
Kierkegaard's Concept of God-Man

By Richard Kearney

In Holy Week of 1848 Kierkegaard experienced a profound religious 'conversion'. This celebrated conversion was occasioned by Kierkegaard's new-found conviction that »all his sins had been forgiven« by God. But this revelation of Divine pardon also entailed a serious problem for Kierkegaard. For if Christ's death and resurrection now revealed itself as a forgiveness of man's sins, it also implied that the 'abyss' separating man from God, the finite from the infinite, could now perhaps be miraculously surmounted! In other words, Christ's *Atonement* for our sins could also be construed as the possibility of an *At-one-ment* between the divine and the human (a double meaning which is also operative in the Danish term, *Forsoningen*). Thus the possibility of a blasphemous identification of man with God, or more exactly of man with the Incarnate Christ as *God-man* (*Gud-Mennesket*), became a very real danger, a terrifying temptation, for Kierkegaard himself.

In this article I propose to examine the various and complex ways in which Kierkegaard critically responded to this temptation. I will confine my remarks to *Journal* entries registered after the 1848 conversion and to four main works written as an explicit or implicit response to this conversion: *Sickness unto Death* (written in 1848 and published in 1849); *Training in Christianity* (written largely during the same period and considered by Kierkegaard as the logical sequel to *S.D.* However, though he originally intended to publish these two works together in a single volume entitled, *The Collected Works of the Consummation*, he finally decided to publish *T.C.* separately in 1850);¹ *The Point of View* (written in 1848 but withheld from publication during Kierkegaard's lifetime – it was eventually published posthumously four years after his death); and the third lengthy and decisive *Preface to Authority and Revelation* (also written in 1848 and also withheld from publication). My particular concern is to explore how these four works and *Journal* entries, composed in the wake of the Easter revelation of 'atonement', reflect Kierkegaard's intense philosophical struggle with the pivotal concept of the 'God-man'.

I: The Problem of the Atonement

Kierkegaard's most immediate response to his Easter conversion is succinctly expressed in a telling *Journal* entry of this time: »I must speak«.

This statement suggests that Kierkegaard was resolving to adopt an authorial standpoint of 'direct communication'. Having just experienced what he believed to be a direct, revelatory communication from God Himself concerning the forgiveness of sins, it seemed appropriate at last to abandon his standard cautionary practice of pseudonymity or 'indirect communication', which had largely prevailed up to his Easter conversion, and to speak out *directly* in his own voice and with his own signature of Søren Kierkegaard. But Kierkegaard actually revoked his original decision to engage in 'direct communication' in those four works in which he attempts to come to terms with the implications of his Easter conversion as a liberation from the melancholy of sin: in *S.D.* and *T.C.* he resorted to the pseudonym of Anti-Climacus and ultimately chose to refuse publication of both *P.V.* and *A.R.* (with its crucial 1848 Preface). So the question arises as to why Kierkegaard should have changed his mind so radically and opted instead to return to the ploys of 'indirect communication', or indeed to no communication at all (i.e. not publish).

Kierkegaard's conversion resulted from a sudden, ecstatic realization that 'Christ's death had released man from sin'. But he quickly became aware of the profound *ambiguity* inherent in this Christian mystery of the Atonement. While Atonement signified on the one hand man's indebted dependency on God for the remission of his sins, it could also be taken to mean that in being absolved from sin man might somehow be able to transcend his finite nature and become one with his Redeemer in a miraculous union of the Divine and the human.

The term Atonement is used in both of these alternative senses in Kierkegaard's two major works on the theme of the God-man (*S.D.* and *T.C.*). In one passage in *Training in Christianity*, for example, Anti-Climacus uses 'Atonement' as a synonym for 'God-Man' – i.e. in the sense of an at-one-ment of God and man.² But no sooner has he done so than he checks himself and denounces the perfidious danger of construing his concept as an Hegelian mediation between the Divine and the human which would presume to erase the essential 'contradictoriness' of such a synthesis. Elsewhere in the same work, the author deploys the term atonement with a lower case 'a' to refer quite innocently and literally to the absolution of man's sins which Christ accomplished by his death on the cross.³ Similarly in *Sickness unto Death* we find Anti-Climacus remarking upon the deep ambiguity of the term Atonement as a dialectical 'negation of the negation of sin' which he quickly qualifies with the following caveat: »But Christianity ... keeps watch to see that the deep gulf of qualitative distinction between God/ and man, may be firmly fixed, as it is in the paradox and in faith lest God/ and man, still more dreadfully than ever occurred in paganism, might in a way (*philosophice, poetice* etc.), coalesce into *one* ... in the System«.⁴

The System alluded to here is of course that of Hegelian speculation. This Kierkegaard repudiated because of its facile attempts to equate God and man in an absolute synthesis which ignored the irresolvable contradiction

inherent in the Christian paradox of the God-Man. Only a keen awareness of our human sinfulness, Kierkegaard argues, can safeguard the irreducible 'qualitative difference' between the Divine and the human. But the problem is that Christianity itself appears, by yet another paradox, to threaten this very precaution of sin-awareness by introducing the doctrine of the Atonement. »The Paradox results from the doctrine of the atonement«, writes Kierkegaard. »First Christianity goes ahead and establishes sin so securely as a position that the human understanding can never comprehend it; and then it is the same Christian doctrine which in turn undertakes to do away with this position so completely that the human understanding never can understand it«. And he goes on to compare and contrast the Hegelian and Christian viewpoints as follows: »Speculation, which chatters itself away from the paradoxes, lops a little bit off at both ends, and so it goes easier: it does not make sin so entirely positive – and in spite of this it cannot get it through its head that sin should be entirely forgotten. But Christianity, which is the first discoverer of the paradoxes, is in this case also as paradoxical as possible; it works directly against itself when it establishes sin so securely as a position that it seems a perfect impossibility to do away with it again – and yet it is precisely Christianity which, by the atonement, would do away with it so completely that it is as though drowned in the sea«. ⁵ However differently Kierkegaard would like to make them, the Hegelian concept of the *Absolute* and the Christian doctrine of *Absolution* here seem perilously close. And this conceptual proximity is compounded by the embarrassing fact that the same Danish term, *forsoning*, was employed to render *both* the Christian notion of 'Atonement' and the Hegelian notion of 'Synthesis'!

Hence Kierkegaard's fear that if we do away with sin altogether we run the risk of elevating man to such a height that he becomes indistinguishable from God, as Hegel did in his System of Absolute Idealism. One of the most insidious consequences of such an Hegelian equation of God and man is the capitulation of the category of the *individual* to the collective and universal category of the *Species*. To preserve and cultivate the category of the individual is for Kierkegaard to remain mindful of our sinfulness which means our finite separateness as temporal beings who can never assume equality or identity with the Eternal being of God. »The category of sin is the category of the individual«, Anti-Climacus reminds his readers in *Sickness unto Death*, »Speculation at once reaches the doctrine of the preponderance of the generation over the individual ... being a sinner is merely subsumed under the Concept which tells us: think and then thou art the whole of humanity«. By contrast, »Christianity begins with the doctrine of sin – that which splits men into individuals and holds every individual fast as a sinner – and therefore with the individual. It is Christianity, to be sure, which has taught us about the God-Man, about the likeness ... but Christianity is a great hater of wanton and impertinent forwardness. By the help of the doctrine of sin and the individual sinner, God and Christ have been secured once and for all ... against the nation, the people, the crowd etc«. ⁶

One of the most pernicious temptations for Christians is to forget that the Incarnation of Christ was a *singular* event in history and to replace it with the *universal* Idea of History as a cumulative merging of God in mankind. Such an historicist abstraction is, Kierkegaard believes, a perversion of the genuine Christian doctrine of *Kinship* (*Slægtskabet*). Only as individuals do we have the right to claim a Kinship with God, not by *identifying* ourselves with Christ, but by humbly *imitating* him (*Imitatio Christi*) in fear and trembling, forever mindful of our own fallen finitude, our own original sinfulness and guilt. Mankind makes itself into an idol whenever »men have forgotten sin ... and allowed the fallen race to become once and for all good again in Christ. And so in turn they have saddled God with an abstraction ... which presumes to claim *Kinship* with Him«. But this, contends Kierkegaard, »is a false pretext which only makes them insolent. For if the individual is to feel himself *akin* to God (and that is the doctrine of Christianity) the whole weight of this falls upon him in fear and trembling and he must discover the possibility of offense«. ⁷

The authentic doctrine of Kinship is travestied by those speculative rationalists who interpret it as a dialectical mediation of *doubt* into an absolute and objective certainty. This doctrine can only be legitimately understood as a moment of belief lived in the 'subjective inwardness' of the 'solitary one' perpetually vigilant of the unmediated possibility of the *offense*. »One's relationship to Christ«, insists Kierkegaard, »is not either to *doubt* or to believe, but either to be *offended* or to believe«. Rationalism is often no more than a revamped paganism to the extent that it elevates man – i.e. the universal category of Mankind – until he becomes identical with the Divine, whereas Christianity, by contrast, lowers the Divine into man (the singular category of one individual) until He becomes the unique event of the Incarnate Christ. Accordingly, anyone who attempts to prove God's existence by reducing God to the universal equation of a logical syllogism is, says Kierkegaard, »*ipso facto* a heathen«. Hence Kierkegaard's insistence that »the God-Man is not the unity of God and mankind. Such terminology exhibits the profundity of optical illusion. The God-Man is the unity of God and the individual man. That the human race is or should be akin to God is ancient paganism; but that an individual man is God is Christianity, and this individual man is the 'God-Man'«. ⁸

But Hegelian Idealism is not the only System to abolish the *offense* by deifying the historical category of Mankind. In *Training in Christianity* Kierkegaard holds that the institutionalized System of *objective Christianity* – what he calls *Christendom* – also commits the grievous indiscretion of such a blasphemous deification. The triumphalist self-assurance of Christendom results from the fact that »it has done away with Christianity and tried to make us believe that Christendom is Christ (the God-man)«. Christendom therefore »represents the annihilation of God by its deification of the established order ... Under the pretence of serving and worshiping, men serve and worship their own device, in self-complacent joy at being themselves the inventors«. ⁹ The fact that its »sermons end with

hurrah rather than *Amen*« is taken by Kierkegaard to mean that Christendom has »done away with the offence« saying to itself instead »in a hushed voice that it is *itself* divine«. ¹⁰ By introducing triumph within the temporal-historical order, thereby essaying to reduce the heterogeneous paradox of Christ the God-Man to the homogeneous platitude of a universal Man-God, Christendom, quite simply, abolishes Christianity.

Against this *triumphant* church of self-congratulation, Kierkegaard champions the *militant* church of struggle, contestation, vigilance and transcendence. »What Christ said about his kingdom being not of this world was not said with special reference to those times when He uttered this saying«, writes Kierkegaard. »It is an eternally valid utterance about the relation of Christ's kingdom to this world and so it is valid, for every age. As soon as Christ's kingdom comes to terms with the world, Christianity is abolished«. ¹¹ The error of those who endorse a triumphalistic Christendom is that »they have quite forgotten that Christ's life of earth is *sacred* history, which must not be confounded with the history of the human race or of the world. They have entirely forgotten that the God-Man is essentially heterogeneous from every other individual man and the race as a whole«. By contrast, »the triumphant church means the homogeneity of the God-Man. Then Christ is no more the God-Man, but only a distinguished man whose life is homogeneous with the development of the race ... The day when Christianity and the world become friends Christianity is done away with«. ¹²

Thus Kierkegaard dismisses 'Peter's Congregation' (by which he means not only the Catholic Church in Rome but the established Lutheran Church in Copenhagen), as an »impatient anticipation of Eternity«. Christianity can never, and should never, become a Congregation, for such a collectivization of believers into the universal category of a Crowd, subsumes the unmediated and 'offensive' paradoxes of time into the premature equations of timelessness, thereby preventing the believer from answering his true vocation to become an individual before God ¹³ Only God has the power to unite the eternal and the temporal in the unique event of the Christian Incarnation. Any attempt by man to do likewise is the worst of all blasphemies.

II: The problem of the Authorship

But what if God himself, not man, were to remove the offense by revealing to us that our sins are forgiven us? What if God himself were to reveal Himself to us, not in a Universal Concept or Crowd or Congregation, but in our own singularity as unique individuals, absolving us from sin and calling us to imitate the way of Christ, the God-Man? What then, once the barrier of sin had been removed by the Divine grace of Atonement, remains to prevent us from becoming *one* with the God-Man in *Imitatio Christi*?

As we noted, Kierkegaard's 'I-must-speak' response to his Easter conversion appeared to indicate an option for *direct* communication. We would expect him consequently to write and speak as himself and in his own

name, suspending his former pseudonymous strategies of *indirect* communication. This expectation would seem to be somewhat vindicated by Kierkegaard's essay 'On the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle', also an 1848 work and also included in the main text of the unpublished *On Authority and Revelation*.¹⁴ In this essay Kierkegaard defines the Apostle as an individual who is willing to obey the Divine call to spread the Word by engaging in direct communication; while the Genius is characterized by cunning, subterfuge, doubt and equivocations, qualities which express themselves in his mode of indirect communication. In a *Journal* entry Kierkegaard argues that Apostleship is a means of imitating the paradigm of the God-Man – i.e. proclaiming directly Christ's seemingly direct message of God made man – not by inflating one's individual humanity until it becomes Divine, but by allowing the Divine to somehow reveal itself in one's apostolic or prophetic witness. The true life of the Apostolic individual, writes Kierkegaard, »is its apotheosis, which does not mean that this empty contentless *I* steals, as it were, out of this finitude, in order to become volatilized and diffused in its heavenward emigration, but rather that the Divine inhabits and tolerates the finite«. ¹⁵ Thus, as Kierkegaard points out in *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, when the Apostle communicates directly he would appear to be emulating Christ's own directness when He declared Himself a God-Man with the words: 'I am the Truth' (combining the individual *I* who is finite and historical with the *Truth* which is infinite and eternal).¹⁶ Elsewhere in his *Journal*, Kierkegaard argues that this direct mode of address employed by the God-Man, Jesus, represents a radical shift from the exclusively 'indirect address' of the Manless God of Judaism – »Christianity alone is direct address«. ¹⁷ In contrast to Judaism, or indeed Arianism and Deism, which tended to underscore the intangible and elusive transcendence of God (*Gott ist Gott*), Kierkegaard is here proclaiming the paradoxical mystery of Christ as a synthesis of the historical and the eternal (*Gott ist Mensch*).¹⁸

A logical consequence of this train of thought appears to be that the apostle who resolves to speak out directly may also somehow participate in this paradoxical mystery of synthesis by passing through a purgative process of atonement which qualifies him for a special kind of union with God. Kierkegaard is careful, nonetheless, to distinguish this legitimate possibility of 'union with God' from the illegitimate 'merging in God' which pantheism promoted:

»According to Christian doctrine man is not to *merge in God* through a pantheistic fading away or in the divine ocean through the blotting out of all individual characteristics but in an intensified consciousness a person must render account for every careless word he has uttered, and even if grace blots out sin, the *union with God* still takes place in the personality clarified through this whole process«. ¹⁹

The extraordinary fact of the matter is, however, that Kierkegaard himself ultimately reneged on this apostolic mode of 'direct address', with its covert connotations of a union between God and man. Moreover, not

only did he decide not to put his own signature to the two major works on the theme of the God-Man (*S.D.* and *T.C.*), but he actually used these works to embark on a full-scale repudiation of 'direct address' as a presumptuous mediation of the Divine and the human! This authorial presumption of direct communication Kierkegaard now equates, not surprisingly, with the primary aberration of Christendom:

»In the first ages of Christendom ... the error with regard to the God-Man took one or another of two forms: either that of eliminating the qualification God (Ebionitism), or that of eliminating the qualification man (Gnosticism). In the modern age on the whole ... the error is a different one and far more dangerous. By force of lecturing they have transformed the God-Man into that speculative unity of God and man *sub specie aeterni*, manifested, that is to say, in the nullipresent medium of pure being, whereas in truth the God-Man is the unity of God and an individual man in an actual historical situation; or else they have simply done away with Christ, cast Him out and taken possession of His teaching, almost regarding Him at last as one does an anonymous author – the doctrine is the principal thing, is the whole thing. Hence it is that they vainly conceive of Christianity simply as *direct* communication, far more direct in its simplicity than the profound dicta of the professor«. ²⁰

Kierkegaard's radical revision of his original Easter decision to adopt the authorial mode of 'direct communication' must, I believe, be understood as an act of *self-censorship*. Indeed Kierkegaard's sustained debunking, in these pseudonymous works, of any attempt to unite the Divine and the human – with the exception of course of the one, true and only legitimate God-Man, Jesus Christ – would seem to betray a repressed inner urge in Kierkegaard to do just that. The Dane doth protest too much! He is putting himself in check, as it were, like a man standing on top of a tower who holds himself back for fear that some demonic impulse in him might hurl him to destruction.

Several days after his Easter conversion Kierkegaard registered the following telling entry in his *Journal*: »My whole nature is changed. My concealment and reserve are broken – I am free to speak. Great God grant me grace«. ²¹ With his melancholy dissipated, his sins absolved and the veto against 'realizing the universal' lifted, the way seemed at last clear for 'direct communication'. But this hopeful horizon soon clouded over again and doubts returned. 'I do believe', muses Kierkegaard, »in the forgiveness of sin, *but* I interpret this, as before, to mean that I must bear my punishment of remaining in this painful prison of reserve all my life, in a more profound sense of being separated from the company of other men«. ²² One moment, then, the knight of faith dons his evangelical armour and prepares for the fray of direct confrontation; the next, he charily doffs it again and retires into pseudonymity.

Gregor Malantschuk interprets Kierkegaard's dramatic vacillations at this time, as an indication that his melancholy, which until then stood in the

way of his accepting the forgiveness of sins, is only *partially* overcome by the Easter conversion, and that this accounts for the enigmatic fact that Kierkegaard, despite his initial determination to speak out directly, returns in the published writings of this year to the indirect strategy of the pseudonym. He also contends that *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (also written in 1848) was withheld from publication because Kierkegaard considered its confessional disclosures too *direct* an exposé of his habitually *indirect* point of view.²³

In yet another *Journal* entry of this time, Kierkegaard offers us an informative and candid view of his post-pascal dilemma as to whether he should speak out as he originally intended or remain silent. On the one hand, Kierkegaard decides to publish *S.D.*, *T.C.* and *P.V.* simultaneously and in his own name, so that »with the power of a single blow« he might »cast (himself) into the arms of God«. On the other hand, such a decision strikes him as symptomatic of a »demoniacal« and »pompous desire to exalt myself«. ²⁴ The peremptory impulse to 'speak out' is, consequently, revoked by a counter-impulse to 'remain silent'. *Training in Christianity*, he goes on to assert in this same entry, »is very important to me personally but does it then follow«, he asks himself, that instead of following his vocation to become a Christian in humble and inconspicuous service, he should at once »make it public«, thus subscribing to a 'prophetic' compulsion in himself to »reform and awaken the whole world, instead of one's own self ... forcing myself almost demoniacally to be stronger than I am«. ²⁵

Faced with this either/or dilemma – to communicate directly or remain silent – Kierkegaard strikes upon a solution of perfect compromise: he will indeed communicate and he will indeed make public his works (or at least two of them) but he will do so *indirectly* by inventing a new pseudonym, Anti-Climacus. And so he adopts the clever ploy of acknowledging himself, Søren Kierkegaard, as editor of both *T.C.* and *S.C.*, while deploying his new pseudonym of Anti-Climacus as *author* of these separately published works. In another *Journal* entry, Kierkegaard comments on the significance of this solution as follows: »*Sickness unto Death* has appeared under a pseudonym and to that extent there is an end to the unhappy torture of putting too great a strain upon myself by undertaking the task which is too great for me: of wishing to publish the whole thing at once and including the part about my work as an author, and at the same time in desperation putting a match to established Christendom. Now it matters less when the other books appear (and the thing about my authorship shall not appear at all) for there is no longer any question of the power of a single blow. Now I shall rest and remain quieter«. ²⁶

The pseudonym of Anti-Climacus is not only new in name but also in conception. Up to this point, Kierkegaard had only used pseudonyms who, by his own admission, were *less* Christian than he adjudged himself to be. Now, however, he chooses a pseudonym who is designed to be *more* Christian than himself. »I would place myself higher than Johannes Climacus«, Kierkegaard admits, »but lower than Anti-Climacus«. ²⁷ He

defines Anti-Climacus as an »extraordinary Christian such as there has never been«,²⁸ thus setting his paradigm of apostleship at the safe distance of an unattainable ideal. And he explains the dialectical transition from Climacus to Anti-Climacus by affirming that »there is something *lower* (the aesthetic) which is pseudonymous and something *higher*, which is also pseudonymous because my personality does not correspond to it«. ²⁹

This question of the relationship between the pseudonymous *personae* and Kierkegaard's own direct personality is crucial. Thus, for example, Kierkegaard expresses an ambiguous attitude to his new pseudonym when he confesses that while *T.C.* »is very important to me *personally*«, it does »not correspond to my *personality*«. He concludes this protean deliberation on his authorship as both identification and distanciation, by endorsing the publication of *T.C.* and *S.D.* under the pseudonym of Anti-Climacus – as a synthesis of the extremes of 'direct communication' and 'silence' – and by revoking his decision to publish *The Point of View* with the tell-tale self-recrimination: »No, nothing about my *personality as an author*«. ³⁰

In order to ascertain the reasons for Kierkegaard's highly ambivalent and prevaricating attitude to his own authorship we need only glance at the opening passages of the ultimately withheld *Point of View for my Work as an Author*:

»In my career as an author a point has been reached where it is permissible to do what I feel a strong impulse to do and so regard as my duty – namely to explain once and for all as directly and frankly as possible what is what: what I as an author declare myself to be. The moment is now appropriate ... There is a time to be silent and a time to speak«. ³¹

It is quite evident that Kierkegaard finally deemed this work to be *too direct* and *too frank* for his own good: that is, too much of a self-glorification of his own personality as an author, to the point indeed where it might even risk an idolatrous identification with the 'I am Truth' revelation of the God-Man. Hence the cautionary side-step of self-rebuke recorded in his *Journal*: »Humility, therefore, is exactly what I need«. ³²

Kierkegaard appears to regard such humility as a necessary antidote to the strong impulse of proud self-affirmation which the prospect of a 'direct communication' (of his own practice of pseudonymous indirectness) in *PV* provoked in him. In this respect, it is important to recall that the subtitle for *Point of View* was in fact *A Direct Communication*. Kierkegaard's original intention in writing this work was to bring the history of his indirect pseudonymous 'point of view' to some sort of dialectical conclusion or 'mediation' where his true, if hitherto concealed, vocation as an apostolic author might finally be revealed in the *Aufhebung* of a 'new immediacy'. Kierkegaard construed this 'new immediacy' as a kind of sacred 'repetition' achieved by an 'ideal Christian' who might miraculously overcome the apparently irreconcilable viewpoints of the pseudonyms and speak out directly because he had received his authority directly from God!³³

If, however, one *cannot* claim the privilege of such a divinely revealed

authority – which alone could vindicate one’s attempt to reconcile the divisions in oneself, between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the real and the ideal, Climacus and Anti-Climacus etc. – then the option of ‘direct communication’ must be rejected as no more than the indulgent self-promotion of one’s own personality qua *genius*. Kierkegaard’s final decision *not* to publish *The Point of View*, precisely because of its directness, can only mean that he contritely recognized his own uncertainty about the ‘Divine’ nature of his Easter revelation, that is, his own reservations about his vocation as an *apostle*. As he makes clear in his *Journal*: »What is indirect is to place dialectical contrasts together – and then not one word concerning (the author’s) personal understanding – what is more indulgent in the direct communication is that there is in the communication a craving to be personally understood«. ³⁴

In short, having divided himself from himself through the use of pseudonyms, Kierkegaard seems to have struck upon the ideal solution of the category of the ‘author’ in *The Point of View* as a possibility of attaining a new, higher and dialectically reconciled self. This ideal synthesis of his divided selves – real and pseudonymous – qua *author* is clearly expressed in the following passage from his *Journal*:

»If anything should be said about my work as an author, it could be done in such a way that a *third person* is formed, *the author*, who would be a synthesis of myself and the pseudonym, and he would speak *directly* about it. Then only an introduction would be needed in which this author would be introduced, and then he would say everything in the *first person*. The introduction would point out that the whole authorship was a *unity*; but I would not be the pseudonym nor the pseudonym I: therefore, this ‘author’ would be a *synthesis* of the pseudonym and me«. ³⁵

But this projected ideal of a dialectically reappropriated authorial self seems, yet again, to have represented for Kierkegaard too much of a *temptation* to apotheosize the self by presuming it possible to absolve himself from his divided, fallen and finite nature – i.e. to deny his fundamental sinfulness. Hence his decision to say nothing about his personality as an author by refusing to publish *The Point of View*.

What Kierkegaard appears to have most feared in himself at this time was his ‘strong impulse’ to portray himself as an *extra-ordinarius* – a sacred martyr elected by God Himself as a prophet for his age. Kierkegaard describes the category of the *extraordinarius* as that unique individual who rises above the common ranks (*extra-ordinem*) of the Crowd, striving to become, through imitation of Christ, one with the God-Man. The *extraordinarius* follows the dialectic of the *Salvator Mundi* by identifying with Christ, whom he feels ‘especially chosen’ to ‘imitate’ (*efterfølge*) in terms of a sacred ‘likeness’ (*ligheden*). In several passages in *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard expresses the conviction that he himself has been singled out by God as a redemptive martyr who must ‘speak out’ in order to challenge and ultimately reform the crowd:

»The thought goes very far back in my recollection that in every generation there are two or three who are sacrificed for the others, are led by frightful sufferings to discover what redounds to the good of others. So it was that ... I understood myself as singled out for such a fate³⁶ (...) I have been conscious of being under instruction, and that from the very first. The process is this: a poetic and philosophic nature is put aside in order to become a Christian ... It is Governance that has educated me³⁷ (...) By obliging a man to take notice I achieve the aim of obliging him to judge ... Compelling people to take notice and to judge is the characteristic of genuine martyrdom. A genuine martyr never used his might but strove by the aid of impotence. He compelled people to take notice. God knows, they took notice – they put him to death. But with that he was content«. ³⁸

Such passages take on an even more relevatory character when we recall Kierkegaard's belief, expressed in certain *Journal* entries, that he would die, like Christ before him, in his midthirties; and when we remember, furthermore, that 1848, the year in which the passages from *PV.* just cited were written, was the thirty-fifth year of Kierkegaard's life. The following *Journal* extracts are highly revealing in this regard:

»As a result of all my inner suffering, my own superiority and the treatment I have suffered, I was brought to the point at which it almost seemed that I myself was a providence to arrange an awakening³⁹ (...) Christ ... as God-Man did not outlive his thirty-fourth year. If being a Christian in the strictest sense of the word is to be endured from childhood up and is continued strictly without developing into any kind of deception; such a man can hardly live to more more than thirty-four«. ⁴⁰

Kierkegaard's compelling desire to cast himself in the role of an *extraordinarius* who emulates the God-Man or martyred Christ, is also evidenced on several occasions in *Training in Christianity* (which he *did* decide to publish). But there is a fundamental difference between the 'viewpoints' adopted in this published – i.e. approved – work and the unpublished *Point of View*. For here the author reverts to the practice of *indirect* communication as the only authentic mode of apostolic address. Not only does Kierkegaard sign the work with the pseudonym of the 'ideal Christian', Anti-Climacus, but throughout the work itself he insistently reminds us that Christ Himself deployed the mode of 'indirect address'. Thus while, at one level, Kierkegaard's return to the pseudonymous constraints of indirect address can be interpreted as a way of humbly *distancing* himself from the elevated immediacy of apostolic witness, at another level, it can be read in the contrary sense as yet another ingenious dialectical ploy to *reidentify* himself with the vocation of the God-man (by redeploying Christ's own indirect mode of communication).

Unlike his contemporaries in speculative Christendom who had reduced Christianity to the 'inoffensive' and innocuous formulae of a 'direct communication', Kierkegaard maintains throughout *T.C.* that such directness is impossible for the true God-Man who must speak 'incognito'. Even in those instances when Christ *seemed* to speak directly, Kierkegaard

now contends (revising his earlier conviction that Christ and the apostles did speak out directly), his listeners perceived it 'indirectly'. And how could they have done otherwise, he asks, confronted as they were with the living and 'offensive' contradiction of God as Man? Kierkegaard asserts in addition that this inevitability of 'indirection' was nothing less than a Divine strategy employed by the Messiah Himself in order to allow his contemporaries the choice of *either* faith *or* offense.⁴¹ That Kierkegaard saw himself as using the *same* messianic method of pedagogical indirection in his own pseudonym of Anti-Climacus as a 'reduplication' of himself – or what he also termed a 'communication by double reflection' – is certainly suggested by the following passage from *T.C.*:

»Whenever it is the case that the teacher (*the lower case 't' here indicates that the author is speaking of himself*) is essentially involved in the teaching there is a reduplication, the communication is far from being the direct ... communication of a professor (*the author here seems to be alluding to Hegel*); being reduplicated in the teacher by the fact that he exists in what he teaches, it is in manifold ways a discriminating art. And now when the Teacher (*the higher case 'T' here indicates that the author is now speaking of Christ*) who is inseparable from and more essential than, the teaching, is also paradox, all direct communication is impossible«. ⁴²

These reflections touch the very core of Kierkegaard's problem of pseudonymity. In refuting the Hegelian path to the God-Man as a blasphemous attempt to *mediate* the paradox in direct communication, Kierkegaard now hits upon an alternative and opposite way of identifying with the God-Man by actually *recreating* paradox in and through indirect communication. At certain points in *T.C.* one suspects that the identity of Kierkegaard's pseudonym momentarily converges with that of Christ Himself:

»Christ would fain have been recognizable directly for the *extraordinary* figure he was, but that the contemporary age by reason of its blindness and iniquity would not understand him ... *He* is love and yet every instant He exists *he* must crucify as it were all human compassion and solicitude – for He can only be the object of faith. But everything that goes by the name of human sympathy, has to do with direct recognizability so this is what it comes to ... responsibility«. ⁴³

It is most probable that Kierkegaard is here comparing Christ's maieutic assumption of an 'indirect incognito' vis-à-vis his disciples with his own similar attitude to Regina, his fiancée. Like Christ's disciples, Regina reacted with too much 'spontaneity', 'sympathy' and 'immediateness' to the *extraordinarius* before her. Kierkegaard, finding himself in an exposed position of 'direct recognizableness' vis-à-vis Regina, felt convinced that a preemptive 'Divine veto' had been levied on his marriage. He felt it incumbent upon him, accordingly, to communicate to her only 'indirectly', as Christ had done before him, thus presenting his beloved with the 'possibility of the offence'. And so he broke off the engagement and transformed himself from a passionate suitor into a dispassionate ascetic,

maintaining that if Regina withstood this 'trial' of indirection and continued to have 'faith' in him, she would then have truly proved her love for him (rather than for some aesthetic projection of her own imagination).⁴⁴

This torturous dialectic of the *extraordinarius incognito* which epitomizes Kierkegaard's ambiguous attitude to the category of the God-Man, is even more explicit in *On Authority and Revelation*, a work which though originally begun in 1846 was returned to and revised after the Easter conversion of 1848 with the author interpolating a third explanatory preface and appending a postscript. It is most revealing that the theme of this particular work – which focusses on the clash between a self-proclaimed, solitary prophet-martyr named Adler, claiming to have had a direct revelation from God, and the counterclaims of the orthodox church authority – should have so conspicuously commanded Kierkegaard's attention just after his own ostensible 'revelation'.

In the 1848 preface to this work, Kierkegaard speaks in an unprecedented fashion of Christianity's power to solve the problems of the age (i.e. its power to resolve the contradictions of historical time which he had hitherto so strenuously denied). Indeed he goes so far as to impute to Christianity the ability to actually *explain* the indecipherable riddle of our human existence as a paradoxical tension between the timeless and time. So that not only does Kierkegaard come disturbingly close here to a Hegelian equation of God's Logos with Man's logic by affirming the possibility of a uniquely Christian understanding which could resolve the paradoxes, but he moves even closer to such a blasphemous equation in his talk of the redemptive consequences of the sacrificial martyrdom of the chosen *extraordinarius*: »And this sacrifice is the sacrifice of obedience, the obedient man who offers himself as a sacrifice is the martyr; for not everyone who is put to death is a martyr.«⁴⁵ This strange mélange of Pelagian presumption and anti-Pelagian obedience characterizes Kierkegaard's ambivalent treatment of Adler's martyrdom and finds an interesting elaboration in the following passage from this work:

»When the individual is the true *extraordinarius* and really has a new starting point, when he understands his life's pressing difficulties in the discrimen between the *universal* (a term used ambiguously in this work to refer to both the Crowd and the authority of the orthodox church) and the individually *extraordinem*, he must be unconditionally recognized for the fact that he is willing to make sacrifices ... As a son is bound by filial piety, so shall or ought the individual be bound by piety towards the universal.«⁴⁶

This definition of the individual's 'obedience' and 'responsibility' as a filial bond with the father, recalls the biblical paradigms of Job, Abraham and of course the Christian Saviour as Son of God. But one cannot dispense with the strong suspicion that it also refers to more contemporary versions of 'filial piety' to a Divine call of the Father – i.e. Adler and Kierkegaard himself.⁴⁷

It is probable that in *A.R.* Adler serves for Kierkegaard as some sort of alter-ego, that is, as an external embodiment of many of his own covert desires, aspirations and intentions. As Frederik Sontag has observed: »Along comes Adler, openly claiming what Kierkegaard had hitherto said must be kept in secret and all the while Søren Kierkegaard has been gaining momentum toward revealing himself directly. Kierkegaard has stressed inwardness and indirection: Adler is direct and outer, just at that time when Søren Kierkegaard seems to be tending in this direction himself.«⁴⁸ Adler, not at all unlike the Kierkegaard of 1848, believed himself to be the chosen recipient of a revelation. In similar fashion, Adler's own initial reaction was 'I must speak'. Unlike Kierkegaard, however, Adler went ahead and did communicate directly, thereby disputing the *Universal* authority of the Church in the name of his *individual* revelation. Although betraying at times a certain empathy with Adler's 'apostolic' resolve to communicate directly, Kierkegaard finally denounces him as a 'confused genius', castigating his 'outcry' for having flouted the orthodox revelation of tradition. Kierkegaard thus concludes that Adler should have 'remained silent'.⁴⁹ If an 'extra-ordinary' individual does receive a revelation then he is obliged to acknowledge in fear and trembling his immense responsibility to the authoritative standing of God's Church and must consequently overcome any personal compulsion to communicate it directly. In what seems like a subtle form of self-chastisement, Kierkegaard adds that Adler should have deliberated more upon the precise significance of his revelation and resisted – as Kierkegaard himself did in suppressing *The Point of View* – his own 'strong impulse' to speak out prematurely and in defiance of authority. Only after such a period of scrupulously reflective deliberation might the *extraordinarius* finally find himself in a position to determine whether he is no more than a 'mere confused genius' (as Kierkegaard describes Adler in the 1848 preface) or a genuine apostle existing on a »qualitatively higher and transcendent level.«⁵⁰

Despite this tone of juridical severity and assuredness, Kierkegaard's overall assessment of the Adler case is profoundly confused on several key issues: 1) as to his own position in relation to Adler; 2) as to both of their positions in relation to authoritative Apostolicity; and 3) as to the position of such Apostolicity in relation to the category of the God-Man. Concerning the first issue, Kierkegaard condemns Adler for »actually reaching the point of identifying himself with Christ«; and yet he is perfectly aware that this is one of the logical conclusions of many of his own claims and impulses at this time. Concerning the second, Kierkegaard categorically denies that either he or Adler had 'any authority' as putative recipients of a Divine revelation; and yet he not only proceeds, albeit with several disclaimers, to himself invoke the authority of the orthodox church against Adler, but he even contradicts himself in his reasons for such a denouncement of Adler – on the one hand, because Adler was a 'confused genius' incapable of critical reflection, on the other hand, because »he was ensnared in *too much reflection*«. ⁵¹ Finally, concerning the third confusion,

Kierkegaard proclaims at one moment that only Christ, as the one true God-man, could exist on a 'qualitatively different' plane to man; while at another he holds that the Apostle also exists on a 'qualitatively different' plane to the ordinary genius.⁵² In short, Kierkegaard's confusion about Adler is an accurate, if refracted, mirroring of his own confusion about himself.

The entire 'communication' dilemma which arose in the wake of the Easter conversion (whether to speak directly, indirectly or remain silent altogether) is therefore, one of the central points of contention in *On Authority and Revelation*. Consequently we find Kierkegaard crying out at one point 'I must speak' and enjoining a 'direct' assault on established Christendom, and revoking this position, the next, by endorsing instead a return to 'indirect' communication or indeed to silent self-denial before the sovereign authority of the »fundamental principles themselves«.⁵³

The ultimate significance of Kierkegaard's dialectically shifting attitude to Adler – like most of his attitudes expressed in 1848 – remains incorrigibly equivocal. Perhaps Adler served as a corrective to his own presumptive urge to become one with the God-Man in a 'filial relation' of sacrificial martyrdom? Or perhaps, contrariwise, Adler served as a secret catalyst for Kierkegaard to carry out his initial Easter resolve to 'speak out' – after an interim period of indirect pseudonymity and reflective deliberation – in his final open *Attack upon Christendom*, under his own personal signature, some seven years later in 1855? There is no way of knowing for certain. Either way, Adler was indubitably one of those *extraordinariuses* who actually rose so far above the *ordinariness* of the crowd and of Christendom, that he supposed himself to be identical with the God-man. Perhaps Kierkegaard, beholding the bold presumption of this self-proclaimed 'martyr', vacillated in fear and trembling, with the whisper of an ancient prayer upon his lips – 'There but for the grace of God go I'.⁵⁴

1. Cf. *Papers*, IX A390 and *Training in Christianity* (Trans. W. Lowrie, Princeton U.P., 1967) p. 123, note.

2. *T.C.*, *op.cit.* p. 109.

3. *T.C.*, *op.cit.* p. 181.

4. *Sickness unto Death* (Trans. W. Lowrie, Princeton U.P., 1941), p. 230.

5. *S.D.*, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

6. *Ibid.* pp. 250-2.

7. *Ibid.* p. 251.

8. *T.C.*, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

9. *Ibid.* pp. 92-3.

10. *Ibid.* pp. 88, 101, 109. Also p. 109.

11. *Ibid.* p. 207.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-18.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-9.

14. *On Authority and Revelation* (Trans. W. Lowrie, Harper Torchbook, New York, 1966), pp. 103-122.

15. *Journal Entry*, III, A I; *Journals and Papers*, II, 1587.

16. See Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, (Trans. Hong and Hong, Princeton U.P., 1974), p. 94. Cf. also p. 97 and p. 119 where Gregor Malantschuk quotes the following passage from Kierkegaard's *De Omnibus Dubitandum*: »Christianity said it had come into the world by a new beginning and that this beginning was at once historical and eternal«. It is possible that this work, also written in 1848, was withheld from publication because it was *too direct*.

17. *Journal entry*, A 184; *Journals and Papers*, I, 427.

18. See Malantschuk, *op.cit.*, p. 94 *et seq.*

19. *Journal entry*, II, A 248; *Journals and Papers*, IV.

20. *T.C.*, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

21. *Journals and Papers*, V, VIII I A 640.

22. *Journal* entry, 848; *Dru Journals*, May, 1848.

23. Malantschuk, *op.cit.*, pp. 328 *et seq.* Malantschuk also adverts to the significance of the fact that Kierkegaard commenced a new piece of 'devotional' writing, *The Lilies of the Field*, towards the end of 1848, where the *Religiosness* A virtues of humility, obedience, stillness, self-abnegation, guilt and above all, silence, predominated once again. This work was written in Kierkegaard's own name, but the point seems to be that it was so signed precisely because it was sufficiently low-key and modest to take the harm out of the signature. That is to say, this work was so unrelated in both tone and theme to the problematic of the 'God-man' as to render the whole question of 'direct' or 'indirect' address quite irrelevant.

24. *Journal* entry, *Dru*, 936.

25. *Ibid.* See also on this difficult phase of the authorship, A. McKinnon and Cappelørn, »The Period of Composition of Kierkegaard's Published Works«, *Kierkegaardiana*, IX; and Malantschuk, *op.cit.*, pp. 354-5.

26. *Journal* entry, *Dru*, 942.

27. *Journals and Papers*, V, X, A 517; see also *Journals, Dru*, 319, where Kierkegaard describes Climacus as »not yet a Christian« and Anti-Climacus as a »Christian to an extraordinary degree« – and himself as residing somewhere in the middle: »quite a simple Christian«.

28. *Climacus and Anti-Climacus, A Dialectical Discovery*, written in 1848. Cf. Malantschuk's assertion, *op.cit.*, p. 336 that Climacus' relation to Anti-Climacus in the realm of pseudonymity is analogous to that between *actuality* and *ideality* in the dialectic of existence.

29. *Journal* entry, *Dru*, 936.

30. *Ibid.*

31. »*The Point of View for my Work as an Author*«, *The Point of View* (Trans. W. Lowrie, Oxford U.P., London, 1936), p. 5. See also Kierkegaard's tortured vacillation between the direct and indirect points of view in *T.C.*, *op.cit.* pp. 16, 17, 42. Here the author justifies the use of 'indirection' by adducing the example of Christ himself; but he also recognizes the need for some kind of directness for both the God-Man and himself: »The whole of Christ's life on earth would have been mere play if he had been incognito to such a degree that he went through life totally unnoticed – and yet in its true sense, he was *incognito*, *T.C.*, p. 16.

32. *Journal* entry, *Dru*, 936.

33. See *Kierkegaard*, (Ed. J. Thompson, Anchor, 1972), pp. 86, 221-223.

34. *Papers*, X III A 624; *Journals and Papers* (Trans. Hong and Hong, Indiana U.P., 1969), 318.

35. *Journals and Papers*, V, X A 300.

36. *P.V. op.cit.*, pp. 45-6 and again p. 59 where K. writes that »The essentially religious author has but one fulcrum for his lever, namely, a religious

sylogism. When one asks him on what he bases the claim that he is right and that it is truth he utters, his answer is – I prove it by the fact that I am derided«. Nor should we forget that it was at this time (i.e. 1848) that Kierkegaard's victimization by the Copenhagen newspaper, the *Corsair*, reached its most vitriolic pitch (see F Sontag's Introduction to *On Authority and Revelation*, *op.cit.* p. 37). K's explicit identification in these passages with the chosen martyr, and his oblique claim to divine authority (albeit chaperoned by the disclaimer, 'I write without authority') by virtue of this chosen martyrdom, both betray a manifestly dangerous approximation to the martyrdom of the God-Man Himself.

37. This could be taken to mean that although K.'s impulse to identify himself with the God-Man is suppressed in the 'aesthetic' (poetic) and 'ethical' (philosophical) stages, it ultimately found expression – however disguisedly – in the 'religious' category of the martyr/*extraordinarius*: cf. *P.V.*, p. 69.

38. *P.V. op.cit.*, p. 35.

39. *Journal* entry, *Dru*, 938.

40. *Ibid.* 995.

41. *C.T. op.cit.*, pp. 129-133.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 133-125.

43. *T.C. op.cit.*, pp. 127-8.

44. On the dangers of the aesthetic imagination as an agency of premature projections of the 'God-Man' ideal – which K. saw as a particular propensity of women, young men and poetic temperaments – see my *Kierkegaard et la Dialectique de l'Imagination* in *Kierkegaard* (dirigé par Jean Brun, *Obliques*, Numéro special, éditions Borderie, Paris, 1981), pp. 49-61. On the relation of marriage and the premature synthesis of the 'Universal' particularly as it pertains to K's relation to Regina, see P. Rohde, *op.cit.*, p. 58 and Lowrie's note to *T.C.*, p. 137.

45. *O.A.R. op.cit.*, third preface, p. 23; and also Sontag's introduction to *O.A.R.*, p. 14-36.

46. *O.A.R. op.cit.*, p. 39.

47. That K's relationship to God the Father was in turn conditioned somewhat by his relationship to his own father is almost certain. In an essay entitled *The Fork in Kierkegaard* (ed. J. Thompson, *op.cit.* pp. 164-183). John Updike provides us with several pertinent quotations from K's *oeuvre*, e.g.: »The anxious dread with which my father filled my soul, his frightful melancholy, the many things which I cannot record – I got such a dread of Christianity, and yet I felt myself so strongly drawn to it« (p. 173). Updike concludes his analysis as follows: »K. did not expect to live past the age of thirty-three (the age of Christ) and did expect his father, though fifty-seven years older, to outlive him (to be immortal) ... We touch a central nerve in Kierkegaard – the identification of God with his father, whom he both loved and hated, who treated him cruelly and who loved him«

(p.173).

48. See Sontag's introduction to *O.A.R.*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

49. *O.A.R.*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

50. *Ibid.* p. 112.

51. *Ibid.* p. 176.

52. See K's essay, »On the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle«, written in 1848 and included in the main text of *O.A.R.*, *op.cit.*, pp. 103-122.

53. In his Introduction to *O.A.R.*, Sontag elucidates this vacillation by showing that Adler served both as a *warning* to K. who saw in him »the extremes to which independent subjectivity could go and so recoiled to bring the inner religious life back under Authority and Revelation« (p. XXXII), and alternatively, as a secret *stimulus* in so far as it may well have been Adler's outspoken example that ultimately persuaded K. to break his

'vow of silence' in the final outburst of the last years.

54. See for example the following suggestive passages in *O.A.R.*: »A true *extraordinarius* stood alone and forsaken, pointed out in the pillory of the special individual, a true *extraordinarius* who was recognizable by the fact that he was executed – well, it is a matter of course that after this he cannot very well go about with congratulations – but neither can he be mistaken for another« (p.44) »In the dreadful responsibility which the true *extraordinarius* has to face is included also the concern lest his example, when he assumes a position *extra ordinem*, may beguile other men who are weak, light minded, unsteadfast and inquisitive to wish to become like him so that his *example* may become a snare, a temptation ... for them« (p. 45).