
“Death Comes In Between”: Reflections on Kierkegaard’s *For Self-Examination*

by David Cain

“From the death of God to the death of man there was but a short step. And it was taken rather quickly,” observes Gabriel Vahanian.¹ We cannot say Kierkegaard did not warn us: “To murder God is the most horrible form of suicide...”² But in another, more dialectical sense, Kierkegaard suggests that the *life* of God spells our death, that this death is the condition of true life, and that we avoid this death subtly, ingeniously, desperately.

Dramatic rendering of this dialectic pervades the authorship and animates *For Self-Examination: Proposed To This Age*, published by Kierkegaard on 10 September, 1851, apparently without misgivings or deliberations concerning pseudonymity.³ This little work – less than seventy-five pages in the 1964 Danish edition – has not received the attention it merits; though John W. Elrod has recently made perceptive comments concerning it in the context of other late works.⁴ *For Self-Examination* was, indeed, the last book actually published by Kierkegaard, concluding this entire astonishing authorship of more lives than a cat.⁵ Eduard Geismar singles it out as appropriately the first work of Kierkegaard to be read – and the last, if one is the limit.⁶ Certainly the title, *For Self-Examination: Proposed To This Age*, could serve suitably to characterize the total authorship. In Paul Holmer’s words:

[Kierkegaard’s] ... pages are a discipline and a way, not another theory. ... What science and scholarship ask us to bracket for the sake of understanding, Kierkegaard asks us to augment for the sake of bringing the self to birth. ...⁷

And *this* birth entails death.

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For Self-Examination is divided into three parts, each governed, as is characteristic of Kierkegaard’s many and varied discourses, by a biblical text: “How to Derive True Benediction from Beholding Oneself in the Mirror of the Word” (James 1:22 to the end of the chapter), Fifth Sunday

after Easter; “Christ Is the Way” (Acts 1:1–12), Ascension Day; “It is the Spirit That Giveth Life” (Acts 2:1–12), Pentecost. These texts invite Kierkegaard to entertain a “post-Easter” orientation, whereas so much of his writing is this side of and on the way to the Cross. Why does Kierkegaard have so little to say about Jesus’ resurrection? *For Self-Examination* holds clues.

The biblical texts also suggest the explicitly Trinitarian structure of the book, secured in three prayers. A prayer follows the text at the beginning of each part. The first is addressed to the Father, the second to the Son, the third to the Spirit: “Father in Heaven” (“*Fader i Himlene!*”), “Lord Jesus Christ” (“*Herre Jesus Christus*”), “Thou Holy Spirit” (“*Du Hellig-Aand*”) (H 7, 63, 85; L 39, 77, 93; SV 17, 59, 95, 111).

Throughout, Kierkegaard’s biblical investment and “hermeneutic” are evidenced. As George E. and George B. Arbaugh observe:

It is rather astonishing that Kierkegaard’s reliance upon Scripture should ever have been questioned – which nevertheless is the case – because of his insistence on subjectivity in Christian experience. His invariable use of Scripture in all of his writing should be sufficient to correct this doubt. The correction is impressively reinforced in *For Self-Examination* as he makes Scripture not only the disclosure of God but also the mirror in which the believer puts his own subjectivity to the test.⁸

For Self-Examination is a surprisingly comprehensive work, beginning with the aggressive Word of God and concluding with the “theological virtues”.

The introductory words, “Preface”, and “A Preliminary Remark” sound basic and abiding themes in the authorship as well as in this work. The first words are II Corinthians 5:11: “Since we have known the fear of the Lord, we seek to win men” (L 28, H u. p., SV 17 50). Here, ever so gently, is death.⁹ To know the fear of the Lord is to stop dead in the tracks of any direct desire to win persons. “For to begin at once, or as the *first* thing, to want to win men – that perhaps might even be called ungodliness, at all events worldliness, not Christianity, any more than it is fearing God” (L 28, H u. p., SV 17 50). Fearing the Lord is here the “Halt!” (TC, 25; SV 16 33) to human enterprise. The “what”/“how” distinction is signaled – the “protest of the mouth” and “my life”. The “Preface” is the familiar plea to “read aloud” in order to allow the text to speak to one directly and personally (L 29, H u. p., SV 17 51). “A Preliminary Remark” develops the “what”/“how” theme with the help of: “that simple wise man of old” (H 1, L 35, SV 17 55); an earnest (*alvorligt*) life;¹⁰ preaching as one’s life (“how”) as well as one’s speech (“what”) – “actions must correspond with words [*at der skal gjøres efter det Sagte*]” (L 37, H 4, SV 17 57); equality “between the talented and the untalented” in relation to Christian proclamation; honesty respecting

the gap between the Christian challenge and the way we live (L 37–38, H 4–5, SV 17 57–58). For Christians are those who are “dead to the world [*afdøde fra Verden*]” (H 5, L 37, SV 17 57); and it is regarding this, above all, that we are to examine ourselves. Of course, the simple wise man of old, Socrates, is made to speak and is but the first of a company of voices, from Luther, whom Kierkegaard brings to Copenhagen for a conversation about faith (H 12–13, L 42–43, SV 17 62–63), to “understanding”, which speaks with telling irony:

“It is to be despaired over that there is no hope,” says the understanding; “yet one can understand it. But that on the other side of this ... there should be a new hope, yes, *the hope* – that is, as sure as my name is understanding, that is madness [*det er, saasandt jeg hedder Forstanden, det er Galskab!*]” (H 97, L 102, SV 17 119).

I
The prayer to the Father focuses on the gracious gift of God’s Word, divine respect for human freedom in relation to this gift, and the “divine patience” which “sits and spells with the individual [*sidder og staver med den Enkelte*] that he might be able to understand the Word correctly” (H 8, L 39, SV 17 59).

The Word of God is gracious gift, but “different times demand different things” (L 39, H 8, SV 17 60). Luther, who was a “doer of the Word” (following James, in spite of Luther’s evaluation of James), stressed faith and grace. Now the temptation is to celebrate faith and to forfeit all “works”, to call oneself a Christian “at a price as cheap as possible” (L 41, H 10, SV 17 61).¹¹ We demand *either* works *or* faith and grace – but not both. If works, then we want credit for them. If faith and grace, so be it ... and good-bye works. But to work to extremity and count it nothing, to take refuge in grace: this dialectic of faith is not to our liking, precisely because it involves dying.¹²

Utilizing the words of Luther, “Faith is a turbulent thing” (H 12, L 42, SV 17 62), as a rhetorical, almost musical refrain (one of many in this and other works), Kierkegaard declares, “... faith is a turbulent thing. It is health, but it is stronger and more violent than the most burning fever” (H 14, L 43, SV 17 63). Here again is the “Halt!” In the words of the Curé de Torcy in Georges Bernanos’ *The Diary of a Country Priest*, “Truth is meant to save you first, and the comfort comes afterward. ... The Word of God is a red-hot iron.”¹³ It is Kierkegaard speaking.¹⁴

This discussion introduces a section on reading the Bible, on seeing oneself reflected in the mirror of God’s word. With the help of an analogy – “Think of a lover who has now received a letter from his beloved” (L 51, H 25, SV 17 69), Kierkegaard effectively develops a conceptual distinction between reading and ... reading. It is possible to read the Bible and not to read ... the Bible. For *how* one reads is decisive in determining *what* one reads.¹⁵

This extended analogy, which could be treated separately as a little essay called, perhaps, “Kierkegaard on Reading the Bible”, shows that all humor had not been drained from Kierkegaard’s pen by 1851¹⁶ – or all dialectical dexterity:

For ‘God’s Word’ indeed is the mirror. But, but – oh, the limitless horizons of prolixity! How much belongs in a stricter sense to God’s Word? which books are genuine? are they also Apostolic? and are these also authentic? have the authors themselves seen everything? or in some instances perhaps have they merely reported what they heard from others? And then the various readings – 30,000 various readings. And then this throng or crowd of scholars and opinions, learned opinions and unlearned opinions, about how the particular passage is to be interpreted ... you must confess that this seems rather prolix. God’s Word is the mirror – by reading or hearing it I am to see myself in the mirror; but, lo, all this about the mirror is so confusing that I never come to the point of seeing my own reflection – at least not if I take that path. One might be tempted almost to suppose that there is a lot of human craftiness in play here (ah, and that is true, we men are so crafty in relation to God and things divine and godfearing truth, it is by no means true as we like to say to one another, that we should be so willing to do God’s will, if only we could learn what it is) ... all this ... we glorify by the laudatory name of learned and profound and serious research and investigation. (L 50–51, H 24, SV 17 69).

Kierkegaard’s words anticipate and interrogate by implication much biblical scholarship which was to come after him.

So then Kierkegaard is against scholarship, “anti-intellectual”? Of course not: “... We do not disparage erudition, far from it – but remember that when thou dost read God’s Word eruditely, with a dictionary, &c., thou art not reading God’s Word...” (L 53, H 28, SV 17 72). Just ask a lover seeking to translate a letter from the beloved written in a foreign tongue. Translation is for the sake of reading, not for the prevention of it: “If thou art a learned man, then take care lest with all thy erudite reading (which is not reading God’s Word) thou forgettest perchance to read God’s Word” (L 53–54, H 29, SV 17 72). The enemy is not erudition but “pitiable misuse of erudition!” “For, look you, there are perhaps a number of various readings, and perhaps there has just been discovered a new manuscript – good gracious! ...” (L 57, H 33, SV 17 75). In 1850, Kierkegaard sketches in his Journal the love-letter analogy soon to be developed in *For Self-Examination* and adds, “He who can sit with ten open commentaries and read the Holy Scriptures – well, he probably is writing the eleventh ...” (J&P, 1, # 210, 85; X² A 555, 400).

With the help of his love-letter analogy, Kierkegaard develops a hermeneutic of humble scholarship (learning serves and aims at true reading, not at replacing it) and an engaged hermeneutic. The Bible *is* a

love letter and is to be read behind closed doors (as well as in public worship) as addressing me personally. Bradley R. Dewey calls this Kierkegaard’s “love-letter hermeneutic.”¹⁷ Kierkegaard notes in the Journal, “Every one is the best interpreter of his own words, it is said. And next comes the lover, and in relation to God the true believer” (J&P, 1, # 211, 85; X² A 556, 400).¹⁸

This engaged hermeneutic is dangerously dynamic: one acts at once on what one understands and does not await the interpretation of all “obscure passages [*dunkle Steder*]” (L 54, H 29, SV 17 72). Perhaps action in light of some passages will result in light being shed on others. There are epistemological implications here. One can see things out over 70,000 fathoms that one cannot see from the shore. Kierkegaard challenges, in the words of his “lover”, “I must comply with the desire at once [as expressed in passages I can understand] and then see what happens to the obscure passages” (H 29, L 54, SV 17 72). Perhaps one will die in acting upon what one has understood and hence be spared the dark passages. But the point is the opposite of procrastination.

One must make oneself vulnerable to the text by taking it personally; one must say “It is I that am addressed, it is about me this is said” (L 64, H 45, SV 17 82). Biblical texts are skillfully deployed as examples. Kierkegaard urges:

... if only thou wilt continue for some time to read God’s Word thus ... thou shalt read fear and trembling into thy soul, so that by God’s help [recall the sitting and spelling of the governing prayer] thou shalt succeed in becoming a man, a personality, saved from being this dreadful absurdity into which we men – created in God’s image! – have become changed by evil enchantment, into an impersonal, an objective something. (L 67, H 50, SV 17 85).

If one lives before the text, the text can come to life. To remember who one is as mirrored in the text is to avoid aesthetic resolve of “never” and “always” and to turn a more humble resolve into action at once; for “it is much better never to forget to remember ... *immediately*, than to say immediately, I shall *never* forget” (L 68, H 54, SV 17 86).¹⁹

Interestingly but in a way which will do little for Kierkegaard’s rating among feminists, a few pages are directed toward, “And thou, O woman” (L 70–74, H 54–61, SV 17 87–91). Why? Because the passage from James which Kierkegaard has been following speaks of “Widows”? The reference might have prompted his consideration, which seems to reflect a tension between the theme of reading aloud “the Epistle for the day” (to which he here returns) and remembrance of “the Apostle’s injunction that woman must keep silent in the Church” (L 70, H 54, SV 17 87). In any case, in “A Preliminary Remark” Kierkegaard has prepared the way also for this discussion, which aims at equality and addresses –

Thou simple man [“Thou simple one” – H] ... And thou woman, although thou art entirely mute in gracious silence – in case thy life expresses what thou hast heard, thine eloquence is more potent than the art of all orators! (L 37, H 4, SV 17 57).

Kierkegaard shows regard for women not by questioning Paul’s infamous words (I Corinthians 14:34) but by attributing to silence the capacity to speak – and to preach. “Nor does she concern herself at home with going about and preaching; it is unbecoming” (H 54, L 70²⁰, SV 17 87). More trouble from the perspective of the spirit of our age.²¹ But “... let us bear in mind that this silence is precisely what we have need of if God’s Word is to acquire a little power over men” (L 71, H 56, SV 17 88). The need, says Kierkegaard, when there is an inverse correlation between the means and the significance of communication (and here our day is a target more tempting than he could have dreamed), is to “procure silence”. “And this is what woman can do” (L 72, H 57, SV 17 89).

This first part, qualified by the opening prayer to God the Father and concerned with God’s Word, concludes with an ode to silence and “wifely homeliness [*Huslighed*]” (L 73, H 59 “domesticity”, SV 17 90). More to enrage us, yet for Kierkegaard in 1851 these pages adumbrate a markedly positive picture of family life. But the deeper point is that God’s Word is addressed to men and to women, who are challenged to strive to understand themselves from its perspective; we are invited to see ourselves in its light, to let our sense of ourselves be communicated by the “Father”, in fear and trembling and also in thanksgiving.

Kierkegaard identifies silence as a sure sign of remembering one’s reflection in the mirror. He adds, “You know very well that he who falls in love and becomes talkative – well, maybe! [*nu ja!*] but to become silent, that is more sure” (H 61, L 74, SV 17 91). This final sentence of the first part subtly recalls the central love-letter analogy and, perhaps more significantly, presupposes an analogy between faith, which becomes silent, and love, which does the same.

II

The prayer of the second part is to “Lord Jesus Christ” who suffered, was not victorious in life, but in death was victorious over death and ascended (H 63, L 77–78, SV 17 95–96). After developing the theme that “Christ is the way”, emphasizing the narrowing narrowness of the way from beginning to end and showing that Christ’s life enacts his words, Kierkegaard questions his “Good Friday” treatment from the perspective of one who wants to hear about *ascension* on Ascension Day. Kierkegaard responds in a way central to his understanding of the relationship between Christian faith and human aspiration:

Oh, my friend, art thou one of those who, punctually at the stroke of the clock and by the date of the calendar is able to put himself into a

definite mood [*en bestemt Stemning*]? Or dost thou suppose that it is Christianity’s intention that we should be like that, and not rather that we should combine together as far as possible the various factors of Christianity?²² Precisely on Ascension Day it ought to be remembered that the way is narrow, *for otherwise we easily might take the Ascension in vain* [*thi ellers kunde vi let tage Himmelfarten forføngeligt*]. Remember, the way was narrow up to the last, death comes in between [*Døden gaaer imellem*] – then follows the Ascension (L 85, H 75, SV 17 103; emphasis added).

“Death comes in between”: here is the “breach” with immanence,²³ the complete break, the full stop before human design which sets free the divine and distinguishes the Christian from the aesthetic.

In so many ways, Christianity can resemble the aesthetic. Think of the familiar formulation: “Before practicing Zen, tea is tea and bowl is bowl. When practicing Zen, tea is no longer tea and bowl is no longer bowl. Knowing Zen, tea is again tea and bowl is again bowl.” But with a decisive difference. Christianly, the difference is stamped with the “death” which comes in between and which prevents the ascension and everything else from being taken in vain. “To draw together the Christian differences,” the different moments in Christian faith which make faith unavoidably dialectical – first no, then yes; no to us on our terms; yes to us on God’s terms; yes to us in the true way which we are after in the first place ... falsely: this is Kierkegaard’s effort and, perhaps, “as far as possible,” his achievement. The effort involves combatting, among other antagonists, superstition, *Overtro*, “overbelief”.²⁴

The structure of Johannes Climacus’ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* bears the marks – not to say scars – of this very battle. Climacus declares:

The problem is pathetic-dialectic the difficulty of the problem consists precisely in its being thus composite I beg the reader always to bear in mind that the difficulty of the problem lies ultimately in putting the two together [*at sætte det sammen*] (CUP, pp. 345–346; SV 10 80–81).

Climacus warns:

If a pagan has been able merely to catch a glimpse of the absolute good, Christianity has helped men to a vision of it – by means of the absurd. When this last qualification is omitted, everything has indeed become much easier than it was in paganism It may seem strenuous enough to struggle through life on the basis of the mere possibility of immortality, and to obtain a proof of the resurrection seems by comparison a tremendous help – if it were not for the fact that the very existence of this proof constitutes the greatest difficulty of all. [Why? Because this

is all too direct, aesthetic: no fear and trembling, no halt, no death] ... If we overleap the dialectical, the resurrection proof becomes, ironically enough, much too demonstrative, and the certainty for immortality even less than in paganism. The mediator becomes an ambiguous character, an aesthetically pompous figure with a glory nimbus and a wishing cup ... If we overleap the dialectical, Christianity as a whole becomes a comfortable delusion, a superstition [*Overtro*], and a superstition of the most dangerous kind, because it is overbelief in the truth [*Overtro paa Sandheden*], if Christianity be the truth (CUP, 383–385; SV 10 119).

We have here an animating concern of Kierkegaard: to knot the thread,²⁵ to keep Christianity from slipping through and falling back into the aesthetic, undoing the entire existential dialectic which has sought to set the religious and Christianity into reflection.²⁶ For "... when the truth is there, and the superstitious mode of apprehending it transforms it into a lie, no saving awakening is possible" (CUP, 385; SV 10 119).²⁷ The wrong "how" can deform the right "what". Death must come in between: "The Ascension is not a direct continuation of the ... [narrow way]" (L 85, H 75, SV 17 103).

The point is not that Kierkegaard confuses or identifies resurrection and ascension; though Reginald H. Fuller finds in the resurrection narratives of Mark (by implication), Matthew, and John 21 "...that the appearances seem to be manifestations of an already risen and ascended One..." such that resurrection and ascension are one.²⁸ Part of the prison from which *For Self-Examination* would release us is preoccupation with such deliberations.²⁹ Rather, the reticence of the authorship concerning resurrection and ascension results from concern to keep Christian concepts from collapsing into the aesthetic and superstition, unraveling everything.

Just as Kierkegaard earlier challenged appealers to "obscure passages" to act on what they have understood, so now he challenges doubters in the ascension with imitation (*Efterfølgelsen*):

...offering reasons to doubt in order to put it to death is just like offering a hungry monster ... [one wishes] to be rid of the tempting food it loves best. ... those whose lives were marked by *imitating* did not doubt the Ascension. ... From the need of eating comes food. Where the need is, that which is needed seems to produce itself. The imitators of Christ truly needed His ascension in order to endure the life they were leading – therefore it was certain (H 80–81, L 88–89, SV 17 106–107).

This a bold move – and outrageous. Simone Weil shares in the outrage: "The danger is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry."³⁰ Doers of

the Word are not detained by obscure passages; followers on the narrow way of Christ have not the luxury of doubt.

III

Between the false and true ways of affirming Christian truth comes death. This theme is played full force in part three. The brief prayer is to the Holy Spirit “who gives life” (H 85, L 93, SV 111). “By Thy help this [the discourse] shall come fresh from the heart,” the prayer continues, recalling the opening encounter with the earnest life of Socrates. Socrates had no need of an orator’s “well-prepared speech” (H 1, L 35, SV 17 55); for “...one in a well-equipped house needs not go downstairs to get water but has it on tap...” (H 3, L 36, SV 17 56).

It is the Spirit that giveth life,” but, again, “death comes in between [*Døden gaaer imellem*]” (L 95–96, H 87–89, SV 17 113–114). Kierkegaard proclaims:

Nor is there anything Christian, not a single Christian goal, which does not, by undergoing a little change [*en lille forandring*] (by taking away a nearer intermediate goal [*en nærmere Mellembestemmelse*]) become something entirely different... (H 86, L 95, SV 17 113).

Here, again, is the battle of the authorship, focused now in *For Self-Examination*. This “nearer intermediate goal” is precisely the death – dying to (*det at afdøe*) – which comes in between (H 88, L 95, SV 17 113).

Kierkegaard declares, “Faith is against understanding, faith is on the other side of death [*Tro er mod Forstand; Tro er paa den anden Side Døden*]” (L 101, H 96, SV 17 118). To say that faith is on the other side of death is to explicate the meaning of “[f]aith is against understanding.” This declaration near the end of *For Self-Examination* offers a way into the long-standing discussions of the “absurd”, “contradiction”, “crucifixion of the understanding” and “against the understanding” in Kierkegaard.³¹ Is the “contradiction” which is Christian faith “self-contradiction”? Indeed, yes; for the *self* is contradicted in its desire to grasp and to control:

And when thou didst die, or didst die to thyself, to the world, thou didst at the same time die to all immediacy in thyself, and also to thine understanding. That is to say, when all confidence in thyself or in human support, and *also in God as an immediate apprehension* [*ogsaa umiddelbart til Gud*, also directly in God], when every probability is excluded, when it is dark as in the dark night – it is in fact death that we are describing – then comes the life-giving Spirit and brings faith (L 101, H 96, SV 17 118; emphasis added).

Do we have here yet another “either/or”: either superstition or death?

Kierkegaard writes in *Christian Discourses* that “superstition” is “...in a rebellious and ungodly way, to desire to have God’s aid. ... the superstitious man would have God serve him” (CD, 70–71; SV 13 69). Death does not protect God, who needs no protection from men and women. Death protects men and women from the glory-sidestepping suicide of superstition. “Overbelief in the truth” is not too much belief but the wrong kind of belief. A concluding prayer to the Holy Spirit ends with these words: “...what a blessing it is for man that Thou dost take away the power and give life!” (H 104, L 106, SV 17 123) – so also with the fine horses who come alive when driven not according to their understanding but according to the royal coachman’s understanding of what it is to drive (L 104, H 101–102, SV 17 121–122).

The Spirit brings new life, presupposing death, the death of old life (H 89, L 96, SV 17 114). The Spirit brings *faith* against understanding (*mod Forstand*). The Spirit brings *hope* against understanding’s hope (*imod Forstandens Haab*). The Spirit brings *love* against self-love (H 96–99, L 101–103, SV 17 118–120). Death comes in between us and the faith, hope, and love in and of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Kierkegaard returns to his Pentecost text and to the gathered apostles who had died, he says, further explicating his use of “death”. Watch the dialectic:

Did they then vow eternal enmity to this unkind world? Well, yes, in a certain sense, for love to God is hatred of the world, but otherwise, no. In order that they might come into love, by loving God they united themselves, so to speak, with God to love this unkind world – the life-giving Spirit brought them this love (H 100, L 103–104, SV 17 121).

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The “nearer intermediate goal” is death, which comes in between creature and Creator as a full stop but not as a dead end.³² The warrant for this declaration is not understanding on this side of death but falling in love, as Kierkegaard knows. He writes, patterning his words after the faith refrain of Luther and enlivening the faith-love analogy, “...a true love is a turbulent thing; but it does not enter the head of the lover to want to change the way things are” (SV 17 65).³³

1. Gabriel Vahanian, *God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), p. xi.

2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses, Etc.*, trans. Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), “The Anxieties of the Heathen”, V, “The Anxiety of Presumption”, p. 70, hereafter in text as CD, p.; Søren Kierkegaard, *Samlede Værker*, ed. A. B. Drachman, J. L. Heiberg, H. O. Lange, 3rd ed. in 20 vols. supervised by Peter P. Rohde (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962–1964), 13, p. 68, hereafter in text as SV vol. p. (SV 13 68).

3. According to Walter Lowrie, “S. K.’s progress in direct communication is registered ... in the fact that the pseudonym Anti-Climacus is discarded, and in these last books the author speaks openly in his own name. He had already ventured so far out, had assumed so fully the risk of being a Christian, that he felt at last he had the right to utter over his own name his stern reproach of established Christianity,” *Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 467. Kierkegaard “felt apparently no inhibition against publishing it [*For Self-Examination*] on September 10, 1851, as soon as it was finished ...”, *ibid.*, p. 470. See also p. 466.

4. John W. Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), see esp. pp. 292–303.

5. The solemn effort of this ending is evidenced by *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (published 7 August, 1851), which brings the authorship to “... its definite point of rest at the foot of the altar ...”, Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself!* (including *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*), trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 5, hereafter in text as L(owrie), p., to distinguish Lowrie’s translation from S. Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination: Recommended for the Times*, trans. Edna and Howard Hong (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1940), which will also be referenced in the text as H(ongs), p.; if H precedes L, the Hong’s translation is followed and vice versa; SV 17 27. The effort of ending is also marked by the publication on the same date (7 August) of but one of Kierkegaard’s many attempts to provide an account of his activity as an author, *My Activity as a Writer*, included in Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, ed. Benjamin Nelson, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 139–158, hereafter in text as PV, p.; SV 18 59–77.

Kierkegaard’s concerns regarding his activity as an author are strikingly present in *For Self-Examination* (see, e.g., H 16, L 45, SV 17 65) and in an unused “Preface” to the work: “What I have understood as the task of the authorship

[*Opgaven for min Forfatter-Virksomhed*] has been done.

“It is one idea, this continuity from *Either/Or* to Anti-Climacus, the idea of religiousness in reflection [*Religiositetens Tanke i Reflexion*],” Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, 7 vols. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978), 6, # 6770, pp. 417–418, hereafter in text as J&P, vol., entry number, p.; *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. A. B. Drachman, J. L. Heiberg, H. O. Lange, 22 vols. supervised by Niels Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968–1970), X⁶ B 4, 3, pp. 14–15, hereafter in text as vol., section, entry number, p. See also SV 17 233. This proposed preface is unadorned and businesslike. It was originally dated 1 June, 1851.

Judge For Yourself! bears a close relationship to *For Self-Examination*, as the words following the title make clear: “For Self-Examination”, “Recommended to this Present Time”, “Second Series” (L 107, SV 17 125). Kierkegaard wrote this work in 1851–1852 but did not publish it “because of its severity,” suggest the Arbaughs. See George E. and George B. Arbaugh, *Kierkegaard’s Authorship* (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana College Library, 1967), p. 347. Lowrie admits, “Why S. K. himself did not publish it remains something of a mystery,” “Introduction” to Anti-Climacus (Søren Kierkegaard), *Training in Christianity*, ed. S. Kierkegaard, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. xxvi, hereafter in text as TC, p. In any case, the work was finally published in 1876, twenty-one years after Kierkegaard’s death, by Peter Christian Kierkegaard, the older brother.

6. “If I were to advise a person to read just one writing by Kierkegaard, without qualification I would advise reading *Til Selvprøvelse* and particularly the first treatise in it, the developments based on the text in the Epistle of James on becoming a doer of the Word by seeing oneself in the mirror of the Word. It places no great demands on philosophical preparation but speaks with plain words and striking images, and it is written with an impressive authority precisely because it is truths which are humbling. And it is also refreshingly free from the sickly ascetic and the introspection which make the diaries from the later years so insufferable to read,” Eduard Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard: Livsudvikling og Forfattervirksomhed*, I–II (København: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1927–1928), II, part 5, pp. 72–73.

7. Paul L. Holmer, “Post-Kierkegaard: Remarks about Being a Person” in Joseph H. Smith, ed., *Kierkegaard’s Truth: The Disclosure of the Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), *Psychiatry and the Humanities*, V, pp. 8, 19.

8. George E. And George B. Arbaugh, op. cit.,

pp. 342–343. See also Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto, *Kierkegaard and the Bible: An Index* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), esp. p. 12.

9. Another “gentle” – and general – sounding of this theme occurs at the end of the first of the *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*: “... the edifying in its first instance is always dismaying [O, men som det Opbyggelige i sit Første altid er det Forførdende ...]” (L 16, SV 17 38).

10. *Alvor* is a central concept in *For Self-Examination* and in the authorship as a whole. It deserves and would reward special study. See, e.g., Robert Widenman, “Christian Earnestness (Seriousness)” in Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, ed., *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1978), *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, 2, pp. 83–99.

11. Think of the language of price which frames *Fear and Trembling*, a work above all concerned with the price of faith: “Not merely in the realm of commerce but in the world of ideas as well our age is organizing a regular clearance sale. Everything is to be had at such a bargain that it is questionable whether in the end there is anybody who will want to bid.” “One time in Holland when the market was rather dull for spices the merchants had several cargoes dumped into the sea to peg up prices. ... Is it something like that we need now in the world of spirit?” See Johannes de Silentio (Søren Kierkegaard), *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 22, 129; SV 5 9, 109. See L 55, 99; H 32, 94; SV 17 74, 117.

12. Kierkegaard writes, “With one eye, as it were, to see all of man’s effort as the greatest childishness, yes, as the most indifferent thing in the world (for he, the Almighty One, has millions of resources and has always been infinitely victorious) and then, nevertheless, to be able to strain himself to the utmost fully as much as someone inspired in sober earnestness by the thought that his persistence, his daring, were crucial to the point of determining no more nor less than that God would be victorious or would lose” (J&P, 2, # 1431, 135–136; X⁴ A 640, 458–459. For further insight into aspects of this fundamental dialectic, see, e.g., Chapter III, “The Share Divine Governance Had in My Authorship,” in PV, 64–92, esp. 67; SV 18 119–137, esp. 121.

13. Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, trans. Pamela Morris (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 51.

14. See, e.g., J&P, 2, # 1277, 77; XI² A 261, 264; J&P, 2, # 1278, 77; XI² A 424, 415.

15. There is a telling exchange between William Stringfellow and Karl Barth as recounted by

Stringfellow, who encountered Barth during Barth’s visit to the United States in 1962: “... I raised with Karl Barth during his visit the matter which is basic ... Again and again, in both the public dialogue and in our private conversations, it had been my experience that as Barth began to make some point, I would at once know what he was going to say. It was not some intuitive thing, it differed from that, it was a recognition, in my mind, of something familiar that Barth was articulating. When this had happened a great many times while I listened to him, I described my experience to him and asked why this would happen. His response was instantaneous: ‘How could it be otherwise? We read the same Bible, don’t we?’” But there is reading and ... reading. The point is that Barth and Stringfellow were reading the Bible in the same way. See William Stringfellow, *A Second Birthday* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 151–152.

16. Lowrie observes of Kierkegaard’s writings of 1850–1852, “The poetical, the paradoxical, the humorous traits were discarded or restrained in the steady practice to attain proficiency in direct communication,” *Kierkegaard*, op. cit., pp. 466–467. Perhaps “restrained”.

17. Bradley R. Dewey, *The New Obedience: Kierkegaard On Imitating Christ* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968), p. 61. See also pp. 196–198, n. 3. The entire chapter, “Jesus Speaks Concretely”, pp. 61–72, draws heavily on *For Self-Examination*.

18. Note the love-faith (“true believer”) analogy, which is finally no analogy. See below pp. 74, 78.

19. This passage belongs with Kierkegaard’s rich treatment of *promising* in the authorship.

20. Lowrie’s translation alters the text significantly: “For her to go out and preach, without concerning herself at all about the home – that is unseemly.”

21. See H 85, L 94, SV 17 112.

22. The Hongs translate: “... as far as possible, put the variations of Christ-likeness together ... [saavidt muligt skulde sætte det Christeliges Forskjellige sammen].”

23. See, e.g., Johannes Climacus (Søren Kierkegaard), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 505–507, hereafter in text as CUP, p.; SV 10 237–239.

24. See below and p. 77 f.

25. This is a favorite image. See, e.g., PV, 158; SV 18 77.

26. See n. 5 above.

27. But this describes what Kierkegaard perceives to be the religious situation of his day. Does it not also speak tellingly of and to our own?

28. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 5.

29. “Preoccupation” is the operative word here. Such deliberations do have their place, according to Kierkegaard; but that place is not the *first* place.

30. Simone Weil, *Waiting For God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p.

210. (“*Le danger n’est pas que l’ame doute s’il y a ou non du pain, mais qu’elle se persuade par un mensonge qu’elle n’a pas faim.*”)

31. See, e.g., CUP, pp. 188–191, 500–505; SV 9 175–178, SV 10 232–237.

32. See J&P, 4, # 4046, 119; X⁴ A 133, n.d., 1851, 76, where Kierkegaard speaks of *Døden imellem* redemptively: death as punishment for sin is also the *death of sin*, the upsetting of “the

devil’s apple cart” (*en Streg i Regningen*, an unforeseen obstacle), “grace and mercy”.

33. Kierkegaard writes, “... er ... en sand Forelskelse en urolig Ting; men det falder ikke den Elskende ind at ville forandre et Bestaaende.”

See H 18 (“the existing state of things”) and L 46 (“the established order”).

See also Fr.-Eb. Wilde, “Established Order (Det Bestaaende)” in Niels

Thulstrup and M. Mikulová Thulstrup, eds., *Kierkegaard and Human Values* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1980), *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, 7, pp. 7–14. This “established

order” – that disquiet belongs to a true love relationship (and, by implication, to genuine faith)

– would seem to be not “the current social order, the existing (social) institutions” but “the state of affairs” (*ibid.*, p. 7) with love (and with faith).