unless we have included in every statement the fact of our reference to the incomprehensible God; and that reference, and therefore our nature itself in the most fundamental sense, is not really understood at all unless we freely allow ourselves to be caught up by that incomprehensible God. No one must think that we can understand man otherwise than by grasping him in his movement towards the blessed obscurity of God. (MS 209)

Although de Lubac is dependent on Étienne Gilson in some respects here, it is because of Kierkegaard's influence that there is an important divergence between Gilson and de Lubac. De Lubac's theology can be distinguished from other thinkers during this time like Gilson, who failed to adequately distinguish Kierkegaard from atheistic

existentialism.⁵⁷ The difference between Gilson and de Lubac can be put this way: for Gilson, paradox does not feature in his Christian philosophy;⁵⁸ for de Lubac, the Christian paradox is his ‘entire Credo’, since

the ‘desire to see God’ cannot be permanently frustrated without an essential suffering . . . for a good and just God could hardly frustrate me, unless I, through my own fault, turn away from him by choice. The infinite importance of the desire implanted in me by my Creator is what constitutes the infinite importance of the drama of human existence . . . this desire is not some ‘accident’ in me. It does not result from some peculiarity, possibly alterable, of my individual being, or from some historical contingency whose effects are more or less transitory. A *fortiori* it does not in any sense depend upon my deliberate will. It is

⁵⁷ Étienne Gilson, *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Armand A. Maurer and Laurence K. Shook (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), 417. Gilson says, “To speak of “existential philosophy” today immediately brings to mind names like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, and others, whose philosophical opinions are not always the same, and to which no Thomism, conscious of its own nature, could under any circumstances fully align itself.” For more on Gilson’s dismissal of Kierkegaard, see Francesca Aran Murphy, *Art and Intellect in the Philosophy of Etienne Gilson*, Eric Voegelin Institute Series in Political Philosophy (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 193, 215–17.

⁵⁸ Recall Gabriel Marcel’s criticism of Gilson: ‘I would be disposed, for my part, to think that there is Christian philosophy only there where this paradox, this scandal, is not only admitted or even accepted, but *embraced* with a passionate and unrestricted gratitude. From the moment on when, to the contrary, philosophy seeks by some procedure to attenuate this scandal, to mask the paradox, to reabsorb the revealed datum in a dialectic of pure reason or mind, to this precise degree it ceases to be a Christian philosophy. Along these lines, very close to us, the extraordinary influence exercised by Kierkegaard in reaction to Hegelian idealism is explicable. That is a key point to which I will soon return, once the translations currently being done have appeared, those of *Sickness unto Death*, *Repetition*, and *The Concept of Anxiety*. If I had to address a criticism to Mr. Gilson, it would perhaps be that of not placing this paradox at the heart of the definition he gives to Christian philosophy’, in Gregory B. Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 165. An additional point of divergence between Gilson and de Lubac is that for the former, Thomas is Aristotelian, but not for de Lubac: ‘Under different forms, and with accentuations varying from one century and school to another, Christian philosophy thus developed the concept of a human nature which is open to receive a supernatural gift. Such a concept was unknown, of course, in ancient philosophy. There is nothing Aristotelian about it—though St. Thomas Aquinas, faithful to his method of conciliation and without any historical scruple, sometimes finds ways to express it in Aristotelian terms. But nor is it Platonic or Plotinian. Though theoretically justifiable by reason, the fact remains that it was wholly shaped and developed in direct dependence on Christian revelation’ (MS 119).

in me as a result of my belonging to humanity as it is, that humanity which is, as we say, 'called'. For God's call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And, by God's will, I now have no other genuine end, no end really assigned to my nature or presented for my free acceptance under any guise, except that of 'seeing God'. (MS 54–5)

Reading de Lubac's comments about the mystery of faith in light of Kierkegaard's contrast between two modes of understanding, it can be seen how de Lubac's remarks converge with Kierkegaard's claim that Christianity is suitably represented *in an ethical-religious way* as incapable of being suitably represented *in an aesthetic-intellectual way*:

if I should be able to declare unequivocally that God gives himself to me, and makes himself to be seen by me freely, and quite independently, then that supernatural gift must be clearly seen to be free not merely in relation to some generic nature, abstract and theoretical, but actually in relation to the concrete nature in which I, here and now, share. (MS 61)

Hence, de Lubac offers 'a return to the point of view of past tradition, which was far more "personalist" and far more "existential" (though not existentialist!) than its language always leads one to suspect' (MS 63). In particular, de Lubac points to Thomas, who 'does not reason from a "disexistentialized" human essence' (MS 67). For it is Thomas, after Augustine, who advocates an 'element of inwardness—which we also call transcendence—which belongs to the creating God "who is more interior to me than I am myself"' (MS 78). Here we cannot overlook the importance of de Lubac's earlier remark about Kierkegaard as the 'theologian of inwardness' (AH 103). This inwardness is Kierkegaard's Augustinian way of speaking about the spiritual life of a person, indeed the realm of the soul's activities.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For more, see Robert Puchniak, 'Augustine: Kierkegaard's Tempered Admiration of Augustine', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 11–22. Robert Puchniak, 'Kierkegaard's "Self" and Augustine's Influence', in Heiko Schulz, Jon Stewart, and Karl Verstrynge (eds), *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 181–94. See also, Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

Now, de Lubac's theology of sanctification is implied in his theological account of human existence before God. Indeed, what de Lubac says about the individual believer, also applies to the church. Elsewhere, de Lubac goes on to say that

All that we say of the person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, applies analogically to his real presence in the Eucharist and to his 'mystical body' (i.e., the Church, considered as an eschatological reality, who has Christ for her head and those who are sanctified for her members).⁶⁰

De Lubac's remarks about individual and ecclesial sanctification bear upon his remarks about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In fact, de Lubac develops this thought in one of his most famous remarks: 'The Church produces the Eucharist, but the Eucharist also produces the Church.'⁶¹ In the next section, I would like to trace a similar line of theological thinking in Kierkegaard's *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*.⁶²

3.5. KIERKEGAARD AND THE REAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE EUCHARIST

In *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac argues that 'Christ in his Eucharist is truly the heart of the Church'.⁶³ In this section, I would like to highlight the way in which Kierkegaard endorses this same way of thinking. Contrary to anti-ecclesial stereotypes about Kierkegaard, when Kierkegaard writes about the Eucharist, it is not in the abstract but rather he writes a series of thirteen short reflections that were meant for a specific liturgical setting of the Friday Eucharistic service in Copenhagen's Cathedral, 'The Church of Our Lady'. From 1209 to 1536, this was a Catholic church that was named after St Mary and it

⁶⁰ Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis*, 299. De Lubac cites a passage from Søren Kierkegaard, Knud Ferlov, and Jean-Jacques Gateau, *Traité du désespoir, Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 225.

⁶¹ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 133.

⁶² Kierkegaard DCF.

⁶³ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 160.

is where Kierkegaard's funeral took place in 1855. Although Kierkegaard is perhaps best known for his 'Attack on Christendom', David Law reminds us that 'the Eucharist was of enormous and central importance for Kierkegaard', and that 'confession, absolution, and the Eucharist were the only ecclesial actions which Kierkegaard continued throughout his life'.⁶⁴ Rather than being suspicious of human desire or the sacraments, Kierkegaard wants to use these Eucharistic writings to awaken our desire for God. In fact, Kierkegaard says that his entire authorship definitively points toward these Eucharistic reflections, which are aimed toward helping readers to prepare themselves for that 'decisive point of rest, at the foot of the altar' (WA 165).

Recently, Carl Hughes has argued that Kierkegaard wrote about the Eucharist in such a way as to 'solicit readers to join and extend the forms of performances that they evoke'—that is, 'to stir a longing for God that should govern every aspect of one's life outside the church walls'.⁶⁵ The edifying aim of these Eucharistic reflections was appropriate in the liturgical context for which they were intended, since the congregation would then proceed to participate in the Eucharistic celebration to which these reflections pointed. In a similar way, these Eucharistic discourses reflect Kierkegaard's own authorial strategy, which aimed to stand aside and motivate his reader to put the book down and to act. In a journal entry from 1850, Kierkegaard says 'in connection with Christianity, I would stress another aspect of the concept of mystery: the ethical-religious'. Indeed, Kierkegaard insists that 'Christianity understood very well that with respect to serving the truth, what matters especially is the transformation of the individual, so that one becomes a suitable instrument of the truth'. Later, Kierkegaard says of the divine mystery that

⁶⁴ David Law, 'Kierkegaard's Understanding of the Eucharist', in Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 17: *Christian Discourses and the Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 275. For more, see Michael Plekon, 'Kierkegaard and the Eucharist', *Studia Liturgica* 22 (1992), 214–36. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, 'Søren Kierkegaard at Friday Communion in the Church of Our Lady', in Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 18: *Without Authority* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007b), 255–94. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, 'Longing for Reconciliation with God: A Fundamental Theme in "Friday Communion Discourses"', Fourth Part of *Christian Discourses*, in Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist (eds), *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2007a* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 318–36.

⁶⁵ Hughes, *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Rhetoric and Performance in a Theology of Eros* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 13.

certainly, Christianity has never been—indeed, it has abhorred being—a mystery in the sense of existing only for a few brilliant minds who have become its initiates. No: God has chosen the lowly and the despised—but still there was no lack of initiation. It is not an intellectual but an ethical initiation, personality's enormous respect for inclusion in the Christian community, and this respect is not expressed in assurances and by making a fuss, but existentially, in action . . . I never forget that with respect to Christianity, a shoemaker, a tailor, a workman is just as much a possibility as the most learned person and the most brilliant intellect. (NB 15:12–15)

Now, in Kierkegaard's understanding of the divine mystery, he also distinguishes between what is seen and unseen in his sacramental theology. Hughes notes how even the vocabulary Kierkegaard deploys for receiving the sacrament [*at gaae til Alters*] indicates a physical action that can be translated literally as 'to go to the altar'. Yet, Kierkegaard distinguishes this visible action from the unseen communion [*Samfund*] with Christ in the Eucharist.⁶⁶ When the Hongs used 'communion table' instead of the more accurate translation of 'altar' or 'Eucharist', this reflects their own denominational terminology rather than Kierkegaard's own understanding. However, Hughes is right to observe that for Kierkegaard, the transformation of desire becomes the way in which we 'see' forgiveness and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁶⁷ Hence, Hughes says that Kierkegaard's description of our communion with God in terms of a generative longing disrupts 'the Lutheran tendency to define the Christian life exclusively in terms of sin and forgiveness'.⁶⁸

So what does Kierkegaard say specifically about the connection between the Eucharist and human yearning? Kierkegaard draws upon some key scriptural passages to develop his reflections on the Eucharist. For Kierkegaard, the purpose of the Eucharist is communion with Christ, who is really present at the altar. Kierkegaard's theology in his Eucharistic discourses can be grouped into three movements: receiving forgiveness, giving thanks, and deepening our longing for God. Indeed for Kierkegaard, God is the one who enables and satisfies the Eucharistic longing 'to renew communion with our Saviour and Atoner', a reciprocal longing that Kierkegaard describes as laying hold of us, which makes us long to lay hold of it (DCF 37). Indeed, Kierkegaard describes this longing in terms of a gift from God—that

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 217 n. 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

is, Christ's desire to share in this Eucharist with us (Luke 22:15). Moreover, Kierkegaard describes the movement of this Eucharistic desire in scriptural terms, referring to the action of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8). Kierkegaard says 'comprehend it you cannot, nor should you', but rather, 'you should use the longing' by the work of the Spirit because 'God gives himself in these gifts' (DCF 39). However, Kierkegaard also notes how a 'person can ignore its call' and 'can resist it' even 'prevent its deeper formation' in them (DCF 40). So, Kierkegaard urges the reader to 'receive it with gratitude as a gift from God, then it will become a blessing to you' (DCF 40). One example of this longing that Kierkegaard provides in his journals is that of the Blessed Virgin:

Mary sought something that was not her own, something that was entrusted to her—and by God—something she had had: in this way we should seek lost innocence, to come into God's kingdom as children. She sought it tirelessly. She sought it in the temple. (NB 15:34; cf. Luke 2:41ff)

Thus, Kierkegaard presents the Eucharist as a sacrament that invites both divine and human action in a non-competitive fashion, saying that God awakens this longing in our soul and it is our responsibility to be good stewards of this longing (DCF 40). Kierkegaard says that it is God who 'gives the time of grace "this very day", but the human being is the one who must seize the time of grace "this very day"'. Indeed, Kierkegaard says that with God, 'there is a linguistic difference between us, and yet we strive to understand you and to make ourselves intelligible to you' (DCF 54). God gives this Eucharistic longing to the believer, God gives himself to the believer through this longing, such that the believer's longing for the Eucharist is the longing for union with God. For this reason, Kierkegaard says, 'I long all the more heartily to renew my communion with him who has also made satisfaction for my sin' (DCF 47). In short, Kierkegaard presents the Eucharist, not as the termination of our longing, but rather the intensification of it.

Kierkegaard has more to say about the restlessness that longs for transparent rest, when he discusses Christ's invitation to give rest to the weary and burdened soul (Matt. 11:28). Kierkegaard reminds us that

The gospel will not be an escape, consolation, and alleviation for a few troubled people; no, it applies to all those who labour and are heavy laden, that is, it applies to everyone and *requires* of every person that he shall know what it is to labour and to be heavy laden. (DCF 51)

For Kierkegaard, Christ's invitation contains a requirement: an awareness of, and repentance for one's sin. Kierkegaard says that 'only the penitent properly understands what it is to pray for rest for the soul, rest in the only thought in which there is rest of a penitent, that there is forgiveness' (DCF 52). As Kierkegaard pens these words, he has in mind the statue of the Risen Christ that was made by Bertel Thorvaldsen, which stands behind the altar in The Church of Our Lady with arms outstretched and the words 'Come to me' chiselled into the base.

It is precisely these words, 'Come to me', that Kierkegaard says we are meant to hear at the altar—the very *voice* of the Risen Christ. Indeed, another mode of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist is his voice, the one who communicates his words and his own life to us. In hearing the voice of Christ in the Eucharist, it is Christ who also knows us intimately, and so we follow Christ, listening and obeying his every word (John 10:27). Kierkegaard says that

[Christ] understands you completely, far better than you understand yourself. You have only to rejoice (oh, the infinite felicity of love!) in his love—to be silent and to give thanks! To listen and to give thanks; yes, for when you are silent, then you understand him, and best when you are completely silent; and when you give thanks, then he understands you, and best when you give thanks always. So happy is a person's love with which he loves God. (DCF 71)

Importantly, Kierkegaard says that 'the divine service does not center as usual on the pulpit, but on the altar. And at the altar what is essential above all is to hear *his* voice' (DCF 58). Kierkegaard insists it is not the priest who gives Christ to us, but Christ himself who communicates his own life to us in the Eucharist. Although Kierkegaard does not use these Eucharistic reflections to explain the doctrine of *Ex opere operato*, he does seem to take for granted a view that the efficacy of the Eucharist depends upon the faithfulness of Christ and his blessing that is given to us in this holy meal (Luke 24:51). For Kierkegaard, Christ not only blesses the bread and the wine, 'his holy body and blood' (DCF 99), but Christ *is* the blessing that we partake in, and indeed the blessing we are meant to become. Lest we think that the efficacy of this sacrament depends solely upon us, Kierkegaard says that, 'At the altar you are able to do nothing at all. Satisfaction is made there—but by another; the sacrifice is made—but by another; the atonement is accomplished—but by the Atoner'

(DCF 85–6). Kierkegaard reminds his reader that ‘you stand entirely in need of grace and the blessing’, and yet ‘the meal itself is the blessing’; indeed, ‘at the altar he is the blessing’ because ‘he is present at the altar’ (DCF 87).

Kierkegaard’s understanding of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is also informed by his theology of the atonement, sacrifice, and Christ as the High Priest who knows our predicament, and who has overcome it (Heb. 4:15). Here Kierkegaard offers a view of Christ’s suffering that does not encourage a person to ‘despairingly shut yourself up with your sufferings, as if no one, not even he, could understand you’. No, in Christ we come to ‘suffering’s highest point, but also to suffering’s limit’ (DCF 95). At the foot of the altar, Kierkegaard says we encounter ‘the Consoler’ who ‘can entirely put himself in your place’ and enable you to ‘become yourself the one who consoles others’ (DCF 96). In this way, Kierkegaard envisions that when Christ is lifted up, he draws all people to himself (John 12:32). Indeed, divine compassion both elicits humility, and brings about the inclusion of the marginalized (Luke 18:13).

Scholars have noted how Kierkegaard’s theology of redemption is tied to his theology of the Incarnation and his theology of the Eucharist. It is Christ who stands in our place in the Incarnation and Atonement, and it is Christ who becomes present to us in the Eucharist. One cannot help but detect an echo of Athanasius’ theology in Kierkegaard’s emphasis upon Christ becoming one with us so that we can become one with Christ.⁶⁹ Kierkegaard says that ‘All, each one individually, receive at the altar the pledge that their sins are forgiven them’ (DCF 114). Kierkegaard also describes the purpose of the sacramental, real presence of Christ in the Eucharist in terms of contemporaneity (*Samtidighed*) with Christ. In his journals, Kierkegaard says that

The condition for a human being’s salvation is the faith that everywhere and at every moment there is an absolute *beginning* . . . A beginning always has a double impetus: in the direction of what has gone before and in the direction of the new. The new begins to the same degree that it pushes against the direction of the old. (NB 15:42)

⁶⁹ Robert Puchniak, ‘Athanasius: Kierkegaard’s Curious Comment’, in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions* [KRSRR 4] (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 3–10.

Indeed for Kierkegaard, this contemporaneity with Christ means that 'absolutely every human being is equally near to God' and, Kierkegaard adds: 'in being loved by him' (DCF 126). In Kierkegaard's understanding of the love of Christ, this love covers a multitude of sin (1 Pet. 4:8). For it is Christ who is the covering that hides [*at Skjule*] the multitude of sin. Kierkegaard explains that Christ hides our sin 'with his *holy body*' (DCF 141), not from God, but from *us*; from our refusal to appropriate and receive forgiveness due to guilt or pride (WA 182). Here Kierkegaard reminds us that Christ 'gives you *himself* as a hiding place' and our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). As Sylvia Walsh says, Kierkegaard's point is that 'love and forgiveness stand in a reciprocal as well as proportional relation to one another, each eliciting and strengthening the other' (DCF 32).

Kierkegaard says that in the Eucharist, it is Christ who overcomes our own self-deception with his love, which overwhelms our hearts (1 John 3:20). In receiving the forgiveness of sin, Kierkegaard says that we are being made aware of our sin and the forgiveness of sin *at once*. But this is not to burden us with our sin, but rather to help us lay it aside so that it no longer presents itself as an obstacle to our communion with Christ and our love of neighbour. In his own words, Kierkegaard reminds his reader that Christ 'is present at the altar where you seek him; he is present there—but only in order once again from on high to draw you to himself' (DCF 124). Moreover, Kierkegaard says that, with the words of institution (1 Cor. 11:23), 'it must be his voice you hear when he says, "this is my body"'. For at the altar there is no speaking about him; *there* he himself is personally present, it is he who speaks—if not, then you are not at the altar' (DCF 58). For Kierkegaard, the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. Christ accompanies the believer wherever they go, and yet wherever Christ is, so is the altar (DCF 60). Kierkegaard says that the task is 'on leaving the altar, still to remain at the altar' during the week and at work (DCF 60).

For Kierkegaard, God gives himself in this Eucharistic longing. It is in this insatiate longing that we encounter the infinite God. God is in the longing that is for Him, but Kierkegaard adds that the Eucharist is not just a ritual meant for believers, but rather the love that is experienced in the Eucharist is poured out in the real presence of Christ in the love of neighbour that is also for Him. Kierkegaard offers two reflections on the relationship between the forgiveness of sin and the love of neighbour (Luke 7:47). Kierkegaard describes this

process as forgiveness ‘loving forth love’ in another (DCF 132). Again Walsh says that ‘forgiveness is not dependent on how much one owes or on one’s ability to repay a debt, yet the person who is forgiven the most should love the most in return’ (DCF 32). In short, the Eucharist is not the end, but rather the generative source of transformation in the Christian’s life. Put differently, we might say that for Kierkegaard, the Eucharist makes the church. However, we should give Kierkegaard the final word:

You receive [Christ] himself, in and with the visible sign he gives you himself as a cover over your sins. As he is the truth, you do not then come to know what truth is from him and now are left to yourself, but only remain in the truth by remaining in him. As he is the way, you do not then come to know from him what way you must go and now, left to yourself, must go your own way, but only by remaining in him do you remain on the way. As he is the life, you do not then have life handed over by him and now must shift for yourself, but only by remaining in him do you have life—in this way he is also the hiding place; only by remaining in him, only by identifying yourself with him are you in hiding and there is a cover over the multitude of your sins. For that reason the Lord’s Supper is called communion with him. It is not merely in remembrance of him, not merely a pledge that you have communion with him, but it is the communion, this communion that you then must strive to preserve in your daily life by living more and more out of yourself and identifying yourself with him, with his love, which hides a multitude of sins. (DCF 143)

3.6. CONCLUSION: READING DE LUBAC AND KIERKEGAARD TOGETHER

This chapter has provided a brief survey of Henri de Lubac’s theological anthropology and I have placed it in the context of the wider project of *ressourcement* (§3.1). I have established, not only Kierkegaard’s influence upon de Lubac’s life story (§3.2), but also I have offered an interpretation and a close reading of several important works by de Lubac in order to highlight the convergence of de Lubac’s theology with Kierkegaard’s writings (§3.3). In order to not leave the reader with a unidirectional analysis, I have attempted to reconstruct Kierkegaard’s Eucharistic reflections in a way that

converges with de Lubac's theology (§3.4). My argument is that de Lubac and Kierkegaard offer complementary theological visions, rather than contradictory ones. Indeed, de Lubac is one central *ressourcement* figure who puts Kierkegaard's writings to work in his fundamental theology and his theology of grace in a unique way that develops the previous generation of the Kierkegaardian tradition in Catholicism.

Yet, this way of telling the *ressourcement* story might appear to some scholars as misunderstanding a crucial aspect of what David Grumett has recently identified as the 'classic *ressourcement* methodology', which prides itself on 'returning to the great sources of the Christian tradition—scripture, patristics, and the liturgy—and applying the Christian vision there presented to the modern era'.⁷⁰ From this picture of *ressourcement*, one could begin to think that it was a two-step process of *first* returning, and *then* applying the ancient insights of the Fathers to a contemporary world—as if there was a 'pure retrieval' untarnished by context-laden application. Is it not rather the case that in returning to the source, the excavator automatically brings *how* the source will be applied? The methodology of this chapter attempts to bridge Catholic theology and Kierkegaard studies to show that the task of *ressourcement* is not primarily a retrieval of an ancient world-picture *which in turn* is subsequently grafted onto contemporary debates, but rather is a mode of retrieval that is *already* a confrontation with contemporary figures and debates—in and as retrieval. Hence, Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly says, 'Despite their historical and scholarly appearance, all Henri de Lubac's works clearly refer to the present' (AH 9). In short, *ressourcement* is not merely a historical retrieval and interrogation of the past faith tradition, but it is also retrieval and interrogation of oneself (and one's situation) before God. Thus, as Kevin Hughes rightly says, *ressourcement* is not 'a nostalgic retreat to the theological safety of premodern Christendom. Rather, it is a vital struggle for the proper diagnosis of our present condition.'⁷¹

If the current literature on *ressourcement* tends to delineate the 'return to the sources' into two stages—first a retrieval, then

⁷⁰ David Grumett, 'Henri de Lubac: Looking for Books to Read the World', in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 237. Emphasis mine.

⁷¹ Kevin L. Hughes, 'The *Ratio Dei* and the Ambiguities of History', *Modern Theology* 21, no. 4 (2005), 645.

application to the modern world—then against this picture of *ressourcement*, I suggest that de Lubac is not only a good example of *how* to do a retrieval, but also that the writings of Søren Kierkegaard are constitutive of de Lubac's retrieval. Rather than a picture of 'the sources' as a whole which has since been fragmented, de Lubac offers a picture of *ressourcement* that is situated in the contemporary world, inquisitive of the church's tradition, and reflexive in regards to one's own existence before God. My claim has been that de Lubac's retrieval cannot be separated from his existential, Kierkegaardian interests—a more modern source whose impact has not been appreciated sufficiently by previous scholarship. Indeed, de Lubac deliberately draws on the basic aims of Kierkegaard's writings as an aid to his unique diagnostic and apologetic task. What results is a broader understanding of the task of *ressourcement* that is at once able to negotiate the authorities of the faith and engage in speculative questions *already* marked by contemporary concerns.

Monstrance or Monstrosity?

A Kierkegaardian Critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics

Creation as a whole has become a monstrance of God's real presence.

*Hans Urs von Balthasar*¹

He deserves to be called a theologian, however,
who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God
seen through suffering and the cross.

*Martin Luther*²

We look not to the things that are seen
but to the things that are unseen;
for the things that are seen are transient,
but the things that are unseen are eternal.

St Paul (2 Cor. 4:18)

In the first half of this book, I argued that the broader catholicity of the Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology has stimulated reform and renewal in twentieth-century Catholic theology, and that this should expand the scope of contemporary portrayals of *ressourcement* theology. In the previous chapter, I examined the Kierkegaardian aspects of Henri de Lubac's *ressourcement* theology to argue that de Lubac develops the Kierkegaardian

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, GL 1, 420. Henceforth, GL 1: page number.

² Luther, AE XXXI, 52; Heidelberg Disputation, paragraph 20. <<http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php#20>> (accessed 20 May 2015).

tradition within Catholicism in original ways for his own theological project. However, Catholic thinkers have not always responded positively to Kierkegaard in every respect. In this chapter, I will examine the writings of de Lubac's protégé,³ Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) to re-evaluate Balthasar's critique of Kierkegaard's view of anxiety (§4.1–4.2) and aesthetics (§4.3–4.4). My argument is that there is a particular Christological problem in Balthasar's thematization of 'distance' in his theology of anxiety and aesthetics, which could be better addressed if Balthasar attended to Kierkegaard's *dialectical* view (§4.5). Alternatively, I suggest that instead of using Kierkegaard as a Protestant foil, Kierkegaard's Christology is a salutary corrective to Balthasar's theological project. Rather than viewing Balthasar's critique of Kierkegaard as a piece of counter-evidence to my overall argument in this book, I conclude that readers of Balthasar and Kierkegaard should find that they share more compatible goals than is commonly recognized.

4.1. ASSESSING BALTHASAR'S CRITIQUE OF KIERKEGAARD'S VIEW OF ANXIETY

In the winter term of 1926–7, long before his personal friendship with Karl Barth began,⁴ Balthasar was first introduced to Kierkegaard's

³ Henri de Lubac refers to Balthasar as a kind of contemporary Church Father: 'instead of wearing himself out like so many others in the effort to rejuvenate the old Scholasticism for better or worse by a few borrowings made from philosophies of the day, or even of renouncing, again like so many others, any organized theological thought, von Balthasar makes a fresh start at outlining an original synthesis, of radically biblical inspiration, which sacrifices nothing of the elements of traditional dogmatics. His extreme sensitivity to the developments of culture and to the questionings of our age inspires such boldness in him. His intimate knowledge, attested to by his earlier works, of the Fathers of the Church, of Saint Thomas Aquinas and of the great spiritual leaders, allows him to attempt the venture. It is on them that he has long been nourished; he is their successor today, without any servility just as without any betrayal, so much has he assimilated their substance', in de Lubac, *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 594–5. For more on the relationship between de Lubac and Balthasar, see Michael Figura, 'Das Geheimnis des Übernatürlichen. Hans Urs von Balthasar und Henri de Lubac', in Magnus Striet and Jan Heiner Tück (eds), *Die Kunst Gottes verstehen: Hans Urs von Balthasars theologische Provokationen* (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 349–66.

⁴ For more, see Stephen D. Wigley, *Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Critical Engagement* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 1–5. See also, Benjamin Dahlke, *Karl Barth, Catholic Renewal and Vatican II* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 98–102,

writings by Romano Guardini in Berlin.⁵ In his writings, Balthasar occasionally praises Kierkegaard; indeed, one of his earliest books, *The Christian and Anxiety* (1951),⁶ was generated out of his engagement with one of Kierkegaard's most significant works. However, Balthasar later reflects upon this encounter as 'my misfortune'.⁷ Many commentators, particularly Joseph Ballan⁸ and John Cihak,⁹ have provided a helpful index of Balthasar's engagement and disagreement with Kierkegaard. Yet, despite the sizeable commentary on Balthasar's treatment of Kierkegaard,¹⁰ Balthasar's commentators fail to offer a critical

121–7. For a wider context that predates Balthasar, see Amy Marga, *Karl Barth's Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster: Its Significance for His Doctrine of God* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), *passim*.

⁵ Manfred Lochbrunner, 'Guardini und Balthasar: Auf der Spurensuche einer geistigen Wahlverwandtschaft', *Forum Katholische Theologie* 12 (1996), 229–46. The text that they studied was *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* with specific reference to Kierkegaard's engagement of Lessing (233 n. 15). Guardini's Kierkegaard seminar took place not long before Hannah Arendt and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel arrived in Berlin. In fact, Hannah Arendt, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Josef Pieper were all students of Guardini. For more, see Robert A. Krieg, Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 8–11. For more on Guardini's treatment of Kierkegaard, see Peter Šajda, 'Isolation on Both Ends? Romano Guardini's Double Response to the Concept of Contemporaneity', in Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2010: Kierkegaard's Late Writings* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 201–22. See also, Peter Šajda, 'Romano Guardini: Between Actualistic Personalism, Qualitative Dialectic and Kinetic Logic', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 10, tome 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 45–74.

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, DCA. In the case of a direct quotation, the English pagination will be followed by the original in German.

⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius, Press 1993), 57.

⁸ Joseph Ballan, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: Persuasive Forms or Offensive Signs? Kierkegaard and the Problems of Theological Aesthetics', in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, ed. Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 10, tome 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 3–24.

⁹ John R. Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), ch. 3.

¹⁰ See Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 52, 134. Francesc Torralba-Roselló, 'Teologia de l'Angoixa: Kierkegaard i Urs von Balthasar', in Joan Busquets and Maria Martinell (eds), *Fe i teologia en la història: estudis en honor del Prof. Dr. Evangelista Vilanova* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1997), 449–56. Peter Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: ein katholischer Kierkegaard?', in Anton E. van Hooff and Peter Reifenberg (eds), *Gott für die Welt: Henri de Lubac, Gustav Stewerth und Hans Urs von Balthasar in Ihren Grundlagen: Festschrift für Walter Seidel* (Mainz:

evaluation of the undesirable theological implications of his hasty dismissal of Kierkegaard. Before these undesirable implications can be brought to the fore, I must critically assess Balthasar's dismissal of Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics.

According to Balthasar in *The Christian and Anxiety*, anxiety is sin that distances the believer from God. But for Kierkegaard, anxiety can have a positive use for faith, since anxiety is how freedom presents itself as a possibility and it is the threshold that demarcates the limit and ground of aesthetics. Although the current usage of the term 'anxiety' in philosophy and psychoanalysis is historically indebted to Kierkegaard's account of anxiety, a comparative analysis with current scientific literature is beyond the remit of this chapter.¹¹ However, it will be helpful to assess Balthasar's critique of Kierkegaard by revisiting Kierkegaard's original argument.

At first, Balthasar lauds Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844)¹² as an unparalleled study in the history of theology—save that of Thomas Aquinas—that we are only now beginning to appreciate (DCA 31). However, Balthasar's initial enthusiasm for Kierkegaard quickly fades because Balthasar thinks (unlike Kierkegaard's

Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2001), 304–14. Jörg Splett, 'Der Christ und seine Angst erwogen mit Hans Urs von Balthasar', Anton E. van Hooff and Peter Reifenberg (eds), in *Gott für die Welt: Henri de Lubac, Gustav Siewerth und Hans Urs von Balthasar in Ihren Grundlagen: Festschrift für Walter Seidel* Anton E. van Hooff and Peter Reifenberg (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2001), 315–31. Aidan Nichols, *Scattering the Seed: A Guide through Balthasar's Early Writings on Philosophy and the Arts* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 129ff, 145. Stefan Endriß, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar versus Sören Kierkegaard: ein Beitrag zur Diskussion über das Verhältnis von Theologie und Ästhetik' (Doctoral thesis, Trier, 2006), 333–77. Mulder, *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition: Conflict and Dialogue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 125ff. Anthony Cirelli, 'Facing the Abyss: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Reading of Anxiety', *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1042 (2011), 705–23.

¹¹ For the historical account, see Samuel Moyn's excellent account in Judaken and Bernasconi, *Situating Existentialism: Key Texts in Context*, 279–304. For an acknowledgement of Kierkegaard's influence in psychoanalysis, see Renata Salecl, *On Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 2004), 32, 48, 53. However, in most recent scientific textbooks on anxiety, Kierkegaard is not mentioned, see Martin M. Antony and Murray B. Stein (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Anxiety and Related Disorders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Stanley Rachman, *Anxiety*, 2nd edn., *Clinical Psychology, a Modular Course*, (Hove: Psychology Press, 2004). Also see, David A. Clark and Aaron T. Beck, *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: Science and Practice* (London: Guilford, 2011). For a synthesis of Kierkegaard and psychoanalysis, see Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis, Trauma*, Veritas Series (London: SCM Press, 2007).

¹² Kierkegaard. Henceforth, CA.

pseudonym) that anxiety was not original to human nature, but rather a consequence of the Fall (DCA 133–6). Therefore, like all other consequences of the Fall, Balthasar sees ‘sin-anxiety’ [*Sündenangst*] as contingent to human nature and opposed to grace which ‘fundamentally removed’ [*grundsätzlich weggenommen*] anxiety in Christ’s work of redemption and remains forbidden to Christians (DCA 89/48). Since Balthasar sees anxiety as something sinful and external to human nature, he was troubled by the fact that Kierkegaard’s fictive author, Vigilius Haufniensis, locates anxiety in Adam *before* the Fall, ‘in the state of innocence’ (CA 41). In short, Balthasar constructs his entire theology of anxiety in response to, and in disagreement with Kierkegaard. Hence, according to Balthasar,

Anxiety remains for [Kierkegaard] a matter of the finite mind horrified by its own limitlessness, and God and Christ are rarely mentioned explicitly . . . [Kierkegaard’s presentation of anxiety] did not free itself sufficiently from [philosophy and psychology] and so its ultimate fate was a twofold secularisation. (DCA 32)

Balthasar’s charge that the insufficiently theological account of anxiety put forward by Haufniensis fails to acknowledge the self-imposed limit that the fictive author places on his investigation of a ‘psychological treatment of the concept of “anxiety” . . . [that] constantly keeps *in mente* and before its eye the dogma of hereditary sin’ (CA 14).¹³ In order to see why Balthasar’s assessment is misguided, we must revisit the argument of Haufniensis.

Haufniensis begins the first chapter of his analysis with an age-old theological question: Is Adam’s first sin just like everyone’s? (CA 25). If we answer this question negatively, then hereditary sinfulness is a *result* of Adam’s first sin and the *precondition* of everyone’s first sin (CA 30). While this negative answer seems quite orthodox, for Haufniensis this answer uncovers a puzzle that is not so easily solved. If Adam’s first sin is not like his second or Cain’s forty-third, precisely because Adam’s sin was *the* first, then there is an infinite regress of causality for the human race. Adam’s first sin as the uncaused first cause would actually place him ‘outside the race, and the race would not have begun with him but would have had a

¹³ For more on this doctrine and its sources, see Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

beginning outside itself' (CA 30). But perhaps we are meant to take 'the first sin' not in a sequential fashion but rather in a quantitative manner—as if Adam's first sin is *greater* than that of his descendants. But Haufniensis says that this still does not solve the puzzle because this would imply that in order for Adam's first sin to be different than his descendants, a quantity must be added in the form of his offspring (CA 30). By virtue of that quantitative addition, a lesser quality of sin is supposed to emerge in his offspring *which can then be contrasted* with Adam's. The result is that we *first* place the race and Adam on level ground, only to go on and *then* differentiate between them. Whether Adam's first sin is taken sequentially or quantitatively, Haufniensis argues that differentiating the first sin of Adam from that of the race prevents the history of the race from ever beginning—not even if we were to displace the problem on to Cain, Christ, or Archbishop James Ussher (CA 33–4).

Haufniensis' point is that the sin of Adam's offspring does not *presuppose* hereditary sinfulness but rather that 'sin presupposes itself, that sin comes into the world in such a way that by the fact that it is, it is presupposed' (CA 32).¹⁴ To suggest the causal link of hereditary sinfulness as the condition for the first sin of the race is to invent a myth about a zero-point 'which denies the leap and explains the circle as a straight line, and now everything proceeds quite naturally' (CA 32). For Haufniensis, hereditary sinfulness names the generational *possibility* of sin, whereas sin itself is the *actual* qualitative leap of the individual. There is no causal relationship between the quantitative sinfulness of the race and the qualitative sin of the individual. For Haufniensis, the first sin of Adam and that of his descendants is a 'qualitative leap' that is occasioned in anxiety (CA 47). The leap is situated between two moments: that of discovering the possibility of freedom, and that of becoming anxious for the actualization of this possibility.¹⁵ Haufniensis says that 'between these two moments lies the leap, which no science has explained and which

¹⁴ For more on the relation of Haufniensis' notion of the Fall and John Milton's, see John S. Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden: Kierkegaardian Reading Of 'Paradise Lost'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also, Dennis Richard Danielson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 8.

¹⁵ Arne Grøn, CASK, 19.

no science can explain' (CA 61). So in Haufniensis' view, sin enters the world *in* anxiety but *through* the qualitative leap of freedom (CA 54). For Haufniensis, 'anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself' (CA 61). Hence, Haufniensis treats anxiety as the threshold of the aesthetic, but also of the religious. The fundamental principle here is that our experience of ourselves and the world outstrips our best current narrations of them. This principle gets carried over from what Kierkegaard has to say about aesthetics, anxiety, and theology. George Pattison says that like the aesthetic

angst too exists in the tension between the ideal and the real, between the unconditional freedom of the human subject and the phenomenal conditionedness of human life as it is lived. As such, *angst* is the condition, or state, out of which the subject must, in freedom, become responsible for itself, in faith or in sin, becoming or failing to become itself.¹⁶

But Balthasar detects a secularizing tendency in Haufniensis' account of anxiety that allegedly reveals an inescapable reality from which God is removed and replaced by nothing (DCA 136–8). It is true that Haufniensis says anxiety 'signifies essentially nothing' (CA 62), and that 'anxiety and nothing always correspond to each other' constantly and reciprocally (CA 96). But it is not the case that anxiety removes God from the picture; rather, Haufniensis makes the opposite claim in the final chapter, that anxiety *can be* 'saving through faith' (CA 155ff). Pattison rightly says that for Kierkegaard, 'the transcendent character of freedom, and its relation, in this very transcendence, to nothingness, can be illuminated' by considering 'the task of becoming subjective (that is, becoming the freedom we are) as interdependent with the human longing for an eternal happiness' (KAR 60–1).

In Balthasar's estimation, Haufniensis advocates a picture of anxiety that is *necessary* to human nature and therefore *irredeemable*. Alternately, Balthasar's counter-claim is that anxiety is *contingent* to human nature and therefore *redeemable* in Christ. What Balthasar's

¹⁶ George Pattison, KAR 60.

critique overlooks is Haufniensis' actual claim: anxiety is necessary *and* redeemable through the theological virtue of faith. At best, anxiety calls us to something that we may or may not have the capability of achieving on our own. In other words, anxiety can be the condition of an implicit awareness of maturing beyond what Kierkegaard calls 'the aesthetic sphere' where one comes to see that one's life has not lived up to its ethical potential. When sin and unfreedom are elements of one's own self-relation, then the likelihood of becoming free is eclipsed. However, Haufniensis does not stop here. If unfreedom was able to close itself off entirely from the possibility and challenge of freedom, then anxiety would never manifest. Yet, anxiety manifests when we are affected by the possibility of freedom such that there still remains a relation to the possibility of freedom even in unfreedom. The ambiguity of anxiety is such that we *at once* resist this possibility and we are influenced by it. For Haufniensis, to say that anxiety is a necessary feature of human existence does not mean that anxiety is also irredeemable. Haufniensis says that one must 'learn to be anxious in order that he may not perish either by never having been in anxiety or by succumbing in anxiety. Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate' (CA 155). But how, and from whom are we to learn it? For Haufniensis, how one deals with the possibility and challenge of freedom in anxiety 'depends simply and solely on the energy of the God-relation in him' (CA 110). So Kierkegaard's dialectical approach to both aesthetics and anxiety is that, although experience outstrips our narration of it, narration can give to experience an indirect, yet true and liberating perception through faith.

For Haufniensis, anxiety is an important feature of one's relation to God and can be saving through faith. Haufniensis positively evaluates anxiety as an instructive and iconoclastic mood 'because it consumes all finite ends and discovers all their deceptiveness' (CA 155). Haufniensis says that 'whoever is educated by anxiety is educated by possibility, and only he who is educated by possibility is educated according to his infinitude. Therefore possibility is the weightiest of all categories' (CA 156). Haufniensis' tone is not mortifying, but *edifying*: 'possibility will discover all the finitudes, but it will idealize them in the form of infinity and in anxiety overwhelm the individual until he again overcomes them in the anticipation of faith' (CA 157).

It is in this way that 'he who passes through the anxiety of the possible is educated to have no anxiety, not because he can escape the terrible things of life but because these always become weak by comparison with those of possibility' (CA 157). George Pattison rightly observes that although anxiety reveals 'the void that undermines all finite certainties, it can serve to educate us up to faith. It is the vertigo of freedom but also the summons to assault the infinite. For faith, the nothingness of *angst* is the narrow gate by which faith itself comes into being.'¹⁷ For Haufniensis, anxiety is inherently iconoclastic: 'Anxiety discovers fate, but just when the individual wants to put his trust in fate, anxiety turns around and takes fate away' (CA 159). Anxiety drives the same iconoclastic question that St Augustine asked of himself in *Confessions*: 'What do I love when I love my God?',¹⁸ and anxiety disrupts our attempts to subordinate the course of our lives to only one overarching and unchanging plot line for all time. Something that Augustine was also aware of when he said: 'My life is a distension in several directions . . . I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand . . . until that day when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together to merge into you'.¹⁹ For what earthly object or goal could satisfy the *whole* of one's life? Paradoxically, the nothingness of the individual's God-relation indirectly brings the meaning of the individual's *whole* life into view as anxiety exposes the way 'finitude always explains in parts, never totally' and 'with the help of faith, anxiety brings up the individuality to rest in providence' (CA 161). It is in this way that Haufniensis wishes to deliver the reader over to dogmatics because 'he who in relation to guilt is educated by anxiety will rest only in the Atonement' (CA 162).

Does this positive view of anxiety imply that the devout must remain constantly anxious? On the contrary, Haufniensis says that anxiety is a necessary *but not a sufficient* component of faith. As such, anxiety does not immediately deliver us over to faith, but rather anxiety *can save through* faith (CASK 150). For Haufniensis, one must learn to be anxious in the right way—that is, in such a way

¹⁷ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith: An Introduction to His Thought* (London: SPCK, 1997), 103.

¹⁸ Augustine and Chadwick, *Confessions*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 183 [X, vi (8)].

¹⁹ *Confessions* XI, xxix (39).

that leads to faith rather than misunderstanding anxiety as an impediment to faith. But does Haufniensis' view imply that anxiety is annihilated in faith? No, Haufniensis says that faith 'extricates itself from anxiety's moment of death' (CA 117). As Arne Grøn rightly says, faith saves us not from anxiety per se, but rather 'from the anxiety that makes us unfree' (CASK 148). So it is fitting that Kierkegaard's other fictive author, Johannes de Silentio, reminds us in *Fear and Trembling* that 'only the one who was in anxiety finds rest' (FT 27). However, since Balthasar thematized anxiety as distance from God, it was not possible for him to appreciate this iconoclastic feature of Kierkegaard's argument, which could actually be used to supplement the basic aims of Balthasar's theology of anxiety. In the next section, I will put a finer point on my assessment, and highlight the theological problem that arises in Balthasar's account as a result.

4.2. RE-EVALUATING BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGY OF ANXIETY AS DISTANCE FROM GOD

As I have suggested, for Balthasar the core feature of anxiety is 'the distance of the sinner from God' [*die Distanz des Sünders von Gott*] (DCA 133/80). Of course, Balthasar does not think that God created humans inclusive of this feature. On the contrary, humans were created in the image of God for union with Him. Any distance that currently exists between humans and God must be a result of a significant shift from God's creative intention. Of course, Balthasar naturally views the Fall as such a shift, and it is not a stretch to view the Fall as both anxiety inducing and as a kind of distancing. In this way, Balthasar views anxiety as primarily sinful because it 'throws a person back upon himself, closes him off, constricts him, and makes him unproductive and unfit' (DCA 89). This inward-looking and stagnating state serves to maintain a person's distance from God, keeping them in sin. Balthasar sees the Hebrew Scriptures as a constant struggle to work out this sinful anxiety. Yet Balthasar thinks that ultimately the Law could never resolve that distance, but could only function as a constant reminder of it (DCA 71).

In the New Testament, Balthasar's view of anxiety as an expression of a human being's distance from God creates something of a puzzle concerning Christ's nature. If anxiety is distance from God, and if

Christ is both fully God and fully human, then it looks as though there is no distance for him to experience. Yet as anxiety is deeply connected to the human condition, Balthasar wants to allow that Christ experienced anxiety—indeed, liberated Christians from ever experiencing it. Balthasar’s resolution of this difficulty is to speak of Christ as having an epistemic limitation in his human nature. In other words, objectively the fully human nature was not distant from his divine nature as God, but as fully human, he could not know that relation to its fullest extent in order to be free from anxiety.²⁰ In this way, Christ shares our anxiety and ultimately redeems it. Indeed, according to Balthasar, God became human *so that* ‘anxiety is drained to the dregs upon the Cross in the actual abandonment of the Son by the Father’ (DCA 75). In Balthasar’s view, Christ’s redemption of anxiety does not give humans a new nature but rather an opportunity to return to that primordial unified nature which was anxiety-free.

Now, if anxiety is primarily sinful, then Christ’s experience reveals a second type of anxiety. Thus, anxiety loses its exclusively sinful status when it is experienced by the sinless Christ (Luke 3:38; Heb. 4:15). This new Christian-anxiety arises because, in Christ’s experience of anxiety it did not cause him to turn away from, or to increase distance from God, but rather caused him to draw *closer* to God. In Christ, anxiety finds its limit; it falls away in union with God. However for Balthasar, the primary example of this is Christ’s struggle in Gethsemane. According to Balthasar, in Gethsemane Christ experiences

a final, precipitous plunge into the abyss of anxiety that immediately breaks over him: vicariously, for every sinner and every sin, he suffers the anxiety of facing the God of absolute righteousness. All that the Old and New Covenants know of anxiety is here gathered together and infinitely surpassed, because the person who in this human nature is frightened is the infinite God himself. . . . It is, furthermore, the vicarious suffering of this Pure One for all the impure, that is, experiencing that anxiety which every sinner by right would have to go through before the judgment seat of God and in being rejected by him. (DCA 74–5)²¹

²⁰ For this point, I am indebted to a conversation with Jeff Byrnes.

²¹ Because Balthasar’s soteriology makes Christ absorb mental anxiety in this way, Balthasar’s description of vicariousness exhibits here a striking resemblance to a core Mormon doctrine of atonement. For more, see Douglas James Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 148ff. Douglas James Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition: Atonement, Evil and the*

As descendants of Adam and Eve, anxiety becomes a constant challenge for us. As Balthasar sees it, there are two choices available to us: *either* Christians are faced with sinful anxiety which distances them from God and is to be avoided; *or* Christians are offered a new kind of anxiety which is venerated as a mystical participation in Christ's passion. Once we have opted for one or the other, Balthasar claims that the church can remove 'sin-anxiety' and can provide anxiety-free access to God (DCA 96–7). And yet, there still remains a possibility for true believers to attain the mystical experience of Christ's anxiety (DCA 105–6). In both scenarios, anxiety can be seen as human suffering—which is ignored in the first type and positively evaluated in the second type. It is precisely here that Balthasar's disagreement with Kierkegaard and his alternative theology of anxiety shows itself to be detrimental to human flourishing by failing to account properly for the phenomenon of anxiety.²²

No figure has generated a more theological interpretation of the phenomenon of anxiety than Kierkegaard. Balthasar knew this, and thought Kierkegaard was wrong because Kierkegaard's view was in keeping with the 'Old Testament' view of sin-anxiety which did not sufficiently address Christ. For all of Balthasar's merit, it is clear that he believes there is a difference between the anxiety faced by Christians and non-Christians (DCA 90–1). Yet modern philosophers have seen parallels in figures like Job and Abraham with their own interests with anxiety. These figures in the Hebrew Scriptures are engaged in struggles with God that they recognize as determining their salvation. As Kierkegaard reminds us in *Fear and Trembling*, the author of Hebrews treats Abraham's actions as the fountainhead of faith itself (Heb. 11:8–12). I think there is sufficient reason for us to have doubts about clearly distinguishing 'Old Testament' anxiety as sinful and 'New Testament' anxiety as praiseworthy. If the phenomenon of anxiety manifests across covenants and faiths, then we might have reason to think that it is not really contingent to human

Mormon Vision (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 133–51, 163–74. For an attempt to portray Balthasar's positive evaluation of human suffering in a more 'orthodox' manner, see Mark A. McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), ch. 6.

²² This is a point that Cihak uncritically makes of Balthasar, see Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, 268.

existence and that we should not expect to find anxiety-free access to God.²³

Balthasar's antagonism toward Kierkegaard's picture of anxiety also extends to an antagonism toward Kierkegaard's view of aesthetics. In the next section, I suggest that there is a correlation between the way Balthasar equates the failure of aesthetic judgement in perceiving Christ, and the way he equates anxiety with sin. My claim is that this correlation occurs in the course of disagreeing with Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics, and that had Balthasar taken Kierkegaard's writings more seriously, he might have dodged the theological problem I have identified. I will assess why Balthasar repudiates Kierkegaard when sketching the basic contours of his own theological aesthetics.

4.3. BALTHASAR'S CRITIQUE OF KIERKEGAARD'S VIEW OF AESTHETICS

Balthasar begins his essay, 'Revelation and the Beautiful' (1959),²⁴ by making a great deal of his title's 'Both/And' approach and chastising Kierkegaard for emphasizing 'unwittingly the sad omission of any possible conjunction between the two concepts of the title, concepts which, since Kierkegaard's eruption into the Protestant and Catholic thought of our century, have dominated Christian ideology' (ET 95). As George Pattison has rightly observed, Kierkegaard uses 'aesthetic' in two different ways: 'on the one hand it relates to "aesthetics" in the sense of the fine arts; on the other hand it is used as an ethical term to describe the life which fails to live up to its ethical

²³ Perhaps it is a good thing that after nearly forty years of praying to be protected from all anxiety, the 2011 edition of the Roman Missal substitutes the word 'anxiety' with 'distress'? The Archdiocese of New York issued a brief statement explaining that anxiety had taken on a too specifically psychological meaning, while distress was 'a more comprehensive description of human fear and pain of body and mind'. For more, see the 2006 discussion transcribed here, <<http://www.adoremus.org/0706USCCBMeeting.html>> (accessed 21 May 2015). Also see, paragraph 54 in *Liturgiam authenticam*, <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20010507_liturgiam-authenticam_en.html> (accessed 21 May 2015). I am indebted to the liturgical prowess of Andy Doyle for these references.

²⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, ET, 95–126. Henceforth, ET: page number.

potential'.²⁵ So, from Kierkegaard's perspective, to give a theological account of aesthetics would be either to talk about God in fine art, or about God in the life which fails to live up to its ethical potential. For Kierkegaard, neither way of speaking about God is theologically appropriate in a strict sense.²⁶ Yet, Balthasar rejects Kierkegaard's 'austere' interpretation of aesthetics because Balthasar thinks that Kierkegaard hives aesthetics off from the ethical and religious sphere (ET 95; cf. GL 1:50). In particular, Balthasar claims that Kierkegaard's aesthetic offers a 'much admired but incredibly false analysis of Mozart' which involves 'an antireligious cynicism' that lacks 'an understanding of what the *daimon* meant to Plato' (ET 96).²⁷

In order to absolve Kierkegaard of these allegations, three brief corrections need to be made to Balthasar's superficial dismissal of Kierkegaard: i) had Balthasar *read* Kierkegaard's religious (rather than pseudonymous) writings, he would have discovered that Kierkegaard was neither anti-religious nor a cynic; ii) had Balthasar *read* Kierkegaard's dissertation on Plato, he would have discovered that Kierkegaard had considerable knowledge of Plato's *daimon*;²⁸ and iii) on the issue of Kierkegaard separating the aesthetic from the other spheres at the expense of the unity of the transcendentals, I submit that although Kierkegaard *illustrates* the aesthetic, ethical, and religious life view with individual characters, it does not follow that these are individual standpoints that rival one another throughout the global population, but rather that these life views are better construed as distinct but ultimately inseparable *ideals* under which the individual sees and leads their own life in seeking the good, true, and

²⁵ George Pattison, 'Kierkegaard: Aesthetics and "the Aesthetic"', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 31, no. 2 (1991), 140.

²⁶ To be clear, I'm not advocating that Kierkegaard is against all things beautiful or revelatory of meaning. For more on Kierkegaard's dialectical view of aesthetics, see Christopher B. Barnett, *From Despair to Faith: The Spirituality of Søren Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), ch. 3.

²⁷ Some have shown that Kierkegaard's analysis is not false, but in fact coheres with what critics have said of Mozart. For instance, see T. H. Croxall, 'Kierkegaard and Mozart', *Music and Letters* XXVI, no. 3 (1945), 151–8. Others have argued more recently that Kierkegaard offers a satire of romanticism here, rather than a straightforward assessment; see Shao Kai Tseng, 'Kierkegaard and Music in Paradox? Bringing Mozart's *Don Giovanni* to Terms with Kierkegaard's Religious Life-View', *Literature and Theology* 28, no. 4 (2014), 411–24.

²⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin, Kierkegaard's Writings II*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong *Lectures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 157–97.

beautiful.²⁹ Nevertheless, despite his superficial dismissal of Kierkegaard, Balthasar does make an interesting observation concerning the family resemblance regarding the notion of the aesthetic between Kierkegaard and Maurice Blondel (ET 103; cf. GL 1:51).³⁰

In the end, Balthasar fails to appreciate how Kierkegaard's Christology offers a dialectical critique of romanticism which, as George Pattison rightly says, was 'unable to achieve a definitive affirmation of meaning or truth; conscious of the dark flux of time, it has an evil premonition, an anxiety, coiled in its heart, and in this anxiety it intuits its ultimate succumbing to guilt and despair' (KAR 53). Indeed, like the author of Qoheleth, Balthasar fails to observe that Kierkegaard is a humorist and 'an observer of the human situation' who 'has lived through and seen through the nullity of the unhappy consciousness of Romanticism which is also the unhappy consciousness implicit in all forms of aesthetic experience and expression' (KAR 55). According to Pattison, Kierkegaard believes that 'the aesthetic consciousness itself prepares the way for its own downfall, especially in the way in which Romanticism gives voice to feelings of melancholy, premonition and anxiety' (KAR 56). As Pattison observes, for Kierkegaard 'art is not merely the sublimation of suffering in beautiful images', because the artist is 'an *unconscious* sacrifice, who does not understand and therefore cannot escape from his situation of suffering and alienation', and the artist's

²⁹ For instance, the unity of the good, true, and beautiful is precisely what is at stake for Kierkegaard in the task of 'existential contemporaneity' since the 'true is not superior to the good and the beautiful, but the true and the good and the beautiful belong essentially to every human existence and are united for an existing person not in thinking them, but in existing' (CUP 348). See also, Kierkegaard's criticism of Xenophon's view of Socrates: 'instead of the good, we have the useful, instead of the beautiful the utilitarian, instead of the true the established, instead of the sympathetic the lucrative, instead of harmonious unity the pedestrian', in Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 25. For more, see an excellent article by Daniel Watts, 'Subjective Thinking: Kierkegaard on Hegel's Socrates', *The Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 61 (2010), 23–44.

³⁰ Balthasar's translator, Alexander Dru took this observation to heart in the introduction of Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics, and, History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan, *Ressourcement: Retrieval & Renewal in Catholic Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), esp. pp. 54, 70. Although there is no textual evidence that shows Blondel was even aware of Kierkegaard, it is noteworthy that only one other Catholic philosopher had made this observation before Balthasar, and that is in an article originally published in 1955 by Cornelio Fabro; see Cornelio Fabro, *Dall'Essere all'Esistente*, [1st edn. 1957] (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1965), ch. 8; esp. pp. 428, 433.

'addiction to beauty reinforces and perpetuates his inability to see that split between ideality and reality which gives his images their peculiarly intense allure' (KAR 57). The fortunate consequence for Kierkegaard is that the inability to detect a gap between ideality and reality is not immune from anxiety. Pattison says that for Kierkegaard, anxiety is 'the absolute frontier between the aesthetic and the religious'; it is 'the moment of choice, a moment towards which the aesthetic points, though not able to encompass it itself' (KAR 60). As I discussed above, Kierkegaard's positive evaluation of anxiety is, as Pattison observes, 'an implicit acknowledgement of the unanswered claims made by reality on the poetic consciousness' (KAR 59). In other words, for Kierkegaard, anxiety is 'both the ground and limit of the aesthetic consciousness' (KAR 63). But as I will point out in the next section, Balthasar's theological aesthetics has no room for this view. At this point, it should be clear to the reader that Balthasar both *disagrees with* and *misunderstands* Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics. In the next section, I will assess the viability of Balthasar's constructive alternative.

4.4. RE-EVALUATING BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGY OF BEAUTY AS THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE CREATION AND CREATOR

In his essay entitled 'Revelation and the Beautiful', Balthasar sketches his own theological aesthetics, which has the chief aim of making beauty a foundational theological category rather than other categories such as truth or the good. By theological aesthetics, Balthasar intends an account of how the glory of God can be seen in natural and artistic beauty. In order to make his claim about the sense perception of uncreated-grace-in-creation plausible, Balthasar first draws upon the resources of Scripture, liturgy, and what he calls the Christian experience of beauty as the link between the finite and infinite.

Balthasar laments the hiving off of the beautiful from the true and the good, construing this gap as a kind of Fall from a previous state of grace: 'whereas previously there was a generally accepted metaphysics establishing a living bond between the immanent sciences and the

transcendent Christian revelation, it has now become quite unreal and ineffectual and has been abandoned in favor of the immanence of the sciences' (ET 96). For Balthasar, the tragic consequence of fragmenting the transcendental unity of Being is that a false dualism is created in theology 'on the ground of scholastic ontology itself' which divorces the *verum* from the *bonum*, separating 'theoretical and practical reason', and Balthasar places the blame, not on Adam and Eve, but Kierkegaard (ET 193–4; cf. 96). Although Kierkegaard's view of the aesthetic shares the same target as Balthasar's view—the transcendental idealism of Kant, and its radicalized version in Fichte³¹—George Pattison says that for Kierkegaard (like Balthasar), art receives 'a privileged position within consciousness, since it is able to create and communicate a sense of unity'; however, unlike Balthasar, this unity does not belong to the domain of 'natural science, existential experience and theology', since these 'can only postulate [unity] as a *desideratum*' (KAR 46). Also unlike Balthasar, Pattison says that for Kierkegaard the 'privilege of art is precisely its limitation. The unity which art offers quite simply does not resolve the question of unity in other spheres of life, and so the wholeness which poetry and art achieve cannot be looked for in the world' (KAR 46). Hence, Kierkegaard often describes aesthetic experience in terms of daydreaming.

Ed Oakes claims that Balthasar's rationale for 'starting with the transcendental of beauty' was that 'it was Balthasar's conviction that the *order* in which these transcendentals are approached is utterly determinative for the way theology can credibly present the mysteries of the Christian religion to an increasingly skeptical public'.³² After

³¹ For more, see Pattison, KAR, 1–34. Pattison observes that Kierkegaard, like Hegel (and we could easily insert Balthasar), 'seeks to show how, in Romanticism, the dialectics of art point beyond themselves, requiring a shift into another sphere or dimension of consciousness; like Hegel he sees the fate of art as being circumscribed by a historical development in which the dynamics of interiorization, the Christ-event and the overcoming of the "unhappy consciousness" of the Middle Ages (and, also, of Early Romanticism) played major roles. But whereas Hegel looked in the direction of an objectively valid system of knowledge, recapitulating in a logically rigorous form the inner meaning of art, Kierkegaard looked instead to what Hegel called "subjective Spirit", that is, psychology. For Kierkegaard it was in the crises and exigencies of individual, personal life that the religious decision chiefly came into play, setting a definitive barrier to the claims of art and aesthetics' (43). See also, Pattison, 'Kierkegaard: Aesthetics', 140–51. Eric J. Ziolkowski, 'Kierkegaard's Concept of the Aesthetic: A Semiotic Leap from Baumgarten', *Literature and Theology* 6, no. 1 (1992), 33–46.

³² Edward T. Oakes, 'The Apologetics of Beauty', in Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin (eds), *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 212.

lamenting the gap created by the independence of aesthetics from Christian revelation in the contemporary wasteland of a 'warped and stunted Protestant *Weltanschauung*' (ET 96), Balthasar tells an elaborate story to locate the source of the problem of scepticism about the correspondence of the form and content of worldly beauty, in order to overcome this scepticism with divine beauty.

A desirable outcome of such a reordering of the foundations of metaphysics would be to subvert the sway of anaemic biblical critics and theologians who have excavated Scripture for a scientifically precise 'truth' and discarded the aesthetic value of revelation as such.³³ For Balthasar, this theological method is wrongheaded, since revelation is encountered in the person of Christ, as attested to in Scripture and tradition, and perceiving the form of revelation is constitutive of seeing Christ's suffering and death in the crucifixion *as beautiful* (ET 113). By adding natural and artistic beauty to his Christological link between uncreated grace and creation, Aidan Nichols says that for Balthasar, Christ's suffering on the cross becomes 'an open window on the transcendentals', indeed 'the supreme presentation of the aesthetic form'.³⁴ Nichols sums up the central claim of Balthasar's theological aesthetics in this way:

³³ In his own words, Balthasar's essay is not meant to 'dwell on the justifiable complaint that recent dogmatic mores are lacking in any real feeling for beauty (all too often in their style)', but rather 'to concentrate on the far greater danger menacing speculative theology, namely, the kind of paralysis induced by a biblical criticism which dominates the whole field and claims to have a monopoly of scientific precision in the modern sense' (ET 97).

³⁴ Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2011), 20–1. In his essay 'Revelation and the Beautiful', Balthasar says, 'The cross is the first aim of the incarnation, indispensable as long as the world continues, and whatever share is given in the joy of the resurrection it cannot replace the duty of finding redemption through the cross and of sharing deeply in the passion itself. For this reason, the glory inherent in God's revelation, its fulfilment beyond measure of all possible aesthetic ideas, must perforce remain hidden from the eyes of all, both believers and unbelievers, though in very various degrees . . . insofar as the veil over the face of Christ's mystery is drawn aside, and insofar as the economy of grace allows, Christian contemplation can marvel, in the self-emptying of divine love, at the exceeding wisdom, truth and beauty inherent there. But it is only in this self-emptying that they can be contemplated, for it is the source whence the glory contemplated by the angels and the saints radiates into eternal life . . . the paradoxical events with which God "shocks" sinful man are seen as an invitation and stimulus to overleap the bounds of a closed world of finite ideas and to share in God's self-manifestation and openness, something to which the creaturely condition itself points, though unable to attain it . . . the humiliation of the servant only makes the concealed glory shine more resplendently, and the descent

The transcendental we call 'the beautiful', can help restore the integrity of a Christologically-given revelation of the God of all being. The significance of the beautiful is that it indicates how an object might be outside us, facing us, and yet at the same time draw us into itself. Of all the transcendentals, the beautiful is the closest to our senses. It is, therefore, more directly present to us than are the other transcendental properties of being. The beautiful is a fully objective property of being, but it is the nature of this property to be communicative, to communicate itself to observers. The beauty is reality under the aspect of form, known as such by imaginative intuition, just as truth is reality as best known through propositions, by the intelligence, and goodness is reality as best known through values, by the moral sense.³⁵

Nichols says that by putting natural and artistic beauty forward as 'the possible vehicle of divine self-manifestation' and 'the actual revelation of God in Christ',³⁶ Balthasar's theological aesthetics attempts to overcome the classic stalemate of *analogia entis* between Barth and Przywara.

Balthasar assigns the failure of modern aesthetics to the attempt to separate divine splendour from concrete forms of worldly beauty.³⁷ In response, Balthasar takes a twofold approach to repair the damage and put aesthetics back on its proper, *theological* course. First, Balthasar attempts to mend the modern conception of worldly beauty by reuniting the form of beauty with the splendour of the sublime, as a counter-position to Kant's separation of them.³⁸ Essentially,

into the ordinary and commonplace brings out the uniqueness of him who so abased himself' (ET 113–14).

³⁵ Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 25. For more, see Aidan Nichols, 'Von Balthasar's Aims in His Theological Aesthetics', *The Heythrop Journal* 40, no. 4 (1999), 409–23. See also Mark McIntosh's entry on Balthasar in Ian S. Markham (ed.), *The Student's Companion to the Theologians*, vol. 38, Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 355–66.

³⁶ Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 42.

³⁷ For a fuller treatment of Balthasar's distinction between form/splendour, see D. C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), esp. chs. 3 & 5.

³⁸ Immanuel Kant and Nicholas Walker, *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), §1–22. For more on Kant's aesthetics, see Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1969), 438–501. Also see, Hannah Ginsborg, *Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology* (Fall 2008 Edition) [cited 5 April 2013]; available from <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/kant-aesthetics/>> (accessed 21 May 2015). Also see, Andrew Ward, *Kant: The Three Critiques* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), chs. 9–12. The most recent,

Balthasar wants to re-enchant the universe by recovering the purposiveness of worldly beauty. To counteract the problem of scepticism about the correspondence of form and content, Balthasar turns to J. W. von Goethe and F. W. J. Schelling to find a philosophically viable, yet theologically reconfigured, aesthetic alternative.³⁹ Balthasar's Romantic turn to Weimar Classicism is not unprecedented for German-speaking Catholic intellectuals.⁴⁰ In fact, Balthasar's theological aesthetics can be viewed as an attempt to recover the rich Catholic tradition indebted to Schelling that precedes Balthasar by three generations but which had fallen out of favour in the wake of the Leonine revival of neo-scholasticism.⁴¹ So, if beauty ceases to be sacramental in modernity, then Balthasar wants to re-enchant beauty with its primordial sacramentality.

In his first volume on theological aesthetics entitled *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar starts with beauty in the *abstract* as inexhaustible and indefinable in order to offer an alternative account to Kant's portrayal of beauty as a *particular* phenomenon reducible to personal

full-blooded re-articulation of Balthasar's position can be found in David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1–34. 'Perhaps the most immediately suggestive aspect of the huge theological trilogy of Hans Urs von Balthasar is the great reversal it effects—simply in its sequence—of Kant' (139 n. 141). And yet, Balthasar's notion of the sublime can also be used to support a position contrary to Hart's, see Clayton Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2001), 32.

³⁹ For more, see Balthasar's interview, 'Geist und Feuer', in *Herder-Korrespondenz* 30 (1976): 76, cited in W. T. Dickens, *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics: A Model for Post-Critical Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 252–3 n. 51. For more on the development and debates in German Idealism, see Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). See also, Gary J. Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

⁴⁰ For more on Weimar Classicism, see Simon Richter, *The Literature of Weimar Classicism*, vol. 7, Camden House History of German Literature (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2005). See also, Roger H. Stephenson, *Studies in Weimar Classicism: Writing as Symbolic Form* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), ch. 2. For Balthasar's relationship to this movement, see Kevin Taylor, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar and Christ the Tragic Hero', in Kevin Taylor and Giles Waller (eds), *Christian Theology and Tragedy: Theologians, Tragic Literature, and Tragic Theory* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 133–48.

⁴¹ For more, see Thomas F. O'Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 188–91. The best treatment of Balthasar's engagement with Schelling is by Stephan van Erp, *The Art of Theology: Hans Urs Von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics and the Foundations of Faith* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), esp. ch. 7.

taste that is resistant to logical deduction and commands universal assent *at once*.⁴² The closest Balthasar comes to explaining the meaning of his distinction between worldly and divine beauty is with a pseudo-Heideggerian argument from the Latin etymology of the word 'beautiful' (*formosus*) as the result of the combination of 'aspect' (*species*) and 'attractive' (*speciosa*), which also introduces Balthasar's distinction between beauty as the form (*Gestalt*) and splendour of God's glory (*Herrlichkeit*) in creation (GL 1:20). For Balthasar, beauty is displayed in the form, and that which shines forth from 'the form's interior' (GL 1:151).

After his proposal to mend the modern conception of worldly beauty, Balthasar's second move is to reattach the determinate content of worldly beauty to the flowering of divine beauty as a transcendental category. From Balthasar's perspective, Kant has lopped the budding flower of divine beauty in exchange for the stem of worldly beauty. To make his point, Balthasar says that the 'form as it appears to us is beautiful only because the delight that it arouses in us is founded upon the fact that, *in it, the truth and goodness of the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed*' (GL 1:118; emphasis mine). Balthasar says that 'we "behold" the form; but, if we really behold it, it is not as a detached form, rather in its unity with the depths that make their appearance in it. We see form as the splendour, as the glory of Being' (GL 1:119). In other words, as Francesca Murphy has aptly put the matter, for Balthasar, 'reality is *intrinsically* aesthetic, and analogical'.⁴³

⁴² GL 1: 18.

⁴³ Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 132. By uncovering the depth and unity of beauty's form, Balthasar acknowledges his debt to Goethe's *Faust* (GL 1:18). Indeed, Balthasar's debt to *The Metamorphosis of Plants* is evident later in this work when Balthasar calls Christ 'the mother-plant' (GL 1:224) and speaks of the importance of seeing the life-principle of the plant as an argument for the immortality of the soul (GL 1:391; 442). For more on Balthasar's debt to Goethe, see Ulrich Simon's essay, 'Balthasar On Goethe', in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 60–76. Far from a passing reference, Balthasar's description of beauty as comprised of form and splendour uses Goethe's logic of polarity—which identifies the interaction of two inseparable but distinct poles without dissolution—to underscore his notion of beauty in such a way that does not sever it from teleology; a subtlety that provides Balthasar an opportunity to endorse the causality of the concept of beauty with the corresponding object. For more on Goethe's disagreement with Kant, see Jennifer Mensch,

Rather than endorsing personal taste as an external source of judgement about beauty, Balthasar insinuates an 'interiority' into the surface itself. Since beauty always refers to a particular form-artefact, then, for Balthasar, we only 'really behold' it when we judge that the shining-artefact refers back to the 'light' of the transcendental categories of 'unity, truth, goodness and beauty, a light at one with the light of philosophy, [which] can only shine if it is undivided' (ET 107). For Balthasar, the interiority of the surface indicates 'its incorporation into the structure of essences, of subjects and objects and their intertwining'—something that Balthasar thinks is jeopardized in Kant's aesthetics. However, detecting the depth of a surface is tricky, as Balthasar himself admits:

the event of the beautiful is not to be held utterly transcendent, as if it derived solely from outside and above. To ascribe such an event to 'being' while detaching it from the 'coming to be' would be to annul metaphysics by the very act which seeks to establish it. Admittedly it is very difficult to retain the two dimensions simultaneously, that of the transcendent event impinging from above and that of an immanent object bound up with a certain structure. . . . it also points to the task of theology. (ET 107–8)

Balthasar admits that discerning the difference-and-connection between worldly and divine beauty is the difficult task of theological aesthetics, but what appears to be less difficult for Balthasar is how that same theological task positively evaluates the ugliness of human suffering as beautiful.

For all of Balthasar's criticism of Kierkegaard, it appears that Balthasar has not escaped his own paradox en route to making his claim about the harmony of worldly and divine beauty. In describing natural and artistic beauty as the link between the finite and infinite,

'Intuition and Nature in Kant and Goethe', *European Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (2011), 431–53. See also Kenneth Westphal's essay, 'Kant, Hegel, and the Fate of "the" Intuitive Intellect', in Sally S. Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 283–305. Balthasar cannot bring himself to endorse Goethe's pantheism. For instance, Balthasar explicitly says, 'the living God is neither an "existent" (subordinate to Being) nor "Being" itself, as it manifests and reveals itself essentially in everything that makes its appearance in form' (GL 1:119). For more on Goethe's religious and philosophical perspective, see H. B. Nisbet's 'Religion and Philosophy', in Lesley Sharpe (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 219–31.

and affirming a qualitative distinction between Creator and creation, Balthasar is constrained to speak of worldly beauty in terms of its 'form' and divine beauty in terms of an indefinable 'super-form' (*Übergestalt*).⁴⁴ Balthasar's incongruity here is in affirming *both* a quantitative and qualitative understanding of the *relation* between God and creation. When affirming beauty's link between the finite and infinite, Balthasar uses a quantitative (degrees of more or less) understanding of beauty's participation in the source of all being. But when he affirms an absolute distinction between the source of being and a property of being, Balthasar employs a qualitative register. How can 'beauty' name and distinguish *both* the epiphany and the phenomenon in a way that prevents idolatry? This is a point where Balthasar's rejection of Kierkegaard's view of anxiety as the ground and limit of aesthetics would be a helpful corrective.

Balthasar's deployment of the 'Christ-form' is his attempt to iron out the paradoxical (qualitative *and* quantitative) relation between worldly beauty (form) and divine beauty (Super-form). With the icon of the 'Christ-form', Balthasar claims that beauty is *at once* the characteristic and origin of being:

If a concept that is fundamental to the Bible has no kind of analogy in the general intellectual sphere, and awoke no familiar echo in the heart of man, it would remain absolutely incomprehensible and thereby a matter of indifference. It is only when there is an analogy (be it only distant) between the human sense of the divine and divine revelation that the height, the difference and the distance [*der Abstand, die Ferne*] of that which the revelation discloses may be measured in God's grace. (GL 4:14)

From this quote, we might frame Balthasar's dilemma as: *either* the analogy of divine revelation is unintelligible *or* it is intelligible. If, on the one hand, Balthasar emphasizes the absolute difference between Creator and creation, then there is no analogy of divine revelation, because that absolute difference [*Abstand*] between the source and characteristic of being becomes unintelligible (if 'what' is created, then 'what' is uncreated?).⁴⁵ However, on the other hand, if

⁴⁴ For a critique of a similar aim in Karl Rahner's theology, see William J. Hill, 'Uncreated Grace: A Critique of Karl Rahner', *The Thomist* 27 (1963), 333–56. For a sympathetic treatment, see Peter Joseph Fritz, *Karl Rahner's Theological Aesthetics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

⁴⁵ For more, see Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge, 1979), 47–76. See also, 'Ideology, Metaphor and Analogy', in Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the*

Balthasar emphasizes the remote distance [*Ferne*] between Creator and creation, then the source of being risks becoming intelligible but indistinguishable from another characteristic of being—indeed, humanly speaking, just another ‘*what*’ in the universe.

So, it becomes very important that Balthasar’s ‘Christ-form’ ensures that the analogy of divine revelation is *intelligible*, revelatory of an *absolute difference* between Creator and creation, and yet sheds light on beauty as naming the uncreated source (however *distant*) and property of creation. Thus, Nichols says that for Balthasar, the ‘Christ-form’ is like ‘an artistic masterpiece’, because it ‘knows no external necessity in either divine or human reality, yet once we apprehend it we see that it “must” be as it is’.⁴⁶ So for Balthasar, the Christ-form concretizes the *analogia entis*,⁴⁷ carrying its own verification on its face, and in being directly recognizable, provides the structural guarantee required for perceiving the form of, and responding to, divine revelation.⁴⁸ This leads us to identify a Christological malfunction in Balthasar’s theology because of his divergence from Kierkegaard.

Way to Emmaus (London: SCM Press, 1986). Herbert McCabe says that ‘God, for St. Thomas, is a cause only in an extended sense of the word. For one thing his characteristic effect is not itself a form, for a form is that by which a thing is a certain kind of thing, but an existent being is not a certain kind of being. Existence, he says, is the actuality of every form. It is *by* their forms that things exist. God alone does not have a form by which he exists, but is sheer existence. Moreover God, for St. Thomas, is not a causal explanation of the world. In his view we arrive at a causal explanation when we detect something whose nature it is to have such and such effects. Finding a causal explanation is seeing the nature of some cause and seeing how the effects must flow from it. Nothing of this kind happens in our knowledge of God; what we know of him does not serve to explain the world, all that we know of him is that he must exist if the world is to have an explanation’, in St Thomas Aquinas, Herbert McCabe, and Thomas Gilby, *Knowing and Naming God (1a. 12–13), Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 102. It is no coincidence that Balthasar jettisons St Thomas when it comes to formulating his aesthetic theory, see James J. Buckley, ‘Balthasar’s Use of the Theology of Aquinas’, *The Thomist* 59 (1995), 517–45.

⁴⁶ Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 37.

⁴⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1964), 74.

⁴⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 55.

4.5. IDENTIFYING THE CHRISTOLOGICAL MALFUNCTION IN BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGY

Now, to make the general claim about the link between divine self-manifestation and beauty more specifically Christological, Balthasar offers an account of the Incarnation as the hypostatic union of beautiful form and divine content. Although he provides no textual evidence, Balthasar claims that Kierkegaard reduces an encounter with Christ to interpreting merely a *sign* rather than being enraptured by the evidential and persuasive depth-dimension of the 'genuine "legible" form' (GL 1:153). Here, it seems that Balthasar has attributed a claim by Nietzsche to Kierkegaard—a common conflation that reflects European scholarship at this time.⁴⁹ However, the issue for Balthasar is the actual recognizability of Christ as the God-Man: 'Christ is recognized in his form only when his form has been seen and understood to be the form of the God-man, and this, of course, at once demands and already supposes faith in his divinity' (GL 1:153). To support this claim, Balthasar reaches for his Goethean register:

just as a natural form—a flower, for instance—can be seen for what it is only when it is perceived and 'received' as the appearance of a certain depth of life, so, too, Jesus' form can be seen for what it is only when it is grasped and accepted as the appearance of a divine depth transcending all worldly nature. (GL 1:153–4)

Now, Balthasar reads Kierkegaard as denying the recognizability of Christ as the God-man.⁵⁰ Presumably, Balthasar's remark here refers to a passage by Kierkegaard's fictive author, Anti-Climacus, in *Practice in Christianity* (1850).⁵¹ Just as Balthasar makes his claim about the recognizability of Christ on the grounds of requiring and presupposing faith, so Anti-Climacus makes his claim about Christ's unrecognizability on such grounds.

⁴⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*, ed. A. Ridley and J. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29–30. [Christ] 'spoke only about what was inside him most deeply: "life" or "truth" or "light" are his words for the innermost—he saw everything else, the whole of reality, the whole of nature, language itself, as having value only as a sign, a parable'.

⁵⁰ Balthasar makes this point again about Kierkegaard in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger, *Two Say Why* (London: Search Press, 1973), 31–6.

⁵¹ Søren Kierkegaard, PC.

If Balthasar encourages us to see the cross as an open window on the transcendental properties of being, then Kierkegaard says that this is a mistake, because 'if temporality were the *uniform transparency* of the eternal, then every eternal willing in a person and every willing of the eternal would be directly recognisable'.⁵² But Kierkegaard points to the fact that when God's son 'was revealed in human form, was crucified, rejected by temporality; in the eternal sense, he certainly willed the eternal, and yet he became recognizable in temporality by being rejected and thus he accomplished but little'. And yet, Kierkegaard concludes,

No cause has ever been lost in the way the cause of Christianity was lost when Christ was crucified; and no one has ever, in the sense of the moment, accomplished as little by a life solely committed to sacrifice as did Jesus Christ. Yet, in the eternal sense, at that same moment he had accomplished everything, because he did not foolishly judge by the result, which was not yet there either, or rather (for here is the conflict and the battlefield for the two views on what it means to accomplish something) the result was indeed there. (UDVS 91)

So, the context in which Anti-Climacus writes is one in which the Christian faith is taken for granted and his concern is that 'people delude themselves into thinking that all Christianity is nothing but *direct* communication', nothing more than 'the professor's profound dictations', and have forsaken the teacher for the teaching (PC 123). For my purposes here, I could state the contrast this way: Anti-Climacus presents the problem of doing theology *after* Balthasar. In other words, Anti-Climacus' concern is the opposite of Balthasar's worry—that is, in misrelating the divine content of worldly beauty, the content is taken for granted as self-evident and the form discarded. Ironically, the inattention to form is the result that Balthasar despised about historical criticism. To be more precise than Balthasar, Anti-Climacus does *not* claim that Christ is merely a sign, but rather, to use a fond phrase of St John Paul II, that Christ is 'a sign of contradiction' (PC 124; cf. Luke 2:34).⁵³ This is a crucial distinction

⁵² Kierkegaard, UDVS, 89. Instead of viewing temporality as the uniform transparency of the eternal, Kierkegaard suggests that they are related as echo to sound, hence temporality is 'the *refraction* of the eternal' (UDVS 90).

⁵³ See Pope John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979).

for Anti-Climacus. On the one hand, a sign does not coincide with that to which it refers and its non-coincidence points away from itself, generating a search for a meaning which is not self-evident (PC 124). On the other hand, a sign of contradiction ‘draws attention to itself and, once attention is directed to it, shows itself to contain a contradiction’ (PC 125).

Anti-Climacus says that a sign of contradiction ‘stands in contrast to what one immediately is’, so in terms of Christ as the God-man, ‘immediately, he is an individual human being, just like others, a lowly unimpressive human being, but now comes the contradiction—that *he* is God’ (PC 126). For Anti-Climacus, as the sign of contradiction, Christ ‘discloses the thoughts of hearts’ (PC 126). Anti-Climacus argues that one sees Christ as the God-man, not in the way that one disinterestedly admires the beauty of a flower, but rather as ‘one sees in a mirror, one comes to see oneself, or he who is the sign of contradiction looks straight into one’s heart while one is staring into the contradiction’ (PC 127).⁵⁴ The contradiction that is generated in the encounter ‘is a riddle’ that as one ‘is guessing the riddle, what dwells within him is disclosed by the way he guesses’—the ‘contradiction confronts him with a choice, and as he is choosing, together with what he chooses, he himself is disclosed’ (PC 127). The problem with the ‘majority of people living in Christendom today’, Anti-Climacus says, is that they ‘no doubt live in the illusion that if they had been contemporary with Christ they would have recognized him immediately despite his unrecognizability’ (PC 128). For Anti-Climacus, they ‘utterly fail to see how they betray that they do not know themselves; it totally escapes them’ (PC 128). Anti-Climacus puts it this way: ‘he was true God, and therefore *to such a degree* God that he was unrecognizable—thus it was not flesh and blood but the opposite of flesh and blood that inspired Peter to recognize him’ (PC 128). In short, Anti-Climacus is concerned that when theologians ramp up the self-evidential power of Christ, they make Christ into a cliché. In hastily dismissing Kierkegaard, Balthasar puts in jeopardy that which he works so hard to defend: seeing the form of Christ in and through faith.

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard’s distinction between faith and sense perception bears a striking similarity to the distinction St Thomas uses when he says of the Eucharist that ‘Christ’s true body and blood in this sacrament cannot be detected by sense, nor understanding, but by faith alone which rests upon Divine authority’ (ST IIIa q. 75 a. 1).

Joseph Ballan correctly identifies the ‘fundamental opposition’ between Kierkegaard and Balthasar: ‘Balthasar’s Christology, while by no means downplaying Christ’s suffering humanity, nonetheless incorporates that aspect of Christ’s existence into a higher, glorious unity’; whereas Kierkegaard ‘does not take this speculative step, preferring to tarry with the *Ungestalt*, dwelling upon the form of Christ’s deformity, the suffering of God in humanity, without sublating that deformity in a higher unity’.⁵⁵ In other words, Balthasar claims that the Incarnation requires and *presupposes* that the unified form of divinity and humanity is available to, and grasped by the senses, whereas Kierkegaard sees the Incarnation as requiring but actively *precluding* such sensate apprehension.

In Balthasar’s own words, the task of theology is to see the formlessness of Christ on the cross as ‘a mode of his glory’ because it is ‘a mode of his “love to the end”, to discover in his deformity (*Ungestalt*) the mystery of his transcendental form (*Übergestalt*)’ (GL 1:460). It seems that Balthasar acknowledges the difficulty of the first task, but not the second task of demonstrating beauty-in-deformity. Moreover, Balthasar explicitly holds out the apologetic promise of making such a positive evaluation of human suffering: ‘How could we, however, understand the “beauty” of the Cross without the abysmal darkness into which the Crucified plunges?’ (GL 1:117). Yet, Balthasar goes so far to claim that in seeing the Christ-form, one sees the whole, and is persuaded, indeed enraptured by the sight: ‘the figure which Christ forms has in itself an interior rightness and evidential power such as we find—in another, wholly worldly realm—in a work of art or in a mathematical principle’, and ‘this rightness, which resides within the reality of the thing itself, also possesses the power to illumine the perceiving person by its own radiant light, and this is not simply intellectually but in a manner which transforms man’s existence’ (GL 1:465–6). For Balthasar, everything hangs on the ability to discern the difference between worldly and divine beauty and to experience that difference as painfully beautiful:

God’s grace in fact is bestowed on the world so that, filled with divine power, it may—*groaningly and in pain*—struggle through into the light

⁵⁵ Ballan, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar’, 21. For more on Kierkegaard’s *Incognito* Christology, and the school of thought that emerged from it, see David R. Law, *Kierkegaard’s Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

of eternity. The beautiful, then, will only return to us if the power of the Christian heart intervenes so strongly between the other world salvation of theology and the present world lost in positivism as to experience the cosmos as the revelation of an infinity of grace and love—not merely to believe but to *experience it*. (ET 109; emphasis mine)

A valid question might be raised here: what if one is *not* persuaded by ‘seeing the form’? However, Balthasar has already anticipated this question: ‘God’s art in the midst of history is irreproachable, and any criticism of his masterpiece immediately rebounds on the fault-finder’ (GL 1:172); indeed, should one not be persuaded or ‘if such a mistake is suspected, it will at once be shown to have been because of a defect in one’s own vision’ (GL 1:486). There is an important shift taking place here. Previously, aesthetic judgement was thought to be a *universal* human capacity, and the sublime a pre-theological category. But with Balthasar’s revision, aesthetic judgement becomes a *limited* capacity available only to Christians, and the sublime becomes very much a theological category for those with eyes to see.

According to Nicholas Lash, there are two kinds of Christian theologians: ‘those who not only affirm that the world has meaning and purpose, but who also affirm that this meaning and purpose may be more or less straightforwardly discerned, grasped, “read off” our individual or group experience’, and those who affirm ‘that the world has meaning and purpose, [but] deny that this meaning and purpose may—whether in respect of particular events or of large-scale patterns in human history—be straightforwardly discerned, grasped, or “read off” our individual or group experience’.⁵⁶ Using Lash’s distinction, I would like to suggest that this characterizes one important difference in the theological aesthetics of Balthasar and Kierkegaard.

Rather than developing his theory of beauty from sources external to Christian revelation, Balthasar attempts to offer a theology that ‘develops its theory of beauty from the data of revelation itself with genuinely theological methods’, which allows theology to retain aesthetics as ‘a good part—if not the best part—of itself’ (GL 1:117). Balthasar claims that ‘the real *locus* of beauty’ is ‘the apprehension of an expressive form in the thing’ that already possesses a ‘depth-dimension between its ground and its manifestation’, which in turn

⁵⁶ Lash, *Theology on Dover Beach* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 161–2.

'opens up the ontological *locus* of the truth of being' (GL 1:152). For Balthasar, there is a difference between worldly beauty and divine beauty, and yet beauty stretches across both realms in such a way that even human suffering can be positively evaluated as beautiful. Since Balthasar singles out Kierkegaard as the primary villain in his aesthetic saga, it was important to evaluate the accuracy of Balthasar's judgement. I have suggested that Balthasar fails to properly understand Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics, and could have avoided a Christological problem in the way he thematized in his theological aesthetics the distance between the divine and human nature of Christ, and the distance between creation and the Creator. It is significant that the above criticisms are reinforced by the fact that Balthasar's portrait of anxiety as distance from God is not an isolated assertion, but rather permeates the whole of his theology. For instance, a sympathetic reader of Balthasar like John Cihak argues that it is out of *The Christian and Anxiety* (1951) in particular, that Balthasar 'delineates and develops in [his] subsequent works his theological anthropology, Trinitarian theology, Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology'.⁵⁷

Therefore, any suggestion (like Balthasar's) that human suffering should be positively evaluated as beautiful is flatly rejected by Kierkegaard because mystical and ordinary beauty can be used to deaden the senses to real suffering in the world. The important nuance Kierkegaard brings to this issue is that '*If a person is to will the good in truth, he must will to suffer everything for the good*' (UDVS 99). This is not the same as positively evaluating suffering as beautiful *tout court*. The difference is that 'a person may have suffered a whole lifetime without its being possible in any way to say truthfully of him that he has willed to suffer all for the good'. Moreover, this rejection can be found in the book that Balthasar detests, Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, which recalls the story of Phalaris the tyrant of Akragas, who tortured his enemies over an open flame and turned their screams into beautiful music.⁵⁸ By presupposing unity in the form of the God-man's direct recognizability, Balthasar *leads the reader toward*

⁵⁷ Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, 12.

⁵⁸ 'What is a poet? An unhappy man who in his heart harbors a deep anguish, but whose lips are so fashioned that the moans and cries which pass over them are transformed into ravishing music. His fate is like that of the unfortunate victims whom the tyrant Phalaris imprisoned in a brazen bull, and slowly tortured over a steady fire; their cries could not reach the tyrant's ears so as to strike terror into his

the grotesque—appraising human suffering as if it was an artistic representation to be contemplated disinterestedly;⁵⁹ whereas Kierkegaard wants to *lead the reader away from* making such a categorical error since ‘direct recognisability is paganism’ because ‘if one can see it in him, then he is *eo ipso* a mythological figure’.⁶⁰ My observation here is not new: Karl Rahner’s charge of paganism, or more precisely, Nestorianism is something that has haunted Balthasar’s legacy for some time.⁶¹

In this chapter, I have outlined Balthasar’s criticism and alternative response to Kierkegaard’s view of anxiety (§4.1–4.2) and aesthetics (§4.3–4.4). I have surveyed briefly the basic aims of Balthasar’s theological aesthetics, giving special attention to the way Balthasar’s thematization of distance features as a Christological problem, and

heart; when they reached his ears they sounded like sweet music’ (Swensen/Johnson EO 19).

⁵⁹ Balthasar refers to God as ‘O You who heal us by wounding us!’ in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Grain of Wheat: Aphorisms* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 116.

⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, CUP, 600.

⁶¹ [Balthasar’s position on suffering] does not help me to escape from my mess and mix-up and despair if God is in the same predicament . . . From the beginning, I am locked into its horribleness while God—if this word continues to have any meaning—is in a true and authentic and consoling sense the God who does not suffer, the immutable, and so on . . . Perhaps it is possible to be an orthodox Nestorian’, in Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965–1982*, ed. and trans. H. Biallowons, H. D. Egan, S. J. Imhof, and P. Imhof (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 124–7. Balthasar’s ability to access (or at least his claim to have access) to the Son’s forsakenness by God, or the relations between the divine hypostases has led more recent theologians to express reservations about Balthasar’s theological speculation. For instance, Tina Beattie critiques Balthasar, saying that ‘the more vulnerable Christ becomes in the passivity of his dying, the more distant from God he becomes, and the more masculine qualities of power, violence, wrath and retribution must be asserted within the fatherhood of God’, in Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 227. Lyra Pitstick has argued that Balthasar often splits the hypostatic nature of Christ in such a way that amounts to ‘the destruction of Chalcedon’, in Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 440 n. 69; cf. pp. 293ff. Karen Kilby has argued that this Christological problem of distance extends, not just to the Atonement, but also to Balthasar’s treatment of the Trinity; see Karen Kilby, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Trinity’, in Peter C. Phan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 215; and Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 94–122. Advocates of Balthasar’s rationale of distance have used it to promote the ‘abysmal dissimilarity’ of the sexes; see Angelo Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 27, 72, 134, 285, 335, 363. For more, see Simon Oliver, Karen Kilby, and Thomas O’Loughlin (eds), *Faithful Reading: New Essays in Theology and Philosophy in Honour of Fergus Kerr, OP* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), chs. 9 & 10.

how this problem is connected to Balthasar's misinformed critique of Kierkegaard (§4.5). Although a critical reader may be resistant to, and suspicious of, Balthasar's theological account of beauty (natural and artistic), and its transparency to the source of being and Christian revelation, I would like to conclude by indicating a way forward by identifying a shared goal between the theological aesthetics of Balthasar and Kierkegaard. To close, I would like to highlight Kierkegaard's relevance to the wider aims of *ressourcement* in contemporary Catholic theology.

4.6. CONCLUSION: READING KIERKEGAARD CLOSER TO BALTHASAR

Matthew Eggemeier says that 'Balthasar's restoration of aesthetics to a place of primacy in Christian theology represents an important attempt to describe [an] alternative ontology—a Christian sacramental ontology'.⁶² Moreover, it is a 'sacramental ontology' that Hans Boersma offers as the interpretive key to the 'essence' of *ressourcement* theology.⁶³ Although Boersma admits that *ressourcement* theologians 'did not set out to establish a particular theological system or school',⁶⁴

⁶² For relevant discussion and bibliographical information, see Matthew T. Eggemeier, 'A Sacramental Vision: Environmental Degradation and the Aesthetics of Creation', *Modern Theology* 29, no. 3 (2013), 359; 338–60. Eggemeier says that 'Balthasar's practice of *ressourcement* is characterized by a retrieval of pre-modern pictures of the world as a means of healing the pathologies of modernity' (p. 355). Eggemeier goes on to say that 'As the aesthetic religion *par excellence*, the Christian claim is that God can be perceived by the senses of sight, touch, sound, smell, and taste . . . [but] Balthasar views the modern era as a particularly inauspicious time for seeing the form insofar as the frame of technological nihilism discloses things as mere resources bereft of transcendental significance. The result is that moderns have become virtually blind to the spiritual depth of creation and perceive it only as raw material for maximizing the efficiency of human projects' (p. 358).

⁶³ It should be noted that Boersma borrows this phrase from Dennis Doyle—who was referring to de Lubac's ecclesiology—and applies it to all the figures covered in his book. See Dennis M. Doyle, 'Henri de Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology', *Theological Studies* 60, no. 2 (1999), 226–7. As cited in Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 243 n. 249.

⁶⁴ Hans Boersma, 'Analogy of Truth', in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 157.

what united them was their view that ‘all of existence—nature and the supernatural—was connected by way of an overall sacramental ontology’.⁶⁵ Boersma says that it is ‘the conviction that historical realities of the created order served as divinely ordained, sacramental means leading to eternal divine mysteries’.⁶⁶ In other words, it is an interpretation of history that views ‘external, temporal appearances [as] contain [ing] the spiritual, eternal realities which they represented and to which they dynamically pointed forward’.⁶⁷

Now, Boersma says that ‘sacramental ontology’ is a response to secularization, a process that he calls ‘the desacramentalizing of the West’.⁶⁸ For Boersma, the object of recovery for all *ressourcement* theologians is a sacramental ontology against ‘the agnosticism, immanentism, and relativism of Modernism’, and the ‘intellectualism of neo-Thomism’, both of which are teeming with ‘confidence in the ability of discursive reason to access and possess theological truth’.⁶⁹ By reading these *nouveaux* theologians through the lens of ‘a sacramental ontology’, Boersma says, it ‘allows us to take seriously their disavowals of the Modernist theology of the turn of the twentieth century’.⁷⁰ For Boersma, a ‘sacramental ontology’ is not just the ‘essence’ and ‘key’ to understanding the movement, but it also affords him a kind of rhetorical and hermeneutical buffer around each *ressourcement* figure steering them away from any potential ‘modernist’ pitfall.⁷¹

On the face of it, Balthasar’s repudiation of Kierkegaard reiterates Heidegger’s earlier dismissal: despite Kierkegaard’s ‘penetrating’ psychological analysis, he ultimately comes up short on providing an adequate ontology.⁷² Interestingly, Balthasar agrees with Heidegger

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 158–9.

⁷⁰ Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 17.

⁷¹ Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 20–1. ‘The fundamental difference between Modernism and *nouvelle théologie* lay precisely in the latter’s sacramental ontology’. It is not difficult to see how Boersma uses this neologism to circumvent the ambiguous historical relationship between the *ressourcement* movement and its inheritance of Catholic modernism. For more, see Gerard Loughlin’s excellent essay ‘*Nouvelle Théologie*: A Return to Modernism?’, in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 36–50. See also, Gerard Loughlin, ‘Catholic Modernism’, in David Fergusson (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 486–508.

⁷² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 494 n. 496. See also, Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 283–340.

about affirming Kierkegaard as a psychologist—the best since St Thomas (DCA 31)—indeed, Balthasar even agrees with Heidegger about dropping the theological implications of Kierkegaard’s ‘penetrating’ analysis of anxiety (DCA 32). Instead of rehabilitating Kierkegaard’s psychology against Heidegger’s secularization of it, Balthasar interprets Heidegger as hatching the egg that Kierkegaard laid. Even though Balthasar and Heidegger may come to differing conclusions regarding a proper account of what the world is like, it would seem that Kierkegaard still provides much of the conceptual terrain for both figures.

In the previous chapter on de Lubac, I suggested that Kierkegaard’s writings resist any ‘decline and fall’ narrative of history that often trips up contemporary readers of *ressourcement* theologians, causing them to privilege the medieval against the modern *tout court*. With such claims, the repudiation of Kierkegaard as the ‘modern Protestant’ in Balthasar’s theological aesthetics undesirably sets up contemporary Catholic theologians to fall prey to what Charles Taylor has called ‘the view from Dover Beach’, which claims that contemporary culture has fallen away from an earlier state of innocence that comprises the ‘withdrawing roar’ of a moral horizon of ‘traditional beliefs and allegiances’.⁷³ Whether this view is put forward in a negative or positive light, this assumption about how ‘old views and loyalties are eroded’ enables the plausibility of an account of our contemporary ‘loss of belief’—whether that is seen as ‘shedding harmful myths or losing touch with crucial spiritual realities’.⁷⁴ Taylor says that

What this view reads out of the picture is the possibility that Western modernity might be powered by its own positive visions of the good, that is, by one constellation of such visions among available others, rather than by the only viable set left after the old myths and legends have been exploded. It screens out whatever there might be of a specific moral direction to Western modernity, beyond what is dictated by the general form of human life itself, once old error is shown up (or old truth forgotten).⁷⁵

Under the sway of ‘the view from Dover Beach’, the task of theology can be reduced to preening oneself with unswerving certainty amid

⁷³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 570.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 571.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

the tumult of culture wars. This diminished task can create an environment where theologians inadvertently adopt either a tendency toward relativism or toward a ghetto mentality when trying to make sense of the deposit of faith for today.

In this chapter, I have suggested that Balthasar's theological aesthetics follows a similar plotline in his narration of the loss of beauty after the Reformation. Yet Kierkegaard offers a view of divine revelation that is equidistant in every epoch. So, how does Kierkegaard's dialectical view of theological aesthetics offer a contribution to *re-sourcement* theology? Kierkegaard would not reject Balthasar's claim that 'Creation as a whole has become a monstrosity of God's real presence'. Instead, he would want to hold that claim in tension with St Paul's insistence that 'We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal' (2 Cor. 4:18). Or as Kierkegaard says in his journals: 'in order that faith can be faith, immediate straightforwardness is denied . . . thus the object of faith does not admit of artistic representation' (NB 15:51).

In his chapter entitled 'Kierkegaard and the Aesthetics of the Icon', Christopher Barnett makes the case that, contrary to what critics (like Balthasar)⁷⁶ have assumed, Kierkegaard actually has a *dialectical* view of theological aesthetics, rather than a view that keeps aesthetics and religion in *opposition*.⁷⁷ The issue of contention is not that for Balthasar beauty has the power to make someone a Christian, and for Kierkegaard beauty has the power to delay someone from becoming a Christian. Rather following Jean-Luc Marion, Barnett says that Kierkegaard deploys poetic or 'aesthetic imagery' in his writings, which can function as either an icon or an idol for the reader.⁷⁸ Barnett traces Kierkegaard's dialectical use of the term 'image' or 'picture' [*Billedede*] to claim that Kierkegaard uses the term in this way to convey how a picture can draw the observer into disinterested

⁷⁶ Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 49–51.

⁷⁷ Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, ch. 3.

⁷⁸ Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 68. Barnett explores how for Kierkegaard, these moral exemplars are found both in Scripture and in objects of nature: the clouds of autumn, the lilies and the birds, the human being, the ocean, even John the Baptist, Paul, Job, Anna, the Tax Collector, and Jesus Christ. For more on the icon/idol distinction in Marion, see Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

inspection, or refract the observer's gaze toward higher things—in Kierkegaard's case, a concrete moral exemplar. Barnett's point is that Kierkegaard employs this literary device in his authorship, not because (as Balthasar claims) he views aesthetics as categorically antagonistic toward religion, but rather because Kierkegaard believes that they are fundamentally integrated. So, the pedagogical task for Kierkegaard is not to elicit admirers, but imitators of Christ. To support this claim, Barnett surveys the many 'icons of faith' in Kierkegaard's authorship, which allows the reader 'to indirectly, but truly perceive the divine'.⁷⁹ In short, Barnett indicates a very perceptive way that both Kierkegaard and Balthasar share similar goals of 'attending to the *form* of Christian existence', in their respective projects. Perhaps this is why Kierkegaard chooses to treat something as elusive and pronounced as anxiety, which tends not to submit to an account of its determinate content. The manifestation of anxiety and beauty resists our subsequent attempt to retrieve, clarify, and classify its source—thus, revealing a limit to our capacity to give an exhaustive account of the way the world is as it is primordially encountered.

So perhaps Kierkegaard's writings can offer to readers of Balthasar what David Burrell and Elena Malits have described as the post-conciliar move away from the 'earlier preoccupation with an "ontology" of the sacraments—*what* is happening and *how* it is being effected' to an approach that focuses upon the 'uses of ritual patterns as a prism for displaying the human dimensions of sacramental action'. In this way, by 'focusing on *sign*, questions of "causality" are transposed into a properly *sacramental* key' as 'human activities carried out in a believing community, with the goal of enhancing its unity by relating that community to the Lord and its members to one another'.⁸⁰ Although this would push Kierkegaard closer to endorsing an ecclesiology that he typically is not associated with, it does anticipate the next chapter on Cornelio Fabro.⁸¹

To recapitulate, my argument in this chapter was that Balthasar's negative evaluation of Kierkegaard's view of aesthetics (§4.1–4.2) and

⁷⁹ Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 75.

⁸⁰ David B. Burrell and Elena Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 42.

⁸¹ For more on Kierkegaard's sacramental imagination as it relates to church architecture and liturgy, see Hughes, *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Rhetoric and Performance in a Theology of Eros* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

anxiety (§4.3–4.4) led him to take up an undesirable theological position that could have been avoided if he had taken Kierkegaard more seriously. After contrasting the theological positions of Balthasar and Kierkegaard, I identified a Christological problem in Balthasar's theological aesthetics (§4.5). I concluded by indicating a way that the distance between the theological aesthetics of Kierkegaard and Balthasar could be mitigated. My overall claim is that Kierkegaard has, and should continue to stimulate reform and renewal in Catholic theology. In the next chapter, my study turns to the Italian Thomist Cornelio Fabro in order to complement de Lubac's and Balthasar's engagement of Kierkegaard's writings.

Doing Theology with Cornelio Fabro

Kierkegaard, Mary, and the Church

Philosophy must keep up its guard against the desire to be edifying.

G. W. F. Hegel¹

As philosophy of the act of being,
Thomism is not *another* existential philosophy,
it is the only one.

Etienne Gilson²

Throughout this book, I have argued that although he is not always recognized as such, Søren Kierkegaard has been an important ally for Catholic theologians in the early twentieth century. For the first time in English, I introduce in this chapter the constructive theological features of the underexplored writings of the Italian Thomist, Cornelio Fabro (1911–1995). Instead of providing an exhaustive account of Fabro’s distinctive reading of Kierkegaard or Thomas, I would first like to lay the essential groundwork for demonstrating Fabro’s importance for constructive theology today. In the first section, I set the stage of Fabro’s historical context to suggest that Fabro’s loyalty to the Thomist revival after *Aeterni Patris* should not be interpreted as incompatible with his desire to negotiate the claims of the modern world (§5.1). In the second section, I focus on Fabro’s recovery of Kierkegaard’s writings (§5.2) as a way into understanding Fabro’s wider project of

¹ Section 9 of the Preface to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Unpublished translation by Terry Pinkard, 2008.

² Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas* (London: Gollancz, 1957), 368.

renewal in Catholic theology in the modern age (§5.3). Specifically, I draw upon Fabro's treatment of Kierkegaard's Mariology (§5.4) and ecclesiology (§5.5) as two counter-intuitive examples of Catholic theological renewal. I conclude with some observations regarding how Fabro's constructive theological contribution deepens and expands our current understanding of *ressourcement* theology today.

5.1. FABRO'S CONTEXT: THE LEONINE REVIVAL AND MODERN ATHEISM

To some readers, Kierkegaard and St Thomas Aquinas are antithetical thinkers. In defence of such a preconception, these readers point to a deep Thomist suspicion of Kierkegaard's so-called 'irrationalism'—like that portrayed by Alasdair MacIntyre.³ Yet, many Kierkegaard scholars have debunked this portrayal as a common misconception.⁴ However, it is rare to find someone who would identify themselves as both a Kierkegaardian and a Thomist. In fact, to the English-speaking world, Cornelio Fabro is not much more than an obscure footnote in the history of Thomism. This footnote often signals Fabro's groundbreaking recovery of the Neoplatonic concept of participation in Thomas' metaphysics.⁵ However, such treatment risks reducing Fabro's legacy to his doctoral thesis and fails to convey the breadth

³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 3rd ed, 2007), 39–56.

⁴ For instance see, Davenport et al., *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001). Lippitt, 'Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Some Problems with Narrative', *Inquiry* 50, no. 1 (2007), 34–69. John J. Davenport, *Narrative Identity and Autonomy: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge, 2012). Anthony Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino* (Roma: EDIVI, 2005). Fabro finished his dissertation in 1937 and published it in 1939. For more, see Alain Contat, 'L'étant, l'esse et la Participation selon Cornelio Fabro', *Revue Thomiste* 111, no. 3 (2011), 357–403. See also, Alain Contat, 'Le Figure della Differenza Ontologica nel Tomismo del Novecento (Prima Parte)', *Alpha Omega* 11, no. 1 (2008a), 77–129. Alain Contat, 'Le Figure della Differenza Ontologica nel Tomismo del Novecento (Seconda Parte)', *Alpha Omega* 11, no. 2 (2008b), 213–50. Also, see the excellent collection of essays edited by Ariberto Acerbi, *Crisi e Destino della Filosofia: Studi su Cornelio Fabro* (Roma: Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, 2012). Gabriele De Anna, *Verità e Libertà: Saggi sul Pensiero di Cornelio Fabro* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2012). Perhaps the only other chapter-length

and depth of the rest of his life's work, such as advising the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and the preparatory meetings of the Second Vatican Council on which he served as *peritus*,⁶ or translating the writings of Søren Kierkegaard into Italian and appropriating his insights for Catholic theology. Indeed, Fabro goes so far as to claim that Kierkegaard's writings arrive not infrequently at the threshold of Catholicism, or to be more precise, *Thomism*.⁷

Although Fabro is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world, his Kierkegaard scholarship and his appropriation of Kierkegaard in his Thomism is a desirable asset for contemporary Catholic theology. In particular, by uncovering the theological affinities of Kierkegaard and Thomas, Fabro's writings offer a fruitful pathway for re-framing theology in the post-conciliar Church especially after the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998)—a document that gives a remarkable endorsement of Kierkegaard.⁸ With the exception of seventeen

treatment of Fabro in English is in Helen James John, *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), 87–107.

⁶ Fabro was nominated as a member of the preparatory commission and *peritus* for the Second Vatican Council in 1960. He contributed a study on atheistic existentialism to the schema for the Constitution *De deposito fidei pure custodiendo*, which, in the end, did not make it past the chief censor, Prof. Joseph Ratzinger. See, Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *History of Vatican II: Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 241, 410–29. See also, Jared Wicks, 'Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as *Peritus* before and During Vatican Council II', *Gregorianum* 89, no. 2 (2008), 233–311.

⁷ Rosa Goglia, *Cornelio Fabro: Profilo Biografico, Cronologico, Tematico da Inediti, Note di Archivio, Testimonianze* (Roma: EDIVI, 2010), 190. See also, Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard e San Tommaso', *Sapienza* IX (1956), 292–308. See also, Fabro's article 'Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic', in Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, *A Kierkegaard Critique: An International Selection of Essays Interpreting Kierkegaard* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 156–206. Rather than rehearsing Fabro's arguments in these two essays, this chapter will take Fabro's view for granted and develop further avenues of interest.

⁸ John Paul II says that Kierkegaard shows us how 'faith liberates reason from presumption, the typical temptation of the philosopher' (n. 76). <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html> For more, see Wayne J. Hankey, 'Practical Considerations About Teaching Philosophy and Theology Now', in *Restoring Faith in Reason: With a New Translation of the Encyclical Letter Faith and Reason of Pope John Paul II: Together with a Commentary and Discussion*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (London: SCM Press, 2002), 199–205. Robert Sokolowski, 'The Autonomy of Philosophy in *Fides et Ratio*', in *Restoring Faith in Reason: With a New Translation of the Encyclical Letter Faith and Reason of Pope John Paul II: Together with a Commentary and Discussion*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (London: SCM Press, 2002), 277–91.

journal articles, virtually all of Fabro's writings remain untranslated into English. *God in Exile* (1968)⁹ is the only book that was published in English and it did not focus on Thomas or his metaphysics, but rather, modern atheism. My claim in this chapter is that Fabro's discovery of Kierkegaard's theology beneath his atheistic commentators (such as Heidegger and Sartre), is *just as revolutionary* as his discovery of Thomas beneath his neo-scholastic commentators. Indeed, Kierkegaard is just as much an influence on Fabro as Thomas¹⁰ and much of Fabro's work introduces the Catholic inheritance of Kierkegaard's thought to those already familiar with Thomas, and re-introduces the originality of Kierkegaard's writings to those for whom his theological significance has been overlooked in continental philosophy.

Prior to Fabro's groundbreaking work, it was difficult for some Catholic readers of Kierkegaard to see his compatibility with Catholicism, due to the misperception that Kierkegaard was a representative of atheistic existentialism and irrationalism.¹¹ Fabro's work corrects this misunderstanding by reading Kierkegaard closer to the Aristotle of St Thomas, and by suggesting that Kierkegaard's Lutheran critique of the state church did not amount to an anti-ecclesiology, but rather a very fruitful resource for ecumenism. In this chapter, I will introduce and explore the constructive features of Fabro's theology which remains tragically underexplored. To demonstrate Fabro's contemporary relevance, I must now briefly situate Fabro in his Leonine context and within the emergence of the European reception of Kierkegaard in order to then underscore how Fabro's work seeks to overturn the influence of neo-scholasticism and modern atheism.

⁹ Cornelio Fabro, *God in Exile: Modern Atheism*, trans. Arthur Gibson (Westminster: Paulist Newman, 1968). For more, see Andrea Robiglio, 'La Logica dell'Ateismo: il Principio di Non Contraddizione secondo C. Fabro', *Divus Thomas* 102, no. 1 (1999), 120–43. See also, Andrea Robiglio, 'Aspetti di *Introduzione all'Ateismo Moderno* di Cornelio Fabro', *Divus Thomas* 100, no. 3 (1997), 139–64.

¹⁰ Cornelio Fabro, Rosa Goglia, and Elvio Celestino Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario: Versione Integrata delle Tre Stesure con Parti Inedite* (Roma: EDIVI, 2011), 85. In Fabro's personal library, there are 312 Kierkegaard-related titles and only 185 titles related to St Thomas; see Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 162. Fabro had always wanted to write an introduction to Kierkegaard but never did, even though he continued to write about Kierkegaard until the end of his life (cf. Goglia *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 60).

¹¹ To see the paradigm shift that Fabro caused, compare the review of Fabro's work in Pietro Parente, 'Il Vero Volto Di Kierkegaard', *L'Osservatore Romano* 11, no. 3 (1952), 3.

The distinctiveness of Fabro's project begins to come into focus by reading his works in comparison with several works of the Thomist revival after Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879).¹² Wayne Hankey has described *Aeterni Patris* as 'the courageous war plan of an embattled church' that engendered a movement that fatefully mirrors the very philosophical context which it endeavoured to supplant.¹³ Pope Leo XIII set out two aims for his theologians and philosophers: use St Thomas to separate philosophy from and subordinate it to theology. As Hankey persuasively argues, separating theology from philosophy required an emphasis on 'the Aristotelian aspects of Thomas' thought' and 'its Platonic elements played down' in order to make the sciences independent from each other. Whilst subordinating philosophy to theology required that once 'the ground of theology in a revelation to faith was stressed and the dependence of theology on philosophy diminished, the sciences were easily subordinated to ecclesiastical theology'.¹⁴ As a result, the desired opportunity for genuine dialogue with the modern world became more difficult, if not impossible. Pope Leo's dilemma generated various genres of Thomism that internalized the dilemma all the way down.¹⁵ However, it is not until Fabro's project that the Neoplatonic

¹² For more on the background of neo-scholasticism and Pope Leo XIII's relation to that movement, see Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 17–36, 226–8. See also, Gerald A. McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (Fordham University Press, 1989), 5–35. Gerald A. McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 25–40. For an assessment of Fabro's distinctive contribution to these debates, see Parts I and II of George Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas', *Franciscan Studies* 17 (1957), 1–22, 107–25.

¹³ Wayne Hankey, 'Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival', *Dionysius* 9 (1985), 90.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁵ Recently the unintended consequence of various Thomism(s) has been deftly examined; see Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002). Notably, it is Mark D. Jordan who draws inspiration from the *form* of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms in order to assess 'the rhetorical force' involved in twentieth-century Thomism's claim to an authoritative rewriting of Thomas; see Mark D. Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas after His Readers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 3. Also see, Mark D. Jordan, 'The Modernity of Christian Theology or Writing Kierkegaard Again for the First Time', *Modern Theology* 27, no. 3 (2011), 442–51. For Jordan's dependence upon Fabro, see Mark D. Jordan, 'The Grammar of *Esse*: Re-Reading Thomas on the Transcendentals', *The Thomist* 44, no. January (1980), 1–26. For a good introduction to Fabro's version of Thomism, see Guido Mazzotta, 'Ipotesi su Fabro', *Euntes Docete* 50 (1997), 213–31.

metaphysics of participation in Thomas comes to the fore in an engagement with continental philosophy, which receives a distinctively Kierkegaardian, rather than Kantian, shape.¹⁶ Indeed, it was precisely Kierkegaard's critique of rationalism that was desirable to Fabro in a time when neo-scholasticism could not manage such critical distance.¹⁷

After Henri de Lubac opened up the possibility of a critical and theological engagement with modern atheism in *Drama of Atheist Humanism* (1944)—an approach that Pope Pius XII subsequently condemned in *Humani Generis* (1950)—Fabro's work brought the much needed proficiency with the history of atheism to re-frame the terms of debate for Catholic engagement with the contemporary world. In 1959, Fabro's work on atheism led him to establish the European Institute of the History of Atheism at the Pontifical Urbaniana University. Fabro's *God in Exile* (1968)¹⁸ began as a set of lectures that Fabro gave as a visiting professor at Notre Dame University from February to May in 1965.¹⁹ Rosa Goglia says that Fabro had about

¹⁶ See Wayne Hankey, 'Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot', in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (Routledge, 1998a), 147–8. Wayne J. Hankey, 'From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: The Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-Speaking North America', *Dionysius* 14 (1998b), 157–88. Hankey sees Fabro's work as a genuine advance in twentieth-century Thomist thought. Others have criticized Fabro's interpretation of participation; see Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 147, 151, 158 n. 155, 170 n. 118, 184–6, 222. However, recently some Thomists have come to the defence of Fabro against Rudi te Velde's judgement; see Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 237–43. See also, Jason A. Mitchell, *Being and Participation: The Method and Structure of Metaphysical Reflection According to Cornelio Fabro*, 2 vols. (Roma: Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, 2012), 485–92. For more on Kant's influence on neo-scholasticism and neo-Thomism, see Norbert Fischer, *Kant und der Katholizismus: Stationen einer wechselhaften Geschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 485–96, 515–52. For the scholastic inheritance of Kant's own thought, see Cornelio Fabro, 'Il Trascendentale Moderno e il Trascendentale Tomistico', *Angelicum* 60 (1983), 534–58. For a more recent account, see Christopher J. Insole, *Kant and the Creation of Freedom: A Theological Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁷ For more on neo-scholasticism, see Ulrich Gottfried Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), ch. 7.

¹⁸ Fabro, *God in Exile: Modern Atheism*. For more on Fabro's American reception, see my chapter entitled 'God in Exile in the USA', in *Fabro e Brentano: per un nuovo realismo*, ed. Antonio Russo (Roma: Studium, 2014), 245–52.

¹⁹ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 75. n. 67.

thirty to forty students signed up for his class entitled, 'Principles of Immanence and the Genesis of Atheism'.²⁰ *God in Exile* is an updated translation of Fabro's earlier two-volume work, *Introduzione all'Ateismo Moderno* (1964),²¹ and represents over a decade of his engagement with figures like Marx, Feuerbach, Hegel, and Heidegger.

Fabro's massive tome comprises over 1,200 pages and is divided into nine parts. The English subtitle aptly depicts the central thread of Fabro's book: 'A Study of the Internal Dynamic of Modern Atheism from Its Roots in the Cartesian *Cogito* to the Present Day'. Fabro's argument is that the Cartesian *cogito* is the seed that contains and yet evolves into modern atheism. Although this claim is anachronistic in respect to the faith of Descartes himself, what Fabro latches on to here is how the quest for certainty after Descartes divides the mind from the world in terms of inner and outer, bracketing the creative activity of God by focusing instead on the productivity of human rationality. In Fabro's own words, he says that the 'chief aim of this volume is to chart the main thrust of the void gouged by the Cartesian *cogito* insofar as it has driven man to that blank despair'.²²

Fabro arrives at 'the inner nucleus of modern atheism' by first defining the phenomenon, and then showing how it came to be by charting important philosophical controversies in a *tour de force*: examining the work of figures like Descartes and Spinoza, to Hobbes, Locke, and Berkeley, up to d'Holbach, Lessing, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Feuerbach Engels, Marx and Lenin, to Bradley and Dewey, on into Nietzsche, Jaspers, and Heidegger, to the dialectical theologies of Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, and Bonhoeffer, to the radical theologies of Robinson and Altizer. At the end of each part of the book, the translator Arthur Gibson has attached some of Fabro's clippings in the form of appendices. Gibson also provides a helpful introduction that summarizes the book, which helps orient the reader. It is worth noting that against the claim of 'death of god' theologians, Fabro says that:

Kierkegaard does indeed stand at the antipodes of the latest Protestant theologizing of the Altizer sort, the theology that desists from any

²⁰ Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 131.

²¹ Cornelio Fabro, *Introduzione all'Ateismo Moderno* (Roma: Editrice Studium, 1964). For more on this text, see Robiglio, 'Aspetti di *Introduzione all'Ateismo Moderno* di Cornelio Fabro', 139–64. See also, Robiglio, 'La Logica dell'Ateismo', 120–43.

²² Fabro, *God in Exile*, xli.

critique of modern atheism and indeed claims to start from it... Kierkegaard does categorically reject the 'death of God' and he refutes the negative conclusions of Hegel and Feuerbach; and this not only [stems] from theological motives [but also] because of his own deep religious aspiration.²³

In some respects, Fabro's genealogy of atheism stood unrivalled until its argument was further nuanced by Michael J Buckley's *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (1987),²⁴ or Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989).²⁵ Indeed, prior to Taylor's monumental work, it would have been difficult to find in the English-speaking world a more resourceful compendium of the history of modern atheism, than Fabro's *God in Exile* (1968). So, it was Fabro's staunch resistance to neo-scholasticism and its rationalistic orientation²⁶ that led him to encounter Kierkegaard and incorporate Kierkegaard's critique of modern philosophy into his own thinking as a way of overturning 'the dominant interpretation of the Scholastic and Neo-Scholastic tradition which portrayed Aquinas as an Aristotelian'.²⁷

5.2. UNCOVERING KIERKEGAARD

Prior to 1948, Italian Kierkegaard scholars struggled to distinguish themselves from the interpretive strategies of their French and German predecessors, which were constructed upon a small portion of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings. It was not until Fabro's introduction and translation of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers* (1948–65) that the theological aspects of Kierkegaard's writings

²³ Fabro, *God in Exile*, 1040–1.

²⁴ Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

²⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁶ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 29. In fact, Elvio Fontana calls for a study to be done just on this topic alone in his essay 'Fabro e il Neotomismo Italiano alla Soglia del Concilio' in Giampietro De Paoli, ed., *Cornelio Fabro e il Neotomismo Italiano dopo il Concilio* (Roma: Bibliotheca Edizioni, 2011), 107–35.

²⁷ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 32.

came into focus for many Catholic readers.²⁸ According to Andrea Scaramuccia, Fabro's translation of the *Journals* 'was at the time the most extensive edition in translation, surpassing those of Haecker in German, Dru in English, and Tisseau in French. Even today it is second only to the collection by the Hongks'.²⁹

In his account of his own intellectual development, Fabro recalls his first encounter with Kierkegaard as 'partly a disgrace' [*una mezza disgrazia*] due to Christoph Schrempf's 'unintelligible jargon' in the German translation of *The Concept of Anxiety*, which Fabro read in the National Library of the Rome in 1940—a year after publishing his dissertation on Thomas' metaphysics of participation.³⁰ Fabro was drawn to this book because it was 'in vogue', and since the 'Kierkegaard' he first encountered was through second-hand knowledge, it led him to see how Kierkegaard was being 'exploited to negate philosophy and deviate from theology, in order to give a free pass to the latest forms of French and German immanentism and various dialectical theologies'.³¹ Fabro identifies two obstacles that prevented Kierkegaard's writings from taking on a more prominent role in Italy:

On one hand, the obstacle of secularisation—whether socialist or liberal—which cannot receive the Christian message of Kierkegaard and continues to overwhelm the culture of Italy, already guided by [Benedetto] Croce or [Giovanni] Gentile at the time of fascism and now continued especially by cultural centres and social-communist publishing houses. On the other hand, there is the obstacle of the deafness of the Catholic environment.³²

²⁸ Franca Castagnino, *Gli Studi Italiani su Kierkegaard, 1906–1966*, Collana del Centro di Ricerche di Storia della Storiografia Filosofica 2 (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1972), 5–29. See also, Cornelio Fabro, *Problemi dell'Esistenzialismo* (Roma: Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2009). For more, see ch. 1 of the recent PhD thesis by Marco Strona, 'Verità dell'Essere e Metafisica della Libertà: Cornelio Fabro Interprete di Kierkegaard' (Pontifical Atheneum of St. Anselm, 2013), 17–54. See also, Ingrid Basso, 'Cento Anni di Studi Kierkegaardiani in Italia: 1904–2004', in *L'Edificante in Kierkegaard*, ed. Isabella Adinolfi and Virgilio Melchiorre (Genova: Il Melangolo, 2005), 305–26.

²⁹ Andrea Scaramuccia, 'The Italian Reception of Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers', *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, no. July (2003), 367. Fabro worked from the second edition of Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker* (eds. Drachmann, Heiberg, & Lange: 1920–1936), which contained a glossary and index. Fabro also used the 1869 Reitzel, as well as Thulstrup's 1968 edition of *Papier*, see Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 163.

³⁰ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 83.

³¹ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*.

³² For Fabro's own account, see Fabro, 'Kierkegaard in Italia', 89.

Contrary to the fragmentary presentation of Kierkegaard by Italian existentialists like Nicola Abbagnano, Enzo Paci, and Enrico Castelli, Fabro discovered that Kierkegaard had in fact ‘an original speculative genius and a profound religious consciousness’ that fuelled ‘the persuasive force of [Kierkegaard’s] critique of the Hegelian dialectic’.³³ In Fabro’s view, this insight was often overlooked because of the state of European Kierkegaard studies, which was partly indebted to Jean Wahl’s *Etudes Kierkegaardiennes* (1938). Fabro comments that:

[Wahl] hastily portrayed speculative problems and presented superficial approximations of theological themes primarily based upon German translations. Kierkegaard’s blazing success in all of Europe, in the first half of this century was largely based upon this equivocation.³⁴

It was Fabro’s newfound commitment to reading Kierkegaard in Danish, and to recovering a more theological reading of Kierkegaard that enabled him ‘more than anything else, to endure the enormous hardship of the war’.³⁵ But most of all, it was his

friendship with Prof. [Erik] Peterson that matured during the war, which was the decisive stimulus for knowing the authentic Kierkegaard as theologian and philosopher, essayist and polemicist. It was [Peterson] that recommended to me the itinerary of *Papirer* as the first and only hermeneutical guide, which made me read in the German translation the celebrated essayist, writer and theologian Theodor Haecker, his personal friend who also, like him, was received into Catholicism under the decisive influence of the great Dane.³⁶

Through such a connection to both Erik Peterson and Theodor Haecker, Fabro came closer to the circle of influential friendships connected to *ressourcement* figures like Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Joseph Ratzinger. Importantly, Fabro saw himself as inheriting the earlier Kierkegaardian Catholic tradition of Theodor Haecker, Erik Przywara, Romano Guardini, and Erik Peterson.³⁷ It is a tradition that Fabro says:

³³ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 83.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁶ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*.

³⁷ Fabro has in mind the translations and essays of Theodor Haecker, Erik Przywara’s essay comparing Newman and Kierkegaard (1948), Erik Peterson’s essay on Existentialism and Protestant Theology (1947), and Romano Guardini’s essay on

vigorously stimulated the German soil for a renewal in Catholic thought from a Kierkegaardian perspective but . . . after the war, the influence of Kierkegaard on Catholic theology was suffocated by the invasion of the anti-metaphysical ontology . . . [of] Heidegger, [by] more boisterous [*chiassoso*] and influential representatives like Karl Rahner.³⁸

Hence, Fabro emphatically states that his ‘encounter with Kierkegaard has been no less decisive than that of St. Thomas’.³⁹ Fabro goes on to say that:

just as the metaphysics of Thomas forever liberated me from the formalism and emptiness of scholastic controversies, so Kierkegaard’s Christian existentialism liberated me from an inferiority complex toward thought; or to be more precise, toward the babble of the continuous stream of systems in modern and contemporary philosophy, revealing to me their anti-human and anti-Christian background.⁴⁰

Fabro is drawn to Kierkegaard’s work because ‘it is realist, without falling into dogmatism; it is dialectical, without falling into scepticism; it is phenomenological with an exceptional intuition, without

the origin of Kierkegaard’s thought (1927). For more, see Theodor Haecker and Alexander Dru, *Søren Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 33, 39, 58. Haecker and Bruyn, *Kierkegaard the Cripple* (London: Harvill Press, 1948), 20. Haecker, *Journal in the Night* (London: Harvill Press, 1950), 140, 170–1. See also, Dru, ‘Haecker’s Point of View’, *Downside Review* 67, no. 209 (1949), 267. Dru, ‘On Haecker’s *Metaphysik des Gefühls*’, *Downside Review* 68, no. 211 (1949), 39–41. For more on the importance of Haecker and Dru, see Heywood-Thomas and Siefken, ‘Theodor Haecker and Alexander Dru: A Contribution to the Discovery of Kierkegaard in Britain,’ *Kierkegaardiana* 18 (1996) Pattison, ‘Great Britain: From “Prophet of the Now” To Postmodern Ironist (and after)’, in J. Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard’s International Reception*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 250.

³⁸ Cornelio Fabro, *Soren Kierkegaard: Opere* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972c), lxi. Fabro’s first problem with Rahner is that he characterizes the metaphysics of St Thomas as a ‘metaphysics of cognition’ in the Kantian vein of Joseph Maréchal, which ultimately extracts Thomas from his historical situation. Fabro’s second problem with Rahner is his attempt to update this Kantian characterization of Thomas with the idiom of Martin Heidegger so as to conflate the *actus essendi* with the ‘presence of consciousness’ of *Dasein*, resulting in an idealism which equates being and thinking. For more, see Cornelio Fabro, *La Svolta Antropologica di Karl Rahner [1974]*, vol. 25 (Roma: EDIVI, 2011). See also, Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 13–48. Similar to Fabro’s review in the same year, compare Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘Review of Karl Rahner’s *Geist im Welt*’, *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 63 (1939), 371–9. Cf. Rowan Williams and Mike Highton, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 92–3.

³⁹ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 85.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* For more on scholastic controversies, see Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, ch. 4.

falling into nihilism'.⁴¹ Fabro attributes these desirable aspects to the fact that Kierkegaard sat at the feet of the Greeks and sees Kierkegaard as explicitly 'reclaiming the classic realism' of Plato and Aristotle.⁴² It is for this reason that Fabro detects a conceptual affinity between Kierkegaard and Thomas.⁴³ Thus, Fabro claims that Kierkegaard's writings rise 'above the arid confines of the Reformation' and offer:

to the Catholic theologian precious resources for the preparation of a phenomenology of theological problems, in particular those related to faith: it could therefore lead to a renewal of traditional theology and offer to the modern person an integral theology *cordis et mentis*.⁴⁴

Fabro writes during a time when the emergence of existentialist thought in Italy carried on despite Pope Pio X's previous condemnation of modernism in *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907). But Fabro seeks to uphold the fundamental principles of Thomism as well as engage the pressing issues of contemporary modernity in dialogue between these two worlds.

5.3. A BRIDGE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

The difference that Fabro's reading of Thomas makes can be seen in his article entitled, 'The Absolute in Thomism and Existentialism' (1951), where he builds a bridge between Pope Leo XIII's world and that of the demands of the modern world. Fabro identifies a tension in Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), which he sees as an extension of the Leonine project that attempts to balance on the one hand,

the search for the evidence of each and every object through all possible routes that autonomous human consciousness has at its disposal; and on the other hand, the foundations of faith which transcend the

⁴¹ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 86.

⁴² *Ibid.* For a more recent argument along these lines, see Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, chs. 2 & 6.

⁴³ For more, see Fabro, 'Kierkegaard e San Tommaso', 292–308. See also, Cornelio Fabro, 'L'Esistenzialismo Kierkegaardiano', in *Storia della Filosofia Vol. 2*, ed. Cornelio Fabro (Roma: Colletti, 1959a), 839–67.

⁴⁴ Cornelio Fabro, *S. Kierkegaard Diario (3rd Ed.)*, vol. 1 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1980b), 130. As cited in Scaramuccia, 'The Italian Reception', 367.

particular conditions of a given cultural epoch and place humanity before the meaning and goal of its destiny on earth in the plan of divine Providence.⁴⁵

Now, Fabro rightly says that this conflicted requirement indicates a path for theologians and philosophers to follow without specifying *how* to concretely fulfil such a task once for all. The warnings against philosophy in this encyclical ironically reminds Fabro of the first half of the 13th century when it was prohibited to read Aristotle. Yet Fabro argues that it was precisely *through* the beneficial use of philosophy in theology that the Church preserved 'the most substantial interpretation of Being that Greek civilization had obtained, and enabled the faith to amplify the horizon of human universality'.⁴⁶

Aware of the new errors that could potentially arise from a devout Catholic scholar's attempt to empirically justify the foundations of faith, Fabro attempts to clarify what encyclicals like *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907) and *Humani Generis* (1950) precisely condemn. Fabro says that the claim to universal progress as articulated in communism, dialectical materialism, and atheism is at odds with the Catholic faith. Fabro also resists the fact that the theological notion of the soul also falls from view in modern anthropological accounts. From Fabro's perspective, these papal encyclicals invite Catholic scholars to engage seriously with modern thought to discern its contemporary significance and value.⁴⁷

Now, Fabro sees his own work as attempting to make good on such a legacy by determining the precise significance of existentialism, and studying the relationship between existentialism and Thomism. Fabro says that the contemporary Catholic scholar 'can no longer remain indifferent to these two issues by dismissing them with general affirmations because contemporary philosophy has a structure of its own which includes, but is not reducible to any familiar schema of subjectivism, rationalism, or irrationalism'.⁴⁸ After treating various concepts in the existential thought of Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger,⁴⁹ Fabro presents Kierkegaard to the

⁴⁵ Cornelio Fabro, 'L'Assoluto nel Tomismo e nell'Esistenzialismo', *Salesianum* 13 (1951), 185.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Fabro says of these prominent figures of the *Kierkegaard-Renaissance* that they all offer disconcerting treatments of Kierkegaard and they have 'betrayed

reader as a prime candidate for building a bridge between continental philosophy and Catholic theology. Fabro notes how these thinkers are indebted to Kierkegaard, and yet all of them suppress the theological import of his work in order to carry out their own projects.

By seeking a better understanding of the contemporary significance of Thomas' notion of participation, Fabro says that the Thomas who emerges 'does not yield to the prior Scholastic temptation of Platonizing Christianity', nor does he fall prey to the contemporary temptation 'of the Aristotelian Averroists who separate reason and faith', rather Thomas 'radicalises the notion of being (*esse, actus essendi*) in culmination with action'.⁵⁰ The upshot of Fabro's work is that Thomas' grammatical enquiry finally becomes detached from 'the rationalistic tradition delivered in the traditional Scholastic manuals (Roselli, Zigliara, Remer, Gredt) and from addressing historical, sociological, and apologetic concerns (Gilson, Maritain, Olgiati)'.⁵¹ Instead, the Thomas who emerges from Fabro's work is one who 'draws upon the culture of his time and signals its movements, but above all who commits himself to the generative inspiration of the Greek, Roman, and Patristic sources to reach a way of thinking that is released from unilateral qualms and capable of universal openness'.⁵²

Fabro portrays the trajectory of his life's work as recovering Thomistic metaphysics in light of the crisis of modern atheism and the theological import of Kierkegaard's writings. Kierkegaard's writings helped Fabro to distinguish his version of Thomism from 'the Greek-Scholastic tradition' by emphasizing the distinctive aspects of the theological anthropology of St Thomas—especially 'the real distinction in creatures between essence and the act of being [*atto di essere*]', and how Thomas rejects 'the extrinsicist conception of *esse* as "*accidens additum*" (which Avicenna endorsed)' or how St Thomas 'moves

Kierkegaard's message by turning its meaning and scope on its head in a way that feeds into the old things that Kierkegaard was wanting to refute, indeed had refuted'. Fabro says that instead of Kierkegaard, 'Sartre opted for Descartes', 'Heidegger opted for Kant-Hölderlin-Hegel-Nietzsche', 'Jaspers opted for Kant-Hegel-Nietzsche-Weber', and 'Karl Barth opted for the Reformed tradition'. See, Fabro, *Soren Kierkegaard: Opere*, liv–lv.

⁵⁰ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 130.

⁵¹ Ibid. For more, see Andrea Robiglio, 'Phénoménologie et Ontologie: Cornelio Fabro et l'Université de Louvain', *Revue Thomiste* 111, no. 3 (2011), 405–36. See also, Andrea Robiglio, 'Gilson e Fabro: Appunti per un Confronto', *Divus Thomas* 17, no. 2 (1997), 59–76.

⁵² Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 130.

away from Avicenna when he attributes (with Averroes) a form of *necesse esse*, dependent upon God, for spiritual creatures'.⁵³ Kierkegaard's writings also helped Fabro to distinguish his version of Thomism from 'the modern subjectivism of immanence that makes consciousness the origin of "being" and universalizes the essence of freedom'. Fabro's Thomism benefited from Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the real presence of the world, which 'gives itself to consciousness in the reality of nature as *object* to be verified as either true or false, and gives itself in the responsibility of the concrete person as *subject* to be judged as either right or wrong'. Finally, Fabro's Thomism benefitted from Kierkegaard's writings to resist 'the ethical empiricism of left-wing existentialism (and Marxism) that reduces humanity to an historical fact'. In short, Kierkegaard's writings helped Fabro's Thomism to posture itself toward 'understanding existentialism in terms of the emergence of the single existing individual as a person before God and before Christ, so that the responsibility of acting recalls the responsibility of thinking and one flows from the other through the "leap" of the decision'.⁵⁴ Fabro identifies three aspects of Kierkegaard's writings that would be attractive and beneficial to contemporary students of Thomas: i) a critique of idealism that defends the principle of non-contradiction, which comes close to defending an Aristotelian notion of 'essence'; ii) an ethical defence of individual human freedom which is available to all; and iii) a critique of the religious compromise of the Enlightenment and liberal Protestant theology.⁵⁵ For Fabro, these desirable aspects stem from Kierkegaard's notion of the act of existing 'before God', which undergirds Kierkegaard's 'positive dialectic of the finite and infinite, time and eternity, freedom and grace, God and the individual'.⁵⁶

⁵³ Cornelio Fabro, *Breve Introduzione al Tomismo* (Roma: Editori Pontifici, 1960), 15.

⁵⁴ Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti di un Itinerario*, 91–2. For more, see Ariberto Acerbi, 'Note e Discussioni—Un Inedito di Cornelio Fabro sulla Libertà', *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 99, no. 3 (2007), 509–16. Ariberto Acerbi and Luis Romera, 'La Antropologia de Cornelio Fabro', *Anuario Filosófico* 39, no. 1 (2006), 101–31. See also, Ariberto Acerbi, *La Libertà in Cornelio Fabro* (Roma: Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, 2005). For more, see Cornelio Fabro and Ariberto Acerbi, *L'io e l'Esistenza e Altri Brevi Scritti* (Roma: Università della Santa Croce, 2006), 177–98.

⁵⁵ Fabro, 'L'Assoluto nel Tomismo', 196.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* For these reasons, Fabro says that it is not just beneficial to read Thomas closely with Kierkegaard, but also Augustine; see Cornelio Fabro, 'Sant'Agostino e

On Fabro's reading of Thomas, 'being can never be fully resolved in concepts and there is not an exhaustive concept of being'.⁵⁷ Fabro distinguishes Thomas from Heidegger⁵⁸ when Fabro argues that for Thomas 'human freedom finds itself on reason but does not derive from it', and that for both Kierkegaard and Thomas 'the act of faith is the supreme accomplishment of human freedom which gives itself to God, inserting time into eternity'. In short, what Fabro's Thomism learns from Kierkegaard is a metaphysical sense of the act of human existing, which preserves rather than threatens human freedom. Stated positively, Fabro incorporates Kierkegaard's understanding of human existence before God to illuminate his earlier insight about Thomas' picture of participation of creature in Creator, which David Burrell has described as a sharing in 'God's creative activity, so that the creature itself *is* a relation'.⁵⁹ This view coheres with Guido Mazzotta's observation that for Fabro 'the participated *esse* of the entity [*ens*] radically distinguishes itself from an essence, which is altogether limited'; alternately, Fabro argues that 'only the participated *esse* of the *ens* is able to transcendently relate the finite and infinite'.⁶⁰

l'Esistenzialismo', in *Sant'Agostino e le Grandi Correnti della Filosofia Contemporanea (Atti del Congresso Italiano di Filosofia Agostiniana, Roma 20-23 Ottobre 1954)*, ed. Ed. (Roma: Edizioni Agostiniane, 1956), 141-69.

⁵⁷ Fabro, 'L'Assoluto nel Tomismo', n 45, 198.

⁵⁸ The earliest that Fabro engages with Heidegger is in a book review of *De l'Essence de la Vérité*, in *Divus Thomas*, LII, Piacenza 1949, p. 105-6. For more on Fabro's engagement with Heidegger, see Cornelio Fabro, 'L'Essere e l'Esistente nell'Ultimo Heidegger', *Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana* 38 (1959b), 240-58. Cornelio Fabro, 'Il Ritorno al Fondamento: Contributo per un Confronto fra l'Ontologia di Heidegger e la Metafisica di S. Tommaso d'Aquino,' *Sapienza* 26 (1973a), 267-78. Cornelio Fabro, 'L'Interpretazione dell'Atto in S. Tommaso e Heidegger', in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo Settimo Centenario*, ed. A. Piolanti (Napoli: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975), 505-17. Cornelio Fabro, 'L'Angoscia Esistenziale come Tensione di Essere-Nulla, Uomo-Mondo nella Prospettiva di Heidegger e Kierkegaard', *Psichiatria e Territorio* 4, no. 1 (1987 [1980]), 9-24. See also, Tito Di Stefano, 'Cornelio Fabro Interprete di M. Heidegger', in *Cornelio Fabro: Ricordi e Testimonianze*, ed. Giuseppe Mario Pizzuti (Potenza: Ermes, 1996), 25-8.

⁵⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge, 1979), 138.

⁶⁰ Guido Mazzotta, 'Cornelio Fabro e l'Università Urbaniana', *Euntes Docete* 48, no. 3 (1995), 322. In his own words, Fabro says that the 'ontological distinction' is not 'the distinction between possibility and actuality, but rather *essentia* and *esse* as power and action [*potenza e atto*]', such that for Fabro '*esse* is not *existentia*, but the profoundly intimate action of every existent reality, *esse* is pure action in God and participated in creatures' so that 'every creature is given the real composition of

In this way, Fabro's Thomism gains a deepened sense of the metaphysical structure of the finite that exists through time, such that theology does not reduce itself to accumulating proofs that demonstrate either the rationality of the act of faith, or the supernatural transcendence of that same act of faith.⁶¹ Fabro emphasizes that 'the "overcoming of metaphysics" does not put metaphysics completely aside'.⁶² Hence, Fabro claims that 'the theological shape of ontology does not rest upon the fact that Greek metaphysics has been assumed by the ecclesiastical theology of Christianity and elaborated from this', but rather it 'rests upon the way in which it has, from the beginning, uncovered the *ens* as *ens*'.⁶³ The Kierkegaardian insight here has been recently stated succinctly by George Pattison:

Kierkegaard never denies that human beings *are* creatures, but he does not define this creatureliness in terms of some ontological essence: the human being is not an individual substance of a rational essence but a being in dynamic and temporally charged ecstatic and open dependence on God and this dependence first becomes actual in the individual's concern for the good. It is neither solely nor primarily in terms of our ontological status but in terms of our hyper-ontological freedom . . . that we become *capax dei*, open to the possibility of the God-relationship.⁶⁴

Although Pattison relates this Kierkegaardian stance to Rahner, it is actually Fabro that fleshes this position out more explicitly. In the first half of this chapter, I have situated Fabro in his historical context by showing how he confronted the impoverished state of both Thomistic and Kierkegaard studies in Europe. I have indicated that the distinctive contribution of Fabro's re-discovery of both Thomas and Kierkegaard allowed him to confront his own intellectual targets.⁶⁵ Specifically, I highlighted how Fabro emphasized the religious instances of Kierkegaard's thought,⁶⁶ and how Kierkegaard provided Fabro with a positive alternative to materialist notions of history in

essence and *esse*', because 'whether infinite or finite, *esse* is always and only action: the infinite is *esse per essenza* and the finite is and has *esse per partecipazione*', in Fabro, *Dall'Essere all'Esistente* (Brescia: Morcelliana, [1st ed. 1957] ed, 1965), 419–21.

⁶¹ Fabro, 'L'Assoluto nel Tomismo', 198–9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁶⁴ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century: The Paradox and the 'Point of Contact'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 100.

⁶⁵ Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 227–33.

⁶⁶ Cornelio Fabro, 'Influssi Cattolici sulla Spiritualità Kierkegaardiana', *Humanitas* 17 (1962), 501–7.

Marxism.⁶⁷ Also, Fabro disassociated Kierkegaard's theological and philosophical positions from Hegel,⁶⁸ and combined Kierkegaard's thought with Aristotelian realism.⁶⁹ In this way, we can begin to see how Fabro incorporated some of Kierkegaard's insights in his version of Thomism. But what is it about Kierkegaard's writings that lends itself to such appropriation?

In the first part of this chapter, I focused on how Fabro brings both Thomas and Kierkegaard together, making a genuine contribution to Thomism in the twentieth century. In this second part, I want to turn the question around by exploring what aspects Fabro sees in Kierkegaard's writings that reveal a distinctive Catholic sensibility. Instead of speculating about Kierkegaard *himself*, Fabro interrogates a Catholic sensibility in Kierkegaard's *writings*.⁷⁰ To support this claim, I will spend the rest of this chapter looking at three brief examples of Fabro's emphasis on Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, Mariology, and ecclesiology.

5.4. KIERKEGAARD'S MARIOLOGY

In this section, I will show how Fabro draws upon Kierkegaard's high regard for Mary to illustrate his account of the relation of human and

⁶⁷ Fabro, *Tra Kierkegaard e Marx: per una Definizione dell'Esistenza*, ed. C. Ferraro (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1952).

⁶⁸ C. Fabro and C. Ferraro, *La Prima Riforma della Dialettica Hegeliana* (Roma: Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2004).

⁶⁹ Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 227. For more on the influence of Aristotle on Kierkegaard, see Fabro, 'La "Pistis" Aristotelica nell'Opera di Soren Kierkegaard', *Proteus: Rivista di Filosofia* 5, no. 13 (1974), 3–24. Cornelio Fabro, 'Actuality. Reality', in *Concepts and Alternatives in Kierkegaard (Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana, 3)* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1980a), 111–13. See also, Fabro's extended analysis 'Aristotle and Aristotelianism', in Thulstrup and Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions [Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana 6]* (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1981), 27–53. For a comparison of Thomas and Kierkegaard on infused virtues, see Mark A. Tietjen's essay, in Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Christian Discourses and the Cisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, vol. 17 (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 165–90.

⁷⁰ Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard e il Cattolicesimo', *Divus Thomas* 19, no. 1 (1956), 67–70. See also, Fabro's comment in Johnson and Thulstrup, *A Kierkegaard Critique: An International Selection of Essays Interpreting Kierkegaard*, 193: 'I have no intention of trying to make a Catholic, much less an unconscious Thomist, out of Kierkegaard'.

divine freedom. In this way, Fabro attempts to make Kierkegaard more palatable to Catholic readers. Indeed, for Fabro:

Freedom is the basis for truth, and in this, in the choice and decision of one's own purpose [*proprio scopo*] and in the qualification of one's own being [*proprio essere*], there is no difference between human freedom and that of God. For this reason, in the annunciation to Mary, God waited to hear her response . . . But Mary also waited to respond, in order to respond as she should with the freedom that is ordered toward the good . . . Since freedom is, and can only be, the primordial origin by which the infinite issues itself in living and knowing, it is the inexhaustible source that nourishes the disquiet and unquenchable yearning of love and it is the extreme longing, by which freedom identifies itself, the arrival far beyond the river of time.⁷¹

Here Fabro latches onto human freedom, which is one of the key themes in Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, and connects it with the human desire for the good.⁷² Significantly, Fabro illustrates this point with the first disciple of Jesus: Mary, his mother. For Fabro, this is not a passing illustration that grafts a Catholic sensibility onto Kierkegaard's writings. On the contrary, Fabro draws this illustration from *Kierkegaard*. For those who read Kierkegaard through Karl Barth, it may be alarming that a 'hyper-protestant' like Kierkegaard would have anything good to say about the veneration of the Virgin Mary.⁷³

Tucked away in the appendix of Walter Lowrie's translation of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, Lowrie observes that 'It would be interesting and edifying to make an anthology of the passages in which Søren Kierkegaard speaks of the Blessed Virgin', because, Lowrie continues, 'surely no Protestant was ever so much engrossed in this theme, and perhaps no Catholic has appreciated more profoundly the unique position of Mary'.⁷⁴ Now, much has been written on Kierkegaard's theology of the Incarnation,⁷⁵ but Fabro's scholarship directly responds to Lowrie's clarion call for Italian Catholics to reinvigorate

⁷¹ Fabro and Acerbi, *L'Io e l'Esistenza*, 198.

⁷² For more, see C. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla Libertà* (Roma: Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2004), chs. 6–8.

⁷³ Cf. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, 153–7.

⁷⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: the Book on Adler*, trans. Walter Lowrie, *Everyman's Library* (London: Random House Publishing, 1994), 288. n. 50.

⁷⁵ For instance, see Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*. See also, Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation: By Faith Transformed* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Cornelio Fabro, 'Cristologia Kierkegaardiana', *Divinitas* 16, no. 1 (1972a).

the Catholic world with Kierkegaard's thought.⁷⁶ So, the distinctive theological feature that Fabro identifies in his reading of Kierkegaard is not just the Incarnation, but also the Annunciation. Fabro says that the Gospel writer portrays the Virgin Mary as receiving 'a request from Above that was both a consensus but also a supreme risk of freedom for both of them, as the Christian tradition has clearly seen, and which has found a profound echo again in Kierkegaard', whom Fabro calls, 'the poet and theologian of the Annunciation'.⁷⁷ For Fabro, Kierkegaard writes in the stance of *expectancy*, which, after Mary's 'Yes', becomes a constitutive feature of Christian discipleship.⁷⁸ Fabro's observation here is valid today in Kierkegaard studies, as the prominent place of Mary continues to be overlooked.⁷⁹

In response to Lowrie's request, Fabro catalogues how Kierkegaard constantly refers to Mary in his *Journals* as 'full of Grace', 'the pure Virgin', the 'faithful Virgin', the 'Madonna', and the 'Mother of God'.⁸⁰ Yet it is not just the use of the Catholic titles that Fabro is interested in, but rather Fabro observes how Kierkegaard focuses on the 'existential situation' of 'the divine maternity of Mary'.⁸¹ For instance, in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's fictive author, Johannes de Silentio, contrasts the distinctive faith of Abraham and Mary.⁸²

'Who was as great in the world as that favoured woman, the mother of God, the Virgin Mary? . . . To be sure, Mary bore the child wondrously, but she nevertheless did it "after the manner of women" [Gen 18:11 KJV],

⁷⁶ See Walter Lowrie, 'Søren Kierkegaard', *Religio* XI (1935), 1–15.

⁷⁷ Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla Libertà*, 11. For more, see Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard Poeta-Teologo dell'Annunciazione', *Humanitas* III (1948), 1025–34.

⁷⁸ For more, see Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard e la Madonna', *Mater Ecclesiae* 7, no. 3 (1971), 132–44. For a more recent Catholic Feminist perspective corroborating this point, see Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate: A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation* (London: Continuum, 2002).

⁷⁹ For instance, Wanda Berry's essay on 'The Silent Woman' in Kierkegaard overlooks Fabro's theological point, see Céline León and Sylvia Walsh, *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 287–306.

⁸⁰ See *Pap.* I A 68, 172, 190, 232; II A 31, 68; VIII A 338; X² A 64; X³ A 57; X⁴ A 454, 521, 572; XI¹ A 40, 45, 141, 184; IX A 12/SKS AA:6, 22; *Papir* 150, 258:8, 78; NB 2:216; NB 5:11; NB 12:194; NB 18:14; NB 25:30, 92; NB 26:25; NB 28:94, 99; NB 29:92; NB 30:14. See also, Fabro, 'Spunti Cattolici nel Pensiero Religioso di Søren Kierkegaard', *Doctor Communis* 26, no. 4 (1973b), 269–70.

⁸¹ Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard, Poeta-Teologo dell'Annunciazione', as cited in: <<http://www.corneliofabro.org/documento.asp?ID=552>> (accessed 23 May 2015).

⁸² Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Fear and Trembling: Repetition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 58, 64–5. Henceforth, FT.

and such a time is one of anxiety, distress, and paradox. The angel was indeed a ministering spirit, but he was not a meddling spirit who went to other young maidens in Israel and said: Do not scorn Mary, the extraordinary is happening to her. The angel went only to Mary, and no one could understand her . . . When, despite this, she said: Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord—then she is great, and I believe it should not be difficult to explain why she became the mother of God. She needs worldly admiration as little as Abraham needs tears, for she was no heroine and he was no hero, but both of them became greater than these, not by being exempted in any way from the distress and the agony and the paradox, but became greater by means of these.' (FT 64–65)

Commenting on de Silentio's comparison between the existential situation of the maternal faith of Abraham and Mary, Stephen Mulhall wonders whether Abraham's

title 'father of faith' has a less honorific and more productive (or rather, reproductive) sense—that to call him a father of faith means not so much that he is exemplary of faith as that true faith is something that he fathered, something represented not so much in him as in his offspring (both immediate and ultimate)?⁸³

Later, Mulhall says that the upshot of de Silentio's comparison is that Abraham's 'fatherhood is dependent upon another's acceptance of motherhood', which confirms Kierkegaard's earlier point in the book that 'the maturity of faith is reached in identification with femaleness rather than maleness'.⁸⁴ It is interesting that St Thomas Aquinas also reaches for the figure of Isaac when he talks about hope as being *born* by faith.⁸⁵

Now, Fabro is alive to this theological point and says that by holding Mount Moriah and the Annunciation together, Kierkegaard presents his reader with 'two decisive points in the story of humanity that indicate the extreme limit of dedication to which the creature, supported by Grace, may never traverse'.⁸⁶ Fabro concludes that for Kierkegaard, Mary is

the 'prototype' of the 'Extraordinary', and her *fiat*, which the same God awaits for the fulfilment of the Incarnation and salvation of humanity, is

⁸³ Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 375.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 377. ⁸⁵ ST II-II q. 17 a. 7 obj 3.

⁸⁶ Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard, Poeta-Teologo dell'Annunciazione', *Humanitas* III (1948), 1025–34 (1028).

a completely voluntary and free *fiat* in the acceptance of divine maternity, that makes Mary the model for every Christian in the acceptance of the divine will. With this, Kierkegaard renounces and denounces the central nucleus of the Protestant theology of grace and accepts, perhaps inadvertently, the essence of the Catholic doctrine of the imitation of Christ.⁸⁷

Fabro's point here is borne out in a passage in Kierkegaard's *Book on Adler*:

Let us mention the highest instance, from which we believers ought to learn. When the angel had announced to Mary that by the Spirit she should give birth to a child—no, this whole thing was a miracle, why then did this child need nine months like other children? O what a test for faith and humility! That this is the divine will, to need the slowness of time! Behold, this was the cross. But Mary was the humble believer; by faith and humility she came to herself, although everything was miraculous. She remained the same quiet, humble woman—she believed.⁸⁸

And again, Fabro points to Kierkegaard's emphasis upon Mary as the one who *enables* the believer to hear the Word of God, which read in a Lutheran context seems odd:

That a woman is presented as a teacher, as a prototype of piety, cannot amaze anyone who knows that piety or godliness is fundamentally womanliness. . . . From a woman, therefore, you also learn the humble faith in relation to the extraordinary, the humble faith that does not incredulously, doubtfully ask, 'Why? What for? How is this possible?'—but as Mary humbly believes and says, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord' [Lk 1:38]. She *says* this, but note that to say this is actually to be silent. From a woman you learn the proper hearing of the Word, from Mary, who although she 'did not understand the words that were spoken' yet 'kept them in her heart' [Lk 2:19]. Thus she did not first demand to understand, but silent she hid the word in the right place, since it is, of course, the right place when the Word, the good seed, 'is kept in a devout and beautiful heart' [Lk 8:15]. From a woman you learn the quiet, deep, God-fearing sorrow that is silent before God, from Mary; it indeed happened, as was prophesied, that a sword did pierce her heart [Lk 2:35], but she did not despair—either over the prophesy or when it was fulfilled.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid. ⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling; the Book on Adler*, 154.

⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, ed. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 149. See also, PF 34; CUP 260.

It is important that in Kierkegaard's works, both Mary and Abraham here, and Adam—in *The Concept of Anxiety*⁹⁰—do not understand the words spoken to them, but must act in faith; surrendering, rather than demanding understanding in advance. Kierkegaard's emphasis upon silence is often misunderstood, and it is important to be clear that by silence he implies non-communication rather than unintelligibility. Jamie Ferreira says that Abraham's faith is 'not found in a negative distancing from actuality, from the finite world. Faith is not a matter of other-worldliness; it is not acosmic, but rather receives the world back again once one has been willing to give it up'.⁹¹ Moreover, as Stephen Mulhall says, for Kierkegaard:

faith's ability to establish and maintain itself in human existence does depend upon its capacity to make itself manifest in discourse—in sacred texts, in rituals, in communal memory . . . [which is] like a maternal function, a matter of incarnating the father's spirit or better nature in words (incarnating the Word?). In this sense, there can be no ultimate discontinuity or alienation between faith and language, and so no essential hiddenness in Abraham.⁹²

It is this aspect of the interaction of human and divine freedom that Fabro draws upon in Kierkegaard's work in order to illuminate Thomas: because in both Thomas and Kierkegaard, 'the *freedom of acting* is the moment of *decision towards the Absolute and for the Absolute*'.⁹³ On the face of it, faith is indistinguishable from Socratic ignorance.⁹⁴ And it is precisely this concrete example of humility that Kierkegaard is after in his attempt to help his readers understand what it means to imitate Christ. Kierkegaard knows that his reader needs such concrete examples, and this is why he turns to, not only Mary, but also to the saints for moral guidance on how to lead one's own life as a Christian.

⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, Thomte, and Anderson, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 44.

⁹¹ Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, Blackwell Great Minds (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 54. For more, see M. Jamie Ferreira, 'The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox and Religion', *Religious Studies* 30, no. 1 (1994b), 29–44. See also, M. Jamie Ferreira, 'Describing What You Cannot Understand: Another Look at *Fear and Trembling*', *Kierkegaardiana* 24 (2007), 86–101.

⁹² Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, 376.

⁹³ Cornelio Fabro, 'La Liberta' in Hegel e Tommaso d'Aquino,' *Sacra Doctrina* 17 (1972b), 182.

⁹⁴ Cf. Plato, *Apology* 20e–21a.

Fabro says that he is drawn to the ‘Socrates of the North’ because Kierkegaard’s own library betrayed the fact that he ‘was nourished by reading Fathers of the Church’ and beyond, such as the writings of St Athanasius, Johannes Tauler, St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, St Teresa, St Alphonsus Rodriguez, and the oratory of Abraham a Sancta Clara.⁹⁵ For Fabro, Kierkegaard’s critique of modern philosophy is iconoclastic since these philosophers want ‘to preserve a god that is no longer God’, and in turn, Fabro says that Kierkegaard’s critique of a modern theology follows in the same vein because of its tendency ‘to preserve a Christianity which is not really Christianity but something more secular, something that is no longer for human beings the Absolute of existence’.⁹⁶ Kierkegaard’s critique of modern philosophy and theology led Fabro to compare Kierkegaard’s writings with those of John Henry Newman. The British historian Bernard Reardon says that Newman is ‘the outstanding religious figure of his century, with the sole exception of Kierkegaard, a man of whom he himself had probably never heard’.⁹⁷ To see how and why Fabro held these seemingly disparate figures together, we must now turn to the ecclesiology of Newman and Kierkegaard.

5.5. THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF NEWMAN AND KIERKEGAARD

After the Second Vatican Council, Fabro saw some of his fellow theologians (like Hans Küng and Karl Rahner) falling prey to a non-explicit faith that Fabro understood as inadvertently endorsing

⁹⁵ Cornelio Fabro, ‘Critica di Kierkegaard all’Ottocento’, *Atti del XV Congresso nazionale di filosofia: Messina 24–29 settembre 1948. Crisi della civiltà. Ragione e irrazionalismo* (1949), 384–5. See also, Fabro, ‘Influssi Cattolici sulla Spiritualità Kierkegaardiana’, 504ff. Fabro, ‘Spunti Cattolici’, 251–80. For more on the influence of Catholic piety in Kierkegaard, see Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). See also the various essays by Christopher Barnett and Peter Šajda in Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions: Theology*, ed. Jon Stewart, vol. 5 Tome II, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

⁹⁶ Fabro, ‘Critica di Kierkegaard all’Ottocento’, 384–5.

⁹⁷ Bernard M. G. Reardon, *From Coleridge to Gore: A Century of Religious Thought in Britain* (Harlow: Longman, 1971), 127.

the dissolution of dogmatic faith and the elimination of the church.⁹⁸ In his 1976 article, 'The Problem of the Church in Newman and Kierkegaard', Fabro argues that the problem facing the Catholic Church is not a rejection of this or that particular dogma, but rather the overcoming of the need for faith itself.⁹⁹ Thus, Fabro draws on the shared commitments of Søren Kierkegaard and John Henry Newman in order to find the resources necessary to confront what he sees as the secularizing tendencies at work in post-conciliar Catholic theology.

However, comparing Newman and Kierkegaard may seem counter-intuitive, since Newman was eventually received into Roman Catholicism and Kierkegaard remained outside the Church as a critic. Yet, Fabro describes their resemblance in terms of their shared critique of the Established Church as perpetuating the process of secularization, which he sees extending into late-twentieth-century post-conciliar theology through the writings of Hegel and Heidegger. In doing so, Fabro seeks to recover Newman and Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the Church Militant—that is, the church that struggles against sin and the principalities and powers on earth, as opposed to the Church Triumphant in heaven. Although Fabro uses this medieval terminology to make sense of the ecclesiology of Newman and Kierkegaard, the term can be better understood by what *Lumen Gentium* describes as the 'pilgrim people of God'.¹⁰⁰

Now, Fabro characterizes Newman's response to secularization with Pascal's existential dilemma: either atheism or the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰¹ Moreover, Fabro says that for Newman, both the existence of God and the unity of the spiritual life are connected in an existential commitment.¹⁰² This is evident in the opening of Newman's book on the Church Fathers:

The Church is ever militant; sometimes she gains, sometimes she loses; and more often she is at once gaining and losing in different parts of her

⁹⁸ Cornelio Fabro, 'Il Problema della Chiesa in Newman e Kierkegaard', *Internazionale Cardinal Newman Studien* (1978), 132.

⁹⁹ Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 120.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html> (accessed 24 May 2015).

¹⁰¹ Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 123. Fabro refers to §547–549 of Pascal's *Pensées*.

¹⁰² Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard,' 125.

territory. What is ecclesiastical history but a record of the ever-doubtful fortune of the battle, though its issue is not doubtful? Scarcely are we singing *Te Deum*, when we have to turn to our *Misereres*: scarcely are we in peace, when we are in persecution: scarcely have we gained a triumph, when we are visited by a scandal. Nay, we make progress by means of reverses; our griefs are our consolations; we lose Stephen, to gain Paul, and Matthias replaces the traitor Judas.¹⁰³

Here Newman offers us an understanding of the Church militant as moonlit—sometimes in full view, other times not visible.¹⁰⁴ Newman wants to emphasize that this sporadic appearing represents failures to be what the Church claims to be in *this* world, which is always about anticipatory living out of what is already, but not fully yet. What Newman offers the contemporary church is a view of Christian existence in the modes of *appearing, showing, discerning, witnessing* to that which is real.¹⁰⁵ In support of this view, Fabro points to the back story of Newman's conversion in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*¹⁰⁶ and his letter to the Duke of Norfolk in defence of papal infallibility as two indications of Newman's ecclesiological commitment to remain *inside* the Church. Based on these texts, Fabro mentions three fundamental principles that Newman upheld: 1) The primacy of revelation and dogma against construing faith as weak reason or

¹⁰³ John Henry Newman, *The Church of the Fathers* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Lubac and Dunne, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery* (Shannon: Ecclesia Press, 1969), 16–17, 64 n. 140. See also, Joseph Ratzinger's comments on the image of Church as moon in Balthasar and Ratzinger, *Two Say Why* (London: Search Press, 1973), 76–9.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas J. Norris, 'Faith', in I. T. Ker and Terrence Merrigan, *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 75. See also, John Henry Newman, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1849), 207. Newman also says, 'A revelation is not given, if there be no authority to decide what it is that is given', in *Development*, 89.

¹⁰⁶ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. I. T. Ker, *Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 182–3. 'I am a Catholic by virtue of my believing in God, and if I am asked why I believe in God, I answer that it is because I believe in myself, for I find it impossible to believe in my own existence . . . without believing also in the existence of Him, who lives as a Personal, All-seeing, All-judging Being in my conscience . . . I believed in a God on a ground of probability, that I believed in Christianity on a probability, and that I believed in Catholicism on a probability, and that these three grounds of probability, distinct from each other of course in subject matter, were still all of them one and the same in nature of proof, as being probabilities—probabilities of a special kind, a cumulative, a transcendent probability but still probability'.

prejudice; 2) An emphasis on the Church Militant with its sacraments and rites as conduits of grace; 3) A critique of the Established Church through a *retrieval* of the faith of the Fathers.¹⁰⁷ For John Macquarrie, the parallel between Kierkegaard and Newman can best be seen in their writings on the problem of 'faith and reason and defending the autonomy of faith against the encroachments of those rationalists who claimed an omni-competence for reason'.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, Fabro portrays Kierkegaard's response to the elimination of the church as a dilemma between 'either the Church militant or paganism', which is not entirely unrelated to Fabro's portrayal of Newman's dilemma of 'either Roman Catholicism or atheism'.

However, George Pattison has recently framed the shared theological question between Kierkegaard (in *Philosophical Fragments*) and Newman (in *University Sermons*) as primarily 'Christological: how might human beings living under the sway of sin come to recognize and receive the revelation of a sinless human life in Christ?'. Only subsequently does their question become ecclesiological: 'how might that revelation be communicated to others by those who first received it?'.¹⁰⁹ To answer the ecclesiological question, both Kierkegaard and Newman point to the concrete moral example of the martyrs—the witnesses to the Truth—as the means of transmission.¹¹⁰ Yet, the answer to the Christological question is inferred from the ecclesiological problem for Newman, but for Kierkegaard, the original transmission of faith to the saints cannot be wholly self-evident, that is, 'derived from a purely empirical or *a posteriori* knowledge of the Church's history'. Pattison says that for Kierkegaard, 'the individual's relation to the revelation of God in Jesus

¹⁰⁷ Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 126–7.

¹⁰⁸ John Macquarrie, 'Newman and Kierkegaard on the Act of Faith', in *Newman and Conversion*, ed. Ian T. Ker (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 82.

¹⁰⁹ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 195. As Pattison rightly says, Kierkegaard argues that the claim of historical continuity between the contemporary and early church depends upon 'a decision as to what counts as relevant to faith and this decision is—epistemologically if not temporally—prior to any act of reading', in other words, the claim of historical continuity 'would itself need to be demonstrated historically, but this must rely on criteria that are essentially non-historical, that is, that concern the individual's own understanding of faith and what it requires of us' (193–4).

¹¹⁰ John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843*, ed. Mary Katherine Tillman, 3rd edn. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 91–2.

Christ must have a basis other than the mere fact of participation in the life of the Church'.¹¹¹

Now, this is not to say that Kierkegaard lacks or even shuns sacramental theology—a cursory reading of his *Communion Discourses* would dispel such a hasty conclusion. Rather, returning to Fabro's interpretation, Kierkegaard emphasizes the Church Militant, rather than the Church Triumphant. In other words, Kierkegaard anticipates the view stated in *Lumen Gentium*: 'the life of the Church is hidden with Christ in God until it appears in glory with its Spouse' (n. 49). It is this hiddenness of the church in Christ that prevents Kierkegaard from prematurely privileging Newman's claim of historical continuity. The theological upshot of Kierkegaard's epistemic humility is not to approach life in resentment, but gratitude. Or to say, with George Pattison, since 'there can be no inerrant historical transmission of Christianity that acquires its validity from anything other than the commitment of each individual Christian', then we must, 'receiv[e] our lives—as do the lilies and the birds—direct from God's hand as a good and perfect gift, a gift of love'.¹¹² Although some may construe this divergence between Newman and Kierkegaard as irreconcilable, Fabro attempts to show how it can be construed as a difference in emphasis.

In this light, Fabro observes that both Kierkegaard and Newman level their critique of Christendom from the standpoint of the Church Militant as described in the New Testament (for Kierkegaard) and tradition (for Newman).¹¹³ Rather, Fabro points to *Practice in Christianity*, where Kierkegaard's fictive author, Anti-Climacus, opposes the State to the Church to say that the Church Militant is not the Church Triumphant.¹¹⁴ Moreover, Kierkegaard says that since Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6), this implies that 'the truth

¹¹¹ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 197. Newman emphasizes the historical continuity of the primitive and contemporary church in terms of its tradition and liturgy, whereas from Kierkegaard's perspective, matters of faith—whether the infallibility of the Bible or Magisterium—cannot be decided upon historical grounds alone.

¹¹² Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 212.

¹¹³ For more on Newman's critique of Christendom and its influence on Vatican II, see I. T. Ker and Terrence Merrigan, *Newman and Faith*, *Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs 31* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2004), 117–42.

¹¹⁴ Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, *Practice in Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). 'Lord Jesus Christ, it is indeed from on high that you draw a person to yourself (Jn 12:32), and it is to victory that you call him, but this of course

does not naturally consist in knowing the truth, but in *being* the truth', which is not 'a product or result of history'.¹¹⁵ Pilate can claim full possession of historical continuity with Christ, even to physically *see* Christ but, despite that, he still fails to *directly recognize* the truth (PC 214). For Anti-Climacus, truth is not a *result* that is already achieved like the invention of gunpowder—with a predecessor who spends twenty years inventing it and a successor that spends much less time improving that invention. Rather for Anti-Climacus, truth is the *way*:

only the person who has travelled the way can triumphally celebrate; but he is no longer in this world, he is now on high, as Christ was indeed also the way when he ascended to heaven . . . [so] a Church triumphant in this world is an illusion, that in this world we can truthfully speak only of a militant Church. But the Church militant is related, feels itself drawn, to Christ in lowliness . . . [thus] a Church triumphant is always understood [as] a Church that wants to be the Church triumphant here in this world. (PC 209)

Anti-Climacus does not jettison the theological category of the Church Triumphant altogether, but rather places it in its proper context, saying 'a Church triumphant in eternity is entirely in order, corresponding to Christ's being raised on high' (PC 209). The problem for Anti-Climacus is that once it is established that truth is a result that has already been achieved, then i) faith becomes a mode of social morality, and ii) everyone is already a Christian by virtue of being human, hence the struggle is over and we can all carry on with the next novelty as a matter of course. Anti-Climacus' problem is that this triumphalistic attitude actually undermines Christianity in particular and religious faith in general: 'In the Church militant, it was piety to confess Christianity; in established Christendom, it is piety to conceal it' (PC 217).

Now Fabro detects here a 'a very precise Catholic demand for the Church' as described in the New Testament, which is that the Church

means that you call him to struggle and promise him victory in the struggle . . . Keep us from . . . delud[ing] ourselves into thinking ourselves to be members of a Church already triumphant here in this world. Your kingdom certainly is not here in the world; there is room for it only if it will struggle and by struggling make room for itself to exist. But if it will struggle, it will never be displaced by the world either; that you will guarantee' (PC 201).

¹¹⁵ Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 129. Cf. PC 205.

Militant empowers the single existing individual to imitate Christ in the world.¹¹⁶ Fabro also says that Kierkegaard's 'rupture with established Christendom' is not provoked by Kierkegaard's despair, but is rather an acute critical gesture that is bound up with his understanding of the Church Militant as the Church of the martyrs who bore witness to Christ.¹¹⁷ By comparing Newman and Kierkegaard, Fabro overturns one of the more prevalent misconceptions of Kierkegaard which has deterred Catholic theologians from serious engagement—that is, his negative view of the church.¹¹⁸ However, Fabro's claim is that both Newman and Kierkegaard are 'without a doubt prophetic thinkers for us today', and that they both offer a critique of Christendom that should be read in light of 'the continuity of thought and life between the contemporary Church and the ancient Church'.¹¹⁹ Although Fabro is not typically associated with the *ressourcement* movement in pre-conciliar theology, there is enough evidence to include Fabro in this renewal movement: indeed, furnishing the groundwork for some of its central insights.

5.6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Secular/radical theologians have often laid claim to extending Kierkegaard's work in pronouncing the death of God,¹²⁰ but this common misreading of Kierkegaard asserts that his critique of Christendom

¹¹⁶ Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 129–30.

¹¹⁷ Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 138. Cf. JP X3 A 415–16.

¹¹⁸ Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 120–39. Although Fabro is not mentioned in recent Kierkegaard scholarship, his insightful comparison has been corroborated, see Ferreira, 'Leaps and Circles: Kierkegaard and Newman on Faith and Reason', *Religious Studies* 30, no. 4 (1994), 379–97.

¹¹⁹ Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 133. In fact, as George Pattison has shown, although he was not technically a reformer himself, 'Kierkegaard's "attack on Christendom" would become central to twentieth-century theological debates about the nature of the Church and its relation to society and, especially, to modern society'; see Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 199.

¹²⁰ For a critique of secular theologians' appropriation of Kierkegaard, see Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 202–13. See also, George Pattison, 'From Kierkegaard to Cupitt: Subjectivity, the Body and Eternal Life', *The Heythrop Journal* 31, no. 3 (1990), 295–308.

implies an anti-ecclesiology.¹²¹ But Fabro seeks to describe this reading of Kierkegaard as a misunderstanding, and instead he offers the following alternative:

The Kierkegaardian principle simply says that in order to be a Christian, it is not enough to accept a creed from a church in which one is baptised as a member. To be saved, one needs to live in the every day reality of this faith because Christianity is not a doctrine but a communication of existence that must separate us from collusion with the aspirations of worldly gain: career, wealth, pleasure, prestige. It is this that constitutes *in concreto* the Imitation of Jesus Christ. Through this principle, the Church has its basis for Kierkegaard, and explains his polemic against the situation of the State Church.¹²²

Fabro reminds us that one cannot be a second generation Kierkegaardian because one cannot perform the critical abseil without depending upon the structure which one criticizes. Hence for all of his critical remarks, Kierkegaard *presupposes*, indeed *loves* the church. So, Kierkegaard's criticism of the church is best understood as finding fault with the church for not being what it really should be, and claims to be. By declaring this in terms of the church being absent, Kierkegaard thereby reinforces the underlying assumption that the church is being what it is not and not being what it *is*. Thus, Kierkegaard's problem with the church is *disappointment* not disbelief: he believes *too much*, not too little.

In the face of the contemporary crisis of faith, Fabro puts Kierkegaard before us because Fabro values how Kierkegaard, albeit as some kind of Lutheran, still possesses a strangely Catholic sense of the church—in terms of its structure, performance, sociality, and sacraments.¹²³ Indeed, Fabro turns to Kierkegaard's writings in order to break up an overly secure notion of ecclesial presence, and to Newman as one who had embraced the church, but who gets his view of the church from his wrestling with being an *Anglican*—a view of the

¹²¹ For an endorsement of reading Kierkegaard's writings as anti-ecclesiology, see David R. Law, 'Kierkegaard's Anti-Ecclesiology: The Attack on "Christendom", 1854–1855,' *International journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7, no. 2 (2007), 86–108.

¹²² Fabro, 'Newman e Kierkegaard', 128.

¹²³ For more on where Kierkegaard gets this Catholic sensibility, see Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*. See also, Stewart, *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), Also, Fabro, 'Spunti Cattolici,' 251–80.

church that Catholicism typically finds difficult to sustain as the fluidity of development cools into solidity of structure and category. With both Kierkegaard and Newman, Fabro is resourcing Catholicism, not simply with its own internal resources—as most of the other *ressourcement* theologians tended to do—but instead, Fabro resources Catholicism with the broader catholicity of the Christian tradition that had been lost to view. In this light, Fabro is a fellow traveller with someone like Yves Congar, but because Congar read Kierkegaard too closely to Luther, Congar failed to see the resemblance between Kierkegaard and Newman.¹²⁴ In the end, Fabro's comparison between Kierkegaard and Newman highlights the need for reform and renewal in light of the Catholic tendency to think in terms of stable structures of grace which can be seen to under-emphasize human action, and needs to be rejuvenated by an emphasis on grace as a continually renewed act.

In this chapter, I have shown the distinctive contribution that Fabro offers, not only to Thomist studies, but also to Kierkegaard studies. To do this, I have shown what Fabro learns from Kierkegaard and the Catholic sensibility Fabro identifies in Kierkegaard's writings. My study of Fabro here has not been an exhaustive attempt, but rather a representative one that shores up for the English-speaking world the originality of Fabro's approach. As a result, my hope is that readers engaged in Catholic studies and Kierkegaard studies would turn to Fabro's work in order to further flesh out a mutual exchange that benefits both disciplines. To accomplish this, more of Fabro's writings must be translated into English. But this task must be left for another day. For now, it has been my claim that Kierkegaard was just as influential for Fabro as Thomas, and that this was not merely circumstantial, but necessary to the ongoing development of Catholic theology and Kierkegaard studies. Jamie Ferreira has it right when she concludes that:

An appreciation of the significance of Kierkegaard's writings will, therefore, have to include his reception by very different kinds of

¹²⁴ Congar, 'Actualité De Kierkegaard', *La Vie Intellectuelle* 25, 9–36. See also, Congar, 'Notes Bibliographiques: Kierkegaard et Luther', 712–17. See also, Paul D. Murray, 'Expanding Catholicity through Ecumenicity in the Work of Yves Congar', in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, 457–81.

audiences . . . much of the lasting impact of Kierkegaard's writings will be on readers who find in these writings something that resonates with them, that provokes them in profound ways, that awakens them to something of value in themselves, and helps them revision and cope with their lives.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 196.

Conclusion

Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard

While geniuses prophetically show the future they do so in fact owing to a profounder recollection of what has gone before. Development is certainly not a step back but a return, and that is originality.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journal* (1849 X² A 207 / SKS NB 14:41)

This book was written during the two-hundredth anniversary of Søren Kierkegaard's birth and the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. Both celebrations gathered together a global community of scholars, who were convinced, not merely of the historical significance of their reason for celebrating, but that this historical significance has an enduring relevance. I have tried to inhabit that celebratory mood throughout this book, but I have refused to let either party carry on without the other. Instead, my aim has been to bring these two disparate celebrations closer together.

This book was borne out of my frustration with the preconception that Kierkegaard studies and Catholic studies have little in common, are even antithetical to one another. To demonstrate that this preconception is actually a misconception, I set out to show how these two disparate disciplines have an unacknowledged historical and conceptual indebtedness to each other, which could be mutually edifying if that relationship were constructively explored, articulated, and celebrated. My claim in this book is that Kierkegaard's writings have stimulated reform and renewal in twentieth-century Catholic theology. In the first part of this book, I examined the broader catholicity of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology and surveyed

the wider Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings in the early twentieth century. In the second part, I assessed how various aspects of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology and the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard gets further developed in the theology of Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Cornelio Fabro. My aim has not been merely to narrate a vital moment in the history of Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard, but rather to provide representative entry points for contemporary readers of Kierkegaard's writings to continue to stimulate reform and renewal in contemporary Catholic theology in the wake of the *ressourcement* movement.

Rather than taking my claim as merely a historical observation, I would like to sharpen it further by saying that the enduring relevance of Kierkegaard's writings *should continue to stimulate* reform and renewal in contemporary Catholic theology. But in order to make good on my claim, two proposals must be issued in the form of a conclusion: i) those contemporary Catholic theologians that see themselves as doing theology in the wake of *ressourcement* theologians should read Kierkegaard; and ii) Kierkegaard's writings should no longer be assumed to undermine the Catholic faith, but rather be seen as an indispensable dialogue partner for investigating and articulating that faith today.

EXPANDING RESSOURCEMENT

Neglecting the twentieth-century Catholic reception of Kierkegaard leads to some negative consequences. First and foremost, overlooking Kierkegaard's reception in Catholic theology is symptomatic of restricting the available resources of Catholic theologians to *only* those figures from the fourteenth century and earlier. This negative consequence is borne out in several contemporary accounts of *ressourcement* theology, which restrict its focus in just this way. For instance, Jürgen Mettepenningen describes *nouvelle théologie* as a 'return to the thirteenth-century Thomas Aquinas' that 'served as the preparatory step and permanent support in a return to the sources of the faith'.¹ Hans Boersma describes the primary task of *nouvelle*

¹ Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 11. This perspective

théologie as ‘taking seriously Christianity’s encounter with Platonism’ in order ‘to recover the church fathers, particularly the Eastern theologians, well known for their Platonist-Christian proclivities’.² Even John Milbank says of *nouvelle théologie* that the ‘initial aim was *ressourcement*—a recovery of the riches of Christian tradition, especially prior to 1300’.³ Finally, Charles Taylor says that *ressourcement* is primarily ‘a return to the Patristic sources, particularly the Greek fathers’.⁴ Although these descriptions rightly highlight the recovery of the patristic material, they only tell part of the story. Indeed, Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard reveals that there were contemporary resources available to Catholic theologians which allowed them to resist the undesirable effects of the Enlightenment, which manifested in the form of neo-scholasticism and modern atheism.

A second negative consequence is a distortion of the basic aims of *ressourcement*: what has been widely asserted as the goal of *ressourcement* amounts to only one of the original stated aims of Jean Daniélou’s programme.⁵ According to Daniélou, a return to the Fathers was a necessary *but not sufficient* resource for engaging contemporary issues. Indeed, Aidan Nichols says that Daniélou held that it is increasingly important for Catholic theologians to follow ‘these alien philosophers onto their own home ground, the better to respond to them’.⁶ So from its inception, *ressourcement* was an engagement with contemporary philosophers as much as it was a historical retrieval of the Fathers, liturgy, or Scripture. The specific importance of Kierkegaard as one of the contemporary philosophers can be seen in the favourable place he is given in Daniélou’s original essay.⁷ It is in

is echoed in Reinhard Hütter and Matthew Levering (eds), *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, O.P.* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

² Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 12.

³ Milbank, *Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 2.

⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 848 n. 39.

⁵ Daniélou, ‘Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse’, *Études* 249 (1946), 5–21. In his essay, besides a summons to scriptural, patristic, and liturgical renewal, Daniélou devotes an entire section to a call for an engagement with contemporary philosophy.

⁶ Aidan Nichols, ‘Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie’, *The Thomist* 64 (2000), 4.

⁷ Daniélou, ‘Les orientations présentes’, 13–16. Daniélou mentions Kierkegaard five times in this essay.

light of this that the need for an account of the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard becomes increasingly clear.

In this book, I have shown (albeit, not exhaustively) how my first proposal for contemporary Catholic theologians to read Kierkegaard could be motivated by seeing Kierkegaard's relevance for the work of emblematic figures like Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Cornelio Fabro. But as I have indicated in the first half of this book, there is a Kierkegaardian tradition already in the generation preceding these figures that is worth exploring as well. For a Catholic theologian like de Lubac, Kierkegaard safeguards the Christian faith from becoming 'romantic sentimentalism' or reduced to 'Hegelian intellectualism'.⁸ For Fabro and de Lubac in particular, Kierkegaard provided constructive strategies in confronting the twin threat of neo-scholasticism and modern atheism. In so far as these two threats persist today, contemporary Catholic theologians would be wise to re-examine the resources available in Kierkegaard's writings.

Further research could be done in this respect with a closer look at the writings of Cornelio Fabro. For instance, the distinctiveness of Fabro's version of Thomism as opposed to that of Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Joseph Maréchal, could be a book-length study in itself. This research could then go on and examine how Fabro's Thomism compares with that of John Milbank or Alasdair MacIntyre. Another line of enquiry could be to assess the nature of Fabro's critique of Karl Rahner's theological anthropology. There are hundreds of recordings and texts available in Rome at the 'Cornelio Fabro Cultural Project' and the *Fabro Foundation* library. A great service could be done to both Kierkegaard studies and Catholic studies by translating and disseminating Fabro's work at the intersection of these two subject areas.

KIERKEGAARD (STILL) MATTERS

The vital importance of Kierkegaard's writings for contemporary theology is, among other things, that he stands as an influential philosopher who bridges, rather than widens, the divide between

⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 106.

secularism and religious faith. In a recent article, George Pattison says that Kierkegaard

was among the first Christian thinkers really to grasp—existentially as well as intellectually—that, after the Enlightenment and the democratic revolutions of the nineteenth century, Christianity could no longer be assumed to be the fallback position of any well-meaning citizen . . . [and that] We can't go back behind the Enlightenment by invoking an authority that has lost its power to compel. Christianity may have significant reservations and criticisms vis-à-vis the ideologies of modernity, but it needs to recognise the reality of what has been called the condition of modernity.⁹

Although Kierkegaard had a delayed reception in Europe, he focused this issue for both secular and religious thinkers alike. For modern theologians in particular, Kierkegaard deepened their understanding of the unity of the individual subject and human freedom by taking seriously the threat of despair and self-deception in our contemporary age, signalling our dependence upon God as our only independence (UDVS 182). In short, Pattison says that by drawing upon Scripture and the medieval mystical tradition, Kierkegaard shows how 'Faith resolves the otherwise irresolvable tensions at the centre of human existence.' In doing so, Kierkegaard put the first person perspective and the love of neighbour back on the map for contemporary thinkers, who had been told that subjectivity only impeded 'scientific' endeavours.

The *Kierkegaard Renaissance* spawned by the writings of Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers, tended to take Kierkegaard's disenchantment with the institutional state-church as a point of departure.¹⁰ Three schools of thought emerged out of the increasing availability of Kierkegaard's writings in Europe that respectively wanted to lay claim to Kierkegaard's inheritance. The first group of radical theologians (god is dead a/theology) viewed Kierkegaard as a pioneer of secularism. The second group of neo-orthodox theologians

⁹ George Pattison, 'Passionate Thinker', *The Tablet* 267 (4 May), no. 8996 (2013b), 6–7.

¹⁰ Although, Heiko Schulz says that contrary to Karl Barth, Emil Brunner 'tended to favour Kierkegaard's "middle works", especially the pseudonymous ones up to 1849, over against the late writings from the *Kirkekamp* period' in Schulz, 'A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard', in J. Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's International Reception* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 338.

tended to portray Kierkegaard as a critic of the believer's accommodation to secular, bourgeois Christendom. This book has focused on a third group of Catholic thinkers, some of whom read Kierkegaard's critique as an indirect endorsement of Catholicism.

The focus of this book has been on the influence that Kierkegaard's writings had on Catholic theology—particularly for Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Cornelio Fabro. Throughout this book, I have advocated for a positive and substantial engagement with the writings of Søren Kierkegaard by Catholic thinkers. I have argued that Kierkegaard's writings have stimulated reform and renewal in twentieth-century Catholic theology, and should continue to do so today. To support this argument, I turned to examine the broader catholicity of Kierkegaard's writings, with a particular focus upon Kierkegaard's theological anthropology. Building upon an ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard's theology, I surveyed the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings across the German-, French-, Italian-, and English-speaking world to argue that there is significant engagement in the twentieth century, which coincides with the beginnings of theological renewal in Catholic theology *and* the dissemination and translation of Kierkegaard's writings in Europe. In light of the first two chapters, I suggested that the influence of Kierkegaard's writings was not restricted to confessional boundaries, and a more ecumenical approach to Kierkegaard's theological anthropology could challenge enduring stereotypes about the limit, scope, and relevance of Kierkegaard's writings to Catholic thought.

Then, I turned to de Lubac as a model of positive engagement with Kierkegaard and then to Balthasar as a model that needed to be corrected. My point here was to show how vital a resource Kierkegaard's writings *were* for de Lubac, and *should have been* for Balthasar. For the first time in English, I just scratched the surface of the wealth of Cornelio Fabro's engagement with Kierkegaard's writings. As a result of, and in conclusion to my argument, I would like to make two modest proposals: i) for contemporary Catholic theologians to *read* Kierkegaard; and ii) to jettison the presupposition that Kierkegaard's theology works at cross-purposes with the reform and renewal of Catholic theology. My hope is that the work here in this book contributes to making good on these two proposals. In the end, it has been my claim throughout this book that Kierkegaard's writings have stimulated reform and renewal in twentieth-century Catholic theology, and should continue to do so today.

What I have attempted to show at every turn is how, for important Catholic thinkers, Kierkegaard's writings offered them the resources for, as Pattison says, '[t]aking seriously the task of Christian witness in a world that is no longer in awe of the authority of hierarchies or Scriptures'.¹¹ Nevertheless, the field is much larger than the three central figures that this book has treated. So, I leave it to others to fill out further the representative sketch that I have provided in this relatively short compass. As a result of my case, we can now see how Kierkegaard's writings matter for the trajectory upon which contemporary Catholic theology finds itself. However, the question remains: can contemporary Catholic theologians afford to neglect Kierkegaard's writings whilst laying claim to carrying on the legacy of the *ressourcement* theologians?

¹¹ Pattison, 'Passionate Thinker'.

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