

‘The Changelessness of God’ as Kierkegaard’s Final Theodicy: God and the Gift of Suffering

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Abstract: In the midst of his final ‘attack on Christendom’, Kierkegaard published a short discourse devoted to James 1:17–21 entitled ‘The Changelessness of God’. Aside from providing a pleasant rhetorical anomaly at this juncture in his corpus, Kierkegaard’s final discourse also introduces another surprise: a defense of the God who sits silently by and watches true Christianity disappear from Denmark. Kierkegaard’s defense of God also accounts for Christian suffering – Christ’s, the apostles’ and perhaps his own – and it does so by creating a sharp division of reality between temporality and eternity, a division that echoes through from the earliest discourses on the same biblical passage. This article contextualizes ‘The Changelessness of God’ by tracing these developments and then continues to press the logic of Kierkegaard’s construal of the relationship between temporality and eternity which ultimately leads to a rather problematic description of suffering as a necessary good and perfect gift from God.

Introduction

Even before his untimely death, 1855 was a bad year for Søren Kierkegaard. He began the year in the midst of a mutually destructive exchange with ‘official Christianity’ in the pages of the Danish paper *Fædrelandet*. While intensifying these attacks later in the pages of his privately funded serial titled *The Moment*, representatives and supporters of ‘official Christianity’ returned the favor with increasingly personal counter-attacks.¹ Slowly succumbing to the toll of this exchange, Kierkegaard became ill, collapsed in the street and was taken to Frederiks

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1 See, for example, the comments made by J. Victor Bloch in *Fædrelandet* 94, 24 April 1855:

Hospital where he died on 11 November after refusing the last rites from all representatives of the church. As it turned out, Kierkegaard's fight with 'official Christianity' was a fight to the death.

Nearly all of Kierkegaard's writings in 1855 fall under the umbrella of 'the attack on Christendom'.² In general, these writings are occupied with highlighting the shortcomings of Danish Christianity, of its pastors, of its parishioners and of its fundamental premises. On 3 September, in the final throes of the attack, Kierkegaard published a little surprise: a sermon delivered four years earlier in the Citadel Church in Copenhagen, a sermon he had intended to publish in some form since at least May 1854. This little sermon was published simply as a discourse devoted to James 1:17–21 under the title 'The Changelessness of God'.³ Given its context in the corpus, should we understand this text, too, to be part of the attack on Christendom? Or, given the tone and familiar content of this discourse, should we understand this text to be an anomaly, a sympathetic counterpoint to the attack? The answer to both of these questions is 'yes'.⁴

In order to understand how this short discourse both serves and mitigates Kierkegaard's attack, the discourse must be understood as part of Kierkegaard's attempt to produce a theodicy in the midst of what he perceived to be a total disintegration of Christianity. In general terms, a theodicy is a defense of God in the face of evil. With his emphasis on the infinite qualitative difference between God and humans, the category of theodicy in Kierkegaard's authorship might initially seem counterintuitive. Yet, Kierkegaard's final discourse amidst the violent and vociferous assault on Danish Christendom clearly serves this function. To support this thesis, the following argument begins with a brief summary of what Kierkegaard describes as the problem with Christendom. Once the problem is clear, we move to an analysis of

Dr. K stands outside the Church of Christ at the foot of the rock and reads the New Testament until he loses his sight. Then he begins to prate that the Church has vanished, since he does not see it anymore. And people out there and down there who would wish it to be true stream in to listen avidly, yet nourish a secret fear that this eccentric man with the singular gestures and the dark discourses, who, although he is delivering a funeral sermon over Christendom, yet in no way wants to make common cause with the world, may devote himself to giving lectures on the downfallen Church and get it to rise again. (Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings* (hereafter *The Moment*), trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 369)

- 2 This description of the late writings was formed, in large part, by the title given by Walter Lowrie to his English translation. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon 'Christendom'*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).
- 3 It is interesting to note that this sermon was simply subtitled 'A Discourse' upon publication, not an upbuilding discourse (the majority of Kierkegaard's discourses including all three previous discourses devoted to this text) or a devotional discourse.
- 4 Plekon's note concerning the late authorship is apropos here: 'However, along with, better, *within* this negative perspective is an *affirmative one* which must be apprehended without losing the first.' Michael Plekon, 'Kierkegaard at the End: His "Last" Sermon, Eschatology and the Attack on the Church', *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000), p. 72.

the discourse itself and, in the process, outline how ‘The Changelessness of God’ contributes both to absolving God of Christendom’s problems and to providing a corrective to what is wrong with his contemporary situation. In conclusion, we place the late discourse devoted to James 1:17–21 alongside the earlier counterparts published in 1843 and suggest that their similarities and differences illuminate a general theological consistency in the corpus, a consistency that has ramifications for understanding the idiosyncrasies of the late attack.⁵ It is important to note that although our essay uses chronology, it is not to be confused with a biographical essay. Rather, we examine different periods of Kierkegaard’s authorship in order to illuminate thematic developments within that authorship. The question is not primarily ‘What events led to such developments?’ Instead, we ask: ‘Is there a coherent logic in Kierkegaard’s authorship that unfolds over a period of time?’

Setting the context: the attack

Kierkegaard’s attack on Danish Christianity has been treated thoroughly in recent years. In their comprehensive overviews of Kierkegaard’s life and work, Joakim Garff, Alastair Hannay and Bruce Kirmmse each devote a full chapter to Kierkegaard’s late clash with the Danish Church.⁶ For all the complicated biographical and textual issues involved in the attack (and there are many), the logic of the attack is fairly simple. In his belated response to Hans Lassen Martensen’s address at Bishop Mynster’s memorial service, Kierkegaard wrote:

The late bishop is introduced by Prof. Martensen into ‘the holy chain of truth-witnesses that stretches through the ages from the days of the apostles’ etc.

To this I must raise an objection – and now that Bishop Mynster is dead I am able and willing to speak.⁷

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- 5 In 1843, Kierkegaard published three discourses entitled ‘Every Good and Perfect Gift Is from Above’ and all were based on Jas 1:17–22. Unlike ‘The Changelessness of God’ (which uses Jas 1:17–21), the earlier discourses all claim to include verse 22, even if this particular verse is not included in the prefatory presentation of the text. Further, the first chapter of Kierkegaard’s *For Self-Examination* (1851) – ‘What is Required’ – uses Jas 1:22 to the end of the chapter, and verse 22 – ‘But be doers of the words, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves’ – is included in the prefatory presentation of that text. See Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 13.
- 6 See Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 727–813; Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 387–419; and Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 449–81.
- 7 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 3. The address was given by Martensen on 5 February 1854, and his chosen text was Heb. 13:7–8. Kierkegaard’s first public comment (above) was published on 18 December 1854, in *Fædrelandet* 295.

In truth, the multiple variations of the critique concerning the imitation of Christ required by Christianity that follow in Kierkegaard's rhetoric straightforwardly operate on a singular principle: to be a truth-witness is to suffer as Jesus suffered. In the first of many formulations, Kierkegaard claims:

A truth-witness is a person whose life from first to last is unfamiliar with everything called enjoyment – ah, whether much or little is granted you, you know how much good is done by what is called enjoyment – but his [Jesus'] life from first to last was unfamiliar with everything called enjoyment; on the contrary, from first to last it was initiated into everything called suffering.⁸

Poverty, loneliness, lowliness, abasement, earnestness, anxiety, torment, persecution, mistreatment – this is, from beginning to end, the life of suffering. In the beginning, the 'point at issue' was the representation of Bishop Mynster as a truth-witness.⁹ In the end, the point at issue was expanded to include all designated by the 'common man', as Kierkegaard proceeded to claim that 'Christianity does not exist at all.'¹⁰ Obviously, this is a rather strong claim, yet the logic is straightforward:

- A. To be a Christian is to suffer for Christianity.¹¹
- B. Nobody in Denmark is suffering for Christianity.¹²
- C. Therefore, nobody in Denmark is a Christian.

Whether this is meant as hyperbole or not, the claim is still made, and it is understood as a literal claim by at least some of Kierkegaard's contemporaries.¹³ Both premises

8 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 5.

9 See the letter of 26 January, where Kierkegaard self-consciously keeps this issue at the center of the conversation (Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 19).

10 The appeal to 'you common man' appears in the drafts of *The Moment* 10 (dated 1 September 1855) and the complete annulment of Christianity also appears earlier in a 28 March 1855 letter published in *Fædrelandet* 74 and later in a draft of *The Moment* 10, dated 15 July 1855 (Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, pp. 346, 39 and 332).

Kirmmse rightly highlights that Kierkegaard's writings in *Fædrelandet* are populist in sentiment and attempt to pit his fellow citizens against the clergy. Yet, even though Kierkegaard is willing to blame the clergy and forgive the common man, he still holds that all have fallen short of Christianity. See Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 458.

11 This is not to say that all suffering is necessarily Christian. It is to say, however, that one cannot be a Christian without suffering for it.

12 At one level, it is obvious Kierkegaard is making this claim anecdotally, as it is highly unlikely that he knew everyone in Denmark. Kierkegaard's claim seems to be predicated on what he perceives to be the assumption of the logic of his contemporaries. Their assumption can be logically expressed as follows: (A) all who live in Christendom are Christians; (B) all Danes live in Christendom; therefore (C) all Danes are Christians. Consequently, because all Danes are Christians, no one in Danish society can suffer for Christianity at the hands of his or her fellow Danes.

13 An anonymous response to Kierkegaard appeared in *Fædrelandet* 79, on 3 April 1855, noting this clearly. In response to Kierkegaard's continued expansion of the critique, 'N-n' states:

A and B share the focal point of the critique, namely, the definition of suffering as the prerequisite for Christianity. Only in refuting either premise A or premise B can one be released from the consequences of the conclusion, the conclusion that Christianity does not exist in Denmark, the conclusion that Kierkegaard seems to believe wholeheartedly.¹⁴

In constructing his critique, Kierkegaard uses the New Testament as his definitional foundation: 'The Christianity of the New Testament is to love God in a relation of opposition to people, to *suffer* for one's *faith* at the hands of people, to suffer for the doctrine at the hands of the people.'¹⁵ But why? Why the either/or of love? Why must a Christian love God in a relation of opposition to people? The answer is sharp and absolute. First, the truth must suffer in this world because the truth stands in opposition to the wretched and evil world.¹⁶ Second, a witness to the truth is tied to the truth in his or her existence, and thus will share the same fate as the truth itself, namely, opposition to the wretched and evil world:

The qualification of *truth-witness* is a very imperious and extremely unsocial qualification and scrupulously allows itself to be joined only with: being nothing otherwise. *Truth-witness* relates to Christianity's heterogeneity with this world, from which it follows that *the witness* must always be distinguishable by heterogeneity with this world, by renunciation, by suffering, and from this it follows that to be this is so unsuitable to: being something else in addition.¹⁷

In short, the entire existence of a truth-witness stands in opposition to the world. Quite clearly, being a truth-witness *and* a pastor paid to be a truth-witness is impossible according to the definition; being a truth-witness *and* being a happily

From the beginning it seemed that the prophetic repentance address moved in a rather limited circle; it was the late Bishop and his *parentator* against whom it was actually turned. But now the design is broadened. Now 'the official Christianity' is the cue phrase. Everything that is taught and preached by the appointed servants of Christianity is lumped together and stamped as Anti-Christianity. And yet the boundary is not here. *Christendom in its totality, Christianity in its whole existence is included.* (Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, pp. 366–7 – emphasis in original)

See also n. 1 above.

- 14 Unsurprisingly, Martensen's initial response was an attempt to refute premise A. In a written response that appeared in *Berlingske Tidende* 302, 28 December 1854, Martensen pointed to the apostle John as the counter-example. He argues that John 'was neither beheaded nor crucified, nor after death slung aside by the assistant executioner, but buried by his congregation' (Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 261). It is important to note that Martensen does not debate the need for New Testament Christianity, but simply Kierkegaard's interpretation of it.
- 15 This statement was written on 15 July 1855 in a draft of *The Moment* 10, yet it is clear that the New Testament served as the foundation of the critique already in Kierkegaard's initial outburst on 18 December 1854 (Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, pp. 332 and 334).
- 16 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 321.
- 17 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, pp. 10–11.

married man with children is impossible according to the definition; being a truth-witness *and* being a professor of 'truth-witnessness' is impossible according to the definition. In short, this rejection of worldly success alongside witnessing to the truth stands at the center of the attack on Danish Christianity.

Kierkegaard's appeal to the imitation of Christ – as definitive for New Testament suffering – is not new in the late attack as it had already played a prominent role in *Practice in Christianity* (1850) and *For Self-Examination* (1851). The apostles – as the truth-witnesses of the first generation – had been utilized in his critique already in *For Self-Examination*. And, the requirement of suffering – as a normal qualification of Christianity – had already been introduced in 'The Gospel of Suffering' (1847). The severity and absoluteness of the claim that Christianity does not exist, however, is new to the latter years of Kierkegaard's life.

'The Changelessness of God' as theodicy

To be clear, Kierkegaard's claim that Christianity no longer exists in Denmark is not a Nietzschean claim. He does not argue that God does not exist. Further, in constructing his theodicy, his task is not to defend God's omnipotence or love in the face of tragedy, violence and loss, the categories Christians are usually forced to address in our contemporary world. Rather, Kierkegaard chooses to defend God against the appearance of peace, prosperity and piety. In the history of Christianity, this is a less familiar posture, though perhaps not entirely absent either, and one could think of several examples from Francis of Assisi to liberation theology that might resonate with Kierkegaard's concern.

But, to return to Kierkegaard's logic, there are four necessary elements that contribute to the particular predicament of nineteenth-century Danish Christendom. First, the entire attack operates on the assumption that God exists. Second, it assumes that God requires and communicates a certain way of living, a way of living revealed in the lives of Jesus and the apostles through the New Testament. Third, it also assumes that nineteenth-century Danish Christians believed that the Christian God exists and that they were, in general, familiar with the requirements of the second assumption (which is to say that they understood that the New Testament contained the requirements for Christianity). This is the crux of the attack, since Kierkegaard assumes that his rendering of the requirements of Christianity is correct, and that all Christians ought to and, in fact, do understand them. Fourth, the attack claims that Danish Christians were watering down what was contained in the New Testament and, therefore, were not following God's required way for living. It is the combination of the third and fourth elements that particularly aggravates Kierkegaard and precipitates the attack. Why? Because the last two statements (taken together) directly ridicule the first two assumptions, especially the assumption that God has communicated his requirements in the New Testament. For this reason, Kierkegaard claims that Christians, and especially the pastors and professors who

should know better, are making a fool of God to the extent that they ignore or alter God's requirements for living.

Theologically, Kierkegaard has some explaining to do if his conclusion is, in fact, true since what he is also saying is that God has stood idly by while every single Christian in Denmark has turned his or her back on God's requirements for living. Although much has been made about Kierkegaard's construal of the failures of his 'Christian' contemporaries, very little attention has been paid to the role of God in the attack. To begin to understand this feature of the attack, one is best served by turning to the interjection reflecting on the role of God in contemporary Denmark that forces its way into the attack between the publication of *The Moment 7* and *The Moment 8*.¹⁸ This interjection takes the shape of a short discourse under the title 'The Changelessness of God'. Kirmmse, in *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, briefly engages this discourse with a single footnote, but he is right to note that the discourse demonstrates Kierkegaard's need (a) to orchestrate his authorship as a war against the abuses of Christianity and not against Christianity itself,¹⁹ and (b) to provide dialectically a constructive base for the critique.²⁰

Justifying God

In *The Moment 2*, Kierkegaard was already preparing his reader for the later, positive justification of God. He asked: 'suppose that what we [Danish Christians] understand by being a Christian actually is what it means to be a Christian – what then is God in heaven?' Answering the hypothetical, he boldly claimed:

He is the most ludicrous being that has ever lived, his Word the most ludicrous book that has ever come to light: to set heaven and earth in motion (as he indeed does in his Word), to threaten with hell, with eternal punishment – in order to

18 Though we are working in slightly different directions, Plekon is surely right to claim that Kierkegaard's 'fully deliberate location of the sermon on God's unchangingness should be taken as an important expression of his theological understanding'. See Plekon, 'Kierkegaard at the End', p. 82.

19 For a sympathetic account of Kierkegaard's attack on the Danish Church that presupposes and values not only Christianity but also the Christian church, see Michael Plekon, 'Before the Storm: Kierkegaard's Theological Preparation for the Attack on the Church', *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004), pp. 45–64. Kirmmse remains less convinced that the church remains important in Kierkegaard's Christianity, and for his contrasting position, the position that instigated Plekon's response, see 'The Thunderstorm: Kierkegaard's Ecclesiology', *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000), pp. 87–102.

20 See Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 521 n. 12. Despite the scant attention allotted by Kirmmse, his comments are considerably more helpful than the accounts of the attack provided by either Garff or Hannay since neither even mentions the publication of 'The Changelessness of God'.

attain to what we understand by being a Christian (and, after all, we are true Christians) – no, something that ludicrous has never happened.²¹

Of course, Kierkegaard does not agree that God is the ‘most ludicrous being that has ever lived’ because he rejects the claim that what his contemporaries understand as Christianity is, in fact, true Christianity. The obvious already stated, there are a few theological assertions implicit in this bit of biting satire, the most important being the assertion that God is not playing around. Rather, God threatens those who mock him with hell and eternal punishment for a purpose, for the purpose of ensuring true Christianity. It is precisely this seriousness that seems to motivate the equally severe nature of Kierkegaard’s attack.

In *The Moment* 8, published immediately following the appearance of ‘The Changelessness of God’, Kierkegaard is forced to wrestle with the question of justifying God’s actions in response to Denmark’s apparent fall into paganism, or perhaps more accurately, its slide back into a legalized caricature of Judaism.²² Reintroducing the God who does not play around, he asks:

Even what can scarcely be called a crime, that a poor person even with just a look beseeches a passerby is punished severely – that is how severely things go in this – just world! But the dreadful crimes, that a person takes the holy, takes the truth in vain, and that in this way his life every single day is a continuous lie – in connection with them no punishing justice intrudes disturbingly; on the contrary, he receives permission to expand unhindered, to embrace a greater or lesser circle of people, perhaps a whole society, which, admiring and adoring, rewards him with all earthly goods! Where, then, is divine justice?²³

Kierkegaard’s answer is that God is in heaven and these crimes against God will not be punished ‘until eternity’.²⁴ In a rather idiosyncratic way, Kierkegaard’s answer is that God is absolutely silent in temporality, ‘nothing but eyes’.²⁵ The short discourse published late in 1855 provides the key to understanding how these two claims coherently and necessarily fit together.

Following the opening prayer and the presentation of the biblical text, ‘The Changelessness of God’ begins in very familiar territory: ‘the temporal, the changefulness of earthly things, and the changefulness of human beings!’²⁶ This brash observation is sharpened here in the late attack, but it had already been prominent since ‘Purity of Heart’ (1847), which called for purification from the

21 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 121.

22 For a very good account of the role that the concept of Judaism plays in the late Kierkegaard, see Bruce H. Kirmmse, ‘Kierkegaard, Jews, and Judaism’, *Kierkegaardiana* 17 (1994), pp. 83–97.

23 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 304.

24 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 305.

25 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 304.

26 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 269.

multiplicity, dispersion, corruptibility and changeableness of life.²⁷ But, the opposite must also be addressed: ‘the changelessness of God’, the ‘Father of lights’ who ‘lives up there where there is no variation, not even a shadow of it’, the ‘Father of lights’ who ‘thinks of nothing else than, unchanged, to send good and perfect gifts’.²⁸ Throughout the discourse, the familiar pietistic (or perhaps even anti-Hegelian) disunity between the visible and temporal world, on one hand, and the invisible and eternal God, on the other hand, is highlighted. But, the uniqueness of this discourse lies in Kierkegaard’s use of James 1:17–21 to embrace and use this disunity for both judging and comforting his contemporary Christians. Or, to use Kierkegaard’s own language, the text speaks both ‘in terror and for reassurance’.²⁹

Judging the world

The passage from James 1:17–21 appears to be Kierkegaard’s favorite text and the reasons could be many. One reason for this preference seems to be that the idea of a ‘gift from God’ provides a useful means of understanding temporal existence and, ultimately, of giving meaning to temporality.³⁰ As he has articulated in manifold ways throughout his attack, Kierkegaard again assumes that temporality and eternity are inversely or dialectically related – the more concern for eternity, the less concern for temporality.³¹ At first blush, this appears to be a problematic assertion, since it seems to be intentional that Kierkegaard titles his serial attack as *The Moment* [*Øieblikket*], the point of contact of time and eternity, or, as Kirmmse states, ‘the eschatological penetration of the eternal realm of the reality of the Spirit into the temporal realm of “the World”’.³² The title itself seems to undercut the sharp disjunction between the temporal and the eternal. But, as it turns out, in the moment, all temporal things and events have value only in relation to eternity, which is to say that eternity is the ultimate criterion for value. In this way, Kierkegaard acutely challenges the possibility that temporality is good or meaningful in itself.

27 See Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 27.

28 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 269.

29 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 271.

30 As David Kangas reiterates, the gift indicates a movement which is a ‘coming into existence within its own presuppositions’ and, as such, provides Kierkegaard with both critical and positive resources for describing Christian existence against his Hegelian contemporaries. See David Kangas, ‘The Logic of the Gift in Kierkegaard’s *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (1843)’, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2000), p. 107.

31 This relation was described already in his *Christian Discourses* (1848): ‘Every “loss” is temporal, but what you lose temporally you gain eternally; the loss of the temporal is the gain of the eternal.’ See Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 143.

32 See Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 463.

All this is not to say that temporal existence has no value. No, temporality has the utmost significance, but only in eternity's accounting. Temporality and temporal events gain value through the choice of, or perhaps for, eternity: the character of their value is determined by how one chooses to relate to them eternally. Thus, a temporal situation such as suffering can be considered good, and even as a good gift from God, if it can be tied to eternal value. As Kierkegaard explains in *Christian Discourses*, relating to the temporal eternally means to lose or renounce temporal things, to be defeated in temporality, to suffer in temporality.³³ As we will see, the upshot, for Kierkegaard, is that when eternity is the determiner of all value, it also follows that a changeless God who does not bend to the plastic preferences of the temporal is also a just God. In fact, the dialectical relationship between temporality and eternity not only allows a changeless and silent God that judges according to eternity, it necessitates one.

The gift of suffering

Before moving forward, however, it must be noted that Kierkegaard's changeless God is not to be confused with an absent or deist God. Certainly, Kierkegaard acknowledges that God created the visible world. He goes further in saying that at every moment God holds 'all actuality as possibility in his omnipotent hand, at every moment has everything in readiness, changes everything in an instant, the opinions of people, judgments, human loftiness and lowliness; he changes everything – himself unchanged'.³⁴ Kierkegaard's God, therefore, is not powerless but omnipotent. His God is a giver of gifts! Theoretically, his God could change everything in temporality to avoid or end suffering. Yet, Kierkegaard's God does not. In fact, suffering is necessarily given as a good and perfect gift for a single purpose: to hasten towards eternity.³⁵ Kierkegaard goes so far as to say that it would be unjust for God to change according to human requests, to let himself be tempted, for it is God's refusal to be tempted by humans to action in temporality that constitutes his loving changelessness. Rather, God's changelessness is required for upbuilding, as Kierkegaard proclaims in the opening prayer: 'You who are changeless in love, who just for our own good do not let yourself change.'³⁶ In this way, suffering in this world is transformed into preparation for eternity; in this way, humans should not only rejoice in suffering but rejoice that they have received the gift of suffering.

Of course, this logic only makes sense within the context of Kierkegaard's dialectic of time and eternity where there is an inversion of temporal and eternal

33 Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, pp. 140–1.

34 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 271.

35 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 271. One is reminded here of Kierkegaard's earlier description of suffering in 'The Gospel of Suffering' as 'educating for eternity' (Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p. 257).

36 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 268.

value. If this is not the case, it is much more difficult to explain the ‘quiet’ God who refuses to grant the pious wish for the alleviation of suffering.³⁷ In other words, God’s accounting constitutes the relative value between temporality and eternity, and this accounting is the eternal justice that supports and justifies Kierkegaard’s dialectical inversion of values. Herein lies the terror of Kierkegaard’s all-seeing God:

O my soul, it is being done every moment, because his unchanging clarity is the accounting, completely ready down to the least detail and kept by him, the eternal Changeless One, who has forgotten nothing of what I have forgotten; neither does he do as I do, remember something different from what it actually was.³⁸

Kierkegaard describes the situation as even more perilous than this when, in *The Moment* 8, he argues that God refuses to step in and intervene. Specifically targeting the clergy, Kierkegaard introduces the example of the capital criminal whom Governance dazzles so that it appears that the criminal’s life ‘illusively’ looks pleasing to God. But, he continues:

Let no one, therefore, be troubled anymore about this objection against divine justice. Precisely in order to be justice, it must first allow the crime to come into existence in its full guilt; but the genuine capital crime needs – note this well! – a whole lifetime in order to come into existence, is specifically the genuine capital crime by being continued for a whole lifetime.³⁹

One could imagine how this thought brought reassurance to Kierkegaard when it appeared that all of his efforts in reforming his contemporary Christianity had failed, had failed miserably. But, he makes more of this claim than personal self-justification; he is attempting to invite all into the true source of comfort. Returning to the theme of ‘Purity of Heart’, Kierkegaard once again argues that blessedness can only be found beyond the changeful, unstable, weary world. One finds rest only in the eternal; in God one finds peace. Again, contextualizing ‘The Changelessness of God’, it almost seems self-evident that Kierkegaard should immediately begin *The Moment* 8 as he does: reintroducing contemporaneity, reintroducing the moment when one becomes an eternal contemporary with Christ.⁴⁰ The expression of this peaceful reassurance and blessedness in the midst of immense life-weariness is also

37 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 278.

38 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 278.

39 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 305.

40 Recalling the category utilized in both *Philosophical Fragments* and *Practice in Christianity* in a new context, Kierkegaard uses the notion of contemporaneity primarily for critical purposes. Nestled within this, however, he encouragingly exhorts:

Oh, if you are in any way eternally concerned for your soul, are thinking with fear and trembling about judgment and eternity, or, on the other hand, if you in any way are uplifted and desire to be even more so by the thought of what it is to be a human being, and that you, too, are a human being and belong to the same race as the glorious ones, the authentic ones . . . if this is the case, then pay attention to

a pivotal contribution of 'The Changelessness of God' within the attack literature. It is not the case that there is a different view of the world in this late discourse in comparison to the writings that surround it. Rather, the discourse is a reflection of how God involves himself with the 'mediocre, wretched, sinful, evil, ungodly world', and why it is the case that it is precisely the God who remains quiet and unchanging that is the just and loving God.⁴¹

It ought to be noted, at this point, that an ambiguity has presented itself in this discourse. It appears, in certain parts of the discourse, that Kierkegaard conflates 'unchangeableness' with inactivity, with sitting quietly while the world passes by. In other parts of the discourse, however, it seems possible that God acts – or could act – constantly while remaining unchanged, which is to say that God acts consistently according to his unchanged character. Kierkegaard does not say as much, but it appears that one might want to make a case, sympathetically, that under his special circumstances, sitting quietly by is the action required of God to remain consistent with his character. Whatever the case may be, in the end, it is clear that the view of the world that Kierkegaard espouses in his attack on Christendom is also utilized in *The Moment* to further one's contemporaneous relationship with God in the moment. Because temporality is given value on eternity's terms, suffering is a good gift, for in temporality suffering teaches one to hasten to eternity. It is no longer enough to ask one to seek willfully to purify oneself by turning away from the manifold temptation of the world as required in 'Purity of Heart'. The late Kierkegaard has found an aid – a good and perfect gift – that becomes invaluable in this purification: suffering. Therefore, even if God has given much suffering, he has not ceased to give good gifts.

Stepping back, one can see that a particular metaphysical scheme lies underneath Kierkegaard's theodicy. To reiterate its implications, we suggest the following claim from *The Moment* 9: 'One certainly does not have religion for the sake of this life, in order to get through this life happy and well, but for the sake of the other life; in this other world lies the earnestness of religion.'⁴² In the strict differentiation between this temporal life and eternity (whether encountered in contemporaneity or after death), it does not matter (from the viewpoint of eternity) how wretched this world is. In fact, the more wretched this world gets, the more one can be sure of one's commitment to eternity and eternal blessedness, and in this assurance lies the love (and justice) of the quiet God.

this matter of contemporaneity so that either, if in contemporaneity there lives such a person who is suffering for the truth, you suffer for acknowledging him for what he is, or, if there is no such contemporary, you make present the life of the departed glorious one in such a way that you come to suffer as you would have suffered in contemporaneity by acknowledging him for what he is. (Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 289)

41 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 321.

42 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 312.

Justifying Kierkegaard

The question of continuity within Kierkegaard's corpus remains. Given that this is already the fourth discourse directly relating to this theme, is there a logic in Kierkegaard's earlier writings that develops and leads to the positions found in the attack? Or, is the attack a new movement that is in general discontinuity with Kierkegaard's previous authorship? This is a complicated question that demands an answer that can only be begun in this context. While building our argument to this point we have sought to gesture in the direction of earlier texts in Kierkegaard's corpus where the conceptual and thematic links seem obvious. In noting these links, it almost seems that just as Kierkegaard's dissertation, *The Concept of Irony* (1841), suggests many of the main themes that later dominate his corpus, *The Moment* also evokes many of these same themes from the other end of the corpus. This observation suggests the possibility of continuity in the corpus, but it certainly does not suffice for an argument.

If one were to summarize Kierkegaard's late polemical view of the relationship between the world and Christianity, one could very easily return to *The Moment* 9 one more time: 'In this mediocre, wretched, sinful, evil, ungodly world the truth must suffer – this is Christianity's doctrine – Christianity is the suffering truth because it is the truth and is in this world.'⁴³ On the surface, this looks like a strong anti-worldly stance. Acknowledging that there are some parts of the late literature that fit this description, Sylvia Walsh has recently argued that 'these writings do not so much constitute the logical conclusion of Kierkegaard's theological reflection as a relaxing of the dialectical balance that characterizes the large body of religious writings produced during the second period of his literary activity from 1847–1851'.⁴⁴ Further, she suggests that rather than giving too much interpretive weight to the late writings, the second or middle phase of the authorship (1847–51) should be regarded as normative for interpreting Kierkegaard. On the other hand, Julia Watkin, addressing Kierkegaard's misogyny, highlights the fact that there is a logic at work in these allegedly anti-worldly pronouncements, a logic that underlies both these late polemical statements and the earlier writings in his authorship. According to Watkin, Kierkegaard's metaphysical assumptions about God and creation and about the eternal and the temporal make it difficult to reconcile marriage and procreation with the prototype, with the ideal likeness to God that demands total self-renunciation.⁴⁵ If this is true specifically concerning Kierkegaard's misogyny, could this also be true about his views on being a truth-witness, on suffering, on Christian existence as a whole?

43 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 321.

44 Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard: Thinking Christianity in an Existential Mode* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 198.

45 Julia Watkin, 'The Logic of Kierkegaard's Misogyny 1854–1855', *Kierkegaardiana* 15 (1991), p. 88.

Our suggestion is that both Walsh and Watkin are at least partially right. Walsh's use of the 'inverse dialectic' [*omvendt Dialektik*] is her solution to straightforwardly describing Kierkegaard's Christianity as entirely negative in relation to the world. Rather than seeing Kierkegaard's critique as one-dimensional, Walsh, drawing on *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), argues that the positive is known and expressed through the negative. Therefore, what appears to be negative (suffering in temporality) may be indirectly positive (it pushes towards eternity).⁴⁶ Reading 'The Changelessness of God' within *The Moment* seems to support her thesis – at least partially – in that the discourse provides the means of understanding the eternal as the dialectical positive to renunciation and suffering's temporal negative. But, does this really constitute a dialectical balance in Kierkegaard's theology? If Kierkegaard is already renouncing the temporal for the achievement of the eternal, how is this not an anti-worldly theology already in 1847–51? Granted, the world is used, in a certain sense, for an eternal gain and therefore is still necessary. This conclusion, however, seems to constitute merely a half-hearted affirmation of the world, at best. But perhaps Walsh is also right in that Kierkegaard has not yet reached the point of hating existence and wishing for death, as he still views the contest between temporality and eternity within the context of a lived existence in temporality, since edification, or upbuilding, can only be understood in terms of human existence distended in time.⁴⁷

In addition to utilizing the theme of misogyny, as Watkin does, another way to test the continuity between the logic of the early and the late authorship is through a comparison of 'The Changelessness of God' with the series of discourses devoted to James 1:17–22 that were published in 1843. We suggest there are a number of significant parallels between the discourses that indicate a fundamental unity in the metaphysical commitments within the corpus, commitments that imply Kierkegaard's theodicy throughout the authorship. Of course, that is not to say that Kierkegaard's authorship is static. Rather, the parallels merely suggest a complementary and not antithetical relationship between the attack and the earlier authorship.

Looking at the first version of 'Every Good and Perfect Gift', the second of *Two Upbuilding Discourses* (1843), Kierkegaard introduces the persistent accent that good gifts come from above. This qualification of the gift as from above is used to explain how the Christian must encounter the everyday situations of life: one should not implore God to change one's temporal situation.⁴⁸ Instead, one should trust God that situations that occur will have value in eternity if one accepts them with

46 See Sylvia Walsh, *Living Christianly: Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Christian Existence* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), pp. 7–16.

47 An article by Arne Grøn is most helpful in seeing that temporality works at two levels in Kierkegaard's discourses. See Arne Grøn, 'Temporality in Kierkegaard's Edifying Discourses', trans. Brian Söderquist, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2000), pp. 192–3.

48 Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (hereafter *EUD*), trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 37. In other words, the quality of the gift as being 'from above' precludes human judgement of the gift.

thankfulness.⁴⁹ Thus, faith consists in trusting that any situation, regardless of character, comes from above and is a good gift that is beneficial in eternity. Even in 1843, Kierkegaard openly acknowledged that punishment is also a good gift, that divine Governance knows how to strike a person, and that even though one's 'outer being' can be damaged the 'inner being' will nevertheless be renewed. All of these claims are consistent with his late position.⁵⁰

The second discourse of *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (1843) shifts focus slightly, attending to the issues of knowledge and doubt while retaining the prioritization of the eternal over the temporal. Here, Kierkegaard argues that any knowledge worth having is knowledge from above. Challenging the immanence of speculative thought in a manner similar to the later *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard defines doubt as a temporal entity that cannot relate itself to eternity.⁵¹ But why doubt in the first place? Because the world is evil? Kierkegaard raises the question, or rather, makes the claim directly: 'Because the world is evil, is God therefore not good?'⁵² Chasing his reader away from the equivocal nature of knowledge of the temporal, Kierkegaard chases his reader to God:

What earthly life does not have, what no man has, God alone has, and it is not a perfection on God's part that he alone has it, but a perfection on the part of the good that a human being, insofar as he participates in the good, does so through God.⁵³

For this reason, the condition for receiving the gift, along with the good and perfect gifts, must come down from above. And, as the discourse nears its conclusion, Kierkegaard explicitly introduces the turn to the eternal by exhorting his reader to continue to set the eyes of faith on that which is above in order to see heaven open. In fact, Kierkegaard even reintroduces doubt in service of the eternal:

[T]he apostle would now allow, indeed encourage, the single individual to use doubt in the right way, not to doubt what stands firm and will stand firm forever in its eternal clarity, but to doubt that which in itself is transitory, which will more and more vanish, to doubt himself, his own capacity and competence.⁵⁴

Moving to the third of *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (1843), we find Kierkegaard's rather sophisticated critique of temporality's notion of what a gift is. Focusing on the giving and receiving of gifts, Kierkegaard asserts that truly good and perfect gifts can only be given from above because worldly gifts focus on establishing and reinforcing external equality, 'which is of very little benefit'.⁵⁵ He refocuses the activity

49 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 43.

50 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, pp. 47–8.

51 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 135.

52 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 133.

53 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 134.

54 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 137.

55 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 143.

of gift-giving towards the realization of 'divine equality', which is equality 'in insignificance in relation to the gift, because the gift is from above and therefore actually belongs to neither or belongs equally to both – that is, it belongs to God'.⁵⁶ Equality is established through the relationship two individuals have to God in thankfulness. In this relationship, there is no attention to the relative position or stature of the other. The benefit of the good gift, therefore, is found in the individual, inward disposition of thankfulness in relation to the gift from above.

In this quick overview of the previous three discourses on the same theme, the language used by Kierkegaard seems slightly different as it takes the form of internal vs. external distinctions more frequently than the temporal vs. eternal language of the later. In these earlier discourses, Kierkegaard is worried about a spirit-consuming uniformity that operates on externalities and seeks to define himself against uniformity in externality, a fight he will later carry against 'the crowd', the masses and the like. That being said, Kierkegaard occupies territory that looks conceptually and categorically similar to the late attack. Speaking of equality, Kierkegaard comforts the reader:

And even if he sometimes forgets about equality again and loses himself, distracted by life's confusing distinctions, nevertheless his mind, every time he goes to the hallowed place, will be preserved in equality before God during that time and will be educated to preserve increasingly this equality in the clamor of the world and with it to penetrate the confusion.⁵⁷

And he continues, prefiguring the equality of 'the neighbor' that appears later in *Works of Love* (1847):⁵⁸

[I]n the same way every upbuilding view of life first finds its resting place or first becomes upbuilding by and in the divine equality that opens the soul to the perfect and blinds the sensate eye to the difference, the divine equality that like a fire burns ever more intensely in the difference without, however, humanly speaking, consuming it.⁵⁹

As Kierkegaard construes the preservation of difference here amidst the equality, he also rings the note that differentiates these earlier texts from 'The Changelessness of God'. Yes, he preserves the priority of the eternal over temporality, the notion that the

56 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 157.

57 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 141.

58 In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard reiterates this same idea as follows:

The neighbor is every person, since on the basis of dissimilarity he is not your neighbor, nor on the basis of similarity to you in your dissimilarity from other people. He is your neighbor on the basis of equality with you before God, but unconditionally every person has this equality and has it unconditionally.

See Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 60.

59 Kierkegaard, *EUD*, p. 143.

gift – in all cases – is for upbuilding, the manifold changefulness of the world and the entailed need for a Christian to shift his focus from the temporal to the eternal. What he has not done, and what he does in the late authorship, is shift the focus back to the temporal: it is precisely the temporal suffering of Christianity that is attended to in the late authorship.⁶⁰ With this development in mind, we return to Kierkegaard's definition of Christianity as suffering, that external equality that has become a qualification for true Christianity.

In short, the centrality and necessity of suffering is the key difference between the early discourses and the last discourse on James 1:17–22. Neither the appearance of suffering nor the gift of suffering as a good and perfect good are different, since suffering is present both early and late. Rather, there are three other differences. The first difference between the early and the last lies in the world's treatment of the one who has relativized the concerns of temporality. In the early discourses, Kierkegaard seems to assume one may turn toward eternity without a corresponding negative response or rejection from the world; in the late discourse, he assumes that the world necessarily persecutes and ridicules the one turning away from the temporal. In this case, one might say that Kierkegaard's understanding of the world has changed; the category of the world, through the language of temporality, has become stridently polemical towards true Christianity.

The second difference between the early and the late lies in the specification of what turning away from temporality means. In the early, it appears as though one can comfortably exist in temporality and still maintain a posture – a hidden inwardness – oriented toward the values of eternity. Perhaps Johannes de silentio's Abraham, the knight of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, is paradigmatic here: Abraham infinitely gives up Isaac and yet receives him back temporally. In the late writings, however, Kierkegaard's Christocentric imitation requires both a spiritual and an external turning away from temporality, and his intervening comments concerning poverty and lowliness indicate this shift most explicitly.⁶¹ Kierkegaard energetically attacks

60 This turn to attending to the external requirements of Christian existence is also what gave rise to Westphal's suggestion of Religiousness C, a suggestion that has generated considerable resistance. See Merold Westphal, 'Kierkegaard's Suspension of Religiousness B', in George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans, eds., *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), pp. 110–29.

61 See Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, p. 67. Another version of this shift from Christianity's hidden inwardness to externality against the world can be seen in Kierkegaard's comments concerning monasticism. At one point, Kierkegaard proclaims the dubiousness of the monastic movement because it went too far in externalizing what 'ought to be inward'. Later, Kierkegaard appeals to the monastery as a sign of the heterogeneity of Christianity with the world, claiming that 'Back to the monastery, from which Luther broke away, is the first cause for Christianity to take up.' See Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1975), pp. 210 (#2749) and 216–17 (#2763).

the professionalization of the clergy, the possibility of an 'enormous guild of business-operating pastors', precisely on this basis.⁶²

In these late modifications, however, the metaphysical world is still very similar. The temporal and the eternal are dialectically related in opposition to one another in all the texts we have examined. Yet, because of the developments we have tracked, one can no longer thrive in both. To conclude *The Moment 6*, Kierkegaard provides a succinct illustration of this relationship:

If two people are eating nuts together, and the one likes only the shell, the other only the kernel, they must be said to be well matched. In the same way God and the world also match each other. What the world rejects, throws away, scorns – the sacrificed kernels – God places an infinite price precisely on that, gathers it more zealously than the world gathers what it loves most passionately.⁶³

At this point in Kierkegaard's logic, however, he is already stepping dangerously close to the position evident in some of his most anti-worldly claims in his last writings. Walsh is right to note that the dialectic relaxes when Kierkegaard makes claims like 'Christianity means precisely that death is a person's essential consolation.'⁶⁴ In the late 'Changelessness of God' and *The Moment*, Christianity as the life of suffering seems to serve as the intermediary link between Christianity as inwardness and Christianity as hating the world. With a God who remains silent in temporality and comforts only in eternity, it is but one small yet precipitous step from Kierkegaard's torturous mediating position of unceasing suffering to wanting to be rid of human existence altogether, the place where Kierkegaard shockingly arrives in a late journal entry:

So it says in an old hymn. Close the cover, that is, the coffin, close it tight, really tight, so that I can really be at peace, well hidden, like a child who is so exceedingly happy when he has found a good hiding place.

Close the cover, close it tight – for I am not lying in the coffin, no, what lies there is not I but what I so very much desire to be rid of, this body of sin, the whole apparatus of the prison I have had to bear.⁶⁵

It is precisely at this juncture, too, that the late discourse challenges the cleanness of Kangas' description of Kierkegaard's logic of the gift as it is found in the early discourses.

62 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 135.

63 Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 222.

64 Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, trans Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 337 (#723).

65 Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vol. 6, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 522–3 (#6898).

Conclusion

In 'The Changelessness of God' and its surrounding chapters of *The Moment*, Kierkegaard attempts to provide not only an explanation of how God relates to the world but also an explanation of why God is right to relate to the world in this particular way. Upon closer examination, it is clear that Kierkegaard's justification of the loving and judging God is tied to his understanding of the relation between temporality and eternity. It is also clear that this relation is consistent with the content of his 1843 discourses on the same passage. What is not entirely clear, however, is how Kierkegaard can justify *his own attack on Christendom*. In justifying God as 'quiet' in temporality, by what authority does he 'ring the alarm'?⁶⁶ Is this not interrupting his own articulation of God's provision for allowing crimes perpetrated against God to mature? In describing suffering and persecution as a good and perfect gift, why does Kierkegaard not simply thank God for Mynster, Martensen and all of Christendom as good and perfect gifts? Pushing his logic to a ridiculous extreme, it seems that Kierkegaard's own actions undermine God's intention (at least as Kierkegaard describes it) to judge his contemporaries in eternity. At the end of the day, it seems that if one would want to justify Kierkegaard's attack as he prosecutes it, one would also have to revise Kierkegaard's own justification of God within the attack.

Kierkegaard's belief that there is reassurance and blessedness in God's unchangeableness is entirely understandable within his attack. Yet there are other elements of Kierkegaard's theodicy that seem to run aground in Kierkegaard's own authorial practices. To mitigate some of these inconsistencies, one should also sympathetically notice that his late justification of God is born within and out of his struggle with Christendom, against the Danish leaders of a certain portion of Christendom. Bishop Mynster, the man who guided the Danish Church for much of Kierkegaard's life, held to what Kirmmse calls a 'Golden Age romantic view of a continuity between the two worlds of heaven and earth'.⁶⁷ This is most emphatically evident in the following rhetorical line of questioning:

What is it, then, that fills the earth with beauty and glory, other than the heavenly, which submerges itself in the earth, as it were? Where does the earth repose, but in the embrace of the eternal? What are visible things other than a revelation of things unseen? What is the temporal but a revelation – incomplete and imperfect, it is true – of the eternal?⁶⁸

During his lifetime, Kierkegaard self-consciously forced himself to put off a direct challenge to Mynster out of respect for his father (although *Practice in Christianity*

66 See Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 51 for his use of this imagery and his explanation of his role in ringing the alarm.

67 Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 128.

68 J.P. Mynster, *Kirkelige Lejligheds-Tale*, vol. I, p. 250, translated and reproduced by Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 128.

already seems to broach or at least approach that threshold). When Mynster died and Martensen stepped forward to proclaim Mynster a 'truth-witness' in 1854, Kierkegaard could remain silent no longer. In the ensuing direct attack, there are many issues at stake and one of the most important is the role of God in the temporal events of Danish Christendom. Therefore, when Mynster was replaced by Martensen – who articulated a less Romantic but equally as troubling pseudo-Hegelian theodicy in which he was willing to claim that God's will 'fulfills itself in the course of the world' by entwining its thread with the course of the world⁶⁹ – Kierkegaard could see no other option than proclaiming a corrective.

The exposition of Kierkegaard's position provided above suggests that his corrective goes too far while also recognizing that this conclusion is certainly debatable. We have sought to provide a full and sympathetic account of his theodicy that is guided by Kierkegaard's theological concerns and convictions. In conclusion, however, perhaps it is possible to include a nod toward Kierkegaard's biographical context as well. Returning to *For Self-Examination*, Kierkegaard described belief in Christ's ascension as follows:

So it always is with need in a human being; out of the eater comes something to eat; where there is a need, it itself produces, as it were, that which it needs. And the imitators truly needed his Ascension in order to endure the life they were leading – and therefore it is certain.⁷⁰

Whether Kierkegaard's late theodicy is logically coherent or not, and whether his theodicy is theologically satisfactory or not, one cannot help wondering whether Kierkegaard's own need is also at the root of its appearance at this point in the corpus. After all, to paraphrase his own words, Kierkegaard truly needed the changelessness of God in eternity in order to endure the attack he was leading in the very temporal confines of nineteenth-century Denmark – 'and therefore it is certain'. And, in this way, the central and final expression of God's changelessness is, for Kierkegaard, comfort and love. May he eternally rest in peace.

69 H.L. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics: A Compendium of the Doctrines of Christianity*, trans. William Urwick (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), pp. 217–18.

70 Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, p. 69.

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