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*The Catholic reception of Søren Kierkegaard: with particular reference to the writings of Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Cornelio Fabro*

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FURNAL, JOSHUA ROBERT (2013) *The Catholic reception of Søren Kierkegaard: with particular reference to the writings of Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Cornelio Fabro*. Doctoral thesis, Durham University.

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**THE CATHOLIC RECEPTION OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD:  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE WRITINGS OF  
HENRI DE LUBAC, HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, AND  
CORNELIO FABRO**

BY

**JOSHUA FURNAL**

SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DURHAM UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

30 July 2013

## Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that although he is not always recognised as such, Søren Kierkegaard has been an important ally for Catholic theologians since the early twentieth century. Moreover, properly understanding this relationship and its origins offers valuable resources and insights to 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 John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* is an indication that Kierkegaard's writings are not so easily dismissed.

My thesis 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 demonstrate Kierkegaard's relevance in pre-conciliar Catholic theology, a number of Catholic theologians with a reform agenda need to be examined, paying close attention to their emphases and responses to Kierkegaard. I set this backdrop by investigating the wider evidence of a Catholic reception of Kierkegaard in the early twentieth century—looking specifically at influential figures like Theodor Haecker, Romano Guardini, Erich Przywara, and other Roman Catholic thinkers that are typically associated with *ressourcement*. A thesis could be written on any one of these figures, and space does not permit an exhaustive index of Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard. However, I have chosen to focus upon the writings of Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the Italian Thomist, Cornelio Fabro.

I turn to de Lubac as a Catholic reformer that offers a model of positive engagement with Kierkegaard's writings, and to Balthasar as a negative model. In Kierkegaard's writings, de Lubac finds the appropriate grammar to name the shared Enlightenment presuppositions of both Neo-scholasticism and the atheistic humanism of his day, and to express anew the insights retrieved from the Church Fathers. In Balthasar's case, Kierkegaard serves as a kind of Protestant foil in his account of theological aesthetics, which I argue distorts Balthasar's own theology of anxiety and Christology. As an original contribution, I introduce for the first time in English a necessary supplement to the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard in the underexplored writings of the Italian Thomist, Cornelio Fabro. In particular, 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 selecting de Lubac, Balthasar, and Fabro, my aim is not just 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.

## **Statement of Copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation of it should be published in any format, including electronic, without the author's prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately.

## **Declaration**

This work has been submitted to Durham University in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and no part of it has been previously submitted to the Durham University or in any other university for a degree.

## Acknowledgments

I could not have researched and written this thesis on my own. Indeed, I have gratefully incurred a number of debts and friendships along the way, some of which will inevitably go unmentioned, but have nonetheless made this thesis possible in one way or another. First, I would like to thank my supervisory team: the germ of this thesis began as an essay for Marcus Pound, who first helped me to see the difference between an experimental essay and a research proposal. If it wasn't for his abiding assistance and encouragement, this thesis would never have 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 his comments have been perceptive. A special thanks goes to Lewis Ayres for his informal guidance and unfailing support with sharpening my argument. This thesis has been much improved through such help.

Second, I would like to thank those who have made my research financially possible: If it were not for the tireless creativity and immense generosity of Paul Murray, the Sisters of Mercy Oaklea Sunderland, the Newman Association, and Porticus UK, I would not have been able to go this far with my education. I am also thankful for a serendipitous meeting in Trieste that led to important friendships with Sr Rosa Goglia ASC, Antonio Russo, and Elvio Fontana who all helped me get better acquainted with the person and archives of Cornelio Fabro CSS. A special thanks to Cullen McKenney, Andrew Brower-Latz, Thomas Lynch, and Matt Crawford, who all took the time to help me revise earlier drafts.

Non posso neanche dimenticare la mia ispirazione spirituale e sostegno di fede: Marco & Lucilla, Sr Carmen, Alberto and Ricardo OSM, e Jose Maria Castillo. Devo ringraziare Dio per la vostra amicizia in questo sentiero di speranza che ci fa sperimentare una comunicazione di vita più profonda, e che ci fa crescere nella gioia dello Spirito. Hasta Siempre! 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, source of wisdom, and friend. Also, I am grateful for my recent acquaintance with 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 CSC has offered to me over the years—I stand on the shoulders of giants. Finally, I dedicate this labour of love to my beloved April, who is ever-patient—she never ceases to remind me that with God, all things are possible.

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## Epigraph

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 Jn 3:1-2 (NRSV)

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 1 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)

Kierkegaard was by far the most  
profound thinker of the last century.  
Kierkegaard was a saint.

- Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction: Catholic Theology *after* Kierkegaard

### 1.1 Introduction

Upon receiving a letter announcing that one of his former students had converted to Catholicism, Ludwig Wittgenstein wondered whether he had been partly responsible for the conversion by having this student read Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>2</sup> At first glance, this might seem like a strange reply to such news. Upon further examination, however, Wittgenstein's odd response is a fitting response. In this thesis, I argue that although he is not always recognised as such, Søren Kierkegaard has been an important ally for Catholic theologians since the early twentieth century. Moreover, properly understanding this relationship and its origins offers valuable resources and insights to 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 John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* (n. 76) is an indication that Kierkegaard's writings are not so easily dismissed. Most philosophers baulk at the claim that had Søren Kierkegaard lived longer, he would have become a Roman Catholic.<sup>3</sup> Such wild speculation has become synonymous for what is conventionally understood as *the* Catholic interpretation of Kierkegaard's work.<sup>4</sup> And yet during the twentieth century, Kierkegaard's critique of the

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

<sup>2</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein : The Duty of Genius* (London: Cape, 1990), 463-464.

<sup>3</sup> Not long after Kierkegaard's death, Danish scholars began to speculate if he had lived longer whether he too would have become Roman Catholic. See, Georg Brandes, *Søren Kierkegaard: Ein Literarisches Charakterbild* (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1879), 239. 'In ihm ward die Probe auf das Exempel gemacht. Er endete damit, selber die Axt wider sein Gottesbild zu erheben. 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 der die Freiheit winkt'. Later on, Höffding says that Kierkegaard had a 'Sympathie mit dem Katholizismus', Harald Höffding and Christoph Schrepf, *Søren Kierkegaard Als Philosoph* (Stuttgart: Frommanns, 1896), 169. See the extensive treatment of Brandes and Höffding in Habib C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard : The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 228-282; 319-331.

established State-church was decisive for some scholars in their conversion to Roman Catholicism.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> However, this did not deter Catholic readers from receiving Kierkegaard's writings as a resource to their own tradition.<sup>7</sup>

To be clear, my thesis 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 which attests to the importance of Kierkegaard's writings for Catholic theology.<sup>8</sup> On the 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, my thesis demonstrates 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 (1962-1965).

But since there is resistance among Catholic readers to Kierkegaard's writings, the central aim of my thesis is to provide a more sophisticated account of the wider Catholic reception of Kierkegaard, illuminating in particular the relevance of Kierkegaard's writings for the *ressourcement* movement.<sup>9</sup> The desired outcome of this aim can be expressed in a modest

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

<sup>5</sup> Roos, *Søren Kierkegaard and Catholicism*, ix-xiii. For more on conversion see Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought*. Especially pp. 130-1, 288; 371-92; 386-7, 396.

<sup>6</sup> George L. Stengren, 'Thomism,' in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana 6: Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1981), 111. However, in his *Journals* Kierkegaard does seem to be somewhat familiar with Johann Adam Möhler, see *Papirer* I A 37; II A 304; II C 29-31.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Papirer* I A 38; I A 138; II A 265.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of French theological scholarship, see François Bousquet, 'Kierkegaard Dans La Tradition Théologique Francophone,' in *Kierkegaard Revisited, Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 339-366. See also, Margaret Teboul, 'La Réception De Kierkegaard En France 1930-1960,' *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 89 (2005), 315-336. For Kierkegaard's reception in Catholic theology, see Adolf Darlap, 'Die Rezeption S. Kierkegaards in Der Katholischen Theologie,' in *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]*, ed. Heinrich Anz, Poul Lübcke, and Friedrich Schmöe (München: 1983), 225-238.

<sup>9</sup> By '*ressourcement*', I have in mind the method of returning to patristic and biblical texts as a resource for the reform and renewal of Roman Catholic theology prior to the Second Vatican Council. During this time, it was also pejoratively referred to as '*la nouvelle théologie*' by critics. I have in mind theologians associated with 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.

three-fold proposal: i) that conventional pre-conceptions about the fruitfulness of Kierkegaard's writings for Catholic theology would be re-examined; and ii) that contemporary Catholic theologians laying claim to the legacy of *ressourcement* theologians would read Kierkegaard's writings and take them seriously as a theological resource; and iii) that in light of the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard, the nature and scope of *ressourcement* would be expanded for contemporary Catholic theology.

### 1.2 Rationale of Thesis: Why Study the Catholic Reception of Kierkegaard?

In the vast secondary literature on twentieth century Catholic theology, a sophisticated account of the reception of Kierkegaard is notably absent. Long-standing robust accounts of the influence of Heidegger,<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche,<sup>11</sup> and Marx<sup>12</sup> make the neglect of Kierkegaard even more striking. Hence, my thesis fills a noticeable gap in Catholic theology in general, and in particular, recent literature on *ressourcement*, which is noticeably silent on the influence of Kierkegaard's writings.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 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, *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, 2013). 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).

<sup>11</sup> Most Catholic thinkers engaging in discussions about Nietzsche today, confront the following secular/radical theology trajectories: 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.

<sup>12</sup> Some trajectories include:

Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America : Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror* (London: Verso, 2012). Christopher Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2nd ed. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ivan Petrella, and Luiz Carlos Susin, *Another Possible World* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, Kierkegaard is only mentioned twice in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 273-275. Only once in Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4. And for all the discussion of paradox, there is no mention of Kierkegaard in John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM Press, 2005).

Prior to my thesis, only a few attempts have been made recently in Kierkegaard studies to address Kierkegaard's relation to, and influence upon Catholic theology.<sup>14</sup> The first attempt is by the Italian Archbishop of Chieti, Bruno Forte (b. 1949) with his short book *Fare Teologia Dopo Kierkegaard*.<sup>15</sup> Forte's book is geared toward a popular audience and gives a brief thematic reflection upon Kierkegaard's concepts of the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity, the singularity of truth and the individual, and even paradox and contemporaneity. Forte's reflections provide a bricolage of quotations from Kierkegaard as a way to introduce the reader to some theological aspects of Kierkegaard's writings. My contribution in this thesis 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 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.<sup>16</sup> 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 attempt that indexes the actual engagement of Kierkegaard by some prominent Catholic and Jewish thinkers.<sup>17</sup> 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 treated in this thesis.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, my thesis provides more historical background than Stewart's volume, which introduces various thinkers in chapters that stand alone without situating this reception in the wider development of Catholic theology in the twentieth century.

### 1.3 Distinctive Contributions

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, see Gregory R. Beabout, 'Kierkegaard Amidst the Catholic Tradition,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2013), 521-540.

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Forte, *Fare Teologia Dopo Kierkegaard, Il Pellicano Rosso* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Jack Mulder, *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition: Conflict and Dialogue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, ed. Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources (Vol. 10, Tome 3)* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> One notable exception: Ingrid Basso, 'The Italian Reception of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*,' in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2005*, ed. K.B.S.N. Cappelorn, N.J. Cappelorn, and H. Deuser (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

As an essential supplement to Kierkegaard studies and recent literature on *ressourcement* in Catholic theology, my thesis 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, my thesis provides an original contribution to recent scholarship by: i) bringing together Kierkegaard studies and Catholic theology in 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 before: 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, my thesis highlights Cornelio Fabro as a key figure in what has been heretofore an impoverished account of the vibrant Kierkegaardian tradition within Catholicism; 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, my thesis provides a more constructive account of Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard's thought in the twentieth century by showing what Kierkegaard's writings do for Catholic theology, and what conclusions they pushed Catholic theologians to draw.

#### *1.4 Chapter Outline*

My thesis 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. In the next chapter, to corroborate my argument, I re-examine one of the most common preconceptions of Kierkegaard—that is, the theological aspects of Kierkegaard's writings simply reiterate Martin Luther's theology. After questioning the validity of this preconception, I go on to suggest how a structural affinity between the basic aim of 'returning to the sources' in contemporary Catholic theology and Kierkegaard's paradoxical presentation of the Christian faith as the 'autopsy of faith' begins to shed light on the 'Catholic soul' of Kierkegaard's writings.

To demonstrate Kierkegaard's relevance in pre-conciliar Catholic theology, a number of Catholic theologians with a reform agenda need to be examined, paying close attention to

their emphases and responses to Kierkegaard. I set this backdrop by investigating the wider evidence of a Catholic reception of Kierkegaard in the early twentieth century—looking specifically at influential figures like Theodor Haecker, Romano Guardini, Erich Przywara, and other Roman Catholic thinkers that are typically associated with the generation before the *ressourcement* movement. Here I sketch the level of awareness that these thinkers had of Kierkegaard’s writings at this time. Also, I outline the objections that these thinkers raised against Kierkegaard’s writings, which contribute to the conventional preconceptions that possess readers today. A thesis 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. However in the three subsequent chapters, I have chosen to focus upon the writings of Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the Italian Thomist, Cornelio Fabro.

I turn to de Lubac as a Catholic reformer that offers a model of positive engagement with Kierkegaard’s writings, and to Balthasar as a negative model. In Kierkegaard’s writings, de Lubac finds the appropriate grammar to name the shared Enlightenment presuppositions of both Neo-scholasticism and the atheistic humanism of his day, and to express anew the insights retrieved from the Church Fathers. In Balthasar’s case, Kierkegaard serves as a kind of Protestant foil in his account of theological aesthetics, which I argue distorts Balthasar’s own theology of anxiety and Christology. Although de Lubac and Balthasar engage with, and were influenced by Kierkegaard’s writings, they represent the culmination of the early Catholic reception, which was dependent upon the French and German scholarship that offered a preliminary sketch of Kierkegaard’s more constructive theological commitments.

To counteract this reception, I introduce for the first time in English a necessary supplement in the underexplored writings of the Italian Thomist, Cornelio Fabro. In this chapter, I sketch the contours of Fabro’s life-long engagement with Kierkegaard. Fabro learned Danish and translated Kierkegaard’s writings and journals into Italian to overturn a French and German 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. In particular, 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 selecting de Lubac, Balthasar, and Fabro, my aim is not just 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.

One generation is not better because it understands  
that a previous generation is wrong,  
if at the moment it does not itself understand  
how to distinguish between the views of the moment  
and of the eternal on the matter!  
– Søren Kierkegaard<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard's soul is Catholic in its core.  
– Cornelio Fabro<sup>2</sup>

## The Catholic Soul of Kierkegaard's Writings?

### 2.1 Introduction

One of the basic aims of *ressourcement* theology is to recover a theology of history—that is, an account of God's action in and through history, which makes theology more historical and history more theological.<sup>3</sup> 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 but given, and only its manifestation is awaited'.<sup>4</sup> 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'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 92-93.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *S. Kierkegaard Diario (3rd Ed.)*, vol. 1 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1980), 88-89. As cited in Andrea Scaramuccia, 'The Italian Reception of Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers,' in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources. Kierkegaard's International Reception. Southern, Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 368.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Daniélou, 'The Conception of History in the Christian Tradition,' *The Journal of Religion* 30, no. 3 (1950), 171-179. I am gratefully indebted to Lewis Ayres for bringing this article to my attention.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 174. 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 Karl Marx and David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd ed. (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 Marx: Per Una Definizione Dell'esistenza*, ed. Christian Ferraro (Firenze: Vallecchi,

Although some have scoffed at attempts to link Catholic theology and Kierkegaard's writings,<sup>6</sup> one obvious Kierkegaardian concept that negotiates continuity amid change is *repetition*.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this concept does lend itself to appropriation by contemporary heirs of *ressourcement* theologians concerned with the 'non-identical repetition' of doctrinal development.<sup>8</sup> But I will not treat this concept here because—whether the concept was perhaps too close to Hegel's dialectics,<sup>9</sup> or to Freud's interpretation of compulsory behaviour,<sup>10</sup>—*ressourcement* theologians engaging with Kierkegaard's writings during the twentieth century did not reach for this analogue. Because of the lack of textual evidence of 'repetition' in the writings of *ressourcement* theologians,<sup>11</sup> I will seek instead to address two obstacles that immediately present themselves to my thesis: i) a common preconception that Kierkegaard's writings are antithetical to the Catholic faith; and ii) the paradoxical problem of endorsing a theological view of history from a contingent perspective in the flux of time.

In the first part of this chapter (2.2), 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. In the second part (2.4), I investigate

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1952), 56-59. 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).

<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 11. For more, see Arne Grøn's excellent essay on Kierkegaard, time, and history in Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward, *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 435-455.

<sup>6</sup> For an ardent dismissal of Catholic readings of Kierkegaard, see Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 263-264. For a legitimization of Catholic appropriations of Kierkegaard, see Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*.

<sup>7</sup> For a full account, see Niels Nymann Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition: A Reconstruction* (Berlin: W. 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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 ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 278-326. Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 60; John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 145-174. See also, Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy, Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 18-35; 109; 160; 221-224. Also see, Marcus Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis, Trauma, Veritas Series* (London: SCM Press, 2007), ch. 2. Following Milbank, Clare Carlisle attempts 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.

<sup>9</sup> Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered, Modern European Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ch. 6.

<sup>10</sup> 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (1914)', in Steven J. Ellman, *Freud's Technique Papers* (London: Karnac Books, 1991), ch. 3.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, many had read *Fear and Trembling*, but there is little textual evidence indicating that Catholic theologians during this era had even read Kierkegaard's *Repetition*.

Kierkegaard's paradoxical presentation of the Christian faith as autopsy—that is, his account of how one relates to the act of, and appropriates the content of the Christian faith. By the end of this chapter, the reader should have a better sense of the thematic groundwork required to establish a firmer link between the basic aims of Kierkegaard's writings and *ressourcement* theologians.

## 2.2 Re-examining the Lutheran Preconception of Kierkegaard's Works of Love

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'.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> In this section, I will investigate the commentary by Amy Laura Hall, who endorses the Lutheran presupposition throughout her concentrated reading of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* (1847).<sup>14</sup> Hall claims that Kierkegaard can be read as providing 'a dense commentary' on Luther's treatise entitled the *Freedom of a Christian* (1520).<sup>15</sup> Hall also claims that 'a productive reading' of *Works of Love* sees Kierkegaard as deliberately indicting the reader using Luther's

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<sup>12</sup> Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*, 266. In her most recent book, Hampson goes further, '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', in Daphne Hampson, *Kierkegaard: Exposition & Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56 n. 27. 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, *Kierkegaard: Exposition & Critique*, 270-271.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 188. For more, see ch. 6 in Barnett.

<sup>14</sup> Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love, Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought 9* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Henceforth KTL.

<sup>15</sup> Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love*, 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 University Press, 2001), 20-21. See also, Craig Hinkson, 'Luther and Kierkegaard: Theologians of the Cross,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3, no. 1 (2001). 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, *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 21: For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* (Macon, Ga.: 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, *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 Niels Thulstrup and Maris Mikulová Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions [Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana 6]* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1981), 131. Joel D.S. Ramussen and David Yoon-Jung Kim, 'Martin Luther: Reform, Secularization, and the Question of His True Successor,' in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions: Theology, Tome II*, ed. Jon Stewart (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 173-217.

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 emphasise 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 locus of our participation 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 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 claim it as providing evidence of Kierkegaard 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> Luther illustrates this point with a fable about a ‘dog who runs along a stream with a piece of meat in his mouth

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<sup>16</sup> M. Luther, H. J. Grimm, and others, *Luther's Works, Vol 31: Career of the Reformer I*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 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].

<sup>17</sup> 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).

<sup>18</sup> 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).

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 is 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 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.<sup>19</sup> 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 work-scepticism that mistrusts a person's behaviour in advance. The outworking of such a suspicion of works is 'that one should believe nothing which he cannot see by means of his physical eyes' (WL 23). According to Kierkegaard, such a work-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

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<sup>19</sup> 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).

temporal and eternal', but rather it is love which is 'before everything else and remains when all else is past'.<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard criticises 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.<sup>21</sup> 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 substantially differs 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 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

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<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard's position here bears a striking similarity to St. Thomas as presented in Otto Hermann Pesch, 'Existential and Sapiential Theology: The Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas Aquinas' in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, ed. Jared Wicks (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), 59-82; esp. pp. 74-75.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 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?'

deceptively appears to be the depth of the source—but only conceals that which is still deeper'.<sup>22</sup>

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;<sup>23</sup> but Kierkegaard says that love is the movement of 'the eternal in itself' and the link between the 'fresh and everlasting life' of God and ours (WL 27).

After his discussion about the recognisability 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

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. UDVS 192.

<sup>23</sup> 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 as 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 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).

someone could identify the tree by the appearance of its leaves, there is no contradiction between form and content until the fruit season demonstrated 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 soteriology<sup>24</sup>—whereby, the salvific status of a person is *independently established prior to* and *distinguishable from* good works—Kierkegaard implies here that the innermost depths of a person 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 individualising 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

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<sup>24</sup> Consider 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 might 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 5:26-27) of life, that is, 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: 351-352).

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 to instrumentalize 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 reemphasises 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 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, we might 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, we 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!'

With the distinction between these two positions 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*.<sup>25</sup> There, the English renders the

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<sup>25</sup> <[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html)>. Kierkegaard also makes an appearance in Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1969), 39.

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*.<sup>26</sup> 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.

### 2.3 Summary

In this thesis, my overall claim is that Kierkegaard’s writings have a defining influence upon Catholic theologians in the twentieth century. In the first section of this chapter, I have identified a major objection to this claim—namely, the preconception that Kierkegaard’s writings are antithetical to the Catholic faith—and sought to provide an alternative reading of one of Kierkegaard’s most treasured texts, *Works of Love*. With the remainder of this chapter, I turn to explore the relevance of Kierkegaard’s notion of ‘the autopsy of faith’ and ‘the Socratic hypothesis’ as a way to highlight the shared concerns between Kierkegaard’s writings and *ressourcement* theologians—that is, a theology of history that recovers a sense of divine self-disclosure in the past that remains alive in the present.

### 2.4 The Autopsy of Faith

Martin Buber tells a story about a very learned person visiting Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev in order to debate him. Upon his arrival, the scholar found the Rabbi pacing back and forth with a book in his hand paying no attention to him; Buber says that the Rabbi suddenly stopped, ‘gave him a brief glance, and said: “But perhaps it is true after all.” In vain did the learned man try to rally his self-confidence. His knees shook, for the zaddik was terrible to behold and his simple words were terrible to hear’; then the Rabbi turned to the scholar and said that many ‘could not set God and his Kingdom on the table before you, and I cannot do this either. But, my son, only think! Perhaps it is true.’ Buber says that over time, ‘the terrible “perhaps” beat on his ears again and again and broke down his resistance’.<sup>27</sup> Buber’s enigmatic story brings into focus the difficulty of performing an autopsy on the source of faith, as well as the uncertainty with which such a task is carried out for believers

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<sup>26</sup> I am so grateful for Werner Jeanrond pointing this out to me. See Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 166. n. 108. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Works of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 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: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love*. M. Jamie Ferreira, ‘The Glory of a Long Desire: Need and Commandment in *Works of Love*,’ in *Ethik Der Liebe : Studien Zu Kierkegaards "Taten Der Liebe"*, ed. Ingolf Dalferth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 139-153.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), 229-230.

and unbelievers alike. In fact, Buber's story suggests that both unbelievers and believers come away unsettled from the question of faith.

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' (*i 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, as Buber's story point out, 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 reliably be 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 in 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.<sup>28</sup> The difference is not a matter of

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<sup>28</sup> '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*, 2 ed. (London: T&T Clark, 1913). For more, see David Law's essay on von Hügel and Kierkegaard in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 75-96.

curiosity or historical evidence but *faith*. In other words, Climacus draws a distinction between the *practice* of striving to see God for oneself, and theological *reflection* upon reports of such practice by those witnesses, emphasising 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, she does not ‘seek prematurely to behold’ because this is to ‘substitute credulity for faith’.<sup>29</sup> 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!” (Lk 13:25-27 NJB)<sup>30</sup>

In Kierkegaard’s journals, we read that faith is neither fantasy, cognition, historical knowledge nor tangibility,<sup>31</sup> but rather that ‘all faith is autopsy’.<sup>32</sup> Kierkegaard continues, ‘all knowledge is concerned either with teaching or with historical knowledge about the teacher’<sup>33</sup> and ‘by having merely historical information about the wonder, a person never comes further’.<sup>34</sup> But striving ‘to be a contemporary’, Kierkegaard says, is not the same thing as being

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.

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<sup>29</sup> 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).

<sup>30</sup> All quotations from Scripture are from the New Jerusalem Bible unless otherwise noted.

<sup>31</sup> PF 197; *Pap.* V B 6:7 1844.

<sup>32</sup> PF 198; *Pap.* V B 6:8 1844.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*; *Pap.* V B 12:4 1844.

<sup>34</sup> PF 199; *Pap.* V B 12:8 1844.

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*'.<sup>35</sup> 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 for 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, knowledge of God, and the knowledge of the good.<sup>36</sup> 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 inner most depths of an individual.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Kierkegaard also speaks of 'the mirror of the

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<sup>35</sup> PF 215; *Pap.* V B 6:17 1844.

<sup>36</sup> 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* (2011). <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2011.00461.x/abstract>>.

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.<sup>38</sup> 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,<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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',<sup>41</sup> 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'.<sup>42</sup>

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. It is also a difference in the act and content of 'seeing'. In the conventional respect, 'seeing' is a judgment 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 'judgment' can refer to both the act and content. So in speaking about either the act or

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<sup>37</sup> For more, see Søren Kierkegaard et al., *For Self-Examination ; Judge for Yourself!* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 25-35. Henceforth, FSE.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, see Søren Kierkegaard and Sylvia Walsh, *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 108-115. Henceforth, DCF. The recent encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, also uses this image: 'Christ is the mirror in which [believers] find their own image fully realized' §22.

<sup>39</sup> 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 Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses, Kierkegaard's Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 325. Henceforth, EUD. See also, FSE 76-81, 116, 131-133.

<sup>40</sup> 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 Grøn, 'Ethics of Vision,' in *Ethik Der Liebe : Studien Zu Kierkegaards "Taten Der Liebe"*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 111-122.

<sup>41</sup> François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, *Histoire De Jenni: Ou Le Sage Et L'athée* (Londres: 1775), 61.

<sup>42</sup> Augustine and Henry Chadwick, *Confessions, Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxxi (46), 301.

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’ (Jn 20:29 NRSV). 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 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 witness 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? Or, what if that which we are calling ‘the god’ is merely a deception? To see how Climacus treats this problem I must delve a bit further into his argument.

#### 2.4.1 *The threat of plagiarism regarding the knowledge of God in history*

In numerous places throughout his authorship, Climacus claims to only present a thought-experiment about what Christianity is, and, unlike Kierkegaard,<sup>43</sup> he disavows being a Christian or a religious person (CUP 483, 557, 597, 617). The central problem of Climacus’s 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).<sup>44</sup> In other words,

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<sup>43</sup> 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. X<sup>2</sup> A 196*).

<sup>44</sup> 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: 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), 244-282.

how can one *conceptualise* 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's authorship is referred to as 'Lessing's problem' or Lessing's 'broad and ugly ditch'<sup>45</sup> and it is meant to directly problematise dogmatic notions of the Incarnation and the natural desire for God by calling into question the possibility of even conceptualising a necessary (could not be otherwise) transition from eternity to history without plagiarising that transition from a contingent (could be otherwise) source.<sup>46</sup> Throughout Climacus's sprawling authorship, Lessing's problem of the knowledge of God and the anxiety of plagiarising that idea serve as a central impetus to the enquiry itself.<sup>47</sup> Although Climacus takes his point of departure, as well as the terms of the debate from Lessing, Climacus indirectly provides a defence of Christianity in the *form* of an attack—rather than *vice versa*.<sup>48</sup>

In light of the anxiety of plagiarising 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 complexity of the question as to 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)<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Lessing and Nisbet, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 87.

<sup>46</sup> For Hegel, this problem was 'resolved' by the inexplicable necessity of contingency; see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and George Di Giovanni, *The Science of Logic, Cambridge Hegel Translations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 478-479. See also, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Klaus Brinkmann, and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part 1, Science of Logic, Cambridge Hegel Translations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), § 145, 215-217. 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 David B. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective, Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 76-90.

<sup>47</sup> 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, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 323-353. Henceforth, IO.

<sup>48</sup> For a parallel reading of Climacus and Lessing, see Cornelio Fabro, 'La Fenomenologia Della Fede: Ambiguità Della Fede in Soren Kierkegaard,' *Archivio di Filosofia* (1957), 188-197. 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), 155-170. 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), 303-321.

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 begin with, Climacus distinguishes between two modes of learning the truth—the Socratic and the non-Socratic hypothesis.

#### 2.4.2 Climacus on the Socratic and non-Socratic approach to seeing the truth

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 her of it (PF 24). Importantly, both the teacher and the pupil stand in the same relation to the truth in need of 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 her (PF 12). Since the teacher is merely an arbitrary occasion, and since the pupil originally possesses the truth, the pupil owes the teacher nothing—the copyright stays with the pupil.

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 her untruth and incapacity to obtain, 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.<sup>50</sup> Precisely because the pupil is in

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Meno*, 80e. Plato and Robin Waterfield, *Meno and Other Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 113.

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

The difficulty arises for the pupil 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'. 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

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<sup>50</sup> 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), 327-334.

as Christ. And in light of the self-revelation of God's love in 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 on to 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 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 which 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's 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’s 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 He reveals Himself as mystery.<sup>51</sup> 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

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<sup>51</sup> 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).

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*.<sup>52</sup> 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). 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 as the absolutely different rather than as a frontier, Climacus—who is not a religious thinker—sets out two ways of seeing the paradox: *intellectually*, in terms of offense 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).

‘Suppose’, Climacus hypothesises, ‘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 213-214). Importantly, in Climacus’s presentation there is the *distinction* between the god and the human being and there is the non-reciprocal *relation* of dependency between them both.<sup>53</sup> 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,<sup>54</sup> what he has his pseudonym say here portrays

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 179.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 154 n. 24; cf. ST 1. q. 44-6.

<sup>54</sup> Stengren, ‘Thomism,’ 98-120. See also, Benjamin Olivares, ‘Thomas Aquinas: Kierkegaard's View Based on Scattered and Uncertain Sources,’ in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions*, ed. Jon Stewart (Aldershot:

a remarkable inner unity with the Angelic Doctor.<sup>55</sup> 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 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’s 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.<sup>56</sup> From the Socratic perspective, faith always requires a ‘crucifixion of the understanding’ (CUP 600). For Mulhall, the upshot of Climacus’s 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 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’.<sup>57</sup> In a similar way, Kierkegaard’s

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Ashgate, 2008), 183-206. For more on Kierkegaard’s engagement with patristic sources, see the rest of Stewart’s volume dedicated to the issue.

<sup>55</sup> For more see, Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 116, 135, 146, 174.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Mulhall, *Faith & Reason, Interpretations* (London: Duckworth, 1994), 50. See also, Michael Weston, ‘Kierkegaard: The Literature of Freedom,’ in *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, ed. James Giles (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 180.

<sup>57</sup> For more on the mystical ladder of the original ascetic, see Jonathan Zecher, ‘The Symbolics of Death and the Construction of Christian Asceticism: Greek Patristic Voices from the Fourth through Seventh Centuries’ (Durham University [PhD thesis], 2011), esp. ch. 4. See also, James Conant, ‘Must We Show What We Cannot

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's revocation since it does not make much sense that an anonymous pseudonym would also feel the need for self-censorship.<sup>58</sup> But bearing in mind Climacus's comments about wonder and seeing with the eyes of faith, then such a revocation could be seen as 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.<sup>59</sup>

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's 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 the reader to help her mean what she says, even in the most unfamiliar circumstances—that is, Climacus procures the possibility of a theology of history in such a way that models for his Catholic readers how *ressourcement* might be carried out in a contemporary age. And yet,

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Say?,' in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 242-283. James Conant, 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense,' in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (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 *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. Timothy Tessin and Mario Von der Ruhr (London: Macmillan, 1995), 248-331.

<sup>58</sup> 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).

<sup>59</sup> Mulhall, *Faith & Reason*, 51-52.

performing such an autopsy of faith can be quite difficult, especially if the body of evidence to be inspected cannot be produced—or worse that body is resurrected.

### 2.5 Conclusion

To sum up what has been covered in this second section, I have investigated Kierkegaard's notion of the autopsy of faith and paid close attention to the paradoxical thought-experiment of Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes Climacus. I noted how Kierkegaard addressed Lessing's problem of the knowledge of God in history and Climacus's concern about plagiarising that idea. I then explored Climacus's portrayal of the Socratic and non-Socratic approach to learning the truth, noting the irreducibly paradoxical nature of the enquiry.

In this chapter, I have addressed two obstacles to my thesis: i) that Kierkegaard's writings are antithetical to the Catholic faith; and ii) the philosophical problem with a theology of history. In doing so, I have laid the thematic groundwork to help the reader see a structural affinity between the basic aim of recovering a theology of history in *ressourcement* theology and Kierkegaard's paradoxical presentation of the Christian faith as the 'autopsy of faith'. My overall argument in this thesis is that Kierkegaard's writings have stimulated reform and renewal in twentieth century Catholic theology, and should continue to do so today. By attending to Climacus's treatment of the philosophical problem facing a theological account of history, I have identified one central, parallel concern between Kierkegaard and *ressourcement* theologians: the inescapable paradox of the unknown god's self-revelation of love as mystery, which continues to be presented as an existential (rather than hypothetical or merely conceptual) challenge today. In light of this, I emphasised the role of grace in Kierkegaard's thought, which underscores a sacramental view of time. As I will suggest in the next chapter, this is an important theological sensibility that will aide *ressourcement* theologians in a critique of Neo-Scholasticism. In subsequent chapters, I turn to the writings of particular Catholic reformers to offer a representative model of positive engagement with Kierkegaard's writings.

## The Wider Reception of Kierkegaard's Writings by Catholic Thinkers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In the previous chapter, I re-examined a major preconception about the theological import of Kierkegaard's writings: that he simply reiterates Martin Luther's theology. As an alternative, I highlighted some theological themes in Kierkegaard's writings have a structural affinity with the basic aims of Catholic thinkers in the twentieth century. To further support my case, in this chapter, I will investigate the wider Catholic reception of Kierkegaard in the twentieth century to shore up the main Catholic objections and to assess the degree of appropriation of Kierkegaard's writings. In this chapter, I argue 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. With the wider reception in view, the reader will be better equipped to ascertain the influence of Kierkegaard's writings in the particular figures treated in later chapters.

### 3.1 Kierkegaard Renaissance in Europe

Most accounts of Kierkegaard's Catholic 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 writings of Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers to name but a few.<sup>1</sup> Although Wahl himself criticised the Catholic portrayal of Kierkegaard,<sup>2</sup> he was closely linked at the Sorbonne to several Catholic thinkers like Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, due to the rise of Heidegger's philosophical influence in Europe, a 'return to the sources' was generated among philosophers and Kierkegaard's

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Wahl, in relation to Hegel and Heidegger see Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Cornell University Press, 2007), 85f. For more on Wahl's relation to Levinas, see Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (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), 211-216. 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 Shestov's anti-rationalist reading.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Wahl, *Études Kierkegaardiennes* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1938), 380.

<sup>3</sup> Alejandro Cavallazzi and Azucena Palavicini Sánchez, 'Jean Wahl: Philosophies of Existence and the Introduction of Kierkegaard in the Non-Germanic World,' in *Kierkegaard and Existentialism*, ed. Jon Stewart (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 395.

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'.<sup>4</sup> Adorno says that Wahl's book 'serves this purpose'.<sup>5</sup> In short, Kierkegaard had already become established as a major figure in the French and German intellectual tradition.

For all its contributions to the field, *Études* frames the way subsequent 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'.<sup>6</sup> Also, Wahl is responsible for perpetuating the view which treats Kierkegaard's pseudonyms as secondary to his *Journals*.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, 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'.<sup>8</sup> European Thomists like Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain<sup>9</sup> latched on to this observation, but discarded Kierkegaard along the way in exchange for Henri Bergson in what eventually became known as 'existential' Thomism.<sup>10</sup> Hence after Wahl's contribution, it is not surprising that Catholic theologians in France would be drawn to Kierkegaard but would ultimately dismiss him in favour of a Thomistic perspective. It is undeniable that Wahl's *Études* is a watershed mark in the European reception of Kierkegaard. Indeed, it would seem that any account of a Catholic reception of Kierkegaard must begin with Jean Wahl—but there is more to the story than that.

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<sup>4</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Review: Études Kierkegaardiennes 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*, vol. 11, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 3-48.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Sánchez, 'Jean Wahl,' 399.

<sup>7</sup> See Eric Pons, 'The French Reception of the Papirer,' in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. Niels J. Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and Jon Stewart (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Jean Wahl, *Petite Histoire De "L'existentialisme": Suivie De Kafka Et Kierkegaard* (Paris: Limoges, 1947), 12; as cited in Sánchez, 'Jean Wahl,' 402.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, see Nathaniel Kramer, 'Jacques Maritain: Kierkegaard As "Champion of the Singular",' in *Kierkegaard and Existentialism*, ed. Jon Stewart (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 217-232; esp. pp. 223ff.

<sup>10</sup> 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), 80-87.

### 3.1.1 Theodor Haecker

Habib Malik's penetrating analysis of the European impact and transmission of Kierkegaard's writings ends 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'.<sup>11</sup> 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 historically as regards his own acquaintance with it, and theologically in terms of affinities between his positions and Catholic doctrine'.<sup>12</sup>

According to Haecker, the writings of Kierkegaard were virtually unknown to the French and English-speaking world at that time.<sup>13</sup> In 1913, Haecker wrote his first essay entitled, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Inwardness*.<sup>14</sup> After the publication of *Satire und Polemik* (1914-1920),<sup>15</sup> Haecker was received into the Catholic Church spending the next several years learning Danish and translating Kierkegaard and Newman into German.<sup>16</sup> Haecker was also arrested and banned from speaking at the university or on the radio because he was an outspoken critic of Nazism.<sup>17</sup> On the dust jacket of the English translation of Haecker's

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<sup>11</sup> Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought*, 390. One of these subsequent thinkers is Miguel de Unamuno, see Malik's treatment (pp. 284-287). 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), 1113-1126. See also, George Pattison, 'Paradox and Mystery: Catholic Existentialism,' in *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 194-201. Other thinkers would be Eugen Biser, Friedrich von Hügel, and Thomas Merton, see relevant chapters in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*.

<sup>12</sup> Malik, 390.

<sup>13</sup> See Theodor Haecker, "Søren Kierkegaard," in *Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Heinz-Horst Schrey (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), p. 19. See also Haecker's, *Søren Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit* (Munich: Verlag J.F. Schreiber, 1913), pp. 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 GmbH, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Theodor Haecker and Søren Appendix Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard Und Die Philosophie Der Innerlichkeit* (München: J. F. Schreiber, 1913).

<sup>15</sup> Theodor Haecker, *Satire Und Polemik, 1914-1920. [with Four Essays on Søren Kierkegaard.]* (Innsbruck: 1920).

<sup>16</sup> Theodor Haecker, *Journal in the Night* (London: Harvill Press, 1950), xiii.

<sup>17</sup> Haecker, *Journal*. Haecker's journal documents his arrest and his critique of Germany. 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

*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 fails to mention Haecker’s work on Kierkegaard.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> 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 Schrepf) 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’.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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to Kierkegaard through Haecker’s writings and in turn introduced Kierkegaard to the English-speaking world. For more, see George Pattison, ‘Great Britain: From “Prophet of the Now” To Postmodern Ironist (and after),’ in *Kierkegaard’s International Reception*, ed. Jon Stewart (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,’ *Kierkegardiana* 18 (1996), 173-190.

<sup>18</sup> Tracey Rowland, *Benedict Xvi : A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 11-12. Rowland does briefly recognise Haecker’s ‘dedication’ to Kierkegaard on p. 20, but only in relation to Alexander Dru and no further.

<sup>19</sup> 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 *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 190, 220. See also, John M. Hoberman, ‘Kierkegaard’s “Two Ages” and Heidegger’s Critique of Modernity,’ in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 240-241. 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. Also, see Markus Kleinert, ‘Theodor Haecker: The Mobilization of a Total Author,’ in *Kierkegaard’s Influence on Literature, Criticism and Art*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 91-114. Wittgenstein felt so indebted to Haecker that he donated some of his family money to him, see Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein : The Duty of Genius*, 109.

<sup>20</sup> Janik, ‘Haecker, Kierkegaard and the Early Brenner: A Contribution to the History of the Reception of *Two Ages* in the German-Speaking World,’ 191. Schrepf was responsible for translating twelve volumes of Kierkegaard’s works into German by 1922.

<sup>21</sup> Theodor Haecker and C. van O. Bruyn, [*Der Buckel Kierkegaards*] *Kierkegaard the Cripple* (London: Harvill Press, 1948), 13.

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'.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

Haecker is right to distinguish Kierkegaard from Newman in ecclesial terms however this should not indicate that their commitments or intellectual targets were incongruous.<sup>24</sup> 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 later on in chapter 5.

However, what unites Kierkegaard, Newman, and Haecker is an emphasis upon 'wonder' and how it outshines human management—a topic that will also be addressed in the next chapter. 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'.<sup>25</sup> Acknowledging this transposition of Kierkegaard and Newman, Alexander Dru sums up Haecker's position thus: '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'.<sup>26</sup> In 1949, Dru was preparing translations of Haecker and published two articles<sup>27</sup> about Haecker's

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<sup>22</sup> Haecker and Bruyn, *Kierkegaard the Cripple*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Haecker and Bruyn, *Kierkegaard the Cripple*, 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*. Cf. *Journal*, 1849 X<sup>2</sup> A 207 (Dru 1003): "The human race, like individuals, also needs examinations or examiners in order to preserve its continuity. Geniuses are really the examiners. They develop much more slowly than other men, they really go through all the fundamental historical forms of existence. And therein lies their significance as correctives. 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."

<sup>24</sup> For a more harmonious view, see M. Jamie Ferreira, 'Leaps and Circles: Kierkegaard and Newman on Faith and Reason,' *Religious Studies* 30, no. 4 (1994).

<sup>25</sup> Haecker, *Journal*, 47. For more on Newman, see Gerard Loughlin, 'The Wonder of Newman's Education,' *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1038 (2011), 224-242.

<sup>26</sup> Haecker, *Journal*, 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, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford, between A.D. 1826 and 1843*, [New ed.], ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 251ff.

<sup>27</sup> 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 (1949), 260-275; Alexander Dru, 'On Haecker's *Metaphysik Des Gefühls*,' *Downside Review* 68, no. 211 (1949), 35-45.

relation to Kierkegaard in the *Downside Review* which appeared alongside one of 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'.<sup>28</sup>

Haecker's foundational place in the Kierkegaardian tradition within Catholicism is important because of his translation of the writings of Newman and Kierkegaard and his subsequent influence upon important figures. However, Haecker's work on Kierkegaard is also important to signal because it precedes that of Karl Barth<sup>29</sup> and Paul Tillich<sup>30</sup>—two figures that are often associated with introducing Kierkegaard to the world of theology.

### 3.1.2 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,<sup>31</sup> but also because of his early—albeit, not flawless—engagement with Kierkegaard.<sup>32</sup> When Romano Guardini presents the thought of Kierkegaard, the genre that he often compares Kierkegaard with is that of mystical theology and Christian psychology.<sup>33</sup> The primary theme that Guardini traces in Kierkegaard's works is

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<sup>28</sup> Dru, 'On Haecker's *Metaphysik Des Gefühls*,' 40.

<sup>29</sup> '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. Thanks to Charlie Shepherd for this reference. Barth's brief exposure to Kierkegaard came in the 1920s during his revision of *Der Römerbrief* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1922), but his Danish muse was soon discarded by the 1930s. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology : Its Genesis and 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]).

<sup>30</sup> 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 Heiko Schulz's 'A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard' in Jon Stewart, ed., *Kierkegaard's International Reception: Northern and Western Europe*, vol. 1 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 307-420; esp. p. 342.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Romano Guardini: Reform from the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010). See also, Robert Anthony Krieg, *Romano Guardini : A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> For instance see, *Der Ausgangspunkt der Denkbewegung Soren Kierkegaards* (Kösel 1927), *Vom Sinn der Schwermut* (1928), and *Unterscheidung des Christlichen* (Mainz 1935). 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 ed. N. J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser and K. B. Söderquist, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2010: Kierkegaard's Late Writings* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010): 201-222. Also see, Peter Šajda, 'The Choice of Onself: Revisiting Guardini's Critique of Kierkegaard's Concept of Selfhood,' *Filozofia* 66, no. 9 (2011), 868-878. See also, Peter Šajda, 'Romano Guardini: Between Actualistic Personalism, Qualitative Dialectic and Kinetic Logic' in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 45-74. Cf. Massimo Borghesi, *Romano Guardini : Dialettica E Antropologia* (Roma: Edizioni Studium, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Romano Guardini, *Pensatori Religiosi*, 2nd ed. (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001). Henceforth, PR.

that of melancholy or depression, and the primary texts that Guardini engages are Christoph Schrempf's German translation of *Sickness unto Death* and *My Point of View as an Author*.<sup>34</sup> 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 by pointing to relevant passages from Kierkegaard's *Journals*.<sup>35</sup> 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 writings is best 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 54-57), 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 irresponsibility embracing incomprehensibility (PR 71).

Although Guardini's method of reading does not allow him to fully grasp Kierkegaard's point, 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 inclosing reserve, the demonic, and learning silence from the lilies and the birds. On the face of it, a person would 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

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<sup>34</sup> In passing, Guardini will acknowledge snippets from *Either/Or*, *Concept of Anxiety*, *Repetition*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and *Stages in Life's Way*.

<sup>35</sup> Often, Guardini only cites the first volume of Theodor Haecker's German translation of Kierkegaard's *Journals*.

melancholy' leads the person away from God and toward eternal perdition; whereas 'good melancholy' leads a person toward God in faith (PR 112-114). 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 human life 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*<sup>36</sup>).

In his book on Blaise Pascal (1935)<sup>37</sup>, 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).

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<sup>36</sup> For MacIntyre's account, see Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (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).

<sup>37</sup> Romano Guardini, *Pascal* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992). All translations are mine. Henceforth, P.

Ultimately, Kierkegaard gets politely dismissed by Guardini because he detects an overly pessimistic and Lutheran theology (P 301). For instance, when discussing the 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).<sup>38</sup> 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 *is sin itself* (P 207). Guardini's initial concern about Kierkegaard's perspectivism in 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*.<sup>39</sup> 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. Commenting on Guardini's characterisation of Kierkegaard, 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.<sup>40</sup>

In some respects, Guardini compares Pascal to Kierkegaard as if to grasp a Catholic understanding of a Protestant phenomenon of a crisis of faith. In the end, Guardini appreciates Kierkegaard at arm's length but ultimately holds up Pascal as the Catholic

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<sup>38</sup> Recently, Simon Podmore has problematized this 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 Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Peter Šajda, 'Romano Guardini: Between Actualistic Personalism, Qualitative Dialectic and Kinetic Logic', 52.

<sup>40</sup> Šajda, 69.

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'; and iii) 'the knowledge of our own suffering in order to orient ourselves in the knowledge of God in Christ'.<sup>41</sup> 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'.<sup>42</sup> 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'.<sup>43</sup> I will treat Fabro more in a later chapter, but it is important that he circumvents Guardini's 'protestant' objections in this way.

### 3.1.3 Erich Przywara

The next prominent Catholic thinker that needs to be mentioned is Erich Przywara SJ (1889-1972), who is probably best known for his famous dispute with Karl Barth regarding the notion of 'analogy of being'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Przywara is also known for presenting Kierkegaard as essentially an anonymous Catholic.<sup>45</sup> Przywara wrote *Das Geheimnis Kierkegaards* (1929)<sup>46</sup> after spending some time lecturing in Davos with Paul Tillich.<sup>47</sup> At the time, Przywara noted

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<sup>41</sup> 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).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> 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).

<sup>45</sup> For instance, consider *Papirer* I A 38; I A 138; II A 265. See also, Cornelio Fabro, 'Spunti Cattolici Nel Pensiero Religioso Di Soren Kierkegaard,' *Doctor Communis* 26, no. 4 (1973), 251-280.

<sup>46</sup> Erich Przywara, *Das Geheimnis Kierkegaards* (München und Berlin: Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1929).

<sup>47</sup> O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J.: His Theology and His World*, 111.

that as he grew fonder of Kierkegaard, Tillich was more enthralled by Schelling.<sup>48</sup> One of the main reasons why Przywara took an interest in Kierkegaard's writings was because Kierkegaard was a modern thinker that 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*.<sup>49</sup> It should also be noted that in 1930, Karl Barth attended Przywara's lectures on Kierkegaard in Basel.<sup>50</sup> 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, spirituality, and his ideas in general. Przywara also has a bit to say about Kierkegaard's 'personal Mariology'<sup>51</sup>—a topic that I will return to in a later chapter on Cornelio Fabro. However, Christopher Barnett has provided a helpful essay that allows readers to gain a sense of the level of Przywara's engagement with Kierkegaard's writings.<sup>52</sup>

What is perhaps less known is the extent of Barth's indebtedness to Przywara's presentation of Kierkegaard. Barth's indebtedness to Przywara is signalled in a reference Walter Lowrie makes in his introduction to Kierkegaard's 'Attack on Christendom'. Lowrie implies that Przywara's Catholic portrayal of Kierkegaard is partly responsible for Barth's later rejection of Kierkegaard.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Barth is quoted as saying 'If I were to follow Kierkegaard, I might as well go over there [the Vatican]'.<sup>54</sup> Although it has been argued that the majority of Barth's criticisms of Kierkegaard are misguided,<sup>55</sup> 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:

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<sup>48</sup> For more, see Thomas O'Meara, 'Paul Tillich and Erich Przywara at Davos,' *Gregorianum* 87 (2006), 227-238.

<sup>49</sup> O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J. : His Theology and His World*, 77.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216 n. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Przywara, *Geheimnis*, 114.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 131-151.

<sup>53</sup> 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; 102-104. Many thanks to Philip Ziegler for this reference. 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* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 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.

<sup>54</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, W. Lowrie, and H. A. Johnson, *Attack Upon "Christendom", 1854-1855* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), xvi. Lowrie provides no textual evidence of Barth saying this.

<sup>55</sup> For more, see an excellent article by Philip G. Ziegler, 'Barth's Criticisms of Kierkegaard – a Striking out at Phantoms?,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 4 (2007), 434-451.

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.<sup>56</sup>

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, the scope of its influence shows that it should not be so quickly dismissed.<sup>57</sup>

### 3.1.4 Erik Peterson

In stark contrast to his former Göttingen colleague Karl Barth, the German theologian Erik Peterson (1890-1960) claims that Kierkegaard’s ‘influence upon 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Theology was significant’.<sup>58</sup> Despite this vast influence, 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’.<sup>59</sup> Peterson continues, ‘everyone knows how to talk about anxiety, paradox, and risk, but the original meaning of Kierkegaard’s thought is slowly falling from view’. Here Peterson shores up the problem in European Kierkegaard studies at this time: the theological import of Kierkegaard’s writings is actively suppressed.

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<sup>56</sup> Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, and J. Baillie, *Natural Theology : Comprising "Nature and Grace"* (London: The Centenary Press, 1946), 116. For this reference, I am gratefully indebted to Dr. Peter Zocher and Dr. Hans-Anton Drewes at the Barth Archive in Basel.

<sup>57</sup> For more on Przywara’s presentation of Kierkegaard’s anonymous Catholicism, see Christopher B. Barnett’s ‘Erich Przywara: Catholicism’s Great Expositor of the “Mystery” of Kierkegaard’, in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 131-151.

<sup>58</sup> 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.* (Torino: Casa editrice Marietti, 1947), 127-132; 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*, trans. Michael J. Hollerich, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1-14. It should also be noted that Peterson was a great influence on Pope Benedict XVI, see <<http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/theologian-sought-heavenly-home-notes-pope>>.

<sup>59</sup> Peterson, ‘Kierkegaard’, 128.

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.<sup>60</sup> 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'. 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*'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, 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'.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> In conclusion, Peterson says of Kierkegaard that although he himself was not a martyr, Kierkegaard still 'remained within Protestantism, and became its victim'.<sup>64</sup> For

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 130-131 n. 9.

<sup>63</sup> Peterson was also fond of this phrase, see his essay 'Witness to the Truth' in Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, 151-181. See also, Erik Peterson, *Zeuge Der Wahrheit* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1937). Also see, Frithard Scholz, 'Zeuge Der Wahrheit—Ein Anderer Kierkegaard,' in *Monotheismus Als Politisches Problem? : Erik Peterson Und Die Kritik Der Politischen Theologie*, ed. Alfred Schindler, *Studien Zur Evangelischen Ethik* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1978), 120-148. For more on the controversy between Kierkegaard and Bishop Martensen, see Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard : A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 50-52, 80-87, 401-410. See also, Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Christian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 131.

Peterson, 'the leap' Kierkegaard had in mind was not merely 'liberation from the immanentism 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'.<sup>65</sup> Peterson's analysis here provides an important insight into the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard at this time, but it also emphasises the autobiographical fact that Peterson was received into the Catholic Church after his encounter with Kierkegaard.<sup>66</sup>

### 3.1.5 Jean Daniélou

The prominent place Kierkegaard receives in Jean Daniélou's (1905-1974) programmatic essay for *ressourcement* theology has been overlooked in secondary literature on *la nouvelle théologie*.<sup>67</sup> In fact, the return to biblical, patristic, and liturgical sources only accounts for the first section of Daniélou's clarion call for liberation from 'une théologie rationalisée qui traitait Dieu comme un objet quelconque de pensée'.<sup>68</sup> 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 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 [*à se dilater à leur mesure*]' 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, does not 'persuade us to dispense with changing our ways of expression [*nous persuaderait de nous dispenser de modifier les formes par lesquelles nous avons à l'exprimer*]'. So, instead of viewing contemporary figures with suspicion, Daniélou says that Marx, Darwin, and Hegel 'représente un élargissement de notre vision du monde extérieur' and existential philosophy in particular serves as an even more profound resource with an emphasis on human freedom, historicity, and subjectivity.<sup>69</sup> Importantly, Daniélou mentions figures like Pascal, Kierkegaard, Barth, Gabriel Marcel, and Max Scheler as examples of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>66</sup> 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' in Erik Peterson, *Marginalien Zur Theologie* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1956), 17-27.

<sup>67</sup> Jean Daniélou, 'Les Orientations Présentes De La Pensée Religieuse,' *Études* 249 (1946), 5-21.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

Christian faith which he distinguishes from the atheistic existentialism of Nietzsche and Sartre.<sup>70</sup>

Daniélou especially highlights Kierkegaard, rather than Nietzsche or Dostoevsky as a prominent philosophical resource for rehabilitating contemporary Catholic theology.<sup>71</sup> 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 contribute to contemporary philosophical discourse.<sup>72</sup> According to Daniélou, Kierkegaard becomes a vital resource for resisting 'une théologie qui traite Dieu en objet' and for affirming 'ce mystère du Dieu personnel, caché dans les ténèbres, où nul ne pénètre par effraction, et qui ne se révèle que par amour'. 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.

### 3.1.6 Yves Congar

It is often overlooked that the French Dominican theologian, Yves Congar (1904-1995) wrote a remarkable essay entitled *Actualité de Kierkegaard* (1934).<sup>73</sup> Congar's essay provides a biographical introduction to Kierkegaard that precedes Jean Wahl's *Études Kierkegaardiennes* (1938)—indeed, Congar is dependent upon a few of Wahl's earlier essays. However, Congar acknowledges the timeliness of his essay is due to the popularity of the *Kierkegaard Renaissance* through the writings of Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers.<sup>74</sup> 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 Erik Peterson, and a Russian Orthodox thinker like Nikolai Berdiaev.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>71</sup> 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.

<sup>72</sup> Daniélou, 'Les Orientations Présentes De La Pensée Religieuse,' 16.

<sup>73</sup> Additional references to Kierkegaard may be found in, Y. Congar, *Vraie Et Fausse Réforme Dans L'église* (Cerf 1950), 180, 184, 202; Y. Congar and R.F. Trevett, *The Mystery of the Temple, or, the Manner of God's Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse* (Newman Press, 1962), 57. Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (Newman Press, 1965), 298, 417; Y. Congar, *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (G. Chapman, 1966), 11; Y. Congar, *Jesus Christ* (Herder and Herder, 1966), 116; Y. Congar, *The Crucial Questions on Problems Facing the Church Today* (Newman Press, 1969), 25; Y. Congar and D. Smith, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Crossroad Pub. Co., 1997), 150. Y. Congar and J.P. Jossua, *Écrits Réformateurs* (Cerf, 1995), 273.

<sup>74</sup> Yves Congar, 'Actualité De Kierkegaard,' *La Vie Intellectuelle* 25 (1934), 9. For more, see Brother Emile of Taizé, *Faithful to the Future: Listening to Yves Congar* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), ch. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Congar, 'Actualité,' 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*, xiii.

Whatever defects one might find in Kierkegaard's writings, Congar makes a deplorable anti-ecumenical jab saying that they can be traced back to the 'ardeur morale, sèche et brulante du piétisme hitlérien' 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 'la personnalité profonde de Kierkegaard n'était pas dans une unité spirituelle totale avec l'auteur de la création littéraire'.<sup>76</sup> 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 unreflectively continue the biographical approach to Kierkegaard that privileges his *Journals* as a kind of direct autobiographical access to the thoughts of the author himself.

Congar also observes that Kierkegaard's work represents neither a 'philosophie tout entière' but rather 'constitue un carrefour de problèmes vitaux, contraint à poser une question et engage une attitude', which is 'un point de vue existentiel et doit se comprendre, pour une grande part, comme une réaction contre le romantisme philosophique issu de Hegel'.<sup>77</sup> With the methodological difference between Hegelian resolution and Kierkegaardian dilemmas in view,<sup>78</sup> Congar says that the upshot of Kierkegaard's contribution is the 'primat de l'individuel sur le "général"' which gives way to an articulation of 'une philosophie de l'existence, mais d'une démission de la pensée spéculative au bénéfice d'une attitude d'obéissance devant Dieu, de conformité vivante à Dieu'.<sup>79</sup> 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* 'à être soi, à exister', which awakens the reader's conscience.<sup>80</sup> Unlike Erik Peterson however, Congar claims that the way Kierkegaard handles the Incarnation betrays his indebtedness to the Lutheran 'watch words' [*les maîtres mots*] of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, which reiterates Luther's theological view of 'sin' and 'faith' as the foundation of all reality.<sup>81</sup>

Whatever Congar finds theologically objectionable in Kierkegaard, there is no mistake that for Protestantism, Kierkegaard is 'le précurseur d'un renouveau'.<sup>82</sup> To his credit, Congar does not restrict Kierkegaard's relevance to *only* Protestantism but also says that for Catholics

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 30.

especially, Kierkegaard cannot be dismissed because he is ‘revealing a true Gospel [*un révélateur du véritable Evangile*], and he offers to Catholics ‘the path of a soul mate [*le chemin d’une âme amie*].’<sup>83</sup> In a prescient manner, Congar discovers in Kierkegaard the resources and language to make the claim that Christianity ‘is not wish fulfillment 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’.<sup>84</sup> Congar concludes his essay 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.<sup>85</sup> 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.

### 3.1.8 James Collins

Moving away momentarily from Europe, 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.<sup>86</sup> 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’.<sup>87</sup> Here, Collins refers the reader to a similar point that is made by Etienne Gilson in his 1948 Aquinas lecture.<sup>88</sup> In reflecting on Johannes de Silentio’s emphasis upon Abraham and its relevance for

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<sup>83</sup> Yves Congar, 'Notes Bibliographiques: Kierkegaard Et Luther,' *Foi et Vie* 57 (1934), 713. This quote also appears in 'Actualité', 31.

<sup>84</sup> Congar, 'Actualité', 32. 'n'est pas un dernier espoir, un dernier réconfort quand on a mené sa vie sur de tout autres principes, mais qu'elle est cet Unique nécessaire par quoi doit être orienté le *tout* de notre vie'

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>86</sup> Collins was also published in Italian, see James D. Collins, 'Fede E Riflessione in Kierkegaard,' in *Studi Kierkegaardiani*, ed. Cornelio Fabro and Nicola Abbagnano (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), 219-239.

<sup>87</sup> James D. Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 39-40. Henceforth, MK.

<sup>88</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1948). Collins relies upon Etienne 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

a 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’.<sup>89</sup> 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 1 and 3, but criticises 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 emphasise the ill-equipped nature of Kierkegaard’s philosophy for a speculative turn in Thomism—which, Collins ends 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 the *Edifying Discourses* ‘Kierkegaard’s personal devotion to the thought of our absolute equality

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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 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).

<sup>89</sup> 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, I, c.)’ (MK 289 n. 22).

before God is comparable to Proudhon's dedication to the idea of justice' (MK 302 n.17).<sup>90</sup> 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).

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 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.

### 3.1.9 Louis Dupré

One final Catholic thinker who has treated Kierkegaard's works at length is Louis Dupré (b. 1926). In his book *Kierkegaard as Theologian* (1958), Dupré explores Kierkegaard's

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<sup>90</sup> 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.

religious upbringing, understanding of sin, grace, faith, Christology, and Ecclesiology.<sup>91</sup> Dupré begins his book in the shadow of James Collins with a quote that sketches the necessity of investigating Kierkegaard's religious writings in order to assess 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 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,<sup>92</sup> 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 emphasising 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).<sup>93</sup> Hence, Dupré argues that Kierkegaard does not advocate any problematic notion of *natura pura* but rather

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<sup>91</sup>Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1964). This is the English translation of Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaards Theologie of De Dialectiek Van Het Christen-Worden, Theologische Bibliotheek* (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), 217-225. Also see, Louis Dupré, 'La Dialectique De L'acte De Foi Chez Soeren Kierkegaard,' *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 54 (1956), 418-455. 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 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1997).

<sup>92</sup>Romano Guardini, 'Der Ausgangspunkt Der Denkbewegung S. Kierkegaards ' in *Unterscheidung Des Christlichen* (Mainz, 1935), 469-472.

<sup>93</sup>For more, see Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 169f.

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 the way the '*consciousness of sin and forgiveness of sin* evoke each other with the internal necessity of two dialectical moments' which originates in 'God's absolutely free and redemptive intervention' (KT 92).<sup>94</sup> 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).

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

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<sup>94</sup> For more, see Louis Dupré, 'Of Time and Eternity in Kierkegaard's Concept of Anxiety,' in *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 111-132. Also see how this insight relates to 'the infinite qualitative difference', in Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*.

selects which neighbour receives my charity, but rather ‘*our duty is to love those whom we see*’ (WL 153), 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 the this question also defines my neighbour, for every man to whom I have a divine obligation is my neighbour’ (WL IX 33; KT 162). Although Dupré does not make this connection, Kierkegaard virtually repeats the teaching of 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’.<sup>95</sup> 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—a theme to be picked up in a later chapter on 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 ... 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. (X<sup>2</sup> A 223)

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). In the end, Kierkegaard shows us that ‘freedom itself is grace’ and that the Christian ‘sees all his efforts as a result of God’s meeting with him in Christ’ (KT 170).

### *3.2 Catholic criticisms of Kierkegaard*

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 were interested in his contribution toward their own debates concerning the relation of reason and revelation, nature and grace, and the establishment of authority in the wake of modernity. These translators found a rich resource

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<sup>95</sup> St. Catherine of Siena, *St. Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue, The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 36. I am grateful for Ben Kautzer bringing this passage to my attention.

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.

As we have seen from the eight Catholic thinkers treated above, the reception of Kierkegaard's writings in the Catholic world has been sporadic and they all have struggled to classify Kierkegaard within already existing genres. Most have been sympathetic towards Kierkegaard and yet his biography, radical philosophy, and Protestantism have engendered somewhat antagonistic responses in some cases. Some thinkers have fully identified Kierkegaard with Catholicism and others with Luther. This varied response is contained in a small body of literature which simultaneously elicits and resists the coincidence of Kierkegaard's writings with Catholicism.

Despite the multi-faceted Catholic reception of Kierkegaard, there have been three general—albeit, unnecessarily polemical and insufficiently substantial—criticisms of him, which can go some way to explain why Kierkegaard has not featured as prominently in recent accounts of the development of Catholic theology in the twentieth century. The first criticism levelled at Kierkegaard pertains to his own story and his tenuous relationships with his father and his ex-fiancée. This biographical criticism is often used against Kierkegaard to account for the various voices found in pseudonyms as the manifestation of a psychologically unstable mind. Although this criticism clearly mistakes a literary strategy for madness, it does reflect the nature of Kierkegaard scholarship at this time in Europe. The second criticism of Kierkegaard's writings is that his philosophy tends toward individualism, fideism, solipsism, perspectivism, etc., which is deemed untenable when compared with papal and magisterial documents. Although this criticism amounts to a common misconception, the rest of this thesis will treat emblematic Catholic figures for whom this misconception is less of a problem and more of a reason to engage substantially with Kierkegaard's writings. The final criticism accounts for the other two alleging them to be inevitable symptoms of the Reformation—that is, *sola fide* gives way to fideism.<sup>96</sup> Since Kierkegaard is virtually indistinguishable from Luther (so this criticism purports), his ecclesiology and theology of nature and grace prevent Catholic readers from fully appropriating his writings in a way that advances, rather than deviates from Catholic theology.

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<sup>96</sup> For a contemporary objection to Catholics insinuating inevitable decline with the advent of the Reformation, see Mark Lilla, 'Blame It on the Reformation,' *New Republic* 4 October (2012). <<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/107211/wittenberg-wal-mart#>>. Lilla says that it does not help 'to imagine that the peak of Western civilization was reached in the decades just before the Reformation, or to imagine that we might rejoin The Road Not Taken'.

### *3.3 Summary*

Now in the previous chapter, I re-examined the Lutheran preconception about Kierkegaard's writings to suggest that perhaps Catholic readers have been premature in their dismissal of Kierkegaard on such grounds. The rest of this thesis treats three representative Catholic thinkers for whom this Lutheran preconception was not a reason to dismiss Kierkegaard, but rather an invitation to take him all the more seriously. In this chapter, I have sketched the wider context of the early Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's writings and the objections that accompany such a reception. Again, any one of these figures could merit an in-depth thesis in itself, but what I have shown 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. With this wider context in view, I will go on to treat three particular figures that inherit this mode of early Catholic engagement, and yet develop it in an original way. I select Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar as two representative theological figures in pre- and post-conciliar Catholic theology that substantially engage Kierkegaard's writings as an interlocutor to their own way of proceeding. I go on to treat Kierkegaard's influence in the writings of Cornelio Fabro, an important Italian Thomist that provides a watershed in Catholic engagement with Kierkegaard's writings in Europe. In short, it is through representative figures like de Lubac, Balthasar, and Fabro that these three general criticisms of Kierkegaard can be overturned by uncovering the Kierkegaardian tradition latent within Catholicism in order to invite contemporary Catholic theologians to engage Kierkegaard's writings anew.

'God' *is*, not because our grammar is outworn;  
but that grammar lives and generates worlds  
because there is the wager on God.  
- George Steiner<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>

## The Theologian of Inwardness: on the Kierkegaardian aspects of Henri de Lubac's theology

### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the influence of Kierkegaard's writings is not restricted to confessional boundaries, but rather significantly shaped the writings of emblematic Catholic theologians in the twentieth century. I now turn from that wider Catholic reception to show how Henri de Lubac's theology is distinctively shaped by Kierkegaard's writings. In this chapter, I argue that by looking closer at the Kierkegaardian aspects of Henri de Lubac's theology, we gain an insight into the basic aims of *ressourcement*. 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 embrace engagement with contemporary philosophy and theology. To support this claim, I examine the Kierkegaardian aspects of de Lubac's theology in *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (1944), *Paradoxes of Faith* (1944), *The Discovery of God* (1945), and *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (1965). As a result, a new perspective on the Catholic receptivity of Protestant theological concerns before the Second Vatican Council is illuminated.

Although the encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950) expressed an explicit condemnation of existentialism, de Lubac is able to communicate his understanding of a renewed Catholic theology by employing key aspects of 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,

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

<sup>2</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1998), 137. Henceforth, MS.

his critical rejection of an historicism that reduces divine transcendence to mere facticity, and his characterisation of faith as the paradoxical gift of openness before God, to make the bold claim that Kierkegaard ‘makes de Lubac’s intellectual enterprise possible’.<sup>3</sup> 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 inter-war years. Thus in this chapter, I want to put forward the best possible case for a specific indebtedness to Kierkegaard’s writings. 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. As I explained in an earlier chapter, Kierkegaard’s fictive author Johannes Climacus exposes the attempt to locate the truth of Christianity from within (‘Socratically’), rather than from without (through a non-Socratic revelation). In this chapter, I want to show how de Lubac critiques a stable notion of ‘pure nature’, insisting that grace is radically interior, yet without us being able to claim it for ourselves. One could say that both Climacus and de Lubac can be understood as reflecting on St Augustine’s insight that God is more intimate to me than I am to myself.

Most introductions to Kierkegaard’s thought and writings<sup>4</sup> 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 already be a Christian and knows too much to learn 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher B. Barnett, ‘Henri de Lubac: Locating Kierkegaard Amid the “Drama” of Nietzschean Humanism’ in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> A few good introductions to Kierkegaard’s work are: George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005). See also, M. Jamie Ferreira, *Kierkegaard, Blackwell Great Minds* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

For instance, Kierkegaard's presence can be detected in de Lubac's *Paradoxes of the Faith* (1945).<sup>5</sup> In this early work, de Lubac organises 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 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 theological claim as if it was a patristic insight, but doing so in an explicitly Kierkegaardian register. For both Kierkegaard and de Lubac, paradox outstrips 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'.<sup>6</sup> In fact, de Lubac wonders whether 'all substantial spiritual doctrine must not of necessity take a paradoxical form'.<sup>7</sup>

But is this Kierkegaardian language *merely* an ornamental feature of de Lubac's theology? I want to suggest that it is not. In fact, my claim is that there is a specific affinity between de Lubac's theology and Kierkegaard's writings, which goes much deeper than rhetorical flourish. 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), *The Discovery of God* (1945), and *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (1965). For de Lubac, the theological task at hand is two-fold: 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.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, de Lubac's method for

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<sup>5</sup> 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). Henri de Lubac, *Nouveaux Paradoxes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955).

<sup>6</sup> Lubac, *Paradoxes*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

accomplishing this dual task is often characterised 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.<sup>9</sup> Although the patristic content of de Lubac's theology is undeniable,<sup>10</sup> it is my claim that Kierkegaard's writings provide the grammar that allows de Lubac to frame his diagnostic and apologetic task as a pre-conciliar theologian in the modern age. I take this *not* to mean that de Lubac could have selected *any* modern philosopher to convey his patristic message, but rather that the way Kierkegaard communicates his concerns is *constitutive* of the way de Lubac seeks to communicate his understanding of Catholic renewal and the way he critiques Neo-Scholasticism. 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 a call for the re-examination of the non-patristic philosophical 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. To see this more clearly, we must now turn to de Lubac.

#### 4.2 Kierkegaard in *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*

By the time de Lubac writes *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (1944), much of the available Kierkegaard scholarship in France was dependent upon scholarship in Germany.<sup>11</sup> 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).<sup>12</sup> Now, Petit took part in the Christian Resistance and was killed in prison by the Nazis. However, Petit was one of the early Catholic readers of Kierkegaard who earnestly suggested that had Kierkegaard lived longer, he would

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<sup>8</sup> Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xii.

<sup>9</sup> Fergus 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*, 25-29. David Grumett, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 7-24.

<sup>10</sup> 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), 317-319. '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'.

<sup>11</sup> 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 *Kierkegaard's International Reception: Northern and Western Europe*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 421-474.

<sup>12</sup> 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 *Kierkegaard Revisited*, ed. Niels Jorgen Cappelorn and Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 274-290.

have become a Roman Catholic.<sup>13</sup> 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'.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar way to Karl Löwith, de Lubac plays Kierkegaard off against Nietzsche on various subjects in his *Drama*.<sup>15</sup> Although the 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 distinguish sufficiently 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'.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, de Lubac can see a difference between these figures and Kierkegaard shines through as a hopeful ally for Catholic theologians seeking to engage with continental philosophy.

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 102-103). 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

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<sup>13</sup> 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 Höffding ont exprimé l'avis que K., s'il était né 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, Alois 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.

<sup>14</sup> de Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 49f. n. 49

<sup>15</sup> Karl Löwith, *Kierkegaard Und Nietzsche Oder Philosophische Und Theologische Überwindung Des Nihilismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1933). See also, Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel Zu Nietzsche: Der Revolutionäre Bruch Im Denken Des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1998), 304-311; 341-349; 383-397. For a more recent comparison and bibliography, see Markus Kleinert's chapter entitled 'Kierkegaard and Nietzsche', in John Lippitt and George Pattison, *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 402-420.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jean Wahl's Preface to Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: Introduction À Sa Philosophie* (Paris: Gallimard 1950), 4-5. Translation Mine.

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 104-105). 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 safeguards for de Lubac’s theology is the claim that the knowledge of God is neither illusory nor impossible in modernity, but rather dilemmatic and wonderfully so (AH 106). Hence, de Lubac venerates Kierkegaard as ‘the herald of transcendence’ in an age ‘carried away by immanentism’ (AH 111).

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 a sense of a marginal influence (at best) upon de Lubac’s theology and my original claim could be dismissed as an exaggeration. However, if the case could be made that de Lubac continually draws upon Kierkegaard throughout his life then my claim gains better traction. Let us now turn to see how Kierkegaard’s writings feature for de Lubac at a pivotal stage in his thought, *The Discovery of God* (1945).

#### 4.3 Kierkegaard in *The Discovery of God*

After sketching his drama of 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* (1945). 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* (1938) and *Surnaturel* (1946)—works that eventually led to de Lubac’s conflict with Vatican censors.<sup>17</sup> Although there are fewer 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 underway is ‘deliberately fragmentary’,<sup>18</sup> like ‘marginal notes’ that are meant to ‘provoke the reader to ... find God!’ (DG 3). Here de Lubac confronts a theological

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<sup>17</sup> For more on de Lubac’s censorship, see Joseph A. Komonchak’s essay ‘*Humani Generis* and Nouvelle Théologie’ in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, 138-156. See also Antonio Russo, *Henri De Lubac*, vol. 3, *Teologi Del 20° Secolo* (Milano: San Paolo, 1994), esp. ch. 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

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.<sup>19</sup> 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 epitaph of *The Concept of Anxiety* reads: 'Socrates was great in "that he distinguished between what he understood and what he did not understand"'.<sup>20</sup> 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?<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Reidar Thomte, and Albert Anderson, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Philosophical Fragments; Johannes Climacus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>22</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. 1, *Kierkegaard's Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 580.

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 he calls ‘aesthetic-intellectual understanding’ from ‘ethical-religious understanding’.<sup>23</sup> Objects that can be grasped in the aesthetic-intellectual mode 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 existence.<sup>24</sup> Now, going back to the 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*.<sup>25</sup> 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 we, as St. Thomas paradoxically says, have the capacity to understand, but cannot be understood (DG 12 n. 24).<sup>26</sup> 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 attempts to explain the importance of marking this difference, specifically drawing upon Kierkegaard:

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’.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Watts, ‘Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought’.

<sup>24</sup> Watts, ‘Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought’.

<sup>25</sup> Watts, ‘Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought’.

<sup>26</sup> 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 and Thomas Gilby, *Summa Theologiae : Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries* (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964).

In other words, because the Creator is absolutely distinct from creation, creation will never eventually attain the status of Creator given enough time and research. De Lubac draws upon Kierkegaard's theology of creation here to safeguard theological grammar from eliding into that of anthropology. 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).<sup>28</sup> 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 has an intermezzo entitled *Abyssus abyssum invocat* (Abyss calls to abyss), which separates the first chapter from, and characterises 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 described—albeit in qualitatively distinct—abysmal terms.<sup>30</sup> 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).<sup>31</sup> Yet, Kierkegaard and de Lubac appropriate this abyss imagery in such a way as to characterise the twofold mystery of the God-Human relation as an Abyss-abyss—introducing a doubling effect as the kind of vertigo internal to the problem of representing the unrepresentable God.

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<sup>27</sup> DG 117-8; cf. *Journals* JP X<sup>1</sup> A 135. De Lubac's references to Kierkegaard are misleading in the English translation and should rather be written in the footnote as JP X<sup>1</sup> A 48 and 679 [1849]; X<sup>2</sup> A 320 [1850]. One of de Lubac's quotes from Kierkegaard actually comes from JP X<sup>5</sup> A 98.

<sup>28</sup> For more on analogical knowledge, see Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 64-75.

<sup>29</sup> See, Henri de Lubac and James R. Dunne, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery* (Shannon: Ecclesia Press, 1969), 1.

<sup>30</sup> 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*.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Tauler's influence on Kierkegaard, see Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 6-28, 64-95, passim. See also, Peter Šajda's essay 'A Teacher in Spiritual Dietetics: Kierkegaard's Reception of Johannes Tauler' in Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions*, vol. 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 265-288.

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 characterised 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 iconoclastic 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)<sup>32</sup>

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 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

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<sup>32</sup> 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 Simplicity 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 also, Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*.

riddle-phrase “That-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought.”<sup>33</sup> To make this point, de Lubac uses a chimerical image taken from Kierkegaard’s *Journals*: 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 inwards, nothing would remain but the unthinkable equality of nothing to nothing’ (DG 69).<sup>34</sup> In light of the discussion above, 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.

It is appropriate then, with the dogma of a free creation from nothing, that de Lubac forcefully 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 expertly able to connect the *content* of 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. But still more needs to be said.

In *The Discovery of God*, de Lubac brings the reader, through wonder and ancient worship, back to consider her 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:

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<sup>33</sup> 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: MIT Press, 1991), 267-289. 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).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. JP 12 A 354 [1850].

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. 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 to 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.<sup>35</sup> 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 33-35, 73-74, 206-207, 274-277, 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). To his own defence, de Lubac emphasises 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). Although de

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<sup>35</sup> For an example of Thomist critics, see David L. Greenstock, 'Thomism and the New Theology,' *The Thomist* 13 (1950), 567-596. 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).

Lubac explicitly resources the content of his enquiry with the Catholic tradition, he does say 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"'.<sup>36</sup>

Even though de Lubac does make an attempt to respond to his critics in the postscript of *The Discovery of God*, it will not be until his later book *The Mystery of the Supernatural* that his critics receive a robust response. To recapitulate, there are only a few explicit references to Kierkegaard in *The Discovery of God*, however these citations highlight the wider, implicit Kierkegaardian structure of de Lubac's 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. Now let us turn to that later work to see the way in which Kierkegaard's writings surface.

#### 4.4 Kierkegaard in *The Mystery of the Supernatural*

I have been arguing that there is a distinctive Kierkegaardian shape to de Lubac's theology. To support this claim, I have drawn on two of his early works and now 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 beyond the limits of human understanding. I now want to show how de Lubac develops this paradoxical claim *in concreto* with 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 evidence for a central aspect of Kierkegaard's theological

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<sup>36</sup> de Lubac, *Service of the Church*, 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 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'.

anthropology—that is, human beings are *at once* temporal and eternal, finite and infinite.<sup>37</sup> 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 dilemma with a separated theology 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). If we take one horn of this dilemma, then the possibility of *becoming* a Christian is lost since everyone is already a Christian and there is no such thing as a private language. If that is not suitable, then separated theology offers up the other horn of the dilemma: ‘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 critique of separated theology 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 militant is in the process of becoming, whereas an *established* Christendom is, is not becoming’ (PC 211).<sup>38</sup> De Lubac’s problem with a separated theology 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). So, Schindler rightly says that de Lubac is left

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<sup>37</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *The Sickness Unto Death : A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13. For another instance of de Lubac’s use of Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology, see Henri de Lubac, *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), 170-171.

<sup>38</sup> 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 judgment. Today, the term of the militant Church is replaced with ‘the pilgrim people of God’ in *Lumen Gentium*.

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 structural affinity 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 structural affinity 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 six through nine 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 de Lubac has removed the explicit references but left the argument intact for those 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 μεταβασις ἄλλο 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 separated theology 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 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. 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* which was allegedly written in protest to his own earlier theological position, which he now claims was written in haste (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 a concrete, historical example of the neo-scholastic interpretation of a pure nature, which, according to de Lubac, would be the equivalent to the undesirable horn of Climacus' dilemma: 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 characterises the rejection of the paradox of Christian revelation in terms of 'offence', he specifically targets Cajetan as the 'unfaithful Thomist' that 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). For de Lubac, the offence generated by the Christian paradox is the starting point of the secular.

we 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). 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. I do not think that anyone who really thought about it could maintain anything so clear-cut ... 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. My claim has been that the shape of de Lubac's theology is distinctively Kierkegaardian. In

other words, it is because of the influence of Kierkegaard's writings that de Lubac's theology can be set off from other thinkers during this time like Gilson, who failed to distinguish adequately Kierkegaard from atheistic existentialism.<sup>39</sup> The difference between Gilson and de Lubac can be put this way: whereas for Gilson, paradox does not feature in his Christian philosophy,<sup>40</sup> 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 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 54-55)

Reading de Lubac's comments in light of Kierkegaard's contrast between two modes of understanding, it can be seen how de Lubac agrees with Kierkegaard's claim that Christianity

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<sup>39</sup> Etienne 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 antagonism to 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; 215-217.

<sup>40</sup> 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, D.C.: 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).

is suitably represented *in an ethical-religious way* as incapable of being suitably represented *in an aesthetic-intellectual way*. In his own words, de Lubac says

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)

De Lubac goes further in his Kierkegaardian *élan*: ‘I must recognize that I, as an individual, participate in the same nature as Socrates’ (MS 63). Hence, de Lubac offers an alternative position: ‘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, in the wake of 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 I would also add that we cannot overlook the importance of de Lubac’s earlier remark about Kierkegaard as the ‘theologian of inwardness’ (AH 103).

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has given a close reading of three important works by de Lubac in order to highlight the distinctive Kierkegaardian shape of de Lubac’s theology. Yet, this way of telling the 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’.<sup>41</sup> 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’ that was not already untarnished by a context-laden application. Is it not rather the case that in returning to the source, the excavator automatically brings with her *how* the source will be applied? The methodology of this article 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 on to 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

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<sup>41</sup> David Grumett, ‘Henri de Lubac: Looking for Books to Read the World’ in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, 237. Emphasis mine.

their historical and scholarly appearance, all Henri de Lubac's works clearly refer to the present' (AH 9). In short, *ressourcement* is not merely an 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'.<sup>42</sup>

If the current literature on *ressourcement* tends to delineate the 'return to the sources' into two stages, first a retrieval, then 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 God-relation. My claim has been that de Lubac's retrieval has a distinctive shape because of *Kierkegaard*. 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 in a way that such an 'autopsy of faith' is *already* marked by contemporary concerns. Unfortunately, Kierkegaard's influence on the *ressourcement* movement specifically, and Catholic theology in general has been covered up, and it is my hope is that this will change in due course.

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<sup>42</sup> Kevin L. Hughes, 'The *Ratio Dei* and the Ambiguities of History,' *Modern Theology* 21, no. 4 (2005), 645.

Creation as a whole has become a monstrosity of God's real presence.  
— Hans Urs von Balthasar<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>

Direct recognisability is paganism; ... if one can see it in him,  
then he is *eo ipso* a mythological figure.  
— Johannes Climacus<sup>3</sup>

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)

## Monstrosity or Monstrosity?: A Kierkegaardian Critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics

### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that Henri de Lubac's theology is shaped by Kierkegaard's writings, and that this should expand the scope of contemporary portrayals of *ressourcement* theology. After examining de Lubac's positive evaluation of Kierkegaard, I now turn to his protégée, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) for a negative evaluation.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I argue that there is a particular christological problem in Balthasar's theological treatment of anxiety and aesthetics that could be better addressed if Balthasar took Kierkegaard's writings more seriously. To support this claim, I re-assess Balthasar's negative evaluation of Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics (5.2--5.3) to argue that Balthasar's refusal to see how helpful Kierkegaard's writings can be is based upon a misconception that

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, J. Fessio, and J.K. Riches, *Glory of the Lord: Seeing the Form* vol. 1 (T. & T. Clark, 1982), 420. Henceforth, GL 1: page number.

<sup>2</sup> Luther's Works XXXI, 52; Heidelberg Disputation, paragraph 20. <<http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php#20>>.

<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, *Postscript*, 600. Henceforth, CUP.

<sup>4</sup> 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 Lubac, *Theology in History*, 594-595. 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 *Die Kunst Gottes Verstehen : Hans Urs Von Balthasars Theologische Provokationen*, ed. Magnus Striet and Jan Heiner Tück (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 349-366.

elicits such disagreement. I then go on to contrast Balthasar's christology with Kierkegaard's view to show how Balthasar introduces a problem of distance between the divine and human natures of Christ (5.4--5.5). Finally, I illuminate some general criticisms of Balthasar's work through the lens of this christological problem of distance (5.6). By identifying this particular problem, I argue that more sense can be made of recent, general criticisms of Balthasar's work—however, whether or not these wider criticisms are convincing, I leave to the reader's judgment.

## 5.2 Balthasar's negative evaluation of Kierkegaard

In the winter term of 1926-1927, long before his personal friendship with Karl Barth began,<sup>5</sup> Balthasar was first introduced to Kierkegaard's writings by Romano Guardini in Berlin.<sup>6</sup> Occasionally, Balthasar praises Kierkegaard; indeed, one of his earliest books, *The Christian and Anxiety* (1951),<sup>7</sup> is generated out of his engagement with one of Kierkegaard's most significant works. However, Balthasar later reflects upon this encounter as 'my misfortune'.<sup>8</sup> Many commentators, particularly Joseph Ballan<sup>9</sup> and John Cihak<sup>10</sup>, have provided a helpful index of Balthasar's engagement and disagreement with Kierkegaard. Yet, despite the sizable commentary on Balthasar's treatment of Kierkegaard,<sup>11</sup> Balthasar's commentators fail

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<sup>5</sup> 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; 121-127. 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.

<sup>6</sup> Manfred Lochbrunner, 'Guardini Und Balthasar. Auf Der Spurensuche Einer Geistigen Wahlverwandtschaft,' *Forum Katholische Theologie* 12 (1996), 229-246. The text that they studied was *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* with specific reference to Kierkegaard's engagement of Lessing (233 n. 15). 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), 201-222. See also, Peter Šajda, 'Romano Guardini: Between Actualistic Personalism, Qualitative Dialectic and Kinetic Logic' in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 45-74.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000). Henceforth, DCA. In the case of a direct quotation, the English pagination will be followed by the original in German.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 57.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Ballan, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: Persuasive Forms or Offensive Signs? Kierkegaard and the Problems of Theological Aesthetics' in Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Catholic and Jewish Theology*, 3-24.

<sup>10</sup> John R. Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), ch. 3.

<sup>11</sup> 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 *Fe I Teologia En La Història: Estudis En Honor Del Prof. Dr. Evangelista Vilanova*, ed. Joan Busquets and Maria Martinell (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1997), 449-456. Peter Henrici, 'Hans Urs Von Balthasar: Ein Katholischer Kierkegaard?,' in *Gott Für Die Welt: Henri De Lubac, Gustav Siewerth Und Hans Urs Von Balthasar in Ihren Grundlagen: Festschrift Für Walter Seidel*, ed. Anton E. van Hooff and Peter Reifenberg (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2001), 304-314. Jörg Splett, 'Der Christ Und Seine Angst Erwogen Mit Hans Urs Von Balthasar,' in *Gott Für Die Welt: Henri De Lubac, Gustav Siewerth Und Hans Urs Von Balthasar in Ihren Grundlagen: Festschrift Für Walter Seidel*, ed. Anton E. van Hooff and Peter Reifenberg (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag,

to offer a critical 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, in the next two sections, Balthasar's dismissal of Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics.

### 5.2.1 Assessing Balthasar's critique of Kierkegaard's view of Anxiety

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.<sup>12</sup> 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)<sup>13</sup> 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 pseudonym, that anxiety was not original to human nature, but rather a consequence of the Fall (DCA 133-136). Therefore like all other consequences of the Fall, Balthasar sees 'sin-anxiety' [*Sünden-angst*] 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

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2001), 315-331. 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), 333-377. Mulder, *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition: Conflict and Dialogue*, 125ff. Anthony Cirelli, 'Facing the Abyss: Hans Urs Von Balthasar's Reading of Anxiety,' *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1042 (2011), 705-723.

<sup>12</sup> 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, *Oxford Handbook of Anxiety and Related Disorders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Stanley Rachman, *Anxiety*, 2nd ed., *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 compelling theological synthesis of Kierkegaard and psychoanalysis, see Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis, Trauma*.

<sup>13</sup> Kierkegaard, Thomte, and Anderson, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. Henceforth, CA.

entire theology of anxiety in response to and 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).<sup>14</sup> In order to see why Balthasar's assessment is misguided, we must briefly 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 historically, 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 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 qualitatively 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* against 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 33-34).

Haufniensis's 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

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this dogma and its sources, see Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin : Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

that by the fact that it is, it is presupposed' (CA 32).<sup>15</sup> 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 primordial 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: of discovering the possibility of freedom and becoming anxious for the actualisation of this possibility.<sup>16</sup> Haufniensis says that 'between these two moments lies the leap, which no science has explained and which no science can explain' (CA 61). So in Haufniensis's 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 the religious. In other words, 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.<sup>17</sup>

But Balthasar detects a secularising tendency in Haufniensis' account of anxiety that allegedly reveals an inescapable reality from which God is removed and replaced by nothing (DCA 136-138). 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). As Pattison rightly says, 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 60-61).

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<sup>15</sup> 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, *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Arne Grøn, *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard*, 1st ed. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), 19. Henceforth, CASK.

<sup>17</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious: From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 60. Henceforth, KAR.

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 critique overlooks is that Haufniensis' claim is that 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 what Kierkegaard calls 'the aesthetic sphere' where one comes to see that their 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 resist this possibility and we are influenced by it *at once*. 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, even though the God-relation finds an altogether wrong expression as fate' (CA 110). Just as one's own self-relation in unfreedom cannot entirely close itself off from the call to freedom, the individual's relation to God cannot be entirely closed off when misunderstood as fate.

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's 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 while 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’.<sup>18</sup> 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?’,<sup>19</sup> 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’.<sup>20</sup> For what single 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 that leads to faith rather than misunderstanding anxiety as an impediment to faith. But does Haufniensis’s 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). Surprisingly, Balthasar’s antagonism toward Kierkegaard’s picture of anxiety overlooks this crucial feature of his argument, which could actually be used to supplement the basic aims of Balthasar’s theology of anxiety. In the next section, I will assess why Balthasar repudiates Kierkegaard when sketching the basic contours of his own theological aesthetics.

### 5.2.2 Assessing Balthasar’s critique of Kierkegaard’s view of aesthetics

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<sup>18</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith: An Introduction to His Thought* (London: SPCK, 1997), 103.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine and Chadwick, *Confessions*, 183. [X, vi (8)].

<sup>20</sup> *Confessions* XI, xxix (39).

Balthasar begins his essay 'Revelation and the Beautiful' (1959),<sup>21</sup> 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 1:95). 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 potential'.<sup>22</sup> 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 amounts to good theology. Yet, Balthasar rejects Kierkegaard's 'austere' interpretation of aesthetics because Balthasar thinks that Kierkegaard hives aesthetics off from the ethical and religious sphere (ET 1:95; 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 1:96).<sup>23</sup>

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 antireligious 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*;<sup>24</sup> 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 these life views are better construed as distinct but ultimately inseparable *aspects* under

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<sup>21</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, vol. 1, *Explorations in Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 95-126. Henceforth ET 1: page number.

<sup>22</sup> George Pattison, 'Kierkegaard: Aesthetics and 'the Aesthetic'', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 31, no. 2 (1991), 140.

<sup>23</sup> 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), 151-158. 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 & Theology* Advance Access (2013), 1-14.

<sup>24</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Howard Hong, and Edna Hong, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates : Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 157-197.

which the individual sees and leads her own life in seeking the good, true, and beautiful.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, despite his superficial dismissal of Kierkegaard, Balthasar does make an interesting observation regarding the family resemblance regarding the notion of the aesthetic between Kierkegaard and Maurice Blondel (ET 1:103; cf. GL 1:51).<sup>26</sup> 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.

### 5.3 Assessing Balthasar's theological aesthetics as an alternative

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.<sup>27</sup> In other words, 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 1:96). 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

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<sup>25</sup> 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 is that '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, Hong, and Hong, *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.

<sup>26</sup> Balthasar's translator, Alexander Dru took this observation to heart in the introduction of Maurice Blondel, Alexander Dru, and Illyd Trethowan, *The Letter on Apologetics, and, History and Dogma, Ressourcement* (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* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1965 [1st ed. 1957]), ch. 8; esp. pp. 428, 433.

<sup>27</sup> It has been reported that Balthasar's theological aesthetics will be the focus of contemplation for Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in retirement. <<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/benedict-xvis-first-night-as-pope-emeritus/>>.

the *verum* from the *bonum* separating ‘theoretical and practical reason’ and Balthasar places the blame, not on Adam and Eve, but Kierkegaard (ET 1:193-4; 96). Ed Oakes claims that the rationale for ‘starting with the transcendental of beauty’ was because ‘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’.<sup>28</sup> After lamenting the gap created by the independence of aesthetics from Christian revelation in the contemporary wasteland of a ‘warped and stunted Protestant *Weltanschauung*’ (ET 1:96), Balthasar tells an elaborate story to locate the source of the problem of scepticism between the correspondence of the form and content of worldly beauty, in order to overcome it 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 that have excavated the content of Scripture for a scientifically precise ‘truth’ and discarded the form and aesthetic value of revelation as such.<sup>29</sup> For Balthasar, this theological method is wrongheaded since the content of 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 1:113). By adding natural and artistic beauty to his otherwise Barthian 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’.<sup>30</sup> Nichols sums up the central claim of Balthasar’s theological aesthetics in this way:

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<sup>28</sup> Edward T. Oakes, ‘The Apologetics of Beauty’ in Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin, *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 212.

<sup>29</sup> 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 1:97).

<sup>30</sup> Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2011), 20-21. 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 into the ordinary and commonplace brings out the uniqueness of him who so abased himself’ (ET 1:113-114).

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.<sup>31</sup>

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’,<sup>32</sup> Balthasar’s theological aesthetics attempts to overcome the classic stalemate of *analogia entis* between Barth and Przywara.

Balthasar blames the failure of modern aesthetics upon the attempt to hive off divine splendour from concrete forms of worldly beauty.<sup>33</sup> In response, Balthasar takes a two-fold 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.<sup>34</sup> Essentially, Balthasar wants to re-enchant the universe by recovering the purposiveness of worldly beauty. To counteract the problem of scepticism between 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.<sup>35</sup> Balthasar’s Romantic turn to

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<sup>31</sup> 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), 409-423. See also Mark McIntosh’s entry on Balthasar in Ian S. Markham, ed., *The Student’s Companion to the Theologians*, vol. 38, *Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 355-366.

<sup>32</sup> Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> 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. ch. 3 & 5.

<sup>34</sup> 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/>>. Also see, Andrew Ward, *Kant: The Three Critiques* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), chs. 9-12. The most recent, 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.

Weimar Classicism is not unprecedented for German-speaking Catholic intellectuals.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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 taste that is resistant to logical deduction and commands universal assent *at once*.<sup>38</sup> 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).

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<sup>35</sup> 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), 252-253. 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: Harvard University Press, 2002). See also, Gary J. Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit : The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> For more on Weimar Classicism, see Simon Richter, *The Literature of Weimar Classicism*, vol. 7, *Camden House History of German Literature Series* (Suffolk: 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 *Christian Theology and Tragedy : Theologians, Tragic Literature, and Tragic Theory*, ed. Kevin Taylor and Giles Waller (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 133-148.

<sup>37</sup> For more, see Thomas F. O'Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism : Schelling and the Theologians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 188-191. 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.

<sup>38</sup> Balthasar, Fessio, and Riches, *Glory of the Lord: Seeing the Form* 18.

In other words, as Francesca Murphy has aptly put the matter, for Balthasar, ‘reality is *intrinsically* aesthetic, and analogical’.<sup>39</sup>

Rather than endorsing personal taste as an external source of judgment 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 1:107). 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 jeopardised in Kant’s aesthetics. However, detecting the depth of a surface is tricky business, 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 1:107-8)

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. It will be this undesirable aspect of Balthasar’s theological position that I will shore up in the next section.

#### 5.4 *Contrasting Balthasar and Kierkegaard on the direct recognisability of Christ*

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<sup>39</sup> 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 *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, ed. John Riches (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, ‘Intuition and Nature in Kant and Goethe,’ *European Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (2011), 431-453. See also Kenneth Westphal’s essay ‘Kant, Hegel, and the Fate of “the” Intuitive Intellect’ in Sally S. Sedgwick, *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 283-305. Balthasar cannot bring himself 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, *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 219-231.

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.<sup>40</sup> However, the issue for Balthasar is the actual recognisability 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 1:153-154)

Now, Balthasar reads Kierkegaard as denying the recognisability of Christ as the God-man.<sup>41</sup> Presumably, Balthasar’s comments here refer to a small passage by Kierkegaard’s fictive author, Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity* (1850).<sup>42</sup> Just as Balthasar makes his claim about the recognisability of Christ on the grounds of requiring and presupposing faith, so Anti-Climacus makes his claim about Christ’s unrecognisability on such grounds. 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).

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’.<sup>43</sup> But Kierkegaard points to the fact that when

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<sup>40</sup> 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’.

<sup>41</sup> Balthasar makes this point again about Kierkegaard in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger, *Two Say Why* (London: Search Press, 1973), 31-36.

<sup>42</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Practice in Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Henceforth, PC.

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)

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's 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 Pope John Paul II, that Christ is 'a sign of contradiction' (PC 124; cf. Lk 2:34).<sup>44</sup> This is a crucial distinction for Anti-Climacus. On 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 looks upon 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).<sup>45</sup> 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

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<sup>43</sup> Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 89. Henceforth, UDVS. 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).

<sup>44</sup> See, Pope John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979).

<sup>45</sup> 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. a1).

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.

Although Kierkegaard’s view of the aesthetic shares the same target as Balthasar’s view—the transcendental idealism of Kant, and its radicalised version in Fichte<sup>46</sup>—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.

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,

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<sup>46</sup> For more, see Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious : From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image*, 1-34. Pattison rightly 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 and ‘the Aesthetic’, 140-151. Eric J. Ziolkowski, ‘Kierkegaard’s Concept of the Aesthetic: A Semantic Leap from Baumgarten,’ *Literature and Theology* 6, no. 1 (1992), 33-46.

without sublating that deformity in a higher unity'.<sup>47</sup> In other words, Balthasar considers the Incarnation as requiring and *presupposing* the sense-perception of the unified form of divinity and humanity, whereas Kierkegaard sees the Incarnation as requiring but actively *precluding* such sense-perception.

In the end, Balthasar fails to pay attention to Kierkegaard's 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 rightly 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 '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 such aberration.

### *5.5 Identifying the theological malfunction in Balthasar's theological aesthetics*

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<sup>47</sup> Ballan, 21. For more on the orthodoxy of Kierkegaard's Christology, see David Law's essay in Cappelørn, Deuser, and Söderquist, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2010: Kierkegaard's Late Writings*, 129-151.

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 objectively 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 1:465-466). 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 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 1:109, 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. Before, aesthetic judgement was thought to be a *universal* human capacity and the sublime is 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 it as such.

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’.<sup>48</sup> Using Lash’s distinction, I would like to suggest that this characterises the difference between Balthasar and Kierkegaard. Thus far, I have outlined Balthasar’s criticism of Kierkegaard’s view of anxiety, aesthetics, and christology. I have also clarified the difference between their respective positions. However, a critical reader may be resistant to, and suspicious of Balthasar’s account of beauty’s (natural and artistic) transparency to the source of being and Christian revelation. Indeed, a critical reader may object that Balthasar’s analogy of beauty actually separates more than it unifies. In the next section, I will uncover a christological problem that arises out of Balthasar’s disagreement with Kierkegaard.

### 5.5.1 *Anxiety as distance: the clue to Balthasar’s christological problem*

As we saw above, 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 her 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, liberates 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.<sup>49</sup> In this way,

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<sup>48</sup> Lash, *Theology on Dover Beach*, 161-162.

<sup>49</sup> For this point, I am indebted to a conversation with Jeff Byrnes.

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 (Lk 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 74-75)<sup>50</sup>

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 96-97). And yet, there still remains a possibility for true believers to attain the mystical experience of Christ’s anxiety (DCA 105-106). 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

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<sup>50</sup> 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 Mormon Vision* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 133-151; 163-174. 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.

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.<sup>51</sup>

No figure has generated a more theological interpretation of the phenomenon of anxiety in human experience 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 90-91). 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 recognise 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 this 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 existence and we should not expect to find anxiety-free access to God.<sup>52</sup>

To recapitulate, there is a correlation between the way Balthasar equates the failure of aesthetic judgment in perceiving Christ with non-Christians, 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 had Balthasar taken Kierkegaard's writings more seriously, he may have dodged the christological problem I have identified above. Therefore, any suggestion, like Balthasar's, that human suffering should be positively evaluated as beautiful is flatly rejected by Kierkegaard.<sup>53</sup> Ironically, 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.<sup>54</sup> By presupposing unity in the form of the God-man's direct

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<sup>51</sup> This is a point that Cihak uncritically makes of Balthasar, see Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, 268.

<sup>52</sup> 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 use of 'anxiety' for '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 the statement, see <<http://www.archny.org/media/yearformass/25%20BI-YFM%20Taught%20by%20Our%20Saviors%20Command%20-%20The%20Lords%20Prayer.pdf>>.

<sup>53</sup> 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'.

recognisability, Balthasar *leads the reader toward* the grotesque—appraising human suffering as if it was an artistic representation to be contemplated;<sup>55</sup> 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’.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

### 5.5.2 Balthasar’s paradox: beauty as distance

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, 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*). 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?

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

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<sup>54</sup> ‘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 heart; when they reached his ears they sounded like sweet music’ (Swensen/Johnson EO 19). Cf. Lucian, Phalaris, I, 11.

<sup>55</sup> 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, 1995), 116.

<sup>56</sup> Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, *Postscript*, 600.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Rahner et al., *Karl Rahner in Dialogue : Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 124-127.

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 the above 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 emphasises the qualitative aspect of 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?). However, on the other hand, if Balthasar emphasises the quantitative aspect of 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'.<sup>58</sup> In short, for Balthasar the Christ-form concretises the *analogia entis*,<sup>59</sup> carrying its own verification on its face, and in being directly recognisable, provides the structural guarantee required for perceiving the form of, and responding to divine revelation.<sup>60</sup> But has Balthasar's theological aesthetics provided the reader with a monstrosity or monstrosity?

### 5.5.3 Summary

I have briefly surveyed the basic aims of Balthasar's theological aesthetics with special attention to some of Balthasar's incongruous claims. 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 '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

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<sup>58</sup> Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 37.

<sup>59</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1964), 74.

<sup>60</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth : Exposition and Interpretation* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 55.

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 judgment. I have shown how Balthasar fails to properly understand Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics, and could have learnt from him to avoid the christological problem of distance I identified. Some of Balthasar's readers have also wondered whether Balthasar's theological aesthetics is actually much less helpful to theologians hoping to engage the realm of contemporary aesthetics. In the next section, I will make sense of wider criticisms of Balthasar by illuminating them through the problem of distance in Balthasar's christology.

### *5.6 Illuminating general criticisms of Balthasar's theological aesthetics*

There have been many criticisms levelled at Balthasar in general, but in this section I will make sense of those that can be illuminated in light of his engagement with Kierkegaard. Again, whether or not these criticisms are convincing, I leave to the reader's judgment. All I set out to do in this section is to illuminate these wider criticisms through my particular criticism of Balthasar.

The first set of criticisms is theological in nature, raised by prominent Catholic theologians. For instance, Fergus Kerr has suggested that Balthasar's theological aesthetic is indebted to Karl Barth's theology of glory.<sup>61</sup> By making such an observation, Kerr is right to underscore the irony that for Balthasar, 'metaphysics seems to be absorbed into theology, in just the way that an opponent of *nouvelle théologie* would anticipate' since there is no doubt that 'neo-Thomists were mistaken to speak of a "pure nature without grace", but it is equally mistaken to allow the discourse of the economy of grace to dictate and even replace the open-ended investigations of philosophy', hence it is 'not only survivors from the neo-scholastic era who would regard this as short-circuiting matters of importance—of importance also for *theology*'.<sup>62</sup> As Kerr makes clear, Balthasar's inability to navigate successfully between the pitfalls of rationalism and occasionalism leaves Balthasar with a theology hermetically sealed off from serious philosophical engagement. In case this judgment seems misguided, Balthasar himself

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<sup>61</sup> Fergus Kerr, 'Foreword: Assessing this "Giddy Synthesis"' in Lucy Gardner et al., *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 1-13. See also, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. II.1 (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 219-222. [§ 31, 650-652]. In a letter dated 4 May 1940, Balthasar writes to Barth: 'Your colossal work has been a source of great joy for me because it has fulfilled the ideal which I had in mind. I had myself thought of writing a larger Catholic dogmatics, and all my publications were intended as a preliminary exercise for this. But the immense service which you have provided for us makes a great deal of what I wanted to produce already superfluous' as cited in Dahlke, *Barth, Catholic Renewal*, 104. For more on the influence of Kant on Barth's CD II/1, see Johann Friedrich Lohmann, *Karl Barth Und Der Neukantianismus : Die Rezeption Des Neukantianismus Im "Römerbrief" Und Ihre Bedeutung Für Die Weitere Ausarbeitung Der Theologie Karl Barths* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 327ff. esp. 358-399.

<sup>62</sup> Kerr, *Giddy Synthesis*, 13.

supplies the theological rationale for such a desired outcome: ‘Our concern is not to retain and transmit the old imagery of the gods but to regain the power which enabled men to embody the revelation of reality in the various myths’ (ET 1:109). Of course, regaining the power to see the difference between ‘the old imagery of the gods’ and ‘the revelation of reality’ requires a greater light by which one is enabled to see.

Balthasar attempts to harness this greater light by likening his theology of aesthetic judgment to gazing indirectly at the sun, since ‘the only true beauty is of a religious order and the shock which induces us to turn aside from the seeming beauty of the world is precisely some glimpse of the only true beauty’ (ET 1:104). Balthasar contrasts ‘true’ against ‘seeming’ beauty and claims that the theologian, like the Christian artist, can make the former visible using the latter since ‘grace has accorded this vision’ to see the difference. Balthasar is careful to ensure that ‘true’ beauty does not eclipse the ‘concrete kinds of beauty immanent in the world’ but rather it is the ‘very richness [of concrete kinds of beauty immanent in the world, which] is a proof of the transcendental origin of the beautiful, but only when the impact from above is truly felt’. So, for Balthasar, one must perceive the form of true beauty by grace.

Whether in fact this is transmitted to the receiver depends on the occasion, whether he has eyes, ears or heart for it, whether his hour has come, whether he is open and receptive to the beauty in question, whether the times are propitious for the manifestation of the beauty in things (not to be exposed in museums to the gaping crowds like captured beasts). (ET 1:104)

It is clear that Balthasar holds open the possibility that the ‘form of the object may convey this impact, may even contain it as a special grace’. Yet, it is unclear how Balthasar maintains a perspective that can adjudicate between simultaneously distinguishing and connecting worldly and divine beauty.<sup>63</sup> All that Balthasar admits is that ‘One must credit Christians with this power, and them alone, for the world which otherwise has no Godward tendency ... has for the Christian something of eternity’ (ET 1:109).

Recently, Karen Kilby has astutely identified the problem of Balthasar’s perspective as a contradiction between the form and content of Balthasar’s assertion that all of history and

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<sup>63</sup> Balthasar says ‘In the luminous form of the beautiful the being of the existent becomes perceivable as nowhere else, and this is why an aesthetic element must be associated with all spiritual perception as with all spiritual striving. The quality of “being-in-itself” which belongs to the beautiful, the demand the beautiful itself makes to be allowed to be what it is, the demand, therefore, that we renounce our attempts to control and manipulate it, in order truly to be able to be happy by enjoying it: all of this is, in the natural realm, the foundation and foreshadowing of what in the realm of revelation and grace will be the attitude of faith’ (GL 1:153).

the life of God is a dramatic play.<sup>64</sup> How does one get access to the “outside” of the play in order to see it as a *whole*? Kilby says that the way Balthasar

uses the aesthetic image, with his emphasis on the wholeness of the form, and with the tendency to make very clear, sharp contrasts between those who can perceive it and those who cannot, seems to lead to a theology which allows little room for argument, little space for a reader to question and disagree. In fact it leads to a situation in which it is hard to know how one might distinguish between being unpersuaded by Balthasar and lacking “the eyes to see” — how differing from Balthasar, in other words, is different from the absence of faith. (BVCI 65)

Here Kilby raises two problems with Balthasar: i) that of aspect blindness when it comes to distinguishing non-persuasion and non-faith; and ii) that of getting a perspective on the whole and Balthasar’s claim to have such a perspective. Kilby uncovers how Balthasar masks these two problems with his methodological pattern of fulfilment. In other words, whilst reading Balthasar, ‘a range of possibilities is surveyed, each of them determined to be inadequate, and a single solution offered which is presented, not only as succeeding where the others fail (or being fully adequate where the others are only partially so) but also as taking up and integrating into itself all that is positive in the others’ (BVCI 71). Kilby goes on to show how Balthasar’s favourite explanatory image of a radiating circle allows him to feign a privileged perspective ‘*in* his very affirmation of the fragmentariness, the perspectival nature, of all theology, Balthasar frequently positions himself *above* it’ (BVCI 91). In other words, through such an image of a radiating circle

Balthasar seems to be telling us that there is no definitive overview, no single privileged perspective, that no theological vision can ever be more than a ray from the center, and yet on the other hand, in his very *ability* to tell us this, to present us with this multiplicity *as* a series of rays converging on a single mysterious center, he in fact presumes an overview of a whole range of perspectives and of their relationship to the core. (BVCI 91)

Kilby rightly observes that the problem of perspective is not just limited to a few of Balthasar’s works, but actually characterises his stance to theology as a whole.

Balthasar’s whole writing, editing, and publishing career, is conceived as an act of bringing together the most different of sources into a universal (“Catholic”) and beautiful symphony, of taking many and varied pieces both within the tradition and outside it and making something whole. But the one who coordinates, who brings together and accomplishes the symphony, in this version, is not God, but Balthasar. (BVCI 152)

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<sup>64</sup> Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, ed. Conor Cunningham and Peter Candler, *Interventions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 64. Henceforth, BVCI.

In light of these criticisms, Kilby concludes that first, ‘the attention [Balthasar] has been given has indeed been justified, but second, that the notion that he might be a great guide, something like a Church Father for our age, is not’ (BVCI 167). So far, I have highlighted theological criticisms of Balthasar’s theological aesthetics levelled by Catholic theologians. I will now briefly turn to philosophical critiques of Balthasar coincidentally raised by two Kierkegaard scholars.

In his essay, ‘Von Balthasar and Protestant Aesthetics’, Lee Barrett confirms Balthasar’s criticism of Protestant dismissals of aesthetics, but charges Balthasar with restricting aesthetic judgment in carrying out such a critique. Barrett claims that Balthasar, in ‘one-sidedly emphasizing the beauty of Christ’s self-sacrificial love as the clue to all beauty’, advocates that we should privilege ‘one experience (even if it is the experience of the beauty of Christ) and make it bear the whole weight of Christianity’.<sup>65</sup> Barrett is right to identify the difficulty of such a thematization in Balthasar’s aesthetic, since beauty and art exhibit ‘no common denominator’ that can be ‘synthesized in a grand meta-theory’ (TAAVB 105).

Barrett’s critical observation is developed into a full-fledged philosophical critique by George Pattison, who is more sceptical of Balthasar’s theology of beauty insofar as it is ‘motivated by the desire to rescue the heritage of Goethe and Schiller’ which places theology into ‘strange service’ (TAAVB 108). Pattison claims that rather than placing theology into conversation with art, Balthasar instead, by making beauty the chief ideal, frustrates the possibility of theological engagement with art, since art does not always adhere to this ideal and often detaches itself from it. Pattison wonders whether art has ever managed to endorse Balthasar’s theological claim that ‘God’s incarnation perfects the whole ontology and aesthetics of created Being’ (GL 1:28). For Pattison, this observation draws attention to an important tension between aesthetics, and what Balthasar would deem a ‘properly theological aesthetics’ that seeks to ‘halt’ what he calls ‘this-worldly aesthetics’ when it fails to ‘fit revelation’s transcendent form’ (GL 1:37) which, Pattison identifies as ‘a necessary preliminary to’ or ‘an integral moment of theological aesthetics’ for Balthasar (TAAVB 109). The tension arises for Pattison when Balthasar calls a halt to this-worldly beauty when it fails to match divine revelation *but does not go on* to negate the analogical capacity for this-worldly beauty still to refer to revelation, since human experiences of beauty are pre-theological—that is, worldly beauty appeals to self-formation rather than being ‘indwelt by a higher spirit’ (GL 1:35). In short, there is, and is not, a link between worldly beauty and divine revelation. For Pattison, this ambiguity begs the question of the possibility, scope, and viability of the analogy of Being

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<sup>65</sup> Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor, *Theological Aesthetics after Von Balthasar* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 105. Henceforth, TAAVB.

itself (TAAVB 109). Since Balthasar ramps up the persuasive power of the analogy of worldly and divine beauty, Pattison charges him with endorsing ‘the legitimation of each and every presumed relation between non-theological and theological domains of experience and discourse’ (TAAVB 109). For Pattison, it is perfectly legitimate for someone to ‘allow the possibility of an analogy of Being without that analogy resulting’ in such universal applicability. Pattison says that

Even within the framework of a Thomist view of life, there are many areas where few would want to be too specific as to just what the divine analogue of a given domain of human experience might be, and the doctrine itself builds such caution into its own formulation, resisting the temptation to deny a continuing element of equivocation even in what analogously unites the divine and human levels of discourse. (TAAVB 109)<sup>66</sup>

Pattison claims that Balthasar’s position commits itself to accepting i) ‘not simply that our (humanly) inspired experiences of Beauty resonate analogously with the divine Beauty (or, more precisely, that they are always already shaped by the resonance within them of the divine Beauty of the Incarnation)’ but also ii) ‘that there is a further analogy between our critical and scholarly reflections on these human experiences and the way in which we should be reflecting theologically on the divine Beauty’ (TAAVB 109-110). In other words, Pattison says that Balthasar is not just committed to an analogy ‘between created and uncreated Beauty’ but is committed to a mistaken view of analogy that ‘is stretched to embrace the ways in which we discourse upon these analogously unified Beauties (that are, of course, finally one Beauty)’ (TAAVB 110).

The logic of Pattison’s reasoning is that if one’s experience of beauty is ‘often fragile, provisional, and contestable’, then scholarly discourse upon human experience of beauty would reflect this as well, in such a way that making the confident connection between Balthasar’s analogy of Beauty and the history of aesthetics becomes a rather difficult, if not an irreducibly frustrating endeavour (TAAVB 110). Much of Balthasar’s argument for his

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<sup>66</sup> For more, see Burrell, *Aquinas : God and Action*, 47-76. See also, ‘Ideology, Metaphor and Analogy’ in Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the 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), 517-545.

theology of beauty hinges upon his retelling of ‘the history of human reflection on beauty and how that history models how we might think of the divine glory’ (TAAVB 110). Pattison is right to question whether ‘a distinct theological discipline is required to deal with the dimension of Beauty in—or dancing around—the divine Being’ (TAAVB 110). Pattison correctly identifies the problem with Balthasar: he hermetically seals theology off from aesthetics with his distinction between worldly and divine beauty, but still requires a prominent role for aesthetics (TAAVB 110). Pattison restates the problem this way: ‘if aesthetics, as we understand it, is not adequate to the task of understanding and interpreting all human analogues of Beauty, how confident can we be that it is adequate as a basis of *theological* understanding and interpretation?’ or to restate it with particular reference to Balthasar, it is not clear how ‘the aesthetics of the Goethean culture that is so central to von Balthasar’s world-view—has (as yet) given anything like an adequate interpretation’ of beauty (TAAVB 112). Pattison’s rejoinder to Balthasar is that

the canons and discourses of Beauty, Form and culture do not themselves adequately address all of that towards which they point. Beauty—the experience of Beauty and its representation in art—is only a preliminary sign of what is neither itself beautiful, nor even super-essentially beautiful, but that nevertheless makes possible the opening up a world within which beauty might be experienced. (TAAVB 113)

Like Kilby’s criticism that non-persuasion is indistinguishable from non-faith for Balthasar, Pattison wonders whether Balthasar is ‘correct to interpret the entirety of modernity’s dissatisfaction with the ideal of Beauty in terms of negativity and rebellion’, since ‘some exponents of modern art’ do ‘attempt to find a way to something more elemental than Beauty, an appearing that is not itself beautiful, or not yet beautiful, but is the raw, rough material of any future renewal of humanity’s experience of Beauty’ (TAAVB 113). Instead, Pattison advocates not the ‘pitting of timeless truths or abstract definitions against each other, but of searching for the most adequate words and symbols in which to communicate the concrete form of truth in our time’ (TAAVB 114). In the end, Pattison is right to say that Balthasar ‘offers us too much too soon’ and to ask whether ‘the time is yet right for a theological aesthetics’. Pattison leaves the reader of Balthasar with an important question:

Is there not more to be found, more (perhaps) to be revealed, and more to be said about the elemental experiences out of which any future donations of Beauty will be formed—*before* we rush on to claiming for ourselves a *gnosis* concerning divine Beauty? (TAAVB 114; GL 1:53)

Pattison finishes his critical essay by saying that de Lubac is probably right in calling Balthasar ‘the most cultured man in Europe’ but that it is ‘precisely the problematic nature of culture in

our time that obstructs a genuinely fundamental reckoning with the possibility of renewing our experiences of Beauty and our practice of beautiful art' (TAAVB 114).

Finally, in order to reinforce my criticism of the problematic nature of construing anxiety as distance from God, it would be helpful to mention briefly how this issue of distance surfaces in some recent criticisms of Balthasar's theology of the Atonement and the Trinity. For instance, Tina Beattie has thoroughly investigated the violent upshot of Balthasar's theology and says 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'.<sup>67</sup> From a different perspective, Lyra Pitstick has argued that Balthasar often splits the hypostatic nature of Christ in such a way that amounts to 'the destruction of Chalcedon'.<sup>68</sup> Finally, Karen Kilby has rightly observed that the constant invocation of distance features as a problem, not just for Balthasar's view of the Atonement, but also his understanding of the Trinity:

In addition to reading the cross as a drama of God's abandonment by God, the Father's rejection of the Son, the second thing one must do to arrive at the notion of distance in the Trinity is to suppose that this abandonment on the cross (and during Holy Saturday) is possible *only if* the eternal trinitarian relations are characterized by infinite, "absolute" distance, radical otherness, separation.<sup>69</sup>

It is significant that the above general criticisms are illuminated by the fact that Balthasar's portrait of anxiety as distance from God is not an isolated incident, but rather permeates the whole of his theology. For instance, even a relatively uncritical commentator such as 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'.<sup>70</sup>

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.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, Balthasar agrees with Heidegger

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<sup>67</sup> Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism : Theology and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 227.

<sup>68</sup> Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness : Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), n. 69 p. 440; cf. 293ff.

<sup>69</sup> Karen Kilby, 'Hans Urs Von Balthasar on the Trinity,' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 215. See also, Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 94-122. Balthasar's 'trinitarian' rationale of distance or separation is mirrored in Angelo Scola's account of the 'abysmal dissimilarity' of the sexes in Angelo Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 27, 72, 134, 285, 335, 363.

<sup>70</sup> Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, 12.

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 terminological map for both figures. Yet, in the end Kierkegaard offers little to the completion of either of their projects. In this chapter, I have shown the places *where* Balthasar’s attempt to fill out his fundamental ontology with Beauty as the proper name for Being runs into problems for his christology and anthropology—precisely because of his divergence from Kierkegaard. But this may be where readers of Balthasar turn to Kierkegaard for help, because what I have argued in this chapter is that Balthasar could have avoided some undesirable theological positions by taking Kierkegaard’s writings more seriously.

#### 5.7 Conclusion: what benefit is Kierkegaard to readers of Balthasar?

To close, I would like to relate the foregoing assessment of Kierkegaard’s relevance to Balthasar and his readers to the wider aims of *ressourcement* in contemporary Catholic theology. It remains to be seen what Kierkegaard’s writings could possibly offer to readers of Balthasar in search of a rehabilitated religious—rather than secular—fundamental ontology. Indeed, in contemporary Catholic theology, it would seem that something like a fundamental ontology is on offer to readers of Balthasar. For instance, 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’.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, it is a ‘sacramental ontology’ that Hans Boersma offers as the interpretive key to the ‘essence’ of *ressourcement* theology.<sup>73</sup> Although Boersma admits that *ressourcement*

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<sup>71</sup> 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, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 283-340.

<sup>72</sup> 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; 338-360. 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).

<sup>73</sup> 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

theologians ‘did not set out to establish a particular theological system or school’,<sup>74</sup> what united them was their view that ‘all of existence—nature and the supernatural—was connected by way of an overall sacramental ontology’.<sup>75</sup> In defining this neologism, 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’.<sup>76</sup> 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’.<sup>77</sup>

Now, Boersma says that ‘sacramental ontology’ is a response to secularisation, a process that he calls ‘the desacramentalizing of the West’.<sup>78</sup> 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 teeming with ‘confidence in the ability of discursive reason to access and possess theological truth’.<sup>79</sup> 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’.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> And yet, regarding all of this, Boersma himself raises an important question:

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the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,’ *Theological Studies* 60, no. 2 (1999), 226-227. As cited in Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 243 n. 249.

<sup>74</sup> Hans Boersma, ‘Analogy of Truth’ in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, 157.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>76</sup> Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 289.

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

<sup>78</sup> Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 15.

<sup>79</sup> Boersma, ‘Analogy of Truth’ in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, 158-159.

<sup>80</sup> Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 20-21. ‘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 : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, 36-50. See also, Gerard Loughlin, ‘Catholic Modernism,’ in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 486-508.

Should Christians really concern themselves with ontology? Isn't the danger of looking at the world through an ontological lens that we may lose sight of the particularities of the Christian faith: God's creation of the world, the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the particular ecclesial community, and Scripture itself? I understand these fears, and I appreciate the word of caution as an important one. Nonetheless, the objections do not make me abandon the search for an ontology that is compatible with the Christian faith.<sup>82</sup>

What I would like to suggest is that the benefit that Kierkegaard's writings offer to readers of Balthasar is another opportunity to take that 'word of caution' seriously. In other words, the benefit that I am referring to would be a healthy suspicion regarding the claims of theologians—even those as grandiose as Balthasar's—to have fleshed out an ontology that is compatible with the Christian faith.

With such claims, Balthasar 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'.<sup>83</sup> 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'.<sup>84</sup> 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).<sup>85</sup>

Under the sway of 'the view from Dover Beach', the task of theology is reduced to displaying moral certainty amid culture wars fuelled by a preoccupation with the boundary-rhetoric of 'continuity and discontinuity' in identifying the contours of Church teaching. This dual task inadvertently pushes theologians to adopt either a tendency toward relativism, or toward a ghetto mentality toward wider culture.

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<sup>81</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses : Philosophy, Literature and Theology*, *Routledge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 71.

<sup>82</sup> Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation : The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 20.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 570.

<sup>84</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 571.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

Following George Pattison, I want to claim that it is unclear whether a project (such as Balthasar's) that uses 'phenomenology to uncover the deep ontological structures shaping human life and/or the human God-relationship is at all conceivable or possible'.<sup>86</sup> So perhaps the upshot for contemporary Catholic theology is that readers of Kierkegaard will be encouraged 'to go on' with leading their life before God, disabused of the need to deliberate first about fundamental ontology. Perhaps this is why Kierkegaard chooses to treat something as elusive and pronounced as anxiety, which tends not to submit to a pre-reflective 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 properly account for the way the world is as it is *primordially* encountered.

Perhaps what Kierkegaard's writings can offer to readers of Balthasar is something closer to 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'.<sup>87</sup>

To recapitulate, my argument in this chapter was that Balthasar's negative evaluation of Kierkegaard's view of aesthetics and anxiety lead him to take up undesirable theological positions that could have been avoided if Balthasar took Kierkegaard more seriously. To support this claim, I investigated Balthasar's critique of Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and aesthetics (5.2) and assessed the viability of Balthasar's alternative (5.3). After contrasting the theological positions of Balthasar and Kierkegaard (5.4), I identified a christological problem in Balthasar's theological aesthetics (5.5). Using this particular issue as a lens, I illuminated wider critiques of Balthasar's theology (5.6) and suggested ways in which Kierkegaard's writings could be beneficial to readers of Balthasar (5.7).

My overall claim for this thesis 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 supplement de Lubac and Balthasar's engagement with Kierkegaard. Fabro is a genuine student of Kierkegaard who substantially engages and negotiates Kierkegaard's contributions from within the Catholic tradition. With Fabro's bridge

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<sup>86</sup> Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses : Philosophy, Literature and Theology*, 71.

<sup>87</sup> David B. Burrell and Elena Malits, *Original Peace : Restoring God's Creation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 42.

building between the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Kierkegaard in view, my argument will gain cumulative force.

Philosophy must keep up its guard against the desire to be edifying.

- G.W.F. Hegel<sup>1</sup>

As philosophy of the act of being,  
Thomism is not *another* existential philosophy,  
it is the only one.

- Etienne Gilson<sup>2</sup>

## On the Kierkegaardian Thomism of Cornelio Fabro

### 6.1 Introduction

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.<sup>3</sup> And yet, many Kierkegaard scholars have debunked this portrayal as a common misconception.<sup>4</sup> 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 (1911-1995) is not much more than an obscure footnote in the history of Thomism. This footnote often signals Fabro's ground-breaking recovery of the Neoplatonic concept of participation in Thomas' metaphysics.<sup>5</sup> However, such treatment risks reducing Fabro's legacy to his doctoral thesis and fails to convey the breadth 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

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<sup>1</sup> Section 9 of the Preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* unpublished translation by Terry Pinkard, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas* (London: Gollancz, 1957), 368.

<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 39-56.

<sup>4</sup> For instance see, Davenport et al., *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*. Lippitt, 'Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Some Problems with Narrative,' 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).

<sup>5</sup> Cornelio 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 (2008), 77-129. Alain Contat, 'Le Figure Della Differenza Ontologica Nel Tomismo Del Novecento (Seconda Parte),' *Alpha Omega* 11, no. 2 (2008), 213-250. 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 chapter-length treatment of Fabro in English is in Helen James John, *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), 87-107.

Council on which he served as *peritus*,<sup>6</sup> 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*.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, I argue that although Fabro is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world, his versatility with continental philosophy and 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.<sup>8</sup>

With the exception of seventeen journal articles, virtually all of Fabro's writings remain untranslated into English. *God in Exile* (1968)<sup>9</sup> 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 and necessary* as his discovery of Thomas beneath his Neo-Scholastic commentators. Indeed, Kierkegaard is just as influential on Fabro as Thomas<sup>10</sup> and much of Fabro's work introduces the Catholic

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<sup>6</sup> 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, *History of Vatican II: Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 241, 410-429. 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II says that Kierkegaard shows us how 'faith liberates reason from presumption, the typical temptation of the philosopher' (n. 76).  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_15101998\\_fides-et-ratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.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), 277-291.

<sup>9</sup> 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), 120-143. See also, Andrea Robiglio, 'Aspetti Di Introduzione All'ateismo Moderno Di Cornelio Fabro,' *Divus Thomas* 100, no. 3 (1997), 139-164.

<sup>10</sup> Cornelio Fabro, Rosa Goglia, and Elvio Celestino Fontana, *Appunti Di Un Itinerario: Versione Integrale 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

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.<sup>11</sup> Fabro's work corrects this misunderstanding by reading Kierkegaard closer to the Aristotle of St. Thomas, and by showing 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 'Kierkegaardian' features of Fabro's Thomism in order to discern Fabro's contemporary relevance since his prodigious corpus remains tragically unexplored in English. 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.

## 6.2 Fabro's Context: the Leonine Revival and the Kierkegaard Renaissance

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).<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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

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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 2010: 60).

<sup>11</sup> To see the paradigm shift that Fabro caused, compare the reviews of Fabro's work in Pietro Parente, 'Il Vero Volto Di Kierkegaard,' *L'Osservatore Romano* 11, no. 3 (1952), 3. And the 1998 review of Ettore Rocca's translation of Kierkegaard's *Il Giglio nel Campo e l'Uccello nel Cielo* in *L'Osservatore Romano*.

<sup>12</sup> 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; 226-228. 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; 107-125.

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Hankey, 'Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival,' *Dionysius* 9 (1985), 90.

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'.<sup>14</sup> 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 internalised the dilemma all the way down.<sup>15</sup> However, it is not until Fabro's project that the Neoplatonic metaphysics of participation in Thomas comes to the fore in an engagement with continental philosophy, which receives a distinctively Kierkegaardian, rather than Kantian, shape.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

After Kierkegaard's death in 1855, it took about seventy years for his writings to emerge in translation outside of Denmark.<sup>18</sup> By 1922, only twelve volumes (out of fifty-five)<sup>19</sup> were translated into German.<sup>20</sup> In Europe, this reception was known as the *Kierkegaard*

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<sup>14</sup> Hankey, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Recently the unintended consequence of various Thomism(s) has been deftly examined, see Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*. 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), 442-451. 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), 213-231.

<sup>16</sup> 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, 1998), 147-148. 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,' *Diogenes* 14 (1998), 157-188. Hankey sees Fabro's work as a genuine advance in twentieth century Thomist thought. Others have criticised 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, 184-146, 222. However, recently some Thomists have come to the defence of Fabro against Rudi te Velde's judgment, see Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 237-243. 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), 485-492. 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), 485-496; 515-552. For the Scholastic inheritance of Kant's own thought, see Cornelio Fabro, 'Il Trascendentale Moderno E Il Trascendentale Tomistico,' *Angelicum* 60 (1983), 534-558. For a more recent account, see Christopher J. Insole, *Kant and the Creation of Freedom: A Theological Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> For more on Neo-Scholasticism, see Ulrich Gottfried Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), ch. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought*, xvii.

<sup>19</sup> This number is based on the latest Danish edition published by the *Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre* in Copenhagen. <<http://www.sk.ku.dk/eng.asp>>.

*Renaissance* and it characterised Kierkegaard as either a Romantic literary figure or as the Hegelian forerunner of existentialism, occluding the theological import of Kierkegaard's writings—especially in the work of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Karl Jaspers. Prior to 1948, Italian Kierkegaard scholars struggled to distinguish themselves from the interpretive strategies of their French and German predecessors which were constructed upon mere fragments of a small percentage 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 came into focus for many Catholic readers.<sup>21</sup> 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 Hongs'.<sup>22</sup>

### 6.2.1 Uncovering Kierkegaard

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 Rome in 1940—a year after publishing his dissertation on Thomas' metaphysics of participation.<sup>23</sup> 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'.<sup>24</sup> 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

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<sup>20</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Christoph Schrempf, vol. 12 (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1922).

<sup>21</sup> 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* (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), 305-326.

<sup>22</sup> Scaramuccia, 'The Italian Reception of Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers,' 367. Fabro worked from the more complete and accurate second edition of Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker* (Ibsen-Himmelstrup 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.

<sup>23</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 83.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

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.<sup>25</sup>

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’.<sup>26</sup> In Fabro’s view, this insight was often overlooked because of the state of European Kierkegaard studies, which was 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.<sup>27</sup>

It was Fabro’s newfound commitment to reading Kierkegaard in Danish, and to recovering a more theological reading of Kierkegaard that enabled Fabro ‘more than anything else, to endure the enormous hardship of the war’.<sup>28</sup> But most of all, it was his

friendship with Prof. [Erich] 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.<sup>29</sup>

Through such a connection to both Erich Peterson and Theodor Haecker, Fabro comes closer to the circle of influential friendships connected to *ressourcement* figures like Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Joseph Ratzinger. Importantly, Fabro sees himself as inheriting the earlier Kierkegaardian Catholic tradition of Theodor Haecker, Erik Przywara, Romano Guardini, and Erich Peterson.<sup>30</sup> It is a tradition that Fabro says

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<sup>25</sup> For Fabro’s own account, see Cornelio Fabro, ‘Kierkegaard in Italia,’ *Il Velcro* 25, no. 1-3 (1981), 89.

<sup>26</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 83.

<sup>27</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 84.

<sup>28</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 85.

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

<sup>30</sup> 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

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.<sup>31</sup>

Hence, Fabro emphatically states that his 'encounter with Kierkegaard has been no less decisive than that of St. Thomas'.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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 falling into nihilism'.<sup>34</sup> Fabro attributes these desirable aspects to the fact that Kierkegaard sat at the feet of the Greeks and Fabro sees Kierkegaard as explicitly 'reclaiming the classic realism' of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>35</sup> It is for this reason that Fabro detects a conceptual affinity between Kierkegaard and Thomas.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Fabro claims that Kierkegaard's writings rise 'above the arid confines of the Reformation' and offers

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Guardini's essay on 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*, 20. Haecker, *Journal*, 140, 170-171. See also, Dru, 'Haecker's Point of View,' 267. Dru, 'On Haecker's *Metaphysik Des Gefühls*,' 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.' Patison, 'Great Britain: From "Prophet of the Now" To Postmodern Ironist (and after),' 250.

<sup>31</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *Søren Kierkegaard: Opere* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), lxi. Fabro's first problem with Rahner is that he characterises 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 characterisation 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), 371-379. Cf. Rowan Williams and Mike Higton, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 92-93.

<sup>32</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 85.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. For more on scholastic controversies, see Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, ch. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. For a more recent argument along these lines, see Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach*, chs. 2 & 6.

<sup>36</sup> 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, 1959), 839-867.

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*.<sup>37</sup>

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.

In short, Fabro's re-discovery of Kierkegaard and Thomas reveals four 'Kierkegaardian' features of Fabro's contribution to twentieth century Catholic theology: first, Fabro vindicates the religious instances of Kierkegaard's thought,<sup>38</sup> second, Kierkegaard provides Fabro with a positive alternative to materialist notions of history in Marxism,<sup>39</sup> third, Fabro disassociates Kierkegaard's theological and philosophical positions from Hegel,<sup>40</sup> and finally, Fabro combines Kierkegaard's thought with Aristotelian realism.<sup>41</sup>

### 6.2.2 Uncovering Thomas

Fabro portrays the trajectory of his lifework as recovering Thomistic metaphysics in light of the crisis of modern atheism and the theological import of Kierkegaard's writings. Fabro identifies three emphases in his own writings in terms of two inseparable moments of 'breaking with' and 'openness toward':

1. A *break* with the Greek-Scholastic tradition that interpreted 'being' in two ways: upon the axis of 'possible/real' and the axis of 'essence/existence'. And an *openness* toward Thomas's understanding of *ens* as the real concrete substance composed of real essence and *esse /actus essendi*. Here Fabro advocates the primacy of the onto-metaphysic of *esse* as 'acting' upon the 'form' in both a realist and idealist sense.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Fabro, *S. Kierkegaard Diario* (3rd Ed.), 130. As cited in Scaramuccia, 367.

<sup>38</sup> Cornelio Fabro, 'Influssi Cattolici Sulla Spiritualità Kierkegaardiana,' *Humanitas* 17 (1962), 501-507.

<sup>39</sup> Fabro, *Tra Kierkegaard E Marx: Per Una Definizione Dell'esistenza*.

<sup>40</sup> C. Fabro and C. Ferraro, *La Prima Riforma Della Dialettica Hegeliana* (Editrice del Verbo incantato, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 227. For more on the influence of Aristotle on Kierkegaard, see Cornelio 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, 1980), 111-113. See also, Fabro's extended analysis 'Aristotle and Aristotelianism' in Thulstrup and Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions* [*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana* 6], 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 Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, vol. 17 (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 165-190.

<sup>42</sup> Fabro's distinction here refers to human creatures, and he explains elsewhere that for St. Thomas, 'the real distinction in creatures between essence and the act of existing [*atto di essere*] is affirmed in the early works with a terminological dependence upon Avicenna (cf. *In I Sent.*, dist. 8, q. 5, a. 1: the article summarises Avicenna,

2. A *break* with the modern subjectivism of immanence which makes consciousness the origin of 'being' and universalizes the essence of freedom. And an *openness* toward the real presence of the entity 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. Here Fabro advocates the primacy of ... [pursuing] the truth in knowing and of the good in acting.
3. A *break* with the ethical empiricism of left-wing existentialism (and Marxism) that reduces humanity to an historical fact. And an *openness* 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. Here Fabro upholds the existential primacy of human freedom as the spiritual subject's radical independence from the finite, which begins with freedom in and with itself.<sup>43</sup>

Fabro says that this contrary movement of 'breaking-with' and 'openness towards' is an attempt to resist being closed within a system or reduced to a single paradigm because it orients his thinking toward understanding 'being' in service of the truth and bearing witness to human freedom.<sup>44</sup>

By seeking a deeper understanding of the significance of participation for Thomas, 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'.<sup>45</sup> The upshot of Fabro's discovery 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, Olgiate)'.<sup>46</sup>

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*Metaph.* tr. III, c. 8 and tr. V, c. 3 and first q. IV, a. 2, the article reassumes Avicenna, *Metaph.*, tr. V, c. 4 and tr. IX, c. 1 and in 2 refers back to *Metaph.*, tr. II, c. 1 and tr. III, c. 8: for the real distinction). However, the Thomist position quickly denounces the extrinsicist conception of *esse* as "*accidens additum*" that Avicenna endorses, to which Thomas opposes the concept of human existing as "*actus substantiae*" (*In IV Metaph.*, lect. II, n. 556). Other teachings by Avicenna connected with this position by Thomism is the distinction of the possible *esse* of the creature and the necessary *esse* of God, which certainly inspires the third way in Thomas' demonstration of the existence of God (esp. in *C. Gent.*, I 15; it seems that the exposition in *Sum Theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 3 is inspired by Moses Maimonides). However, even on this point, St. Thomas notably moves away from Avicenna in so far as he attributes (with Averroes) a form of *neesse esse*, dependent upon God, by spiritual creatures', in Cornelio Fabro, *Breve Introduzione Al Tomismo* (Roma: Editori Pontifici, 1960), 15.

<sup>43</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 91-92. For more, see Ariberto Acerbi, 'Note E Discussioni - Un Inedito Di Cornelio Fabro Sulla Libertà,' *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 99, no. 3 (2007), 509-516. Ariberto Acerbi and Luis Romera, 'La Antropologia De Cornelio Fabro,' *Annuario Filosofico* 39, no. 1 (2006), 101-131. See also, Ariberto Acerbi, *La Libertà in Cornelio Fabro* (Roma: Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. For more, see Cornelio Fabro and Ariberto Acerbi, *L'io E L'esistenza E Altri Brevi Scritti* (Roma: Università della Santa Croce, 2006), 177-198.

<sup>45</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 130.

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'.<sup>47</sup>

So far, 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 how the distinctive contribution of Fabro's re-discovery of both Thomas and Kierkegaard allowed him to confront his own intellectual targets, which can be briefly summarised as: i) The Neo-Scholastic conception of *esse* [act of existing] as an empirical fact that is synonymous with 'essence', which fails to distinguish Creator from creature and lacks the metaphysical basis of freedom; ii) The Cartesian *cogito* of modern thought and its relation to radical atheism and Spinoza's idealism; iii) Dialectical Materialism which negates personal responsibility and morality in exchange for biological determinism.<sup>48</sup> These intellectual targets led Fabro to make the following commitments to: i) the development of Thomas' metaphysical notion of participation between Creator and creation; the phenomenological method and the relation of science and philosophy; iii) the recuperation of classical and Christian realism in the metaphysical existentialism of Kierkegaard.<sup>49</sup> By now, the reader must be asking herself, what is 'Kierkegaardian' about Thomism? In the next part of this chapter, I will take up this question in order to highlight the constructive aspects of Fabro's work.

### 6.2.3 Distinctive Features of Fabro's Kierkegaardian Thomism

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 continental philosophy. 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 particular conditions of a given cultural

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. For more, see Andrea Robiglio, 'Phénoménologie Et Ontologie: Cornelio Fabro Et L'université De Louvain,' *Revue Thomiste* 111, no. 3 (2011), 405-436. See also, Andrea Robiglio, 'Gilson E Fabro: Appunti Per Un Confronto,' *Divus Thomas* 17, no. 2 (1997), 59-76.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 232-233.

<sup>49</sup> Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 227.

epoch and place humanity before the meaning and goal of its destiny on earth in the plan of divine Providence.<sup>50</sup>

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 13<sup>th</sup> 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’.<sup>51</sup>

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 identifies two explicit condemnations and two explicit invitations that characterise the Leonine tradition: i) a condemnation of the *hypothesis* of universal progress asserted by various forms of communism, dialectical materialism, and atheism; ii) a condemnation of historicism and *atheistic* existentialism which repudiates immutable essences in exchange for the sole ‘existence’ of the single individual and negates the value of reasoning in metaphysical matters; iii) an invitation—the first of its kind in Fabro’s view—for Catholic scholars to engage seriously modern thought in order to discern its contemporary significance and value; iv) an invitation for future priests to be instructed in the methods, teachings, and principles of St. Thomas *d’Aquino*.<sup>52</sup>

Now, Fabro sees his own work as attempting to make good on such a requirement 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’.<sup>53</sup> After treating various concepts in the existential thought of Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger,<sup>54</sup> Fabro presents Kierkegaard to the reader as a prime candidate for building a

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<sup>50</sup> Cornelio Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' *Salesianum* 13 (1951), 185.

<sup>51</sup> Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' 186.

<sup>52</sup> Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' 186.

<sup>53</sup> Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' 187.

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. Alternately, 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.<sup>55</sup> 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'.<sup>56</sup>

To close this section, I would like to note briefly the ways in which Fabro's version of Thomism is influenced by Kierkegaard's writings. For Fabro, the human intellect is characterised in terms of pure potentiality in respect to its object, such that human consciousness is 'essentially open' to the being of the *ens*. Moreover, since the object reveals that human consciousness is 'being-in-the-world', then universal and necessary first principles are not deduced abstractions, but rather present themselves as internal to the existential structures of the single existing individual. In this way, the *ens* returns to Being as its ground and activity, and yet Being is concealed in mystery and truth presents itself as the 'unconcealedness of being'.<sup>57</sup> Thus, on Fabro's reading of Thomas, 'being can never be fully resolved in concepts and there is not an exhaustive concept of being'.<sup>58</sup> Fabro distinguishes

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<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, Fabro says of these prominent figures of the *Kierkegaard-Renaissance* that they all offer disconcerting treatments of Kierkegaard and they have 'betrayed 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.

<sup>55</sup> Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' 196.

<sup>56</sup> 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 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), 141-169.

<sup>57</sup> 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. 105-106. 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 (1959), 240-258. 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 (1973), 267-278. 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), 505-517. 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), 25-28.

<sup>58</sup> Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' 198.

Thomas from Heidegger 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'.<sup>59</sup>

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'.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Guido Mazzotta has rightly observed 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'.<sup>61</sup>

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.<sup>62</sup> Fabro emphasises that 'the "overcoming of metaphysics" does not put metaphysics completely aside'.<sup>63</sup> 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*'.<sup>64</sup> 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

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Burrell, *Aquinas : God and Action*, 138.

<sup>61</sup> 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 essence and *esse*', because 'whether infinite or finite, *esse* is always and only action: the infinite is *esse per essentia* and the finite is and has *esse per partecipazione*' in Fabro, *Dall'essere All'esistente*, 419-421.

<sup>62</sup> Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' 198-199.

<sup>63</sup> Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' 199.

<sup>64</sup> Fabro, 'L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo,' 200.

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.<sup>65</sup>

Although Pattison moves to relate this Kierkegaardian stance to Rahner, it is actually Fabro that fleshes this position out more explicitly. So far, I have shown how Fabro incorporates some of Kierkegaard's insights in his version of Thomism, but what is it about Kierkegaard's writings that lends itself to such appropriation?

#### 6.2.4 Summary

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. It has long been suggested by some Catholic readers of Kierkegaard that had he lived longer, he would have become a Roman Catholic. Fabro takes this suggestion as a humorous joke; and instead of speculating about Kierkegaard *himself*, Fabro takes very seriously the intelligibility of the joke by interrogating a Catholic sensibility in Kierkegaard's *writings*.<sup>66</sup> 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.

#### 6.3 Natural desire for God as human freedom

Fabro tends to speak of humanity's natural desire for God in terms of human freedom. In his lectures on 'the theological self' at the University of Perugia, Fabro channels the opening passage of Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death*:

Only the person that relates to the Absolute and bends back upon herself to listen to herself (in the ultimate sense of life and death) is able to understand the basis of freedom, which grounds the capacity to choose, as *at once* the extremely fragile and forceful tension: the fragility comes from the relation to the finite, and the force from the relation to the infinite. Only at this level is freedom of conscience justified and grounded for Kierkegaard, the freedom of faith. In fact, humanity is free in so far as it is spirit. But what is spirit? The spirit is the self. And the self, what is that? It is a

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<sup>65</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century : The Paradox and the 'Point of Contact'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 100.

<sup>66</sup> 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'.

relationship that relates to itself, or it is, in the relating, the relating to itself that the relationship relates to itself; the self is not the relation, but the relating itself to itself.<sup>67</sup>

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, de Lubac focuses on this same passage from Kierkegaard in order to flesh out his understanding of the natural desire for God. It is pertinent that Fabro does so as well, but extends this argument further into the realm of human freedom as that which manifests our natural desire for God. 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.<sup>68</sup>

Here Fabro latches on to human freedom, which is one of the key themes in Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, and connects it with the human desire for love.<sup>69</sup> 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 on to 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 and the Saints.<sup>70</sup> But here is another distinctive contribution that Fabro makes, to which I will now turn.

#### 6.4 *The Virgin Mary and all the Saints*

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

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<sup>67</sup> Fabro and Acerbi, *L'io E L'esistenza E Altri Brevi Scritti*, 194. Cf. Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Fabro and Acerbi, *L'io E L'esistenza E Altri Brevi Scritti*, 198.

<sup>69</sup> For more, see C. Fabro, *Riflessioni Sulla Libertà* (Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2004), chs. 6-8.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, 153-157.

Catholic has appreciated more profoundly the unique position of Mary'.<sup>71</sup> Now, much has been written on Kierkegaard's theology of the Incarnation,<sup>72</sup> but Fabro's scholarship directly responds to Lowrie's clarion call for Italian Catholics to reinvigorate the Catholic world with Kierkegaard's thought.<sup>73</sup> 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'.<sup>74</sup> For Fabro, Kierkegaard writes in the stance of *expectancy*, which, after Mary's 'Yes', becomes a constitutive feature of Christian discipleship.<sup>75</sup> Fabro's observation here is valid today in Kierkegaard studies, as the prominent place of Mary continues to be overlooked.<sup>76</sup>

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'.<sup>77</sup> 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'.<sup>78</sup> For instance in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's fictive author Johannes de Silentio contrasts the distinctive faith of Abraham and Mary against the tragic sacrifices for the nation by Agamemnon and Jephthah (FT 58).

'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

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<sup>71</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling ; the Book on Adler*, trans. Walter Lowrie, *Everyman's Library* (London: Random House Publishing, 1994), 288. n. 50.

<sup>72</sup> For instance, see David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 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 (1972).

<sup>73</sup> See Walter Lowrie, 'Søren Kierkegaard,' *Religio* XI (1935), 1-15.

<sup>74</sup> Fabro, *Riflessioni Sulla Libertà*, 11. For more, see Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard Poeta-Teologo Dell'annunciazione,' *Humanitas* III (1948), 1025-1034.

<sup>75</sup> For more, see Cornelio Fabro, 'Kierkegaard E La Madonna,' *Mater Ecclesiae* 7, no. 3 (1971), 132-144. 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).

<sup>76</sup> 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.

<sup>77</sup> See *Pap.* I A 68, 172, 190, 232; II A 31, 68; VIII A 338; X<sup>2</sup> A 64; X<sup>3</sup> A 57; X<sup>4</sup> A 454, 521, 572; XI<sup>1</sup> A 40, 45, 141, 184; IX A 12. See also, Fabro, 'Spunti Cattolici,' 269-270.

<sup>78</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *Kierkegaard, poeta teologo dell'Annunciazione*, as cited in: <<http://www.corneliofabro.org/documento.asp?ID=552>>.

it “after the manner of women” [Gen 18:11 KJV], 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)?<sup>79</sup>

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’.<sup>80</sup> 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’.<sup>81</sup> 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 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.<sup>82</sup>

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 -

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<sup>79</sup> Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, 375. It is interesting that St. Thomas Aquinas uses the figure of Isaac to say that hope is something that is born by faith (ST II/2 q. 17 a. 7 obj. 3).

<sup>80</sup> Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, 377.

<sup>81</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *Kierkegaard, poeta teologo dell'Annunciazione*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

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.<sup>83</sup>

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.<sup>84</sup>

It is important that in Kierkegaard's works, both Mary and Abraham here, and Adam—in *The Concept of Anxiety*<sup>85</sup>—do not understand the words spoken to them, but must act in faith; surrendering, rather than demanding understanding. 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'.<sup>86</sup> 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

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<sup>83</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling ; the Book on Adler*, 154.

<sup>84</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 149. See also, PF 34; CUP 260.

<sup>85</sup> Kierkegaard, Thomte, and Anderson, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, 44.

<sup>86</sup> Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 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 (1994), 29-44. See also, M. Jamie Ferreira, 'Describing What You Cannot Understand: Another Look at *Fear and Trembling*,' *Kierkegaardiana* 24 (2007), 86-101.

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.<sup>87</sup>

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*'.<sup>88</sup> On the face of it, faith is indistinguishable from Socratic ignorance: the means by which the wise person sets out to disprove the oracle's decree.<sup>89</sup> 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.

Fabro says that he is drawn to the 'Socrates of the North' because Kierkegaard's own library betrayed the fact that 'Kierkegaard was nourished by reading Fathers of the Church' 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.<sup>90</sup> 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 mundane, something that is no longer for human beings the Absolute of existence'.<sup>91</sup> 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

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<sup>87</sup> Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, 376.

<sup>88</sup> Cornelio Fabro, 'La Liberta' in Hegel E Tommaso D'aquino,' *Sacra Doctrina* 17 (1972), 182.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Plato, *Apology* 20e–21a.

<sup>90</sup> 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), 384-385. See also, Fabro, 'Influssi Cattolici Sulla Spiritualità Kierkegaardiana,' 504ff. Fabro, 'Spunti Cattolici,' 251-280. For more on the influence of Catholic piety in Kierkegaard, see Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*. See also the various essays by Christopher Barnett and Peter Sajda 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).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

probably never heard'.<sup>92</sup> To see how and why Fabro held these seemingly disparate figures together, we must now turn to the ecclesiology of Newman and Kierkegaard.

### 6.5 *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 the dissolution of dogmatic faith and the elimination of the Church.<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup> 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 secularising 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 secularisation, which he sees extending into late 20<sup>th</sup> 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'.<sup>95</sup>

Now, Fabro characterises Newman's response to secularisation with Pascal's existential dilemma: either atheism or the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Fabro says that for Newman, both the existence of God and the unity of the spiritual life are connected

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<sup>92</sup> Bernard M. G. Reardon, *From Coleridge to Gore : A Century of Religious Thought in Britain* (Harlow: Longman, 1971), 127.

<sup>93</sup> Cornelio Fabro, 'Il Problema Della Chiesa in Newman E Kierkegaard,' *Internationale Cardinal Newman Studien* (1978), 132.

<sup>94</sup> Fabro, 'Newman E Kierkegaard,' 120.

<sup>95</sup><[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)>.

<sup>96</sup> Fabro, 'Newman E Kierkegaard,' 123. Fabro refers to §547-549 of Pascal's *Pensées*.

in an existential commitment.<sup>97</sup> 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 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.<sup>98</sup>

Here Newman offers us an understanding of the Church militant as moonlit—sometimes in full view, other times not visible.<sup>99</sup> Newman wants to emphasise 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. Thomas J. Norris sums up Newman's position in this way:

Faith is by its very constitution an effect of God speaking and communicating: it is not primarily the result of our own thinking: "we do not see, we cannot prove". Faith, in other words, is not immanently generated knowledge, truth gained "by sight or by reason". Faith rather is knowledge generated in believers by the action of grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Faith has two qualities or "peculiarities: it is most certain, decided, positive, immovable in its assent; and it gives this assent not because it sees with eye, or sees with the reason, but because it receives the tidings from one who comes from God" ... The key question in the ancient Church, as in all subsequent centuries, was, has God spoken? And if he has spoken, who are the appointed hearers of his Word, his spokespersons? That means that the Apostles "were nothing in themselves, [but] they were all things, they were an infallible authority, as coming from God".<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Fabro, 'Newman E Kierkegaard,' 125.

<sup>98</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Church of the Fathers* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002), 1.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Lubac and Dunne, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 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*, 76-79.

<sup>100</sup> 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.

In support of this view, Fabro points to the back story of Newman's conversion in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*<sup>101</sup> 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 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.<sup>102</sup> 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'.<sup>103</sup> 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?'.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> Yet, the answer to the Christological question is inferred from the

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<sup>101</sup> John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. I. T. Ker, *Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 182-183. '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'.

<sup>102</sup> Fabro, 'Newman E Kierkegaard,' 126-127.

<sup>103</sup> John Macquarrie, 'Newman and Kierkegaard on the Act of Faith ' in *Newman and Conversion*, ed. Ian T. Ker (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 82.

<sup>104</sup> 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).

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 Christ must have a basis other than the mere fact of participation in the life of the Church’.<sup>106</sup>

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 emphasises 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’.<sup>107</sup> 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).<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, Kierkegaard says that since

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<sup>105</sup> John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843*, ed. Mary Katherine Tillman, 3rd ed. ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 91-92.

<sup>106</sup> Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 197. Newman emphasises 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.

<sup>107</sup> Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 212.

<sup>108</sup> 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), 117-142.

<sup>109</sup> Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, *Practice in Christianity*. ‘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 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

Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6), this implies that ‘the truth does not naturally consist in knowing the truth, but in *being* the truth’ which is not ‘a product or result of history’.<sup>110</sup> So even though Pilate can claim historical continuity with Christ, even to physically *see* Christ, but despite being in full possession of historical continuity, Pilate still fails to *directly recognise* the truth (PC 214). For Anti-Climacus, truth is not a *result* that is already achieved like the invention of gun powder—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 all together, 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 militant empowers the single existing individual to imitate Christ in the world.<sup>111</sup> Fabro also says that Kierkegaard’s ‘rupture with established Christendom’ is not provoked by Kierkegaard’s despair, but 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.<sup>112</sup> By comparing Newman and Kierkegaard, Fabro overturns one of the more prevalent misconceptions of Kierkegaard which has deterred Catholic theologians

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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).

<sup>110</sup> Fabro, ‘Newman E Kierkegaard,’ 129. Cf. PC 205.

<sup>111</sup> Fabro, ‘Newman E Kierkegaard,’ 129-130.

<sup>112</sup> Fabro, ‘Newman E Kierkegaard,’ 138. Cf. JP X3 A 415-416.

from serious engagement—that is, his negative view of the Church.<sup>113</sup> However, Fabro’s claim is that both Newman and Kierkegaard are ‘without a doubt prophetic thinkers for us today’ who 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’.<sup>114</sup>

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 brings 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)<sup>115</sup> began as a set of lectures that Fabro gave as a visiting professor at Notre Dame University from February to May in 1965.<sup>116</sup> Rosa Goglia says that Fabro had about 30-40 students signed up for his class entitled, ‘Principles of Immanence and the Genesis of Atheism’.<sup>117</sup> *God in Exile* is an updated translation of Fabro’s earlier two-volume work, *Introduzione all’ateismo moderno* (1964)<sup>118</sup> and represents over a decade of his engagement with figures like Marx, Feuerbach, Hegel, and Heidegger.

Fabro’s massive tome comprises of over 1200 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

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<sup>113</sup> Fabro, 'Newman E Kierkegaard,' 120-139. 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,' 379-397.

<sup>114</sup> 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.

<sup>115</sup> 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*, ed. Antonio Russo (Roma: Studium, 2014) pp. 245-252.

<sup>116</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 75. n. 67.

<sup>117</sup> Goglia, *Fabro: Profilo Biografico*, 131.

<sup>118</sup> 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,' 139-164. See also, Robiglio, 'La Logica Dell’ateismo: Il Principio Di Non Contraddizione Secondo C. Fabro,' 120-143.

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'.<sup>119</sup>

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 that desists from any 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.<sup>120</sup>

In some respects, Fabro's genealogy of atheism stands unrivalled until its argument was further nuanced by Michael J Buckley's *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (1987),<sup>121</sup> or Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989).<sup>122</sup> Indeed, prior to Taylor's monumental work, it would be 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). For it was Fabro's staunch resistance to Neo-Scholasticism and its rationalistic orientation<sup>123</sup> that led him to encounter Kierkegaard and incorporate Kierkegaard's critique of modern philosophy into his own thinking as a way of overturning 'the dominate interpretation of the Scholastic and Neo-Scholastic tradition which portrayed Aquinas as an Aristotelian'.<sup>124</sup> Although Fabro is not associated with the

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<sup>119</sup> Fabro, *God in Exile*, xli.

<sup>120</sup> Fabro, *God in Exile*, 1040-1041.

<sup>121</sup> Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>122</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>123</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 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), 107-135.

<sup>124</sup> Fabro, Goglia, and Fontana, *Appunti*, 32.

*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.

#### 6.6 Concluding Remarks<sup>125</sup>

Secular/radical theologians have often laid claim to extending Kierkegaard's work in pronouncing the death of God,<sup>126</sup> but this is a common misreading of Kierkegaard asserts that his critique of Christendom implies an anti-ecclesiology.<sup>127</sup> But Fabro seeks to correct this misunderstanding by saying:

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.<sup>128</sup>

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 criticises. 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.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, Fabro turns to Kierkegaard's writings in order to break-up an overly

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<sup>125</sup> I am gratefully indebted to Paul Murray and Philip Ziegler for the following remarks on an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>126</sup> For a critique of secular theologians' appropriation of Kierkegaard, see Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 202-213. See also, George Pattison, 'From Kierkegaard to Cupitt: Subjectivity, the Body and Eternal Life,' *The Heythrop Journal* 31, no. 3 (1990), 295-308.

<sup>127</sup> 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.

<sup>128</sup> Fabro, 'Newman E Kierkegaard,' 128.

secure notion of ecclesial presence, and Fabro turns 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 church that Catholicism typically finds difficult to sustain as fluidity 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.<sup>130</sup> 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-emphasise human action and needs to be rejuvenated by an emphasis on grace as a continually renewed act.<sup>131</sup>

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 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 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.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> 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*. Also, Fabro, 'Spunti Cattolici,' 251-280.

<sup>130</sup> Congar, 'Actualité,' 9-36. See also, Congar, 'Notes Bibliographiques: Kierkegaard Et Luther,' 712-717. 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*, 457-481.

<sup>131</sup> For more, see Paul D. Murray, 'St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That,' *New Blackfriars* 91, no. 1032 (2010), 142-170.

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<sup>132</sup> Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 196.

What is of importance in Kierkegaard must be appropriated anew,  
but in a *strict* critique that grows out of *our own* situation.  
Blind appropriation is the greatest seduction ...  
Not everyone who talks of 'existence' has to be a Kierkegaardian.  
My approaches have already been misinterpreted in this way.

- Martin Heidegger<sup>1</sup>

## Conclusion

This thesis was written during the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Søren Kierkegaard's birth and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. Both celebrations gathered together a global community of scholars, which are convinced not merely of the historical significance of their reason for celebrating, but both communities are convinced that this historical significance has an enduring relevance today. I have tried to inhabit that celebratory mood throughout this thesis, but I have refused to let each party carry on without the other. Instead, my thesis sought to bring these two disparate celebrations closer together.

This thesis 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 thesis is that Kierkegaard's writings have stimulated reform and renewal in twentieth century Catholic theology.

Rather than taking my claim as merely an 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

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Karl Löwith dated 13 September 1920, as cited in Martin Heidegger, Theodore J. Kisiel, and Thomas Sheehan, *Becoming Heidegger : On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910-1927* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 98.

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’.<sup>2</sup> Hans Boersma describes the primary task of *nouvelle 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’.<sup>3</sup> 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’.<sup>4</sup> Finally, Charles Taylor says that *ressourcement* is primarily ‘a return to the Patristic sources, particularly the Greek fathers’.<sup>5</sup> Although these descriptions rightly highlight the recovery of the patristic material, it only tells 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.<sup>6</sup> 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’.<sup>7</sup> So from its inception, *ressourcement* was an engagement with contemporary philosophers as much as it was an 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

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<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie - New Theology : Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 11. This perspective is echoed in Reinhard Hüter and Matthew Levering, *Ressourcement Thomism : Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life : Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, O.P.* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation : The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 848. n. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Daniélou, 'Les Orientations Présentes De La Pensée Religieuse,' 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.

<sup>7</sup> Aidan Nichols, 'Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie,' *The Thomist* 64 (2000), 4.

is given in Daniélou's original essay.<sup>8</sup> It is in light of this that the need for an account of the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard becomes increasingly clear.

In my thesis, 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 introduction, there is a Kierkegaardian tradition 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'.<sup>9</sup> 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 Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Joseph Maréchal, could be a thesis-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 countless recordings and texts available in Rome at the 'Cornelio Fabro Cultural Project' and the *Fabro Foundation* library, which is located at the Pontifical University Santa Croce. A great service could be done to both Kierkegaard studies and Catholic studies by translating Fabro's work at the intersection of these two subject areas.

*Conclusion: Kierkegaard (still) matters*

The vital importance of Kierkegaard's writings for contemporary theology is, among other things, that he stands as an influential philosopher that bridges, rather than widens, the divide between 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

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<sup>8</sup> Daniélou, 'Les Orientations Présentes De La Pensée Religieuse,' 13-16. Daniélou mentions Kierkegaard five times in this essay.

<sup>9</sup> AH, 106.

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.<sup>10</sup>

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 focus upon Kierkegaard's disenchantment with the institutional State-Church. 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 tended to portray Kierkegaard as a critic of the believer's accommodation to secular, bourgeois Christendom. My thesis has focused on a third group of Catholic thinkers, some of whom read Kierkegaard's critique as an indirect endorsement of Catholicism.

To recapitulate, the focus of my thesis 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 thesis, 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, my thesis turned to examine the Catholic 'soul' of Kierkegaard's writings with a particular focus upon Kierkegaard's theological view of history. Then, I turned to de Lubac as a model of positive engagement with Kierkegaard and then to Balthasar as a negative model. My point here was to show how vital of 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

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<sup>10</sup> George Pattison, 'Passionate Thinker,' *The Tablet* 267 (4 May), no. 8996 (2013), 6-7.

thesis, 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 writings are hostile to the Catholic faith. My hope is that the work here in this thesis contributes to making good on these two proposals. In the end, it has been my claim throughout this thesis 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 these 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'.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the field is much larger than the three central figures that my thesis has treated. So, I leave it to others to further fill out the representative sketch that I have provided in this relatively short compass. As a result of my thesis, 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?

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

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