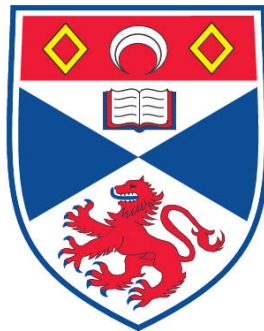


**ARTFUL LIVING AND THE ERADICATION OF WORRY IN
SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S INTERPRETATION OF
MATTHEW 6:24-34**

Paul C. Warhurst

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



2011

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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

ST MARY'S COLLEGE



**ARTFUL LIVING AND THE
ERADICATION OF WORRY IN
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MATTHEW 6:24-34**

A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

PAUL C. WARHURST

TO THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

St Andrews, Scotland

December, 2010

DECLARATIONS

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I, Paul Warhurst, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 79,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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ABSTRACT

Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard published fourteen discourses, across four collections, on Matthew 6:24-34. The repeated readings of the biblical text, whose themes include the choice between God and mammon, worry, what it means to consider the birds and lilies, and how to seek first the kingdom of God, converge with Kierkegaard's interest in anxiety, despair, worry, subjectivity, indirect communication, choice, the moment, and life before God. This thesis explores the ways the discourses make connections with his larger works, elucidate frequently explored Kierkegaardian themes in recent scholarship, and contribute to his critique of nineteenth-century Copenhagen. Particularly, focus is placed on his development of the concept of worry and theological solutions for worry. In light of a human being's distinctiveness as *imago Dei*, Kierkegaard elucidates how to respond with artful living to the ongoing possibility of worry, a possibility which is connected to Christian anthropology and to an individual's orientation towards possessions, status, and the future. The discourses present an interpretation of each verse and phrase of Matthew's text and, held up against modern Matthew scholarship, they correlate with and contribute to Sermon on the Mount and New Testament studies. After a close reading of the fourteen discourses, the project considers their relationship to both the Sermon on the Mount sermons of Martin Luther and three modern Matthew commentaries. The comparison shows Kierkegaard's contribution to the history of interpretation of the passage and highlights how he promotes the importance of awareness of sin, interestedness, and appropriation in the task of biblical interpretation. Overall, the discourses serve as spiritual treatises and intimate Kierkegaard's sympathy with classic Christian spirituality. In combination with the cultural-ecclesiastical critique, the creative exegesis, and the in-depth analysis of the cause of and cure for worry, his work emerges as an excellent example of spiritual theology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin by acknowledging Professor Ronald Nash, whose recorded lectures on the history of philosophy and Christian thought first sparked my interest in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard.

An intellectual and spiritual journey that began with those cassette tapes has and continues to receive tremendous support and encouragement from the community of Salt Lake Theological Seminary. Special thanks go out to Tom McClenahan for being a faithful teacher and example of the integration of faith and learning.

The community at St Mary's college has provided an amazing setting in which to study and live for the last several years and I am grateful to the many relationships I have been blessed to have. Thanks go out to Paul and Mary Blair, Luke and Holly Tallon, Mariam Kamell, Daniel and Adriel Driver, Gisela Kreglinger, Jason Sexton, Tim Stone, Drew and Melanie Lewis (and Elaine and Micah), Jake and Chris Andrews, Meg Ramey, All Saints Church, my colleagues in the Admissions office, and many others as well.

The academic supervision of Dr. Mark Elliott and Dr. Michael Partridge has proven invaluable in the Phd process. I am deeply grateful for their time, support, insight, and direction with this project; I hope our conversations about Kierkegaard have been as enriching for you as they have been for me.

I also extend my thanks to my parents, my brother and his family, and my extended family in Utah. Thank you for always cheering for me and maintaining interest in my work despite the geographical distance.

Special thanks go out to Josh Vargo and Elizabeth Powell whose friendship has been a great blessing throughout the PhD experience. Thanks for reminding me and helping me to celebrate the small victories along the way!

Finally I give thanks for my wife Amber and my beautiful daughter Ruby. Amber, you have accomplished the seemingly insurmountable tasks of writing your own PhD, teaching undergraduates, and taking care of our daughter while simultaneously having to listen to me ramble on about Kierkegaard *ad infinitum*. I would not be handing in this thesis without your love, faith, wisdom, courage, and strength. Ruby, like the birds and lilies of the Gospel, you are a God-given diversion that reminds me of the earnestness and joy of life. I love you both and dedicate this thesis to you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	<i>The Concept of Anxiety</i>
CD	<i>Christian Discourses</i>
CI	<i>Concept of Irony</i>
CUP	<i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i>
E/O I	<i>Either/Or Part I</i>
E/O II	<i>Either/Or Part II</i>
EUD	<i>Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses</i>
FT	<i>Fear and Trembling</i>
FSE	<i>For Self-Examination</i>
IKC	<i>International Kierkegaard Commentary</i>
JP	<i>Journals and Papers</i>
JFY	<i>Judge for Yourself</i>
PC	<i>Practice in Christianity</i>
PF	<i>Philosophical Fragments</i>
POV	<i>The Point of View for My Work as an Author</i>
SUD	<i>Sickness Unto Death</i>
TM	<i>The Moment and Later Writings</i>
TDIO	<i>Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions</i>
UDVS	<i>Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits</i>
WA	<i>Without Authority</i>
WL	<i>Works of Love</i>

CHAPTER ONE

KIERKEGAARD AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Introduction

In a recent article on Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and biblical hermeneutics, Joel Rasmussen comments how, despite Kierkegaard's prolific interaction with the Old and New Testament, 'his reputation as an interpreter of Scripture remains obscured'.¹ This passing over of the Danish thinker in this field of study reflects, more than anything, the fact that his contribution to the history of thought has been predominantly mined by theologians and philosophers. Rasmussen goes on to suggest that the emergence of the 'post-foundational scholarship of our age' has created openness to alternative readings of the New Testament (i.e. not historical critical) so that, 'in recent decades the very understanding of what it means to be a biblical exegete or critic "in the modern sense" has itself come under considerable critical scrutiny'.² In conjunction with these trends and out of a conviction that Kierkegaard has left behind imaginative, relevant exegesis of the Bible, this dissertation sets out to document his work on a portion of the Sermon on the Mount and to elucidate how these writings contribute to Kierkegaard scholarship, New Testament studies, and spiritual theology. In particular, the focus will be on the fourteen edifying discourses he wrote on Matthew 6:24-34.³

¹ Joel D.S. Rasmussen, "Kierkegaard's Biblical Hermeneutic," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible Tome II: The New Testament* ed. Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 249.

² *Ibid.*, 250.

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), *idem*, *Christian Discourses; the Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), *idem*, *Without Authority*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), and *idem*, *For Self-Examination; Judge for Yourself!*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna

The fourteen meditations on the Gospel passage about worry and the birds and lilies were published in four collections of writings in 1847, 1848, 1849, and posthumously in 1856. This concentrated study of a single passage of the Bible is not the lone occurrence in Kierkegaard's authorship; instead, it follows an observable pattern found at several places in his work. His larger writings show this kind of specificity frequently: *Purity of Heart* expounds upon James 4:8; *Works of Love* deals at length with 1 Corinthians 13; *Fear and Trembling* is a running commentary on Genesis 22; and *Practice in Christianity* revolves around Matthew 11:28 and John 12:32. A similar tendency to re-examine a biblical passage also occurs in other sections of his upbuilding discourses.⁴ Not surprisingly, these were texts where he found support for many of his most important categories of thought. From a quantitative standpoint, the Matthew writings, which devote over 200 pages to the Gospel text, are the largest of their kind; furthermore, as Lee Barrett's study shows, this is only part of Kierkegaard's prolific interaction with Matthew 5-7, 'traces of the Sermon on the Mount can be found in every genre of his *corpus*'.⁵

Within Kierkegaardian secondary literature, these collections have received the most attention in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary* series.⁶ These volumes look respectively at the four collections which contain the Matthew discourses and dedicate a portion of each monograph to this material. The contributors address important issues commonly explored in Kierkegaard studies like

Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). All references in the body of the thesis are from the Princeton University Press collection. Alternative translations, when chosen, are cited in the footnotes.

⁴ For instance, in *EUD*, Kierkegaard has three separate discourses on James 1:17-22.

⁵ Lee C. Barrett, "The Sermon on the Mount: The Dialectic of Exhortation and Consolation," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible Tome II*, ed. Barrett and Stewart (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 33, 41.

⁶ Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), idem, *IKC: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), idem, *IKC: Christian Discourses and the Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), and idem, *IKC: Without Authority* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007).

the stages of existence, his polemical attack against Christendom, and indirect communication; in other instances, the various essays direct the data into the realm of ethics and theology. The details of Kierkegaard's exegetical content remain largely overlooked. Alongside these studies, Leo Stan's recent synopsis of the bird and lily discourses provides a thorough presentation of the material as a whole.⁷ His conclusions are largely theological in nature and his exploration of themes such as biblical creationism and suffering faithfully captures major aspects of the Matthew writings. Importantly, Stan also intimates the reciprocal relationship between exegesis and theology in Kierkegaard's work. Even with these contributions to the Matthew discourses, compared to Kierkegaard's major works, there remains a relative lack of work on these writings. Moreover, in light of the focuses alluded to above, there is space for research on his exegesis from the perspective of biblical studies. The question is not so much, 'Is Kierkegaard an interpreter of Scripture'? It is clear that he is. Instead, this thesis organizes around the question, 'What is discovered by paying attention to what he actually has to say about the meaning of a portion of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount'? Hints of the significance of this type of inquiry can be found in a selection of modern critical commentaries where leading Matthew scholars recognize the presence of Kierkegaard's contribution.⁸ Though the details of his

⁷ Leo Stan, "The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air: An Endless Liturgy in Kierkegaard's Authorship," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible Tome II*, ed. Barrett and Stewart (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

⁸ Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament (New York: Crossroad, 1999); Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Davies, W. D., and Dale C. Allison. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 1. 3 Vols. International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988; Warren S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*, Atla Bibliography Series; Vol. 3 (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); and Martin Stiewe and François Vouga, *Die Bergpredigt Und Ihre Rezeption Als Kurze Darstellung Des Christentums* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2001).

reading are not pursued in those works, there is promise that the ‘obscuring’ of Kierkegaard as a biblical interpreter will not last much longer.

As a way of setting the stage for his reading of the Gospel, this chapter will consider the different factors that contributed to Kierkegaard’s sustained interest in Matthew 6:24-34. At the base of each of the explanations offered, there rests a fundamental reason: the Bible is the single most important and influential text for his life and literature. This is not a new insight and several recent monographs, in addition to the work mentioned above, help to corroborate and expand on the centrality of the Old and New Testament in his work. In particular, this branch of Kierkegaard studies has attempted to articulate and develop his distinctive hermeneutic, a brief overview of a few pertinent pieces now follows. While none of these directly address the passage on the birds and lilies, this discussion shows another fruitful approach to the question of Kierkegaard and the Bible. It also allows an opportunity to see the ways the secondary literature has portrayed Kierkegaard’s relationship to the Bible and the extent to which his explicitly exegetical work in other parts of his *corpus* has been drawn forward.

Kierkegaard and Hermeneutics

Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto offered the following projection, in 1953, regarding the future reception of Kierkegaard’s work in the field of hermeneutics:

Histories of twentieth-century hermeneutics, unlike those of the nineteenth, will be quite unable to ignore the influence of this “genius in a market town” . . . How will histories of twentieth-century hermeneutics be possible apart from a multitude of preliminary studies in the hermeneutical practice of Kierkegaard?⁹

⁹ Paul Minear and Paul S. Morimoto, *Kierkegaard and the Bible: An Index*, Princeton Pamphlets; No. 9 (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953), 12.

To thoroughly evaluate the extent to which their prophecy has come true is beyond the scope of this section. Instead, I wish to comment on movement along this front in Kierkegaardian circles, which includes four recent books on Kierkegaard and his relationship to and use of the Bible, both in his pseudonymous and signed writings. Two writers, L. Joseph Rosas and Jolita Pons, concentrate their study on the use of Scripture within the pseudonymous writings and attempt an explanation of its function therein.¹⁰ Timothy Polk and Kyle Roberts also pay close attention to his use of Scripture and expand the discussion to include various sections of the upbuilding and signed literature; in addition, they seek to extend their findings beyond the world of Kierkegaard scholarship and to connect his work to the broader conversation of biblical interpretation, especially for those who hold to a Scripture principle for the Old and New Testament.

L. Joseph Rosas

Rosas' work confirms that 'the form and structure of the entire corpus is shaped and influenced by Scripture'; additionally, his impressive indexing of the biblical text in Kierkegaard's major works provides a useful resource for future readers of Kierkegaard.¹¹ Unfortunately, methodologically, in his insistence that the spheres of existence (aesthetic, ethical, and religious) correspond with Kierkegaard's different uses of Scripture proves too rigid and unavoidably shapes the material into an unnatural form. Subsequently, this leaves too much of the literature at odds with Kierkegaard's otherwise central goal of appropriation, overlooks the presence of explicit religious hermeneutics throughout his life, and disregards Kierkegaard's

¹⁰ Rosas does also devote some space to the signed literature.

¹¹ L. Joseph Rosas, *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 65.

frequent claims for the religious unity of his *corpus*. Rosas' tight categories assert too much control over Kierkegaard's biblical quotes and allusions which he cuts and pastes to fit into his categories. Nonetheless, his discussion of Kierkegaard's 'religious' hermeneutic confirms his work as that of a legitimate and serious biblical scholar. It also provides a beneficial description of and introduction to a recurring theme throughout each of the works examined in this section, namely, that Kierkegaard's hermeneutic always calls the reader to possess the proper kind of interestedness in the text. This interestedness finds confirmation, especially, through the event of appropriation.

Jolita Pons

Jolita Pons' *Stealing a Gift: Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms and the Bible* proceeds in a similar manner to Rosas' work though she limits her investigation to the pseudonymous writings. She argues that Kierkegaard's use of the Bible in the pseudonymous works is not, as Rosas claimed, an illustration that could be said just as well with other sources; contrariwise, it is a necessary ingredient to understanding the literature.¹² Moreover, in her view, the presence of the Bible, through quotation, in the pseudonyms creates an 'interdiscursive relationship between two texts' which in turn results in a multi-dimensional dialectic relationship between the 'host' and 'foreign' text.¹³ This interweaving of texts 'is an act of generosity; it is that by means of which one author makes place for another, withdraws himself, and makes possible the other's tête-à-tête with the reader'.¹⁴ Accordingly, Kierkegaard has intentionally inscribed the Bible throughout these writings to 'create an invisible but omnipresent

¹² Jolita Pons, *Stealing a Gift: Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms and the Bible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), xii.

¹³ Ibid., 2, 8.

¹⁴ Ibid., 145.

web'.¹⁵ The self-distancing employed by Kierkegaard, coupled with the interweaving of biblical texts, focus attention on the reader and open up the possibility of appropriation, which, for Pons, 'means to make truth your own (proper to you), to internalize it, to convert it into reality within yourself'.¹⁶ In appropriation, the reader grasps the 'alien actuality' of the textual personalities 'in the form of possibility'; through contemplation, this foreign actuality converts into a possibility that the individual can appropriate.¹⁷ In his writings, Kierkegaard 'create(s) the best possible conditions for the reader's existential reception of the biblical text';¹⁸ accordingly, the reader becomes active as a 're-creator of the original context and creator of a new interactive meaning'.¹⁹

Her presentation offers a fresh lens through which to view this part of Kierkegaard's work and her conclusions challenge Kierkegaard scholarship to put weight on the importance of the Bible as background material for understanding his work.²⁰ Her model, while helpful, arguably does not account for places in the pseudonymous literature (e.g. the sermon at the end of *Either/Or* and the poorly veiled Gospel presentation in *Philosophical Fragments*) where significant exegesis, not just quotation, is occurring. That is, Kierkegaard's pseudonyms do not just leave traces on the page for the reader to pick up and run with, they also actively interpret the Bible in order to persuade the single individual toward Christianity. Her study does raise an important point about the 'ideal' Kierkegaard reader: With the plethora

¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷ Ibid., 94.

¹⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹⁹ Ibid., 39.

²⁰ Minear and Morimoto make a similar point in their day: 'In accenting S.K.'s dependence upon previous Danish and German writers . . . scholars are tacitly confessing that the chief source of their own thought may be found within the confines of the history of philosophy. It never occurs to them that the Scriptural tradition in itself might serve as the most effective educative agent'. *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, 7.

of biblical citation, comes a demand to be able to know and recognize the parallel texts that Kierkegaard employs - he or she ought to be familiar with the Old and New Testament. From this it follows that his writings welcome readers in the field of biblical and pastoral studies; such well trained eyes could undoubtedly profit from the web of Scripture woven through his corpus.

Timothy Polk

The next work to consider, *The Biblical Kierkegaard: Reading by the Rule of Faith*, offers a slightly different approach to that of Pons and Rosas. Specifically, Polk interacts with Kierkegaard's biblical deliberations with a view to defining and shaping a distinctive hermeneutic. He also aims to demonstrate that Kierkegaard reads by the Rule of Faith, in continuity with orthodox Christianity, and as one who 'conforms to the broad biblical tradition' which upholds the Bible as inspired, authoritative, and intertextually unified.²¹ To support his programme he turns to Kierkegaard's discourse on 1 Peter 4:8, 'Love Covers a Multitude of Sins' in order to convert it into a viable 'hermeneutical construal'.²² In the discourse, part of *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard calls people to be love-sleuths who detect love in those who sin against them and hide these offences through silence, mitigating explanations, and forgiveness. Polk expands on these three imaginative activities of love and adapts them into a method for reading the Scriptures. The task involves looking for love in the message of the Bible in the same way as one would look at the person who sinned against him. In Polk's estimation, this outlook will help to address the 'oppressive potential' of the Bible, found particularly among those who view it as 'a rich

²¹ Timothy Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard: Reading by the Rule of Faith* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 2, 70.

²² Ibid., 52.

repository of oppression freighted with the hypocrisy of easy wisdom, patriarchy, ethnic prejudice, etc'.²³ For this audience, the Scriptures represent the 'offending' neighbour of Kierkegaard's discourse in need of the reader's lenses of love.

Positively, his attempt to connect Kierkegaard with biblical orthodoxy helps to 'rescue' the latter from a proclivity to ignore the text's historical particularity in preference for its universal existential obligation. From the start, Polk emphasizes the slipperiness of the Rule of Faith; in the end, he seems to equate and conflate it with a reading lens of love, commitment to inspiration, and a freely applied intertextuality. Methodologically, the alteration of Kierkegaard's discourse into a reading strategy remains arbitrary and unjustified. Kierkegaard's meditations on 1 Peter 4:7 are aimed at performing works of love, not in-roads to biblical hermeneutics. Polk set out to explicate an important biblical text in Kierkegaard's work; instead of drawing out the actual reading of 1 Peter as a potential contribution to New Testament studies (a more fruitful direction in my opinion), he chose to modify it into a 'Kierkegaardian' hermeneutic, which ended up as something less than original insofar as it merely reflected a long-standing and multifaceted Christian tradition. Despite the questionable methodology, the conclusions are not without merit. For Polk's purposes, he relates one aspect of the Rule to Kierkegaard's work thus: 'love should overarch and be prior to the vision or goggles we all possess when reading'.²⁴ He goes on to entertain an important connection between sanctification and good reading which finds expression in Kierkegaard's writings as well: 'Virtue leads to vision, and vision empowers virtue' so that 'the better one reads/lives, according to the Rule, the

²³ Ibid., 52

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

more clearly might one love; and the better one loves/lives, the clearer one will read'.²⁵

Kyle Roberts

Finally, there is Kyle Roberts' dissertation, a project that elaborates on Kierkegaard's call for subjectivity and his view of Scripture and then merges them together to identify what Roberts terms a 'hermeneutic of appropriation'.²⁶ For Roberts, 'appropriation, in Kierkegaard's thought, denotes the inward, personal *ownership* of truth, meaning, or in a more concrete sense, linguistic communication (as in a conversation) . . . appropriation is *making truth and meaning (either given through written texts or spoken conversation) one's own*'.²⁷ According to Roberts, Kierkegaard's programme for Bible reading has three related elements: 'passionate-primitive reading', which acknowledges and seeks the personal relevance of the text for an individual's life; 'procedural reading', which includes solitary, imaginative attention to the original context and meaning of the text; and 'pneumatological reading', which maintains awareness of the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding revelation.²⁸ Initial understanding arises from a passionate and primitive look at the Scriptures; confirmation of a reader's understanding of a text comes into view through a proper, existential application of the message. This necessary, active participation on the part of the reader leads to a fourth type of reading implicit in Kierkegaard's hermeneutic of appropriation, a performative reading: 'Kierkegaard's hermeneutical

²⁵ Ibid., 88-89.

²⁶ Kyle Roberts, "The Bible as God's *Edifying Discourse*: Toward a Kierkegaardian Theology of Biblical Interpretation" (PhD Dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2005), xxiii.

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁸ Ibid., 164-165. For another article on the role of the Holy Spirit in Kierkegaard's hermeneutic see: Matthew J. Frawley, "The Essential Role of the Holy Spirit in Kierkegaard's Biblical Hermeneutic," in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(S): Essays on Hermeneutics and Communication*, ed. Poul Houe and Gordon D. Marino (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels, 2003).

insights, constructively applied to the task of evangelical theology, suggest that the theological task be seen as that of *performing* the text in response to its active agency in the theologian's life'.²⁹

The dissertation marks out Kierkegaard's central convictions on Bible reading, especially as he presented them in the discourse on James in *For Self-Examination*. To his credit, Roberts' research also provides extensive coverage of the journals and other discourses to corroborate and solidify this hermeneutic of appropriation. The chapter on Kierkegaard's Scripture principle yields a fully developed picture of his high and orthodox view of the Bible and provides a set of presuppositions from which subsequent, related research may depart. In contrast with Polk's methodology, Roberts approach grounds the four-point interpretative strategy in the numerous places where Kierkegaard explicitly addresses the question of concerned reading; through Kierkegaard, he helps to recover wisdom and practices from the history of Christianity. He shows how Kierkegaard's call for subjectivity, contemporaneity with Christ, and imaginative performance of the text, provoke the reader/hearer of the Word back to the position he saw endangered by social and scholarly trends in his own historical context. The question remains whether or not Kierkegaard's 'passionate-primitive reading' suffers on account of its seeming detachment from the greater Christian community, both in his own day and in the centuries that preceded him. Before concluding this overview of recent studies on Kierkegaard and his use of the Bible, I want to add another study to the conversation that addresses the issue of hermeneutics *and* creates dialogue between Kierkegaard's exegesis and New Testament studies.

²⁹ Roberts, "God's *Edifying Discourse*," xxiii.

Richard Bauckham

In contrast to the other scholarship above, Richard Bauckham's contribution shows more explicit attention to the content of Kierkegaard's reading of the text and frames it in discussion with the field of biblical studies.³⁰ His focus is the epistle of James. First of all, Bauckham describes Kierkegaard's piece on James 1:24-25, 'How to Properly Look at Oneself in the Mirror of the Word,' as Kierkegaard's 'fullest discussion of biblical hermeneutics,' and he elaborates on the important questions it raises for the field of biblical studies.³¹ Specifically, Bauckham observes that, 'Kierkegaard poses very starkly and powerfully a fundamental hermeneutical issue about appropriate ways of reading Scripture'; he takes Kierkegaard to hold two complaints against scholarship; first, that the 'process of scholarship and interpretation is never done' and secondly, that 'objectivity' keeps the student from really hearing God's Word.³² In support of the latter complaint Bauckham agrees that 'biblical scholarship does pose a temptation . . . to substitute study for faith and action'.³³ He concludes that this outlook on biblical studies was a 'necessary over-reaction' that went too far by polarizing and setting at odds objective and subjective readings of the Bible. This overreaction stems from the historical situation of nineteenth-century Denmark, the rise of Hegelian idealism, and the poor spiritual condition of the Lutheran church of Kierkegaard's day.

To correct Kierkegaard's corrective, Bauckham recommends 'a hermeneutical approach which transcends the opposition between learning about the text and hearing the text's address'; he promotes a middle ground where 'relatively objective methods . . . need not exclude the passionate interestedness which Kierkegaard rightly expects

³⁰ Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage*, New Testament Readings (London; New York: Routledge, 1999).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 2, 4-5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

of anyone who reads Scripture as God's Word'.³⁴ To portray Bauckham as an opponent of Kierkegaard misrepresents his work, and, in addition to these hermeneutical questions, he helps to spotlight Kierkegaard's place in the history of interpretation of the epistle of James. Bauckham's book, of course, is on James and not Kierkegaard. For this reason, though his critique of Kierkegaard's seeming despising of anything overly objective has its place, there remains more to explore regarding the significance and depth of Kierkegaard's (and his pseudonyms') arguments against historical criticism. Moreover, it is possible that Bauckham and Kierkegaard have different ideas in mind when they use the term 'objective'. Bauckham views it as an application of available critical tools to better understand the text; Kierkegaard uses 'objective' and related terms as a way of describing a form of Idealist academic and ecclesial idolatry in his day and age. By working through the content of the discourses on James, Bauckham surmises that Kierkegaard operates as a biblical interpreter who 'leads us into the theological and existential dimensions of the text in a way that purely historical exegesis fails to do'.³⁵

Summary of Kierkegaard and Hermeneutics

Several germane contributions arise from these projects on Kierkegaard and hermeneutics. Cumulatively the research establishes the centrality of the biblical text to his thinking and writing and reinforces the need for greater attention to the dialogue he fashioned between his texts and the Bible. Polk and Roberts help show that Kierkegaard's methods stand within a greater tradition of biblical interpretation, even if he sometimes isolates the reader too much from the community. Simultaneously, Kierkegaard offers a corrective to overly objective historical critical assumptions that

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

³⁵ Ibid., 172.

might wilfully, or inadvertently, undermine a proper attitude toward the Bible. On this point, though Bauckham remains uneasy about Kierkegaard's scepticism toward historical critical questions, he too highlights this as an important reminder for the modern biblical scholar. In addition, each writer confirms the weighty presence of appropriation in Kierkegaard's hermeneutic and epistemology. This underscores the role of the reader and shows that transfer of meaning is best confirmed through appropriate actions.

From a methodological perspective, these presentations, with the exception of Bauckham, confirm a trend to steer Kierkegaard's biblical writings toward hermeneutical description and construction. This testifies to the ongoing relevance of his method for reading a religious text and, after having examined the discourses thoroughly, I return to this topic and compare and contrast these studies with hermeneutical features in the Matthew discourses. With that in mind, the primary task of this project moves beyond hermeneutics in order to explore the *fruit* of his interpretation as it is recorded in the fourteen, Matthew 6:24-34 discourses. Put another way, I am interested, not just in the 'how' of his reading, but in the 'what' of his reading. Accordingly, in the ensuing chapters, which chronologically consider the collections of Matthew discourses, I draw attention to the ways the material informs about the meaning of the biblical text. Sometimes this is easy. Kierkegaard, almost inductively, comments on a verse or set of verses in a phrase by phrase manner; where his approach seems less direct, the discourses are still never too far from the passage and he consistently reminds the reader (through quotation) of the verse(s) upon which the discourse is reflecting.

By stressing the results of his exegesis, I hope to cull together a Kierkegaardian commentary on each of the verses from Matthew 6:24-34. As

evidenced by the recent work on Kierkegaard and the Bible, very little work has been done which underscores what he actually contributes to the understanding of the biblical text. By placing focus on the interpretation of the Matthean text, I do not mean to suggest that Kierkegaard has done nothing more than give his opinion about the meaning of each verse. These writings are never without a polemical edge, and, like the other parts of his work, he continually offers insight into and a critique of his culture; moreover, the project does not strive to stifle ways recent scholarship has taken the material into other academic disciplines. Moving on from this look at recent literature on Kierkegaard and the Bible, I now want to consider various reasons why Matthew 6:24-34 was a favorite text for his upbuilding discourses.

Kierkegaard's Fascination with Matthew 6:24-34

I already mentioned how the priority of the Bible represents the most basic explanation for the existence of the discourses. But why was Kierkegaard preoccupied with the passage on the birds and lilies? What led him back there again and again? 'Worry', the theme of the Sermon on the Mount material under consideration, provides the first clue. Warren Kissinger notes how in Kierkegaard's 'description of selfhood, the concept of anxiety occupied a central place. Consequently, Jesus' admonition about not being anxious, and his description of the birds and lilies in the Sermon on the Mount motivated Kierkegaard to write three separate interpretations of Matt. 6.24-34'.³⁶ To better grasp this interest, it will help to look briefly at two other writings that are related to the content of the discourses, *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) and *Sickness Unto Death* (1849). Both books, along with the Matthew writings, provide conceptual definitions of anxiety, despair, and worry that need

³⁶ Kissinger, *Sermon on the Mount*, 48. There are actually four collections including the 1851 piece 'Christ as the Prototype'.

further clarification. While each of the three terms has a distinct emphasis, to completely isolate one idea from the other two cannot obtain. As the project progresses, which predominantly addresses the issue of worry, it will become apparent that all three notions appear and overlap in the Matthew material.

The Concept of Anxiety

Kierkegaard's pseudonym, in *The Concept of Anxiety* attempts a 'simple psychological deliberation' on the role anxiety (*Angest*) plays in understanding the origin of, the act of, and the continuation of sin.³⁷ For the first human beings, in the state of innocence, he describes the emergence of this anxiety thus:

In this state there is peace and repose, but there is simultaneously something else that is not contention and strife, for there is indeed nothing against which to strive. What, then, is it? Nothing. But what effect does nothing have? It begets anxiety. This is the profound secret of innocence, that it is at the same time anxiety. Dreamily the spirit projects its own actuality, but this actuality is nothing, and innocence always sees this nothing outside itself (CA: 41).

At this point, the self's understanding only operates within a psychical-physical synthesis; this does not mean the individual is not also spirit, instead, it only refers to the self's ignorance/innocence toward its spiritual nature. Pseudonym Vigilius Haufnensis goes on to address the topic thus: 'Anxiety is *a sympathetic antipathy* and *an antipathetic sympathy*' (CA: 42). The possibility of spirit, of becoming what one unknowingly already is, puts an indefinable tension on the individual; one can neither escape oneself nor grasp hold of oneself (CA: 44). Anxiety, as delineated in the work, also distinguishes human beings from the animal world; it connects to an individual's freedom and the access to endless possibilities which that gives. Moving on in his deliberation, Haufnensis applies the concept to a reading of Genesis and its account of

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). For further study see also Perkins, ed., *IKC: The Concept of Anxiety* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985)

Adam and Eve and God's prohibition to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The command awakens in Adam the freedom of becoming a self other than the one he is, this is 'the anxious possibility of *being able*' (CA: 44).

Anxiety, as a possibility, never departs from an individual. In and of itself, this anxiety is not sinful or guilty; moreover, as the product of pure possibility and in a pre-sinful environment, it never quite acquires concreteness in the world. After sin enters the world, however, 'anxiety is a determinate something and its nothing is an actual something, because the distinction between good and evil is posited – *in concreto*' (CA: 111-112). An individual thus stands in relationship to both of these possibilities – faith annuls the possibility of evil while sin annuls the possibility of the good. This is a by-product of being temporal and eternal, and, one's response to it may result in willful spiritlessness, sin, and the demonic, or, repose and faith in the Atonement (CA: 162). The concluding chapter of the work demonstrates how anxiety might positively educate an individual and shows the salvific potential available to the person who allows anxiety of possibility to expose the depths of sin into which he is capable of falling (CA: 158).³⁸ In this final scenario, an individual's struggle with anxiety no longer persists in innocence. Existence is an endless encounter with the possibility of good and evil; the more aware a person becomes of this conflict, this ongoing moment where the eternal touches the temporal, the more spiritual she becomes. The sympathetic antipathy and the antipathetic sympathy, whether directed toward faith or sin, now encompass an action of the will toward *something*. The concept of anxiety, in its innocence, and after sin enters the world, has relevance for Kierkegaard's reading of Matthew 6:24-34 and I return to its defining features below

³⁸ For further discussion on this possibility see Gordon Marino, "Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

where I compare it alongside despair and worry. The conversation now turns to the concept of despair.

The Concept of Despair

Sickness Unto Death provides the most thorough account of the second of the interconnected concepts, despair (*Fortvivlelse*).³⁹ Pseudonym Anti-Climacus opens the discussion with a definition of the self as a synthesis: ‘a human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis’ (SUD: 13). The duality addressed here further qualifies the psychical-physical synthesis noted in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Anxiety emerges out of ignorance of the synthesis while despair emerges through an imbalance in the synthesis. He traces the nature of the human being back to God’s creative action; accordingly, despair would not be possible if, ‘the synthesis in its original state from the hand of God were not in the proper relationship’ (SUD: 16). While despair’s possibility traces back to the Creator, its actuality is not God’s fault, the synthesis itself is not to blame (SUD: 16). Furthermore, despair is a spiritual sickness that needs to be cured. Dialectically speaking, there nevertheless also remains a nobility in the concept as long as it stays in the realm of possibility, ‘to be able to despair is an infinite advantage, and yet to be in despair is . . . the worst misfortune’ (SUD: 15). This *possibility* of despair, like anxiety, never leaves an individual. Anti-Climacus goes on to stress that despair is active. It occurs in actuality when the self acts in such a way that a misrelation occurs within its synthesis; that is,

³⁹ For further study see Alastair Hannay, "Kierkegaard and the Variety of Despair," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. ed. Hannay and Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gregory Beabout, *Freedom and its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair*, Marquette Studies in Philosophy, Vol. 12 (Marquette: Marquette University Press, 1996); Perkins, ed., *IKC: Sickness Unto Death* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987)

a person attempts to live too much in finitude, freedom, etc. At its height, despair happens with full cognizance of God and equates to sin. The individual either wills to be himself or wills not to be himself. Both movements disrupt the synthesis and seek to establish the self apart from the Creator – the power upon which the synthesis both exists and is sustained in the world. On several occasions in the Matthew material Kierkegaard will describe human beings using the language of *Sickness Unto Death* to explain what it looks like to both encounter the possibility of worry and defeat worry. In the subsequent overview of worry, it becomes apparent that there is also an irreconcilable difference between despair and worry.

The Concept of Worry

Matthew 6:24-34, with its four explicit references to the topic, demands a reading that acknowledges that ‘worry’ is the major issue under discussion. Naturally, this word, ‘worry’, whether as a verb (*bekymyre*) or a noun (*Bekymring*), receives the most attention in the discourses which comment on the Gospel text. At times, Kierkegaard also interchanges the Danish word for care or concern (*Sorg*) with ‘worry’, though, for all intents and purposes they operate synonymously and a separate treatment of *Sorg* is not necessary. It should also be noted that the Greek verb μεριμναω is translated variously as ‘to worry’, ‘to be anxious’, or ‘to be concerned’; in the case of ‘to be anxious’ this should not be confused with the more technical use of the noun form ‘anxiety’ found in Kierkegaard. It is not my intention here to attempt to collapse the three concepts together; nevertheless, it does seem most fruitful to illustrate the common ground that exists between worry, anxiety and despair.

First of all, each functions with an important dialectic of possibility-actuality. As is the case with the other concepts, the possibility of worry sets human beings

apart from nature; to actualize worry equates with unbelief and sin. This dual-edged nature also points to the educative potential of all three notions. While Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms never condone the act of despair, worry, and certain forms of anxiety, there remains a call for the individual to be schooled by these features. That is, to grow Christianly involves gaining a greater awareness of the live possibility of falling into anxiety (toward the good), despair, and worry; as this alertness to real danger increases, which is closely connected with consciousness of sin, so does the individual's need to flee to grace in every moment of life. In addition, all three concepts connect to the imagination. Anxiety materializes through contemplation of what an individual could do; despair, especially that which he labels as infinitizing, is a disequilibrium characterized by remaining too long in fantasy.⁴⁰ The same holds true for worry. Excessive care over food, drink, clothing, and the next day, can stem from an unhealthy imagination which pictures an unreality where God is removed from the equation as the source of material needs.

Perhaps the most significant link between these ideas comes through considering Kierkegaard's end game for the reader in each publication – faith. This also provides a strong case for highlighting their commonality over their difference. Together these themes go to the core of his campaign to call people to become genuine individuals before God. Instructed by anxiety, the individual will 'rest in the Atonement' (CA: 162); despair is defeated when 'in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it' (SUD: 14); the individual dispels worry by trusting and contenting herself with the heavenly Father. Turning to the content of the Matthew discourses, the reader finds that

⁴⁰ Dialectically, Kierkegaard would also insist that there is a despair which arises due to a lack of imagination; this is particularly true for the person who rejects forgiveness of sin on the grounds that it is too good to be true.

Kierkegaard illustrates countless ways worry assaults, both inwardly and outwardly, while he provides practical, spiritual tools to confront this universal problem. His post-lapsarian picture of anxiety brought about a similar love-hate relationship with concrete items. An individual can have sinful care and anxiety about food, money, status, and more. Despair differs from worry on this point. It functions more within an individual; he or she falls out of equilibrium as a result of the wrong decision of the will. That being said, worry also encompasses this type of inwardness. By way of example, too much self-projection into the next day is a phenomenon Kierkegaard likens to self-torment; in addition, in his descriptions of the pagan, the harrowing portrait can only be described as a loss of self equivalent to the sketch of despair in *Sickness Unto Death*. The greatest proof for the continuity between the three concepts is to be found in the Matthew discourses themselves; as we will see, Kierkegaard is comfortable with using the terminology of anxiety and despair alongside his predominant interest in worry.

A difference remains in his approach to each concept. With anxiety, he employs a lower pseudonym; with despair he turns to a higher pseudonym; with the question of worry, he chooses to sign his own name to the documents. Moreover, *Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety* operate as companion pieces and develop their argument expressly from a psychological-theological framework. While the Matthew material is not devoid of this type of insight, the overall mood of the discourses remains more pastoral. In form alone, he follows the examples of other sermon collections from his time. Additionally, he grounds the concept of worry within a particular passage of the New Testament and displays more conscientious exegesis of the text. Taken together, the works show two related sides of Kierkegaard's scholarship: *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Sickness Unto Death* put in

the foreground his theological convictions on anthropology, sanctification, and hamartiology; the Matthew discourses put into the foreground his interpretation of a text where he finds support for the theology explicitly espoused. This reciprocal relationship between the Bible and theology is an important aspect of his work, though it always remains subservient to the greater goal of upbuilding the single individual. Kierkegaard's extensive investment in clarifying and classifying the concept of anxiety and despair helps to explain his subsequent fascination with worry and, consequently his focus on Matthew's text. The 1846 events surrounding *The Corsair* affair, his decision to end the pseudonymous literature, emerging financial problems, and a fresh engagement with the sermons of Martin Luther all shed further light on the existence of the discourses in his *corpus*.

The Corsair Affair

In 1846, the year prior to the release of the first collection of Matthew discourses, Kierkegaard received harsh treatment and public scorn as a result of what is now called *The Corsair* affair. Briefly recounted, the episode arose as a result of a battle of wits between Kierkegaard and long-standing rival P.L. Møller.⁴¹ In particular, Kierkegaard, writing pseudonymously, attacked Møller, partly for a scathing review of his work and partly to expose his secret involvement in *The Corsair*, a publication which satirized various individuals and aspects of life in Copenhagen.⁴² Subsequently, his remarks upset Meire Goldschmidt, a respected friend, who was also editor of *The Corsair*, by insinuating that Møller was the real editor of the satirical publication. Between January and March of 1846, *The Corsair*

⁴¹ Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 119.

⁴² Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard: Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21.

launched an offensive of words and images that distorted Kierkegaard's physical and literary image and forced him into isolation in Copenhagen. Roger Poole describes the effect this way: 'The burden of the review is that Kierkegaard is the most egocentric and the most abstract person in the world . . . the readers of *The Corsair* have been visually conditioned . . . to see Kierkegaard in a certain way, and from now on they will indeed see him in that way.'⁴³ The accuracy of Poole's assessment can be seen in Kierkegaard's 1846 journal where he notes how: 'Even the butcher's boy almost thinks himself justified in being offensive to me at the behest of *The Corsair*. Undergraduates grin and giggle and are delighted that someone prominent should be trodden down'.⁴⁴ Kierkegaard felt the abusive edge of the publications and its after-effects included the loss of his personal anonymity and the enjoyment he derived from walks through town and conversation with friends and acquaintances. This was a huge cost to Kierkegaard and the entire escapade set him on a path toward greater loneliness.

The seclusion manifested itself in more frequent recreational outings in the surrounding forest district; spiritually, he consoled himself through prayer, confident that in communion with God, the whole situation could be forgotten.⁴⁵ It would be irresponsible to suggest that his nature walks facilitated a new found attention to birds and lilies; nonetheless, the solitude brought on by *The Corsair* Affair, coupled with the verbal and visual attacks he experienced, left a mark on Kierkegaard that comes through in the later Matthew 6 writings. It is noteworthy to see how he argues in the 1847 writings about the importance of being alone before God, the destructiveness of aesthetic/external comparison, and the opposing forces at work on the image or

⁴³ Poole, *Indirect Communication*, 119.

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*. ed. Alexander Dru (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1938) 161.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

identity of the self. Kirmmse summarizes the events thus: ‘The effects of this on Kierkegaard’s sensitive psyche were nothing short of catastrophic; he now regarded himself as a loner whose books were not understood, and who was now to be persecuted, scorned and made to suffer . . . Kierkegaard felt obliged to remain and inform his contemporaries as to the nature of Christianity’.⁴⁶ In the first place this meant a change in direction vocationally. Instead of retiring his pen and exchanging it for a rural pastorate, he must channel the anger and bitterness of the ordeal. This was not catastrophic. It did result in a sharp decrease in writing from the lower pseudonyms and the beginning of the second authorship where he began to thoroughly address the ‘outward dimension and external consequences’ of Christianity.⁴⁷

End of the Pseudonyms

Concurrent with *The Corsair* events, Kierkegaard wrote the short piece, ‘A First and Last Explanation’, in which he owned up to several pseudonymous writings written and published between 1843 and 1846. He attached the account to the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts*, a work that he intimated to be the last pseudonym, and, possibly his final book full stop. In a journal note from February, 1846, he resolved to find solace as a parish priest and to leave behind the life of an author.⁴⁸ Though this determination did not come to fruition, in another sense, Kierkegaard’s life as author would not be the same in the aftermath of *The Corsair* events. His loss of anonymity and confession about the pseudonyms made it impossible to continue in the same literary style; ‘The indirect communication lay in

⁴⁶ Martin Schwartz-Lausten and Frederick H. Cryer, *A Church History of Denmark* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 235.

⁴⁷ Walsh, *Thinking Christianly*, 22.

⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 149.

ruins', writes Roger Poole, 'that ironic cover had been blown. Now, in the cartoons of *The Corsair*, the works of all the pseudonyms were directly attributed to Kierkegaard himself, and his editors and characters ransacked for spicy illustrations'.⁴⁹ Poole's comments help to make it clear that, in Kierkegaard's mind, something had to change; nevertheless, one should be careful not to reduce indirect communication to pseudonymity. Neither activity ends after *The Corsair*. Without diminishing the torment brought on Kierkegaard in 1846, the events also served to encourage his already polemical nature and to foster in him a spirit of martyrdom. In early 1847 he writes: 'from now on, my career as an author is indeed not brilliant. It is clear enough that I shall be sacrificed'.⁵⁰ The extent to which he should be faulted for his overreaction to the public shame is less important than the effects of the conflict; from this point forward, *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* (1847) and *The Crisis in the life of an Actress* (1848) would be the only significant lower pseudonyms to be published the rest of his life. In their place, Kierkegaard wrote and released a steady stream of his most important Christian literature. With regard to the Matthew writings in particular, I suggest that their acute attention to the problem of worry, coupled with their often gentle and indirect manner, represent his attempt to serve a pastoral role, even if it was from a distance and through the use of pen and paper. There is a flip-side to the story. As the years went by, the post-*Corsair* literature also shows, as C. Stephen Evans notes, how 'Kierkegaard became increasingly convinced that establishment Christianity in Denmark . . . made authentic Christian life difficult and even impossible . . . the person who has genuine faith necessarily expresses this faith

⁴⁹ Poole, *Indirect Communication*, 16.

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 190.

by being a follower, an imitator, of Jesus; it is not merely an abstract, propositional belief'.⁵¹

Money Matters

Kierkegaard's tarnished public image fed his renewed zeal for writing and played a part in the decrease of lower pseudonymous literature and a prolific production of unquestionably Christian literature which included the fourteen Matthew discourses. His emerging money problems also suggest a reason for the specific interest in the content of Matthew's text. Up until 1847, he enjoyed financial freedom through the success of his father's business and the wealth left to him after his death. Circumstances began to change. Lowrie recounted the steps Kierkegaard took to try to adjust to his diminishing income: 'In August 1847 he sold to his publisher Rietzel the whole outstanding stock of his books . . . At the same time he tried to sell to Philipsen the right to publish a second edition of *Either/Or*, and only because he could not at once get the price he demanded the publication was delayed for over a year,' by the end of the year, he had sold his house as well.⁵² That served as a temporary fix, but money issues continued and the war with Germany severely lessened the value of his investments. Kierkegaard comments on this thus: 'I bought government bonds with the cash from the sale of my house, which I had otherwise decided to leave lying idle – the stupidest thing I have ever done and which must certainly be looked upon as a sort of lesson'.⁵³ His investment failed and he entered a personal economic downturn, the standard of living that included a servant, a large library, and frequent traveling, at last caught up with Kierkegaard. A question about

⁵¹ C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9.

⁵² Walter Lowrie, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1970), 189.

⁵³ Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 270.

his financial security emerged. This, coupled with the scars from *The Corsair* debacle, proved too much; he writes, 'I should have been able to bear everything else . . . if my financial future had not tortured me'.⁵⁴ Financial concerns stayed with him the rest of his life. Lowrie calls it 'an amazing instance of divine providence that as he was carrying home from the bank the last money he possessed, he fell paralyzed upon the street, was carried to a hospital and died within a few weeks.'⁵⁵

These struggles correspond with the appearance of the Matthew discourses which frequently address the issues of wealth and poverty, worldly cares, and what it looks like to worry about the necessities of life. Accordingly, they express life-experience he gained through coming face to face with the possibility of poverty and offer a view into Kierkegaard's developing faith. Up to this point, he imagined himself protected from these problems and the Gospel passage would have proven a source of challenge, comfort, and wisdom in this new phase of life. This is also evident in Kierkegaard's style of writing. He communicates as one who is equally being educated in the school of the birds and lilies; furthermore, as part of his veronymous writings, he would not have released these biblical meditations without first existentially and subjectively grappling with the appropriation of the text. In their preface to *Works of Love*, the Hong's concur that 'Kierkegaard saw his entire authorship as being instrumental in his own essential education'.⁵⁶ Lessons related to financial burdens could have been previously lost upon the independently wealthy Kierkegaard. In the end, the clues about his worry found in the journals helped foster the publication of a Gospel-oriented, realistic-idealistic outlook on possessions.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 258.

⁵⁵ Lowrie, *A Short Life*, 189.

⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses*, trans. Edna Hong, Howard Hong, and Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 13.

Further attestation of these financial troubles finds expression in his relationship to the Bishop of Copenhagen, Jacob Peter Mynster.

Relationship with Bishop Mynster

Kierkegaard's personal relationship to the text can also be deduced from features of his complicated relationship to Bishop Mynster, who was his father's priest and the leading religious figure of the State church. As the Bishop, he held power over the appointing of priests and professors and Kierkegaard's journals elucidate how this authority caused a clash. Caught between wanting to respect his deceased father and tough times financially, Kierkegaard struggled with whether or not he could or should wait until Mynster died before he published the final discourse on Matthew 6:24-34, 'Christ as the Prototype', a work which indicted the Bishop's outlook on Christianity. In particular, he wanted to make sure he would still have the resources to circulate what he thought needed to be said. Moreover, there was the recurring idea to take a secure post as pastor: 'He [Mynster] knows that I have financial worries,' writes Kierkegaard, 'has known it for several years; I myself told him. Now he is waiting and watching for this to force me to cut back, perhaps even to throw myself into his arms so that he can exploit me and have further proof that his way is the way of wisdom and earnestness' (JFY: 260). Kierkegaard hardened himself against this option in the end, whether this was completely voluntary on his part he leaves unclear; for certain, Kierkegaard's polemical jabs did not exactly help his case or pave an easy path into the University or Church in the late 1840's. This biographical account not only verifies the financial strain in Kierkegaard's life, it also confirms the tension he felt in his relationship with Mynster, whom he wanted to respect and in whom he saw a tremendous potential to positively influence genuine

Christianity in Denmark. I will return to this episode in the next chapter in order to show how it manifests in the Matthew discourses as well. As a final point in exploring Kierkegaard's fascination with Matthew 6, I want to make mention of his interest in the spiritual writings of Martin Luther.

The Sermons of Martin Luther

In 1847, after reading Luther's sermon on Matthew 21:1-9, Kierkegaard wrote of the experience in his journals: 'Wonderful! The category "for you" (subjectivity, inwardness) . . . is Luther's own. I have never really read anything by Luther. But now I open up his sermons – and right there in the Gospel for the First Sunday in Advent he says "for you," on this everything depends' (JP 2: 2463). This discovery (or re-discovery) of Luther's writings for Kierkegaard is not enough evidence to prove that he also went on to read Luther's influential sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. What this exclamation does demonstrate is that at this time in his life Kierkegaard had experienced a new-found respect for and joy over the writings of the reformer.⁵⁷ To test the theory that Luther directly influenced Kierkegaard's Matthew 6 discourses requires a close reading of Luther on this text and a comparative analysis with the material explored in the next three chapters. Support for this type of inquiry is found in the study of David Yoon-Jung and Joel Rasmussen: 'Given this evidence that Luther's *Postil* are, in fact, substantive enough to serve as the primary source material for the development of Kierkegaard's *Lutherbild* . . . we might ask why so little critical attention has been given to the importance of these specific works within

⁵⁷ For a treatment of Kierkegaard's taking up of Luther's sermons, his reception of the reformer's work, and an extensive bibliography for further study, see David Yoon-Jung and Joel D.S. Rasmussen, "Martin Luther: Reform, Secularization, and the Question of His 'True Successor'," in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions Tome II: Theology*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

Luther's corpus'.⁵⁸ Their work, which highlights ways Luther left an impression on Kierkegaard's work, nevertheless makes no mention of the possible link between the Matthew material and the reformer. The full examination of the connections comes in chapter five. For now, it will have to suffice to say that, even a cursory comparison between the two writers gives the impression that Kierkegaard read and borrowed from Luther's work on Matthew 6:24-34.

Summary of Kierkegaard's Fascination with Matthew 6:24-34

Kierkegaard's interest in Christian anthropology and humanity's possibility to experience anxiety, despair, and worry factors largely into his attentiveness to Matthew's Gospel passage. His own economic turmoil may also have encouraged this research. In addition, with the fall out of *The Corsair* affair, these discourses, following closely after those shocking events, express his determination to communicate in a straight-forward, and even pastoral tone, that reaches beyond the upper-class and academic audience of his earlier, pseudonymous works. In addition to the various personal factors attested to above, many more explanations of this interest come by way of the actual content of the text. Matthew's text about loyalty, nature, and worry provided material that spoke directly into several of Kierkegaard's concerns and interests: life's either/or, the concept of worry, the creature-Creator distinction, time and the moment, and more. These connections will come forward in the subsequent presentation.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 190.

Conclusion

Before beginning the central work of the project a few words on methodology are in order. In the earlier discussion on anxiety, despair, and worry, one feature of my presentation already emerged. The overview of these terms reveals Kierkegaard's proclivity toward extensively explaining and developing a particular word or phrase. In both *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Sickness Unto Death*, he oversteps the boundaries of the common usage of the terminology; instead, he imaginatively expands the terms he selects and fashions them into full-blown, theological categories of thought. A similar approach, intimated in the earlier look at 'worry', is more fully developed in the subsequent chapters. Consistently, Kierkegaard focuses the discussion around a verse or section of Matthew 6:24-34; in addition, he introduces a specific term or concept intricately tied to his interpretation of the passage. The results from his creative mapping of the meaning and implications of the terminology significantly inform us about his interpretation of the Matthew text. That is, there is a reciprocal relationship between the text and the key-words; the vocabulary he chooses derives from Matthew's Gospel and, once unpacked goes on to inform the reader more clearly about the interpretation of Matthew. Cumulatively, these word-constructions, built up around the Sermon on the Mount, provide a sort of glossary that aids the reader in overcoming the pervasive problem of worry.

In addition to tracking the associations between the text and the concepts explored in the discourses, the project pays close attention to Kierkegaard's instructions for eradicating worry. Particularly, I draw out how the steps he prescribes for worry-free living correspond with an activity I describe as 'artful living'.⁵⁹ Artful

⁵⁹ I do not claim to be absolutely original with this phrase. It derives primarily, as we will see, from Kierkegaard's own comments and it also shares affinities with the title of a recent book by Walsh,

living is not aesthetical sophistication; instead, this expression attempts to capture the various divinely assisted movements an individual makes in the face of the possibility of worry. This way of life looks slightly different from collection to collection. The 1847 and 1849 discourses promote artful living as an additional step the individual takes above and beyond an already glorious, distinct, God-given attribute granted only to human beings. A slight difference remains insofar as the 1847 writings confront the issue of worry while *Three Devotional Discourses* applies artful living to the problem of suffering. In *The Cares of the Pagans*, this picture of Christian living involves one's relationship to various acceptable, temporal situations in life, such as poverty, wealth, powerlessness, and power.

Exploring Kierkegaard's attention to defining important concepts and to graphically representing artful living cannot exhaust the riches of these writings; while the two approaches feature prominently in what follows, this in no way is an attempt to limit or subdue the polyvalent potential of his deliberations on the birds and lilies. Instead, these rubrics are aids in the greater task of documenting his interpretation of Matthew 6:24-34. The project now turns to the first collection of discourses, *What We Learn from the Birds of the Air and the Lilies of Field*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE 1847 MATTHEW DISCOURSES

In the introductory chapter, the major task was to explore various reasons why Kierkegaard was interested in the Gospel passage, Matthew 6:24-34. Along side several personal factors, it was his ongoing quest to deal with the related concepts of anxiety, despair, and worry which drew him to the text. In addition, I brought up the fact that he introduces key expressions for each of the Matthew discourses, embarks on various textual paths to understanding their meanings, and applies them toward the interpretation of Jesus' admonitions against worry. This chapter looks at how the concept of worry in Matthew's text corresponds with Kierkegaard's ideas about contentment, gloriousness, and blessed happiness. Before beginning, introductory comments on the first collection as a whole are in order.

Introduction to *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*

Background

The unusually long-titled work, *What We Learn from the Lilies in the Field and from the Birds of the Air (What We Learn)*, was released in 1847 as the second of three sections that make up *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Situated between *Purity of Heart* and *The Gospel of Suffering*, it traditionally has received less attention among English speaking Kierkegaard scholars.⁶⁰ This disparity arose partly because, up until the Hongs' translation in 1993, no English work had released all three parts in the same

⁶⁰ Stephen N. Dunning, "Transformed by the Gospel: What We Learn About the Stages from the Lilies and the Birds," in *IKC: UDVS*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 111.

volume. As separate entities, they naturally found varying degrees of interest among the readership.

Kierkegaard's title to the work, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, suggests similarities and differences between each section worth considering. In the first place, all three parts contain discourses that aim to build up; they are directed toward 'that solitary "individual" who reads willingly and slowly . . . for his own sake' (UDVS: 5). Kierkegaard writes as a lay person, without authority, and hopes to create enough distance from subsequent readers so that neither the beauty nor defects of the discourses might distract or hinder the individual from the 'inwardness of appropriation' (UDVS: 5). More will be said about this shortly. On the other hand, the spirit (sometimes translated moods or veins) of each section differs. *Purity of Heart* receives the title 'An Occasional Discourse' and serves as 'spiritual preparation for the office of confession'; *What We Learn* explores Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:24-34 about the cure for worry and the blessedness of humanity; *The Gospel of Suffering* expounds the various ways that suffering for the truth releases into an undefeatable joy. Walter Lowrie views the collection as that which 'begins to express what SK regarded as "the specifically Christian"'.⁶¹ This idea was alluded to in the previous chapter where I discussed the virtual end of his pseudonymous authorship. Lowrie may go too far insofar as he risks downplaying the Christian nature of the earlier writings; what is certain, nonetheless, as Robert Perkins notes, is that throughout the material Kierkegaard 'presents/argues the moral and theological viewpoints that will occupy his attention for the remainder of his life'.⁶²

Bruce Kirmmse draws attention to ways the collection acts as a charged polemic against political and religious leaders of Kierkegaard's day. He writes:

⁶¹ Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 370.

⁶² Perkins, ed., *IKC: UDVS*, 3.

The growing political liberalism of the Danish middle class; the smug, culture-conscious conservatism of the upper bourgeoisie (Romanticism) . . . the superficial and polished “profundity” and worldly opportunism of Bishop J.P. Mynster and the intellectualized Christianity of H.L. Martensen . . . and finally, the shallow, optimistic Christianity of N.F.S. Grundtvig, who expressed the fervent hopes and ambitions of the rising peasant class.⁶³

Undoubtedly, his assessment of the material has some merit (though a much more thorough textual argument for this does not appear alongside this blanket statement) and his comments offer a perspective on how these writings addressed and may have been perceived by Kierkegaard’s contemporaries. Nevertheless, it would be unbalanced to characterize these *upbuilding* writings as predominantly critical. *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* in general must also be granted the opportunity to shine as a positive and encouraging message for the single individual. In the case of *What We Learn*, Kierkegaard is interpreting a biblical text with a view to leading his reader, who is presumably struggling with worry, further into Christian contentment, service, and allegiance. As this chapter, and the subsequent work on the other Matthew collections progresses, places in the discourses that unleash a clear polemic will be granted a hearing; still, I operate under the conviction that this remains, quite often, only background noise in comparison with the devotional and exegetical force of this material. Hopefully confirmation of this begins immediately with a consideration of Kierkegaard’s own sentiments about the orientation of the writing and its intended audience.

The Role of Author, Text, and Reader

In the preface to *What We Learn*, Kierkegaard communicates his role as author, the role of the discourses, and the nature of the ideal reader. This pattern is nothing new for him. It is a continuation of the prefaces from the various other upbuilding treatises he wrote between 1843 and 1845. For the 1847 Matthew material he says this:

⁶³ Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, ed. Merold Westphal, The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 279.

Although this little book is without the *authority* of the teacher, a *superfluidity*, *insignificant*, like the lily and the bird – oh would that it were so! – yet by finding the only thing it seeks, a good place, it hopes to find the *significance of appropriation* for that single individual, whom with joy and gratitude I call *my* reader (UDVS: 157).

First of all, with regard to his role as author, Kierkegaard creates distance between himself and the reader. All that he deems worth mentioning on this front is his hope that the finished product helps and the joy and gratitude he holds for the individual who takes the writing seriously. By removing himself from the scene, Kierkegaard sets the discourses free. He does this out of recognition that he has no final control over how they might be received and in order to encourage active reading. There is an observable difference between these introductory comments and the earlier prefaces to *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. There he refers to himself as the one without authority; here he transfers this lack of authority to the text, thus diminishing even more any direct mention of himself in the preface.

Secondly, after setting up the independence of the discourses, Kierkegaard goes on to ascribe to them volition and desire. *They* seek an encounter with the single individual. Moreover, he hopes that the discourses might, in some measure, follow the example of the birds and lilies. To mimic these teachers involves a perpetual presentation of the Gospel lesson, regardless of the presence of an author or audience. The text functions as possibility literature. It, like the birds and lilies, serves as a mirror, which, if looked upon, promotes possibilities for worry-free existence. What is more, like nature, the discourses are bound and limited; they remain an untapped treasure without the single individual's conscious effort to look, consider, read, and appropriate. Perhaps the most significant reason for the hopeful comparison with the lilies and birds has to do with the overall mood of the writings and how, throughout this collection, Kierkegaard strives to non-judgmentally assist the reader in overcoming worry. Nature performs this task perfectly. It keeps company with the worrier without speaking and without the gaze of

spiritual superiority. For Kierkegaard, the issue of worry requires a teacher ‘whose words are not a misapprehension, whose encouragement does not contain any hidden blame, whose glance does not judge, whose comfort does not agitate instead of calm’ (UDVS: 161). Ultimately his description finds its fulfillment in Jesus and not just the bird and lily; in line with this ideal, Kierkegaard endows the discourses with a similar character. Speaking of the worried individual he writes: ‘since he was so loath to have any *other* human being speak to him about his worry, the discourse will respect his worry, and I shall not speak about any human being, or about any worried human being, but prefer to speak about *the worried lily*’ (UDVS: 167).

Later Kierkegaard describes this tactic as an imitation of Socrates’ bashful dialogue in *Phaedrus*, he writes, ‘out of respect for the worry I shall willingly cover my face, so that I see no one but speak only about the bird of the air’ (UDVS: 180). In other words, he tries to maintain a sufficient amount of indirectness in the presentation so that the reader is neither embarrassed nor condemned by the call away from worry. Everything is carried out to help the single individual to get alone with the discourses, the birds and lilies, and God. It is there that he or she may find out something significant about human beings and appropriate the words of Matthew’s Gospel. This call to get alone with nature and away from the advice of others comes with an unavoidable contradiction. After all, even by trying to remove himself from the discourses, Kierkegaard’s ‘text’ is still giving advice and inviting the anxious person to reflect on its message in a way that cannot be completely different from a well-meaning friend. Following the preface, Kierkegaard inserts a prayer and quotes the full text of Matthew 6:24-34. He describes the passage as the ‘Holy Gospel’ and contextualizes it as the lectionary reading for the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost. These elements create a solemn setting and intimate the literary genre of the discourses.

George Pattison argues that Kierkegaard's literary approach to upbuilding and to religious dialogue reflects a concession to and recognition of the modern culture of books. He writes: 'Writing - the book-world and periodical-world - is the cultural embodiment and instrument of reflection . . . a constant invitation to lose oneself in an esthetic relation to reality, rather than to exist in one's primitivity'.⁶⁴ Whether through vulgar novels or reworked Hegelian philosophy, the book-world in Denmark too readily offered an imbalance of fantasy or abstraction for the public. With this negative view acknowledged, Kierkegaard, through writing, attempts to swim against the stream of the merely aesthetic; his works 'resist being appropriated in the manner of abstract or objective knowledge' and his style 'repeatedly attempts to turn readers back to themselves and to their individual situation vis-à-vis God'.⁶⁵ In relation to these collections, Pattison's comments apply in view of the fact that Kierkegaard borrows the form of published sermons of his time and transforms it into a dynamic theological-psychological treatise. In addition, the depth of reflection and self-examination called for in these 'near-sermons' would have stood out amidst the offerings of the preachers of his day, even in their ability to lead the reader into genuine encounter with God. Before turning to the discourses and Kierkegaard's reading of Matthew 6:24-34, I want to mention how recent scholarship has considered connections between the three 1847 writings and Kierkegaard's three stages of existence.

The Discourses and the Aesthetic, Ethical, and Religious

Kierkegaard, in a journal entry, initiates a comparison between the discourses of *What We Learn* and the stages of existence. He writes, 'the structure of the three

⁶⁴ George Pattison, "The Art of Upbuilding," in *IKC: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003), 88.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 88

discourses about the lilies and the birds is as follows: the first is esthetic, the second ethical, the third religious' (JP 5: 5975). His comment is curt; nevertheless, various attempts to explain his allusion testify to a prominent approach to the material. Sylvia Walsh captures this line of questioning by asking how 'they [the discourses] individually represent respectively the aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres in their focus and content'.⁶⁶ The consensus is that Kierkegaard sets forth in *What We Learn* the effects the Gospel has on the negative portrayals of each life-view as it is recorded in Kierkegaard's earlier pseudonymous literature. Positively, this research finds in the discourses a picture of what these stages look like after being transformed by the message of Matthew. Stephen Dunning's work is representative of this methodology and, in order to overview this approach, I now briefly consider his conclusions.⁶⁷

In his explanation of the presence of the stages in the discourses, Dunning proposes that Kierkegaard is showing how 'the Gospel enters into all three stages and transforms them'.⁶⁸ This recognizes the Christian nature of the writings and stresses that movement is not quantitative and linear as much as it is qualitative and substantive. Dunning summarizes the progression thus: 'Aesthetic dependence joins with ethical humility in responding to God's proposal'.⁶⁹ His terminology, 'dependence', 'humility', and 'responding' reflect the content of the collection, and, applied to the main themes of the discourses, the following possibilities emerge. Kierkegaard captures the aesthetic negatively by drawing attention to acts of superficial comparison and self-sufficiency. This must be replaced with dependence, which leads to the contentment championed in the initial writing. In the second discourse, Kierkegaard shows how governing and work,

⁶⁶ Walsh, "If the Lily Could Speak: On the Contentment and Glory of Being Human," in *IKC: UDVS*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 136.

⁶⁷ For further study see also Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); and David D. Possen, "Faith's Freedom from Care," in *IKC: UDVS*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005).

⁶⁸ Dunning, "Transformed by the Gospel," 127.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 126-128.

as ethical tasks, will lead to pride, abuse, and imbalance apart from recognizing the need for humility, i.e. God's authority and help; Matthew's news about the gloriousness of humanity reorients and redeems these otherwise purely ethical duties. The final writing's display of the incompatibility of God and mammon, and the need to choose allegiance between the two, awakens a religious person, otherwise trapped in an enclosing sorrow, to the urgency of seeking first God's kingdom.

Inherent in attempts to find the stages in this material is the risk of forcing the data too much. To cite one example, to label the third discourse (based on Matthew 6:24) as religious becomes more complicated when read beside the 1849 triad of writings, also viewed as fertile ground for the theory of the stages.⁷⁰ The latter collection places the same discussion of loyalty and choice (6:24) in the second (ethical) position. Dunning's configuration of the material captures this potential for inconsistency when he concludes that 'choosing between God and the world is what might be called a religious (**rather than an ethical** [emphasis mine]) imperative, for it is a response to God's proposal'.⁷¹ It also seems somewhat rigid to restrict these concepts (dependence, humility, and responding) to only one discourse. Viewing the works as stepping stones is complicated by the fact that the reader encounters God's proposal in every piece, that it takes humility to depend on God, and so on.

My comments are not meant to disparage this scholarship. Furthermore, this is not the only topic Dunning and others pursue in their work on the discourses; as the chapter advances, I continue to interact with and benefit from their insights. The presence of this literature also highlights the ongoing and needed commitment to elucidating Kierkegaard's major categories in lesser studied parts of his *corpus*. Finally, this

⁷⁰ See M. W. Sinnett, *Restoring the Conversation: Socratic Dialectic in the Authorship of Søren Kierkegaard* (St Andrews: Theology in Scotland for St. Mary's College University of St. Andrews, 2000).

⁷¹ Dunning, "Transformed by the Gospel," 123.

discussion helps differentiate the approach that follows. Specifically, I read the discourses with a view to Kierkegaard's understanding of the meaning of the New Testament text. Beyond the question of the stages, the most fundamental transition called for in the writings is a shift from worry to faith. Recalling the preface, the prayer, the sermon-like structure, and the citation from the 'Holy Gospel', it seems reasonable that one of Kierkegaard's clearest aims was to talk about Matthew 6:24-34. I now turn to the first of the three discourses, 'To Be Contented with Being a Human Being', and its presentation on the concept of contentment.

Discourse One: 'To Be Contented with Being a Human Being'

Discontentment, Worry, and Comparison

In the opening discourse Kierkegaard begins by pointing out how the Gospel passage from Matthew presupposes the problem of worry, and, accordingly addresses itself to the worried individual. The prominent cause of this worry is the unhealthy act of comparison. Kierkegaard writes, 'in daily association with people, in the multifarious diversity and its various connections, one forgets through the busy or the worried inventiveness of comparison what it is to be a human being' (UDVS: 165). As the discourses proceed, the worry under scrutiny intensifies, as does the tendency for the entrapped individual to internalize the struggle and to resist help from others. Kierkegaard describes the cares thus, they 'penetrate into the soul', 'become fixed all the more firmly, and 'they give the strength of worry' (UDVS: 160, 183 & 201). This, in part, is the consequence of comparison. Other people's lives are transformed into a standard of measure which devastates or confirms one's self worth – this, in turn, creates a distrust of outside assistance. The 1847 discourses do not mince words with those who seem to benefit from superficial comparison; nevertheless, overall, they concentrate on

building up the individual who has been *crushed* by the effects of improper comparison with others, with God, and with the future.

Jolita Pons reiterates the misrelation between comparison and the quest for a true self: 'The major problem with comparison is that it makes one want to be someone else, which is contrary to the fullness of being – becoming oneself'.⁷² Moreover, Kierkegaard's attention to 'multifarious diversity' as a contributing factor to the comparison which generates discontentment may also flag the Romantic tendency to over-elevate difference. Stephen Dunning describes the effects of this thus: 'The consciousness of a person who, preoccupied with his or her own differences from others, forgets that to be a human being is both universally shared and deeper than all diversities'.⁷³ Similarly, according to Sylvia Walsh, 'making too much of diversities' leads us to 'regard ourselves as being so different from others' that we no longer remember what it is to be a human being.⁷⁴ In an early journal entry (1835) Kierkegaard already shows his interest in contemplating nature with regard to questions of diversity; he notes how, 'before my contemplative gaze, vanished the pettiness that so often causes offence in life, the many misunderstandings that so often separate persons of different temperament, who, if they understood one another properly, would be tied together with indissoluble bonds'.⁷⁵ Putting too much stress on diversity opens the door to the unwarranted care targeted in the discourse; it either demeans or over exalts the perception of the self on the basis of faulty criteria.

Turning to Matthew's text, Kierkegaard roots the concepts of comparison and discontentment in the admonition of 6:25: 'Therefore I say to you, do not worry about

⁷² Pons, "On Imitating the Inimitable: Example, Comparison, and Prototype," in *IKC: UDVS*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 189.

⁷³ Dunning, "Transformed by the Gospel," 115.

⁷⁴ Walsh, "If the Lily Could Speak," 140.

⁷⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse and University of Copenhagen, Vol. 1 (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 9.

your life, what you will eat and what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will wear'.⁷⁶ To clarify these connections he also offers a thought experiment on what it might look like if the lily or bird were to encounter a similar form of comparison-generated anxiety. By doing so he is elaborating on what it means to 'look at the bird' and to 'consider the lily'. In chapter five, I will more fully develop his comments on *how* to 'look' and 'consider', for now the main point is that in order to enter the world of the bird and lily envisioned by Kierkegaard, the reader must first separate from the temptation of comparison. He or she needs to get out into nature where 'there is unbroken silence; no one is present there, and everything is sheer persuasion' (UDVS: 161). Christian contentment begins with contemplation.

Contemplation and the Path to Contentment

Michael Casey, in his book on the practice of *lectio divina* says this about the mindset that sparks a need for sacred reading:

We are aware that God is not fully present to us – or that we are not fully present to God. It is this sense of divine absence that makes us search more diligently. Authentic reading, therefore, has the character of dissatisfaction . . . a patient receptivity may serve us better than a clamorous urgency to be enlightened.⁷⁷

Casey further connects this level of interaction to the practice of *contemplatio* - something he describes as a 'prolonged mutual presence that communicates to the disciple the spirit and style of the elder'.⁷⁸ In his case the elder represents either the writer of scripture or of revered devotional literature. Casey's ideas of 'dissatisfaction' and 'patient receptivity' help illuminate the movement called for by Kierkegaard wherein the discontented worrier puts himself in the place to receive a word from the lily and bird of

⁷⁶ All quotations from the Matthew text come from Kierkegaard's discourses; other biblical quotations are taken from the New King James Bible.

⁷⁷ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori: Liguori/Triumph Books, 1996), 8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

the Gospel. For Kierkegaard this includes a retreat into a setting of ‘quiet solemnity’ (*stille Høitidelighed*), and participation with the stillness (*Stilhed*) (UDVS: 162, 186). The worried person steps out of comparison-ridden society to sit at the feet of the master teachers, the lily and the bird.

The connection to contemplation is strengthened when Kierkegaard insists that:

Only if the person in distress actually gives his attention to the lilies and the birds and their life and forgets himself in contemplation of them and their life, while in his absorption in them he, unnoticed, by himself learns something about himself – unnoticed, since there is indeed sheer silence, no one present. The worried person is free of any and all co-knowledge, except God’s, his own – and the lilies (UDVS: 161-162).

The word ‘contemplation’ does not appear in the Danish; nevertheless, Kierkegaard captures the idea in the notions of ‘giving attention to’, ‘self-forgetfulness’, and, quite drastically, in the term translated ‘absorption’ (*Selvfortabelse*), which denotes self-forfeiture and could even be linked negatively to the concept of perdition. The individual is so existentially alone with nature (and God) that she does not even notice herself. To arrive at this state, ironically, means to become absolutely nothing before God, which is also to become a true self. His discussion of consciousness of worry and proper contemplation marks the start of his interpretation of Matthew 6:28-29: ‘Look at the lilies in the field, how they grow; they do not work, do not spin. But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed as one of these’. His reading continues with commentary on the wildness and beauty of the lilies, their lack of employment, the providence of the heavenly Father, and, finally, the superiority of the human being.

The Way of the Lily

Kierkegaard isolates each phrase of 6:28-29. Accordingly, he next draws attention to the wildness of the flowers of the field. This is in contrast to the garden varieties carefully tended by human hands; the wild flowers are ‘abandoned, unappreciated,

disregarded, [and] without human solicitude' (UDVS: 162). This seeming forlornness makes their beauty and the mysteriousness of 'how they grow' an attractive feature to a worried, forsaken human being. The providential care of their Creator provides the explanation. As Kierkegaard puts it, they have an unseen gardener who perfectly tends to all their needs: 'One who knows them just as intimately as the gardener knows the rare plants, one who attends to them every day . . . one who gives them growth' (UDVS: 163). The implications are clear, if the heavenly Father goes to this much trouble for a flower, how much more will he tend to human beings. As verse 6:30 states, 'would he not much more clothe you, you of little faith'? The worried person, through looking at the lily, is participating in a redemptive form of comparison that leads to knowledge of self and God. This favorable comparison develops further in Kierkegaard's remarks that though the lilies 'do not work or spin' they still produce a setting where 'the carpet is richer than in the halls of kings' (UDVS: 163). Once again the explanation for this is God. He adorns the lilies. This divine work with the wild flowers intimates a much more profound adornment of the human being which lies at the heart of genuine contentment.

Kierkegaard goes on to construe the Gospel's words about the lily as something feminine: 'The woman stays in the house, does not go out to seek the necessities of life; she stays at home, sews and spins, tries to keep everything as neat as possible: her daily occupation, her diligent labour, is most closely associated with adornment' (UDVS: 163). Though not completely free from activity, the scenario shows the woman (and the lily) as rooted and stationary – their most significant task is to make things beautiful. His comments also reveal how worry strikes at the heart of an individual's calling. Sylvia Walsh finds 'the gender allusions' problematic for women; specifically, she argues that 'in suggesting that the biblical text itself intends these associations, Kierkegaard invests them with a divine authorization that reinforces and helps to perpetuate gender

stereotypes which are detrimental to the upbuilding and advancement of women, if not for men also'.⁷⁹ She is right to address any presence of 'classism and sexism' in his reading and to challenge the notion that the passage champions the idea that 'adornment is (and should be) their [women] chief occupation in life'.⁸⁰ However, it is not necessarily objectionable that the first century text alludes to particularly female tasks.

New Testament scholar Ulrich Luz notes how the language of sewing definitively refers to women's work: 'The general term κοπιάω cannot be interpreted to mean a man's work'; from this premise he argues thus: 'If my overall interpretation of the text is correct, it supports the view that women also followed Jesus'.⁸¹ To be fair, Walsh's critique does not extend to the cultural setting of Matthew's Gospel; still, Luz's insights should provide encouragement and confirmation that the Gospel's use of metaphor intentionally speaks to women in a broader society that generally overlooked and neglected them. In the end, Kierkegaard's worry-countering message applies to both sexes; anyone can get caught up in activities connected with improving his or her image.

Kierkegaard concludes his reading of 6:28-29 by noting how closer inspection of the adornment of the lily reveals its surpassing greatness to the Old Testament prototype of glory, splendour, and wealth: King Solomon. He then makes the connection back to men and women: 'The lily, without working and spinning, is more beautiful than Solomon's glory; exactly in the same sense, this person, without working, without spinning, without any meritoriousness, is more glorious . . . by being a human being' (UDVS: 165). Before sewing and spinning to clothe and adorn oneself, an individual must rest in the reality that he or she is adorned by God – this is contentment and what it means to not worry about what you will wear. Kierkegaard takes everything back a step,

⁷⁹ Walsh, "If the Lily Could Speak," 138.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 343.

the foundation of work is not activity, but rest. Superficial comparison with others creates dissatisfaction, heightens the diversity in the world, and causes forgetfulness about the greater solidarity pronounced by the Gospel. To sharpen his point, he crafts a parable on the lily.

The Parable of the Lily

Through the fable of the lily (and subsequently the bird) Kierkegaard reiterates poetically the opposite natures of comparison and contentment. In the journals, he comments on the use of these stories: ‘It is not by chance that the fairy tale is used in the first discourse, for this is the way life is, especially when habit takes over – so far from the ideal that the ideal requirement must sound like a fairy tale. – Furthermore, all comparisons are avoided this way’ (quoted in UDVS: 390). The moral of the story is not well hidden; Kierkegaard wants to make people smile so that they may also open themselves up to the message on offer for Danish society. The jest of the story is not without earnestness. He realizes that some will mock his simplicity, to this he replies: ‘if he is so vexed that he defiantly and insultingly turns away from pure evangelical gentleness, then he is not earnest at all but rebellious. Even the sufferer ought to be able to listen sympathetically to an almost childlike but moving interpretation’ (quoted in UDVS: 391). As I mentioned earlier, the decision to approach the subject so softly comes, in part, from his conviction that Jesus, as teacher, momentarily did the same in his interaction with the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. Otherwise, Kierkegaard has no problem pointing out how the New Testament is strict when it comes to being weighed down by worry and earthly cares.

In the beginning, a flower lived quietly by the stream and thistles, content with the ‘Gospel’s truthful account’ that it was more beautifully dressed than Solomon. This all

changed with the frequent visits of a garrulous bird.⁸² He chattered about greater freedom, better fields and more luxurious lilies, always concluding the dialogue ‘with the comment, humiliating to the lily, that in comparison with that kind of glory the lily looked like nothing – indeed, it was so insignificant that it was a question whether the lily actually had a right to be called a lily’ (UDVS: 167). Kierkegaard shows here the potential for discontentment, boredom, and worry when an individual gets information on the good life from the wrong source – the lily fell in love with the wrong bird and with the impossible possibility it held out to the flower. This sparked a self-dialogue in the lily and ‘it convinced itself that the worry was proper’ (UDVS: 168). Its behaviour at the end of the fable patterns the concept of sin and despair found in *Sickness Unto Death*: The lily willed not to be itself and, at the same time, willed to be itself for self-glorification. It asked the bird to pluck it and carry it to better ground with the belief that, there, it would blossom into the envy of all else around. Tragically, it withered and died along the way.

Pattison, through discussion about a newly constructed amusement park in Kierkegaard’s day, Tivoli Gardens, grants insight into the cultural application of the fable: ‘The inhabitants of this provincial market-town were able to experience and to participate in the life of the metropolitan crowd, to lose themselves in it, whether as spectators or as making themselves into the objects of others’ stares, seeing and being seen in the mode of the urban spectacle’.⁸³ With this in mind, the parable offers a latent critique of the ‘see and be seen’ phenomenon of nineteenth-century Copenhagen. In view of this, the bird, with its description of the distant field of beautiful, Crown Imperials might also represent an industrious, world traveler trying to lure Copenhagen outside itself in order to become the likes of Paris or London. The lily (and Copenhagen) was

⁸² Contrast this talkativeness with the earlier comments on stillness and the discourse on silence in the 1849 discourses; in the latter piece, the issue of speech and the superiority of silence emerge as the central theme.

⁸³ Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64.

relatively isolated, though not without being well known to a few surrounding nettles and flowers. If this parallel fits at all, it reveals a layer of the story that addresses the cultural war of his day between remaining a market town and becoming cosmopolitan. Regardless, Pattison's description of 'seeing and being seen' helps pinpoint the mechanism which generates the discontentment of the discourse.

Sylvia Walsh finds a modern application of the fable beyond the intentions of Kierkegaard:

The parable exposes and condemns the maltreatment of women by men, and the potentially destructive consequences of worry over comparisons with other women for female self-identity and contentment, it contains a powerfully illuminating insight and warning for women in particular, but also for men in its depiction of male seduction of women as a pathology of their sex.⁸⁴

In addition to her challenging words against the wrong path to true identity, her allusions to men's guilt in this destructive comparison stem from Kierkegaard's description of the bird as 'the poet, the seducer' (UDVS: 170). A fruitful question arises from her study: 'Who or what might Kierkegaard have in mind in this portrayal of the wicked bird'? For one, this negative evaluation of one whom he names 'poet' could have been received in his day as a critique of Romanticism and its insistence that aesthetic possibility is greater than actuality. Kierkegaard does not reject the value of possibility; instead, he condemns poetic fancy which holds out what is impossible, the lily wishes what can never come true. Consequently, its activity consists in moving away from the highest *telos*, to exist as a flower in the forest watched over by God. As David Possen notes, the poet-seducer comes along to flatter the 'fantasy that the highest value in human life is to be found in aesthetic distinctions among individuals'.⁸⁵ Pursuit of these distinctions brings restlessness and perpetuates the myth that the activity of relocation (self-transplanting) will bring happiness. For modern times, this speaks against the excessive energy, time,

⁸⁴ Walsh, "If the Lily Could Speak," 142.

⁸⁵ Possen, "Faith's Freedom from Care," 159.

and resources exerted on ‘improving’ one’s external appearance in order to fit whichever cultural composite is most en vogue. In line with the biblical orientation of the discourses, another promising allusion for the tale is found by connecting them to the opening chapters of the book of Genesis and its primordial account of contentment and the loss of contentment.

Discontentment and Comparison in the Garden of Eden

The composite sketch of shallow comparison, the destructive activity it causes, and the teaching from the fable pull together Kierkegaard’s reading of verse 6:25: ‘Do not worry about what you will wear’. His story grounds contentment in the Bible’s teaching that human beings are created in the image of God, a topic taken up more fully in the second discourse in the collection. It also overlaps with the account of the creation, fall, and recreation of Adam and Eve recorded in Genesis 1-3. The wicked bird of the fable represents the tempter, the demonic which deceives an individual into rejecting God’s assessment of his or her life. Struggle arose for the lily with the appearance of competing voices, the Gospel and the evil bird, and a choice had to be made between the two sources of information. Turning to the narrative in Genesis 3, one finds a similar scene. The serpent stirs up discontentment by offering new, alternative realities contrary to the word of God and the existence he provided for Adam and Eve. Following Walsh’s feminist critique this especially illuminates the parallels present between Eve and the lily. Each are female images in a pristine, natural setting, who, deceived by the trickery of comparison, experience death (spiritual/physical) and expulsion from their idyllic locales. Eve was active when she needed to choose rest; her decision stemmed from anxiety over becoming something she was not – possessor of the knowledge of good and evil. Just before they are removed from paradise, Adam and Eve together fail miserably in the first

attempt at self-adornment. Consequently, as Hans Dieter Betz notes, ‘God himself must come and instruct the first humans in how they can obtain better clothes’.⁸⁶

Clothing covers nakedness but it cannot cure worry. One also needs reminded about the human being’s first layer of clothing; that is, the image of God. Returning to Matthew, Kierkegaard argues in such a way that the passage must be speaking of a deeper aspect of image and appearance. Instead of coming to instruct merely on how they can obtain better clothes, Jesus comes, by way of the lilies to remind of the greater clothing already possessed. In this first movement from worrisome activity to contentment, Kierkegaard establishes the foundation of tasks that involve aesthetic adornment; these duties constitute work, and, as will be shown, are good. However, adornment, enacted out of ungodly comparison, must be dealt with. The second discourse elaborates on the connection of God’s clothing to the doctrine of *imago Dei* and the gift of work. This solidifies the relationship between his reading of Matthew and the opening chapters of Genesis. An individual caught in comparison must cease with that type of striving and, like the lily, revel in the truth that he is amply adorned by God. A look at his treatment of the bird in the first discourses now follows. While the expression of worry varies from the lily, the message to cease striving and to rest in providence remains the same.

The Way of the Bird

Discussion now moves to the bird and Kierkegaard’s exegesis of 6:26: ‘Look at the birds of the air; they sow not and reap not and gather not into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them’. Like he did with the passage on the lilies, he provides a phrase by phrase explanation of the text. As creatures ‘of the air’, the birds cannot

⁸⁶ Hans Dieter Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 113.

participate in the farming activities of the text. ‘They live without temporality’s foresight, unaware of time, in the moment,’ says Kierkegaard; sowing, reaping, and gathering are part of the language of ‘the work of foresight’ (UDVS: 172). Like the wild flower, there is no mistaking who it is that takes care of the bird of the air – the heavenly Father; no one else looks after their needs. God is the farmer who feeds them from the storehouses of the earth. Herein lies the fitting comparison and consolation for the person worried about making a living: ‘the heavenly Father also feeds the creatures who do sow and harvest and gather into barns . . . the one who supports himself should learn from the birds of the air that it nevertheless is the heavenly Father who feeds him’ (UDVS: 173). To solidify his point, he tells a second tale, this time about a worried wood-dove.

The Parable of the Wood-Dove

The second fable chronicles a conversation between two tame doves and a wood-dove. At first the wild bird is basing its life on the Gospel; before long, however, the apparent ease the other two birds, along with their confidence in their farmer’s storehouse of grain, trick it into comparison and worry seizes its life. Discontentment grows. The wild bird curses its existence and seeks certainty about future provisions; after failing at storing up enough for the days ahead, it finally decides to sneak into the dovecote with the two tame doves, assuming the farmer will take care of it as well. Kierkegaard describes the metamorphosis of the once contented bird thus: ‘it had undergone a big change; it was far from suffering actual need, but it had acquired an *idea* of need in the future. It had lost its peace of mind – it had acquired *worry about making a living*’ (UDVS: 175). Undisciplined imagination and blatant disregard for the past faithfulness of the heavenly Father brought about unhealthy comparison, not just with the well-off doves, but with tomorrow; accordingly, the wood-dove ‘grieved because it never dared to

speak with certainty about the next day' (UDVS: 180). Its activity of finding enough food for each day became tainted by the thought that it might so improve its situation that it would no longer have to confront a daily uncertainty of provision.

In the 1848 discourses, discussed in the next chapter, Kierkegaard addresses the situation of the rich, those who do have an overabundance stored up for the days to come. He challenges the notion that barns full of goods can actually equate to certainty about the next day. In the present discourse, uncertainty ought to encourage faith in the *greatest* certainty: 'The heavenly Father will surely feed me tomorrow' (UDVS: 180). This unflappable repose in providence defines the confidence called for by the discourse; it reiterates Jesus' chastisement of the disciples when he describes them as 'you of little faith' (6:28). Trust in God seems prosaic beside a warehouse full of material provision; nevertheless, it is the only way out of this form of worry. As Jacob Golomb points out, 'for Kierkegaard passion and uncertainty are interrelated; the greater the uncertainty, the more passion it demands'.⁸⁷ Applied to this fable, Golomb's insight is another way of saying that an undetermined future equals freedom. Dialectically it creates the moment of faith (passion) or, if mismanaged, it opens the door to a practical paganism that manifests in workaholic tendencies, greed, hoarding, selfishness, and misery. As a New Testament scholar notes, '[people] seek to make up for the lack of faith by activity or diligence, but it's never enough'.⁸⁸ 'The worried wood-dove feared to be completely dependent on God and therefore ceased to be independent' says Kierkegaard (UDVS: 181-182). Caught between fear of lack and fear that the Gospel cannot deliver it went into a tail spin, in the language of *The Concept of Anxiety*, it became 'dizzy'.

⁸⁷ Jacob Golomb, "Kierkegaard's Ironic Ladder to Authentic Faith," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 32, no. 2 (1992).

⁸⁸ Ben Witherington, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 153.

This earlier work gives a different perspective on the two types of certainty Kierkegaard contrasts in the story of the wood-dove; in particular, he explores the relationship between freedom, spiritual dizziness, and faith. Pseudonym Vigilius Haufnensis speaks thus about the relationship between anxiety and freedom: ‘Anxiety is the dizziness⁸⁹ of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself’ (CA: 61). This statement helps illuminate the message of the bird. Everyone needs food, drink, and clothing; dizziness occurs when one realizes how these needs create contrasting possibilities in our relationship toward God, work, others, and the future. When chasing or clinging to possessions, and not faith, characterizes life, the very freedom that appeared is replaced by bondage and a ‘laying hold of finiteness’, instead of the heavenly Father.

Returning to the discourse, the quest to be one’s ‘own providence for all his life or perhaps merely for tomorrow’ equates to unlawful comparison with God and tries to gain exemption from being the object of God’s providence’ (UDVS: 178). This is what it means to worry about food and drink. To borrow again from the terminology of *Sickness Unto Death*, in despair before God the wood-dove willed to be itself – independent, self-sufficient, certain about tomorrow, in despair before God it willed not to be itself – dependent, created, trusting. According to Kierkegaard, anyone who acts this way has ‘trapped himself unto death’ (UDVS: 178). The wood-dove, in the end, coveted the existence of the tame birds, snuck into the dovecote to secure his future, and, upon being discovered by the farmer, he was put to death. Despite the sad ending, the discourse ultimately holds out hope. The primary step away from worry about material care

⁸⁹ Related to this dizziness is Kierkegaard’s idea in *SUD* that sin is disequilibrium; dizziness is psychological imbalance; despair is spiritual imbalance; it is ‘the inability of the self to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and rest by itself’ (16).

involves remaining in the position where the heavenly Father has placed an individual. Before summarizing the discussion on contentment, I want to entertain one other potential rendering of the parable of the wood-dove.

Mynster and the Parable of the Wood-Dove

Viewed through the lens of Kierkegaard's conflicted relationship with Bishop Mynster, the story may also contain a cautious critique of the latter's blending of materialism and Christianity. Kierkegaard says this about the Bishop: 'Mynster has proclaimed true Christianity but – in an un-Christian way – has derived great advantage from it, has enjoyed all the good things of life because of it, has gained enormous prestige, and also has ingratiated himself by making Christianity into “the gentle comfort” etc.' (JFY: 254). Furthermore, he offers the following comments about the characters represented by the farmer's doves: 'An almost comic light falls on the rich doves that strut around and also an ethical accent, that they are the very ones who have the worry about making a living' (UDVS: 391).⁹⁰ Following this interpretation, the tame doves represent the clergy provided for by the State (the farmer); in its anxiety, the wild bird almost comes to its senses about the fate of the other two: ““It may well be,” it said to itself, “that the tame doves pay dearly for their secure living; it may well be that when all is said and done they have many worries from which I have been free until now, but this security for the future keeps running in my mind”” (UDVS: 176). It is not hard to imagine the parallels between this and Kierkegaard's own relationship to the pastorate and the security it held out to him.

⁹⁰ From another angle, Kierkegaard posits that the tame doves, in addition to standing for the arrogance of wealth, point to the ideal of the text, a confirmed experience of trust and dependence on the good farmer (UDVS: 177).

There is also the issue of the farmer putting the wild bird to death. Granted, this puts a harsh spin on this line of interpretation; nevertheless, it is possible that Kierkegaard realized that with Mynster in power, he would only be made an example of, and selling his integrity for a living would amount to the death of his true self. Later in the same collection he gives further expression to his stance on these matters through his praise of the Apostle Paul; Kierkegaard puts the following words in his mouth: 'I have not earned one penny by proclaiming the Word, I have not married money by becoming an Apostle . . . I have not been exempted from any arduousness of life, nor have I through preferential treatment been barred from any of its advantages' (UDVS: 200). For sure, his relationship to Mynster is not the only, or even the best lens through which one may read the material. Nonetheless, this possibility could clarify ways the complex issues of his personal life contributed to his repeated study of the text and how he maintains a combination of pastoral and polemical approaches to the text.

Summary of Discourse One

Kierkegaard's exegesis of Matthew's text conveys two related pictures of contentment. For those concerned about image and appearance, the beauty of the lily offers an education away from the deception of glamour, status, and reputation. Likewise, the bird offers wisdom for those making a living, especially when such activity stems from worry about making ends meet. Kierkegaard does not condemn the act of providing for self and family; instead, he wishes to lay the foundation from which this work should flow. Everyone has material care, just as every individual has an image. When a person looks around at another's standard of living and wealth in order to determine his or her own needs, worry begins; in addition, the activity of making a living takes a wrong turn when it operates as a response to comparison with the uncertainty of tomorrow and the

temptation to store up treasures. Both expressions reveal the root problem of striving to be self-sufficient: ‘The human being is not contented with being a human being but wants to compare himself to God, wants to have a security by himself, which no human dares to have, and therefore this security is in fact – worry about making a living’ (UDVS: 178). Work, while it certainly brings in income to purchase the necessities of life, is not the first stage of dealing with the possibility of worry.

Common ground exists between Kierkegaard’s interpretation of the text and the work of modern scholarship, especially insofar as his exegesis addresses a frequent critique of this section of Matthew’s Gospel; namely, that the writer seems to offer the reader ‘a charter for laziness’.⁹¹ Like the majority of modern Sermon on the Mount scholarship, Kierkegaard promotes faith that is neither irresponsible nor idle; instead he writes, ‘it is certainly praiseworthy and pleasing to God that a person sows and reaps and gathers into barns, that he works in order to obtain food’ (UDVS: 177). Dale Allison responds to the same possible critique that Matthew 6:25-34 is a ‘religious flight from solid reality’ and an encouragement for ‘people to belittle or abandon work’.⁹² Using the broader context of the Gospel, Allison tempers these misguided readings by showing how, elsewhere, Jesus does instruct about the future and that the providential care of the heavenly Father does not exempt the disciple from suffering in an evil world. In Kierkegaard’s construal of the text, work flows from faith. This is the logic of the discourses; he first lays the foundation necessary for contentment: God provides everything. Then he is able to construct a model of the activity that springs from this base.

⁹¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2007), 268.

⁹² Allison, *Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 151.

David Possen comments how the origin of the cares of the first discourse ‘derive, in particular from our all-too-human habit of comparison: our way of measuring ourselves and our attainments by the beauty, quality, or pleasure we perceive in others and in their attainments’.⁹³ Efforts to gain contentment through favorable self-assessment and a less favorable assessment of others place a person on the merry-go-round of comparison and lead to a spiritual dizziness. The source of lasting contentment is the word of Jesus that equality trumps diversity. It is a shared humanity that represents something immutable and infinitely lovelier than an image obtained from the ever changing externalities of life. Provision comes from God, who takes care of human beings need for inner and outer nourishment and attire. To participate in this is to participate in ‘the essentially equal glory among all human beings’ (UDVS: 171). Kierkegaard’s concept of contentment provides a condensed version of his reading of Matthew wherein he proposes that good theology fosters worry-free living, a move he continues to make throughout the Matthew writings. As discussion moves to the next discourse, he expands on the foundation of contentment through an exploration of the gloriousness of human beings and the types of action that complement stillness and repose in the heavenly Father.

Discourse Two: How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being

A Godly Diversion

In the second discourse, ‘How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being’, Kierkegaard commences with a declaration: ‘The Gospel says: Divert your mind’ (UDVS: 184). Worry distracts. To be free from worry requires a ‘godly diversion, which does not, like the empty and worldly diversion, incite impatience and nourish the worry, but diverts,

⁹³ Possen, "Faith's Freedom from Care," 158.

calms, and persuades the more devoutly one gives oneself over to it' (UDVS: 184). Moreover, with godly diversion 'the persuasion mounts with every instant; more and more movingly it steals the temporal from you; with every moment you continue to contemplate it, that which ought to be forgotten sinks into deeper and deeper oblivion' (UDVS: 185). The term 'diversion' (*Adspredelse*) might also be used in Danish to connote recreation, amusement, or past-time. This is how Kierkegaard employs it especially in his description of counterfeit cures for care which are empty, worldly, foolish, fast-paced, and loud (UDVS: 183).⁹⁴ Such remedies are short-lived and exacerbate the worry in the end. Coming from the verb *at sprede* the term may also include the idea of spreading out, scattering, dispersing, and dispelling. These better capture the goal of a godly diversion. Distraction for distraction's sake alone provides no lasting *content* to do battle with the enemy of worry; instead, it leaves the house swept, but empty and allows the demons to regroup and reoccupy in an even worse way (Mt 12:43-45). Accordingly, the bird and lily sidetrack the worrier with two contrasting characteristics: the beauty of life, the subject of discourse two, and the reality of death, the subject of the final piece. These features indicate nature's immediacy and temporality; afterward, with the aid of reflection, these opposites transcend immediacy and lead into enduring truths that put away the cares addressed in Matthew's text. Kierkegaard focuses the introductory words on godly diversion; with the mind and eyes clear and the worry cast aside, the individual is now prepared to think about something more important – namely, how glorious it is to be a human being. The first discourse established God as the adorer and provider and called for a ceasing of striving; these

⁹⁴ Kierkegaard chose fireworks as his negative example of empty/godless diversions. This serves as a second reference to the activities of Tivoli Gardens, where fireworks frequently occurred. While this sort of entertainment may provide a form of self-forgetfulness, in the end such diversions fall prey to the law of diminishing returns. For a more thorough study of its effects on Copenhagen see Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*.

realities are turned over again and coupled with the glorious thoughts of this discourse and proper activity ensues.

Gloriousness and the Lily

His discussion on the lily and the concept of gloriousness revolves around Matthew 6:30 'If, then, God so clothes the grass of the field . . . would he not much more clothe you, you of little faith'. Kierkegaard's intentional omission of the middle section on the transience of the flower is treated in the later discussion on temporality and death. Here, Kierkegaard wants to explore the manner in which the heavenly Father clothes the human being. He puts it succinctly: 'To be clothed, then, means to be a human being – and therefore well clothed' (UDVS: 188). This is really just a recapitulation of where he left off in the previous discourse. He continues: 'All that I am by being a human being – *that* is my clothing. I am responsible for none of it, but glorious it is' (UDVS: 191-192). To elaborate further on this 'glory', Kierkegaard 'concentrate[s] everything on that one single verse that Scripture itself uses with authority: *God created the human being in his image*' (UDVS: 192). Distinct from Solomon's glory and the lily's beauty, this glory is an invisible glory; it is what it means to be spirit, and it endows humanity with privileges not conferred upon the rest of the created order.

To arrive at this reading, Kierkegaard exegetes the text thus: 1) the lily is better clothed than Solomon in his kingly attire, 2) Jesus tells the disciples God will much more clothe them, 3) for this to be the case, by clothing, Jesus must have in mind something more than just material goods, 4) otherwise, in order to be better dressed than the lily, the promise must be that the followers will receive fancier material clothing than Solomon. 'Would it not be a discrepancy,' asks Kierkegaard, 'if the last part was to be interpreted to mean the few pieces of clothing a person may need' (UDVS: 188)? The theological

depth of his reading is significant; nevertheless, Kierkegaard goes too far by completely overlooking the temporal dimensions of the passage. Lack of clothing would have been a real possibility for the original audience, which would have included itinerant missionaries and disciples. Nevertheless, this interpretation generates a conversation on the appropriate activity attached to the terminology of gloriousness. It also marks the first of several expressions of *artful living* found in the Matthew discourses. Artful living, in this context, refers to a movement related to the gloriousness of being *imago Dei*; it is a shift from a God-given status shared by every human being to genuine living in the kingdom of God.

Artful Living: From Dominion to Worship

After presenting his case that Matthew's discussion on the lily connects to the idea of *imago dei*, he follows by discussing the call to have dominion over the earth, an activity intimately associated with bearing the image of God (Gen. 1:28). While this high status says much about the gloriousness of human beings, it is still not the culmination of existence; it is the gateway to artful living. The first expression of subduing the earth, in Genesis 1-3, entailed gardening, a developing of the land in a way that enhances and beautifies the world. Put another way, to rule is to adorn; but this is not the final stop. Beyond this there lies the superiority of worship. To accentuate the point Kierkegaard contrasts the possibility of ruling and worship from a physiological perspective: 'The upright gait is the sign of distinction, but to be able to prostrate oneself in adoration and worship is even more glorious; and all nature is like the great staff of servants who remind the human being, the ruler, about worshipping God' (UDVS: 193).⁹⁵ To govern the earth is a privilege and part of a human being's dignity; nevertheless, if the

⁹⁵ Further reference to the distinctly human ability to stand upright is found in Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 474 n. 395.

gloriousness stops there, without taking stock of the greater wonder of worship, the problem of power/status related worry surfaces. To worship God is not only the highest calling of the human being it also keeps a check and balance on the task of ruling and subduing. This leads to a synthesis of sorts. Contentment and rest combine with activity and ruling to culminate in worship. 'To worship is not to rule', says Kierkegaard, 'and yet worship is what makes the human being resemble God, and to be able truly to worship is the excellence of the invisible glory above all creation' (UDVS: 193).

This resemblance is not like for like, as if God worshipped too; it is an inverse relationship. It is tempting to favor ruling as the better reflection of God but this only draws attention to how great a difference there is between earthly rule and God's reign. Looked at from another angle, worship operates as imitation of God insofar as it reciprocates God's initial act of adorning human beings. Worship contributes to clothing God in majesty; it adds to his splendour. An example of this is found in the Book of Revelation where the twenty-four elders lay their crowns before Jesus; at the end of the Revelation (19:12) John has a vision of the Rider on the white horse (Christ) whose head is covered with many crowns. Having considered the lily, it is now time to contemplate Kierkegaard's elaboration on the bird and what it teaches about the gloriousness of humanity and, ultimately, about living artfully.

Gloriousness and the Bird

In the discussion of the bird, Kierkegaard begins to undermine its ability to signify the truth in light of its inability to genuinely experience the dangers of worry. Because the bird does not sow, reap, and gather, it cannot experience the possibility of worry; contrariwise, for humans, 'it is certainly more truthful to say that it is a perfection to recognize the danger, to face up to the danger, to be awake, to say that it is a perfection

to be able to have worry about making a living' (UDVS: 194). The bird as a pattern falls short due to its lack of existential qualification. Kierkegaard capitalizes on this by diverting his audience to the prototype of worry-free living, Jesus Christ. The lesson comes full circle. The worried one remembers 'that the one who referred him to the bird . . . is the very one who in earnestness and in truth . . . is the prototype of the essential human perfection' (UDVS: 197). The reading turns to Christology. Jesus is the premier example of one most prone to the worry of making a living, and the one who most profoundly lived free from care. Kierkegaard's comments here are brief, not until the 1848 collection on worry does the reader encounter a fully developed Christological application of the text. In order to tease out the second major aspect of gloriousness, Kierkegaard uses the bird to remind the worried individual of the perfection of work.

Artful Living: From Working to Co-Working

Matthew's text on the inactivity of the bird represents another way of stating that the bird does not work (UDVS: 197). As a model of one who un-meritoriously receives the bounty of God, the bird excels. Instruction on work, the flip side of trusting in providence, remains outside its expertise. God grants provision and he also ordains the proper means to provision. Out of this comes a Christian ethic of work: 'To work is a human being's perfection. By working human beings resemble God, who indeed also works'; to fully synthesize the rest and activity, Kierkegaard takes it a step further for the Christian, who, instead of supporting himself, is 'God's co-worker' (UDVS: 199). In a communion sermon on Luke 24:51 he elaborates on this idea of working with God: 'Whatever a person is going to undertake, whether the work is great and significant or lowly and insignificant, he is able to do nothing if God does not give his blessing' (CD: 297). This reveals the importance of the first lesson from the bird on absolute

dependence; it is certainly true in a technical sense that countless individuals accomplish much without any interest in being a co-worker with God. For Kierkegaard, labour unapproved by God or done in independence of God is unsuccessful. He calls the reader to ‘godly undertakings’ and ‘the more decisively it is a godly undertaking and the more clearly a person is aware that what he has in mind is a godly undertaking, the more clearly and deeply he also feels that he needs the blessing and that it is futile if God does not bless it’ (CD: 297). The same is true with making a living. Birds have their own glory insofar as they do not participate in their own provision and yet are blessed by God. The gloriousness attached to artful living, i.e. co-working with God, is qualitatively different. Work is performed with the approval of and in participation with the heavenly Father.

Kierkegaard also understands work to be an ontological necessity, not merely a temporal necessity. The lazy one who dreads or avoids vocation and the wealthy whose net worth grants exemption from labour both have an impoverished existence. They never realize their highest potential. Implicit in his argument is the idea that obtainment of one’s ‘dream job’ is not enough to guarantee job satisfaction; it must have as its foundation an ontologically based theology of work. Kierkegaard closes the discourse by employing the Apostle Paul as a prototypical expression of what a life looks like that puts into practice Matthew’s message on work. In particular, Kierkegaard is attracted to the Apostle’s boundless energy, his rejoicing in hardship and persecution, and, most of all his unwillingness to take support from his congregations (UDVS: 199-200). I mentioned earlier how the sum portrait of the Apostle may also have laid down a critique of Bishop Mynster. Similarly, it might have extended to an upper class view of work in his day that despised manual labour. More poignant than this, however, is the message that kingdom work is not about money or ease, and it is not a means to a temporal end – it is about getting your hands dirty and it brings to life perfection and indefatigable joy.

Summary of Discourse Two

The discourse on the gloriousness of human beings grounds the message of Matthew in two bedrocks of Jewish-Christian theology: *imago Dei* and work. Accordingly, Kierkegaard's interpretation reminds the reader of his or her status and task in the world – each of these are also vulnerable to the assault of worry. In the first discourse it was shown how, if carried out in a state of worry, the acts of adornment and work stand in the way of kingdom living. Moreover, the discussion on contentment emphasized God's role in clothing and providing. In the present discourse he highlights the human being's participation in these undertakings and then refocuses it around the call for artful living. To rule and subdue is glorious, to worship is even more so, and, as an act that acknowledges the true source of power and authority, it displays the highest possibility for those entrusted with the care of creation. The same point is made when Kierkegaard describes work as a human being's perfection, which, even when performed in mediocrity, resembles the activity of God. Beyond this he implies a further progression that moves from work to co-working *with* God and illustrates it through his treatment of the Apostle Paul. Adorning and working need their counterparts of rest and contentment in order to attain to artful living: the invisible glory of the image of God combines with the visible glory of dominion in worship; the unseen working of the heavenly Father combines with the seen work of a human being to make a co-worker with God. In rest and dependence the invisible part of humans gives expression to the physical part; in worship and co-working, the physical body gives expression to the spiritual nature of human beings. For the final discourse Kierkegaard shifts to two as of yet unexplored sections of Matthew's text in order to define what it means to be blessedly happy.

Discourse Three: What Blessed Happiness Is Promised in Being a Human Being

From Diversion to Earnestness

In the final 1847 discourse the bird and lily become object lessons on the inevitability of death, decay, and temporality in the world. Continuing the idea of diversion, Kierkegaard explains how their fleeting existence can grab the attention of a committed worrier, create sympathy in him for nature, and turn him toward the proper earnestness of life (UDVS: 201). This self-forgetfulness and compassion is the first step toward the blessed happiness under consideration. Kierkegaard links the pathos of creation to Matthew's description of the life cycle of the lily and the bird (Mt. 6:30, 10:29). In particular, the lily, as that which once delighted the eye, now withers, decays, and returns to the earth or serves as fuel for an oven. It departs unknown, undistinguished, and forgotten. Sympathy for the sorrow of nature results in a breakdown in the diverted individual: 'The worried one sinks into sadness, things darken before his eyes, nature's beauty pales, the bird's song becomes as silent as the grave, decay will swallow everything' (UDVS: 203). The pathos is accentuated by the ambiguity of nature. One cannot tell, as he gazes on it, whether he is contemplating life or death. Kierkegaard takes Matthew's words on the decomposing lily in an unexpected direction; he construes them as an announcement of 'death's earnest reminder of death'; moreover, he raises the question of which is more gripping on a worried person: the permanence of death or the fact that it appears, like the lily, 'clothed in loveliness' (UDVS: 203). Out of this new expression of sadness there blossoms the possibility of breakthrough.

The reality of death, which is observable in nature, helps open the worrying person up to hearing the earnest words of the Gospel, which, though a tough pill to swallow, bring the promise of blessed happiness. Recognition that everyone dies can

prompt a person to be concerned about the right things, God and his kingdom, and to exert energy in light of them. It is too late for nature. It is not too late for the human being. Having first distracted the worrier with the bird and lily, Kierkegaard now dismisses them in light of weightier matters:

One can speak in many ways about the lilies and the birds; one can speak gently, movingly, ingratiatingly, fondly, almost as a poet speaks, and a human being also may speak this way, may coax the worried one. But when the Gospel speaks authoritatively, it speaks with the earnestness of eternity; then there is no more time to dwell dreamily over the lily or longingly to follow the bird – a brief, an instructive reference to the lily and the bird, but then the eternal requirement of earnestness (UDVS: 204).⁹⁶

The earnestness of death is the final lesson from the birds and lilies. It is not, however, as vital as the earnestness of eternity. To be awakened to the reality of death is also to be awakened to the possibility of worrying about death, which actually overshadows the other expressions of care in Matthew's text. To confront this care, Kierkegaard insists first that a person must own up to it. Otherwise, the need for the Gospel's remedy will never arise. He compares this to a person who knows he is sick and, instead of wanting to be coddled by the doctor, demands to hear the full diagnosis (UDVS: 204). With the help of the natural world, the worried one embarks on a journey from self-absorption, to concern over the fleeting flowers and birds, to the Gospel: 'So it also holds true of the rigorous words of earnestness that in earnestness and truth they give the worried one something different from his worry to think about' (UDVS: 204). Kierkegaard's transition from nature to the 'eternal requirement' is initiated with an interpretation of Matthew 6:24: 'No one can serve two masters, for he must either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon'.

⁹⁶ Pattison captures this thought well: 'Kierkegaard allows us to rest in the contemplation of natural innocence only long enough to gather our energies for a further venturing on the road to consciously-chosen selfhood'. *Kierkegaard, the Aesthetic and the Religious: From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 166.

No One Can Serve Two Masters . . .

The earnestness of eternity maintains that divided loyalty is impossible in the kingdom of God. Kierkegaard rejects possible challenges to the veracity of the statement ‘no one can serve two masters’; he states, ‘there can be no doubt about which two are referred to . . . the question cannot be about human relationships’ (UDVS: 204). In other words, God and mammon are the two loyalties being discussed by Matthew and there is no sense in quibbling over whether or not, in another context, serving more than one master can occur. While modern Matthew scholarship does offer cases from the ancient times where loyalty to two masters happened without loss of self, never does anyone question what this verse has in mind. Nevertheless, there is an appeal in Kierkegaard’s comment that such ‘observations’ remain outside the scope of the text, it is a kind of superfluous detail that risks distracting the reader of the commentary.⁹⁷ His reading moves from the question of ultimate loyalty to the next part of the verse: ‘He must either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other’. Kierkegaard describes Matthew’s words as ‘the colossal point of contention . . . this is the place where the most terrible struggle carried on in the world must be fought’; the location of the battle is a person’s ‘innermost being’ (UDVS: 205). Live for God or live for money. In this struggle there exists no middle ground where the two can come together in some form of agreement. The amount of money makes no difference; an individual can hate and despise God over a penny or because of millions of pounds. By putting things thus, Kierkegaard intimates that it would actually be more insulting for the poor to reject God than the wealthy. Either way ‘the struggle is over the highest and everything is at stake’ (UDVS: 205). Verse 6:24 sets the terms for the most important either/or in the universe, it also implies that every human being has the possibility of

⁹⁷ Davies and Allison, for example, point out instances where the ‘statement is not, strictly speaking, true’. *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 641.

obtaining the highest and of squandering the highest for mammon. This unfolds in a section on the human being's unique ability to choose God – this is the promise of blessed happiness.

The Blessedness of the Capacity to Choose

Birds and lilies exist for the glory of God and their natural submission is a form of perfection. As already noted, they exalt God without the temptation of worry, which also represents their lesser status than human beings. Kierkegaard elaborates especially on their lack of freedom. Compared to human beings, they are 'bound in necessity and have no choice' (UDVS: 205). The superiority of every human being is found in his or her faculty of choice in the realm of relationship with God. Just as soon as Kierkegaard acknowledges this freedom, he shows its limitations in light of the Gospel passage, which allows for only two choices, God or the world. God and mammon are unequal options and blessedness only comes to the one who has chosen properly (UDVS: 205-206). At first sight, his comments look as if they align with a strong volitionalism. Before jumping to that conclusion, the reader ought to proceed further into his description of the faculty of choice; additionally, read against other sections of the Matthew writings, a more nuanced viewpoint emerges. A discussion of choice fits well with the text. Kierkegaard goes beyond its context in order to enumerating various aspects; to begin, it is precious wealth and it is meant to be spent:

A choice – it is indeed the glorious treasure, but it is not intended to be buried and concealed, because an unused choice is worse than nothing, is a snare in which the person trapped himself like a slave who did not become free – by choosing. It is a good you never can get rid of, it stays with you and, if you do not use it, as a curse (UDVS: 206).

Postponement or evasion of the proper choice in the realm of religion is a form of self-enslavement and, when left too long it amounts to tacit rejection of the good. As Kierkegaard states, 'if a person avoids choosing, this is the same as the blasphemy of

choosing the world' (UDVS: 207). His strong position sounds strikingly similar to Luther who wrote: 'with regard to God, and in all that bears on salvation or damnation, he [an individual] has no 'free-will', but is a captive, prisoner and bond-slave, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan'.⁹⁸ Similarly, the attempt to choose both as master is the same as not choosing, which, as just noted, means choosing the world. Choice resembles the ability to rule and to work insofar as all three capacities are shared by those who bear the *imago dei*. Unlike the other two, it is also an unavoidable responsibility. God maintains his honour in this way; though he stoops in order to stand as one of the choices, he also makes sure that non-decision cannot occur.

The infinite possibilities afforded by the faculty of choice are tempered and limited by the reality of the kingdom of God. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the condescension of God in becoming an object of choice on par with mammon also carries Christological overtones. Matthew's Jesus presents two options to the listener of the Sermon; in so doing, he actually presents himself – a visible human being – as the God to be chosen. Kierkegaard recognizes the uncomfortable feel of this doctrine among some of his contemporaries; namely those with tendencies to distance God from any such humiliation. He writes, 'that kind of talk, which through loftiness would prevent God from letting himself be chosen, is blasphemy, which in a polite way tries to get God put outside . . . to place a crown of thorns on his head and spit on him is blasphemy, but to make God so lofty that his existence becomes a delusion, becomes meaningless – that, too, is blasphemy' (UDVS: 208). This captures in miniature a larger discussion in *Practice in Christianity* where Kierkegaard's higher pseudonym Anti-Climacus shows repeatedly how humanity stumbles over either God becoming man (lowliness) or a man claiming to be God (loftiness). The former type disallows God's involvement on earth;

⁹⁸ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: J. Clarke, 1957), 107.

the latter type puts him to death for getting too involved. Steven Dunning comments how the 'kenotic references certainly testify to the paradoxical character of a religious consciousness that has been transformed by the Gospel'.⁹⁹ The idea that Jesus is the paradox (God and man) is only implicit in the discourse. However, when this discussion is viewed alongside *Practice in Christianity*, and its insistence that divine assistance is needed to choose the paradox, Kierkegaard's position ceases to align with a pure volitionalism when it comes to choosing God instead of mammon.

Kierkegaard summarizes his reading of 6:24 and the discussion of choice thus: 'To have the choice is the glorious perilousness of the condition, but what, then, is the eternal happiness that is promised if the choice is rightly made or, what amounts to the same thing, what should a person choose' (UVDS: 208)? The answer is to seek God's kingdom and righteousness. The gift of choice, properly used, ushers an individual into the kingdom of God – this is the blessed happiness (*Salighed*) mentioned in the discourse's title.¹⁰⁰ What a person chooses to serve, he also seeks. Luther, in his sermons on the Sermon, makes a comparable point: 'What a person loves, that he will certainly pursue, that he will enjoy talking about, that will occupy all his heart and his thoughts'.¹⁰¹ Matthew employs two different Greek verbs to accentuate the idea as well – the pagans restlessly seek after (ἐπιζητέω) what they will eat, drink, and wear; the disciples seek (ζητέω) God's kingdom and he provides them with all the rest. Keeping in mind the earnestness of this discussion, Kierkegaard shifts his commentary to 6:33 and further elucidates the lesson which began by contemplating the pathos of nature: 'But seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness; then all these things will be added to you'.

⁹⁹ Dunning, "Transformed by the Gospel," 125.

¹⁰⁰ *Salighed* also carries the idea of bliss, exhilaration, and salvation.

¹⁰¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works. Vol. 21, the Sermon on the Mount (Sermons); and the Magnificat*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1956), 189-190.

Seeking God's Kingdom and Righteousness

Following Matthew's description of two types of seeking, the conversation about the gift of choice is transferred to the concept of seeking. That is, a person either seeks mammon or seeks God. Only choosing and seeking God allows for worship and work to occur in purity and freedom from worry; these holy affections guide the whole person. In his presentation of what it means to seek, Kierkegaard begins by assuming that an individual has given up on the consolation of mammon, 'the world does not quiet his longing . . . it helps him only by means of repulsion to seek further, to seek the eternal' (UDVS: 209). When the cause of care nauseates the individual, the worry itself has also been dealt with. This notion complements the earlier discussion on anxiety and despair and how the palpability of their possibility can help to educate a person away from their destructive force. Pathos and the fleeting nature of possessions lead to a proper view of mammon that consequently results in a life that flees immediacy and monotony for life with God. Seeking the kingdom also involves a 'sequence of inversion'; at the outset, the world and its lures bombard the senses, 'but the proper beginning begins . . . expressly by letting a world perish' (UDVS: 209). Kierkegaard then comments on what it means to seek 'first'

Seeking first stresses the unconditional nature of the Christian life: 'The person who thinks of doing it at another time of the day, at some other hour, has not even arrived at the beginning' (UDVS: 210). Kirmmse suggests that Kierkegaard's reading of the verse 'stands in fact as the rubric under which can be placed one whole side of SK's view of human culture, in particular of society and political arrangements'.¹⁰² In particular, the goal is not a top down model where believers ought to go out and earn as much as possible in order to then share with the less fortunate. That is not seeking the kingdom

¹⁰² Kirmmse, *Golden Age Denmark*, 341.

first; instead, for the rich Christian, charity ‘is a natural consequence of having all things as though one had them not . . . philanthropy, social responsibility, etc.’ exist under the all-encompassing category of “the rest””.¹⁰³ This is an important distinction. Kierkegaard explores it further in the 1848 Matthew discourses where he goes into greater detail on how to manage ‘all these things’. As his exegesis of 6:33 continues, so does his phrase by phrase exposition of the text; after looking at ‘seek’ and ‘first’ he turns to ‘kingdom’ and ‘righteousness’.

God’s kingdom is not a physical place to which a person must travel; it is participation in a life of righteousness. He writes, ‘the last word [righteousness] describes the first, because God’s kingdom is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”’ (UDVS: 210).¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard then explains ‘righteousness’. First of all, he details all that it is not. It is not ‘extraordinary abilities’ or ‘earthly obscurity’ or ‘power and dominion’; neither is it accomplished by good deeds done apart from faith and forgetfulness of God; on the latter point he elaborates: ‘Is not practicing righteousness in this way like the thief’s doing what is right and just with the money he has stolen’ (UDVS: 210-211)? Instead, ‘righteousness’ is an inwardness that remembers God and the ‘how’ of the deed is just as important as the ‘what’ of the deed. This seems to be a harsh critique of philanthropy not done in the name of Jesus and Kierkegaard dismisses any possibility of finding the blessing and righteousness (presented throughout the Sermon on the Mount) anywhere outside of Christianity. ‘Secular’ acts of justice amount to stealing from or plagiarizing God, to not declare and honour the source, amounts to unrighteousness. For Kierkegaard, these deeds turn God’s kingdom into a land among many lands. Accordingly, an individual may visit the realm for business or pleasure, buy souvenirs or

¹⁰³ Ibid., 343.

¹⁰⁴ See Romans 14:17

mine and export resources, and return to their neighboring homeland that is vanishing and decaying.¹⁰⁵

Concluding his close reading of 6:33 he says this: ‘There is only one thing that is to be *sought*: God’s kingdom. Neither wealth’s thousands nor poverty’s penny is to be sought; this will be added to you’ (UDVS: 212). Commenting finally on the phrase ‘all these things’, he borrows from the parallel account in Luke 12:26 and summarizes earthly accumulation as ‘the rest’. Once a person seeks God’s kingdom, an acquisition of lasting treasure devalues the worth and pursuit of material goods; after all, someone with great fortune has no problem leaving behind what amounts to a few pennies (UDVS: 212). He ends with a quote from 2 Corinthians 3:11 on the fading glory of the Law. Kierkegaard substitutes ‘mammon’, ‘all these things’, and ‘the rest’, for the Law of Moses. In the letter to the Corinthians a distinction is maintained between the glorious Law and the condemnation inevitably attached to it; in the same manner, Kierkegaard upholds the goodness of God’s creation and possessions, despite their foreseeable decay. Both are marvelous gifts of God, both are fading away, and both always leave the individual in want. Just as the Apostle called his readers to die to the Law, Kierkegaard sees Matthew calling the disciples to die to all these things.

Summary of Discourse Three

Kierkegaard’s definition of blessed happiness presupposes the problem of worry. The worried individual, through meditation on the Gospel, shifts from thoughts of his own sorrow, to thoughts of death and decay, to contemplating the choice between life and death, all in order to enter the kingdom of God. After making the right choice, this

¹⁰⁵ In *CUP* Kierkegaard works out a similar position in a discussion about the difference between absolute telos and finite telos. The individual who lives for the absolute telos (Kingdom of God) finds his way through the proper negotiation of life’s finite telos (all these things). He who would put the finite telos first or attempt to use the absolute telos as a means to the finite is deceived, or, in this case, unrighteous (393-394).

happiness also involves a movement away from the visible to the invisible, from seeking the seen to seeking the unseen; reciprocally, God acts to provide all these things which the individual relinquishes and continues to relinquish for a life of righteousness.¹⁰⁶ This attitude toward material goods also creates problems in Kierkegaard's theology which compound in his later years; specifically, he risks endorsing an overly ascetic, or even Gnostic view of the world and possessions.¹⁰⁷ Such leanings hardly seem present in the current collection, however, and in the next chapter, in the discourse 'The Care of Abundance', Kierkegaard further qualifies his perspective on a Christian's relationship to 'the rest'.

Conclusion

The preceding discourses leave the reader with a better understanding of the concepts of contentment, gloriousness, and blessed happiness and their relationship to Matthew 6:24-34. *What We Learn* also helps bring together passive and active features of the Gospel's call to discipleship. Materialism, status, career, the future, and the reality of death all stand as potential causes of worry; Kierkegaard offers his reader a vocabulary of faith to assist in this ongoing battle. The balance of dependence and activity, rooted in loyalty to God and his kingdom and alluded to through meditation on the bird and lily, guard an individual from the disequilibrium associated with comparison, ruling, work, and decision making. As Possen notes, 'the Gospel directs us to imitate the lilies and the birds despite our fundamental differences from them . . . to have faith, we must detach ourselves entirely from concern for those same ineradicable marks of our difference: our

¹⁰⁶ The motif of an individual giving something up and God giving it back represents a common theme in the biblical passages Kierkegaard selects. Two other instances of this losing – gaining dialectic are the story of Abraham and the story of Job, though the difference between Matthew's Gospel and the other two is significant. Abraham, though willing to give up his son, never does and Job is passive in the loss of his goods and family. The disciple, on the other hand, willfully gives up 'all these things'.

¹⁰⁷ See also John R. Betz, "Hamaan before Kierkegaard: A Systematic Theological Overview," *Pro Ecclesia* XVI, no. 3 (2007): 303.

work, plans, and savings, in a word, our *investment* in the natural world'.¹⁰⁸ Worry is parasitic. It feeds off the indelible distinctions that God has granted to every human being – *imago dei*, work, and choice. The grand presupposition behind Kierkegaard's reading is God. He is the loving, providing, creating, condescending one who initiates the return to contentment, gloriousness, and blessed happiness.

¹⁰⁸ Possen, "Faith's Freedom from Care," 169.

CHAPTER THREE

THE 1848 MATTHEW DISCOURSES

Already within the first collection of Matthew writings, Kierkegaard has commented in one form or another on most of Matthew 6:24-34. Notably, he did not treat the question of 6:27: ‘Who among you can add one foot to his growth even though he worries about it?’ (UDVS: 159) Neither did he say much about the pagans mentioned in 6:32. These passages receive more attention in the 1848 collection that makes up the first part of *Christian Discourses*. An introduction to this group of discourses now follows.

Introduction to *The Cares of the Pagans*

The second collection of Matthew 6 writings, *The Cares of the Pagans* (*The Cares*), makes up the first of the four-part book *Christian Discourses*.¹⁰⁹ The title, *Christian Discourses*, suggests something slightly different than the 1847 writings which were gathered under the heading of *Upbuilding Discourses*. Nevertheless, in light of the previous chapter and the overtly Christian nature of *What We Learn*, it is not necessary to look for gleaming contrasts in the material. Both writings are religious in character. In fact, in the opening prayer of this collection, Kierkegaard seems to make an allusion to the meditations on the bird and lily from a year earlier. He writes: ‘Father in heaven! In springtime everything in nature comes back again with new freshness and beauty. The bird and lily have lost nothing since last year – would that we, too, might come back unaltered to the instruction of these teachers!’ (CD: 5) This is another way of saying that, for Kierkegaard, Matthew’s passage has more to offer. Alongside this continuity, *The*

¹⁰⁹ The other three parts are: ‘States of Mind in the Strife of Suffering’, ‘Thoughts That Wound from Behind – for Upbuilding’, and ‘Discourses at the Communion on Fridays’.

Cares also holds out ‘new freshness and beauty’ which is confirmed by his different approach to the Gospel text and structuring of the discourses.

Structural Features

Instead of the line-by-line exposition of Matthew, found commonly in *What We Learn*, each discourse develops under three headings, which feature three main ‘characters’ of 6:24-34: the birds and lilies, the Christian, and the pagan. By nature, the birds and lilies exist free from anxiety or care; by faith, the Christian does not possess the worry under consideration; the heathen, contrariwise, lives ‘without God in the world and therefore is never essentially himself (which one only is by being before God)’ (CD: 44). Each address concludes with a summary that compares and contrasts the three groups and their relative relationships to God, each other, and the care under consideration. As an example, in the first discourse on poverty, he writes, ‘the bird is poor and yet not poor; the Christian is poor, yet not poor but rich; the pagan is poor, poor, poor – poorer than the poorest bird’ (CD: 22). The summaries illuminate three important distinctions: nature/human, believer/unbeliever, and creature/Creator. Put in terms of the development of Kierkegaard’s theology of sanctification, these differences show 1) the superiority of humanity to nature in its ability to worry, 2) the blessedness of the Christian, who, over against the pagan, defeats this possibility through various expressions of artful living, and 3) the centrality of a proper view of God (theology) and its assisting role in becoming a true self. Proper negotiation of these distinctions also connects with artful living, which was introduced in the previous chapter. Here this movement receives a more central place in the discussion of his interpretation of Matthew; in connection with Kierkegaard’s solutions for worry, it reveals how Gospel living entails a relativization of the world’s

categories of existence and a voluntary submission to the New Testament's definition of selfhood.

In order of appearance, the discourses examine seven causes of worry. Kierkegaard inserts the concepts within the title to each piece; the key terms are as follows: poverty, abundance, lowliness, highness, presumptuousness, self-torment, and irresolution, fickleness, & disconsolateness. The first four discourses give the reader a view into situations where worry *can* crop up. Kierkegaard labels these earthly classifications as 'matters of indifference, of innocence, that which one has not given oneself or made oneself into, that which, Christianly, does not matter at all' (CD: 60). Functionally in the collection, this distinction helps frame his argument; nevertheless, not all these circumstances come to a person unsolicited. No one is born the president of a nation and not every millionaire simply fell into her riches – such individuals have *given* themselves and worked hard to *make* themselves who they are. On this point he seems to also overlook the fact that stations in life can, and sometimes should be changed. The same Jesus who commends the contentment learned from the bird and lily calls for justice and speaks against the extortion, oppression, and corruption connected with money and power. This is lacking in Kierkegaard's reading. Instead, he is interested in encouraging individuals to respond to riches and power in the present moment and he wants to remind the reader to focus on spiritual riches and status as the only unflappable cures for worry. The inescapability of these continuums betrays that the goal for the individual is not to obliterate every earthly category, but to exist in a certain manner within the categories. As Anthony Rudd says, 'the soul has to be gained in a constant struggle against our tendency to lose it by abandoning our real telos for an absolute attachment to merely

relative goods'.¹¹⁰ Because these identity markers may be clung to too tightly, they simultaneously invite a possibility of worry to which human beings are always susceptible.

In contrast, the final three cares presuppose a willful choice on the part of the individual. They explore existential attitudes that betray that worry already *has* a stronghold. Gregor Malantschuk distinguishes between the two sub-groups thus: 'He [Kierkegaard] begins with elementary human problems such as the cares of poverty and gradually ascends to cares with more and more of a spiritual cast'.¹¹¹ The conversation on care in the second half of the collection shifts stress away from the individual's relationship to external sources and dissects the inner workings of a person's relationship with the self, the next day, and the ability to properly exercise the will in response to God. These manifestations of care can only be construed as negative; where there is presumptuousness, self-torment, or indecision, as defined by Kierkegaard, there is worry (CD: 60). Together, both parts of *The Cares* highlight how worry's possibility surfaces in the world around and within the individual. While these sub-groups help to differentiate the material, it must also be remembered that 'worry', when actualized, is always a spiritual issue. Moreover, the material is unified through Kierkegaard's answer to the cares of the pagans, which leads the reader into genuine selfhood and the adventure of artful living. Unique among the collections of Matthew 6 material, the 1848 discourses include a formal introduction; it is to this the conversation now turns.

¹¹⁰ Anthony Rudd, "Kierkegaard on Patience and the Temporality of the Self," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2008): 501.

¹¹¹ Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, 326.

Kierkegaard's Introduction to The Cares of the Pagans

The introduction begins by comparing and contrasting the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai and the presentation of the Sermon on the Mount:

It was on top of Mt. Sinai that the Law was given, during the thundering of heaven; every animal that, alas, innocently and inadvertently approached the holy mountain had to be put to death – according to the Law. It is at the foot of the mountain the Sermon on the Mount is preached. This is the way the Law relates to the Gospel, which is: the heavenly down on earth (CD: 9).

Law and Gospel represent poles of a continuum. The former comes with directness, loftiness, noise, and an unapproachable, consuming holiness; at the foot of the mountain one encounters the ‘Gospel’, ‘so mollified is the Gospel, so close is the heavenly which comes down, now on earth and yet even more heavenly’ (CD: 9). In the place of the dead animals on Sinai, Jesus brings along the birds and lilies and a message revealed through indirectness, silence, and a holy, yet approachable, teacher. In a journal entry from 1839 he comments how the Sermon on the Mount ‘typologically calls to mind that great *Sermon from Mount Sinai*’.¹¹² The major difference he notes in this earlier reference is between the unseen God on Sinai and the visible likeness of God expressed in Christ in Matthew’s text. By sitting at the foot of the mountain, Christ ‘thus intimated by way of a typological contrast that [he] was the fulfillment of the Law, and that this fulfillment of the Law had now been made possible *on earth*’.¹¹³ Kierkegaard by no means denigrates the Old Testament. Instead, he substitutes certain aspects of the Gospel in its place. The Sermon does not do away with the sternness of the Law; it elaborates on and tempers it. Lee Barrett argues that Kierkegaard intuitively reintroduces Lutheranism’s second and third use of the law in the later works of *For Self-Examination* and *Judge For Yourself*. Kierkegaard accomplishes this by substituting imitation of Christ in the place of the Mosaic Law, ‘the life of Christ, the prototype, serves as the law, as the pattern for holy

¹¹² Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, Vol. 2, 36.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 36-37

living'.¹¹⁴ A similar mindset is found in this collection. The ideal life of Christ (the heavenly down on earth) is not merely a negative witness of human inability; it is also the pattern of worry-free, artful living. More will be said on this later. In addition, Kierkegaard finds a balance in the text between its direct message and its indirect message. The straightforward message about the impossibility of serving two masters and seeking first the kingdom of God is lightened by the lily and the bird temporarily. At the end of the introduction he writes: 'The upbuilding address is fighting in many ways for the eternal to be victorious in a person, but in the appropriate place and with the aid of the lily and the bird, it does not forget first and foremost to relax into a smile' (CD: 12).

The introduction continues with words of praise for the bird and lily. First of all, free from worry, 'although they do have the comparable necessities', the birds and lilies of the Gospel reveal negatively the nature of paganism and worry and positively the worry-free way of a Christian (CD: 11). Moreover, they are exemplary teachers and models for aspiring human teachers: they never judge or condemn; they never stop teaching and they have no interest in receiving praise for any 'success'; a student's failure to learn never brings their reproach; they never give up – even when misunderstood, underpaid, and under-appreciated – 'they demand no dependency' from their pupils; and as for integrity, they perfectly practice the entire content of their silent sermon' (CD: 10-11). His portrait indubitably offers an inspiring reminder to aspiring educators and elucidates Kierkegaard's own feelings on the subject as well. Merold Westphal considers this praise of Jesus' assistant professors thus: 'This is not theology of nature or natural theology but a heuristic for reading the Gospel text and subjecting ourselves to its

¹¹⁴ Barrett, "Faith, Works, and the Uses of the Law: Kierkegaard's Appropriation of Lutheran Doctrine," in *IKC: FSE/JFY*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 89.

authority'.¹¹⁵ Acknowledgement of this frees Kierkegaard to take liberties with the image of the bird and lily; it also separates his view of nature from the influential Romantics of his era. Pattison concurs, describing the observations from the bird and lily as 'only indirectly drawn from nature; as ciphers of transcendence they are essentially literary figures, taken by Kierkegaard from the text of Scripture'.¹¹⁶ Kierkegaard's ode to the bird and lily also shows signs of his burgeoning attack upon Christendom.

The Polemical Side of the Discourses

Kierkegaard finished *The Cares* in early February, only days in advance of the French Revolution of 1848. By the time they were published, a similar revolution occurred in Denmark. According to Kirmmse, '[Kierkegaard] regarded these discourses as incendiary both to the conservative establishment that was passing away and to the liberal order that appeared to be replacing it'.¹¹⁷ Moreover, from the introduction, it becomes clear that Kierkegaard's ensuing discussion of the pagan is a not so well-disguised critique of Christendom, which, as Evans notes, is 'a term Kierkegaard uses to denote the kind of "establishment Christianity" that equates being a Christian with being a respectable member of a given society'.¹¹⁸ To make his point, Kierkegaard ponders what, if any value his discourses on worry may hold in a professedly Christian land; that is, a land free from the cares of the pagans. In response, he decides that such a city can serve as a prototype, one can visit and observe a Christian nation and conclude that 'the cares that are not found here with us, although the comparable necessities and pressures are present, must be the cares of the pagans' (CD: 11).

¹¹⁵ Merold Westphal, "Paganism in Christendom: On Kierkegaard's Critique of Religion," in *IKC: CD*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 22, n.24.

¹¹⁶ Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*, 63.

¹¹⁷ Kirmmse, *Golden Age Denmark*, 340.

¹¹⁸ Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*, 8.

Ostensibly the Christian city of Copenhagen provides the same sort of insight into paganism as the bird and lily. Kierkegaard's sarcasm is poorly masked when he raises the question of what to do when pagan worry is found in a supposed Christian land. Appealing to the objective perspective of an angel, he decides that such a creature could reach one of three conclusions about said city: 1) all are Christians and free from the worries of the heathen; 2) the worry found in Christendom is wrongly called the care of the heathen and must therefore receive a new, less derogatory name; 3) 'these cares are found among people in this country; ergo, this Christian country is pagan' (CD: 11). This, of course, is the point. Kierkegaard views the situation as being so dire that he continually compares these individuals with two sobering New Testament descriptions: they are 'without God in the world' (Eph 2:5) and they are akin to those in Hebrews 6 who have irrevocably fallen away from the grace of God. Without denying the allegation that the discourses operate as a 'subtle mockery' of 'Christendom', he himself, trapped by his own short-comings, maintains that he would not dare to indict Denmark thus. Instead, he transfers responsibility to the writings - recognizing that the discourse's treatment of the pagan 'could have this up its sleeve' (CD: 11). Individual suspects are also indicted in these discourses and there are adumbrations here of a later, greater expressiveness on Kierkegaard's part which is now known as a full scale 'Attack upon Christendom'.

The polemical side to these discourses is undeniable. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that, according to Kierkegaard's journals, it is the third part of *Christian Discourses*, "Thoughts That Wound from Behind – for Upbuilding", which carries the brunt of his critique. In fact, this causes hesitation for him about whether or not to put part three, which was written last, with the other 'gentle' and 'milder' sections. After deliberation, Kierkegaard errs on the side of earnestness, 'without the third part *Christian*

Discourses is much too mild, for me truly not in character; they are mild enough as it is' (CD: 400). Recalling the earlier discussion of Law and Gospel, his inclusion of this sternest section accomplishes a similar equilibrium. He highlights this contrast especially with regard to the fourth and mildest part of *Christian Discourses*, which consists of biblically-grounded meditations for communion; the combination creates a 'felicitous juxtaposition', something Kierkegaard ultimately attributes to 'Governance' (CD: 400). I bring this up to help foster a balanced reading of *The Cares*, both in light of Kirmmse's comments above, and two subsequent discussions with other Kierkegaard scholars that focus on the critical side of the material. Louise Carroll Keeley provides another helpful reminder of this balance by drawing attention to the 'positive lessons' of the discourses, and how they 'offer concrete spiritual guidance and direction'.¹¹⁹

Artful Living and the Discourses

Like the first group of Matthew writings, *The Cares* is most interested in charting worry, in its various expressions, and recommending how a person may leave it behind and trust the caring heavenly Father. Kierkegaard's description of how to accomplish this also continues the conversation on artful living initiated in the last chapter. His choice of the categories of wealth and power derive from the Gospel's admonition to not worry about food, drink and clothing; consequently, these labels apply to every single individual and delineate potential arenas of worry. Christianity's response to the cares associated with these status markers equates to artful living. Beyond his prescription for life within these categories, Kierkegaard's description of the pagan at the end of each discourse provides a negative lens to contrast, and also inform, what it means to live artfully.

¹¹⁹ Louise Carroll Keeley, "The Genius and the Saint: The Spiritual Teachings of Kierkegaard in *Christian Discourses* and Thérèse of Lisieux in *Story of a Soul*," in *IKC: CD*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 61.

In the first four pieces, the bird and lily positively reflect care free life within the categories of riches and power. In the final three discourses, while they still model life free from the worries of the final three discourses, they cannot relate as well to the problems described. Kierkegaard's explanation for this is the fact that, with presumptuousness, self-torment, and indecisiveness, there is no corresponding need connected to the cares; i.e. one cannot be presumptuous, etc. without also worrying. This places greater emphasis on his description of the pagans, who embody the various soul-destroying behaviours under consideration. In the case of presumption he writes: 'What presumptuousness is, that is, what the particular manifestations are, we get to know best when we speak about the pagans' (CD: 63). Kierkegaard still carries on with his imaginative portraits of the birds and lilies and these interactions demarcate the important nature-human distinction connected with the task of artful living. Consequently, the reader encounters two images which fall short of artful living, and for two different reasons. The bird and lily fall short because of their nature; the pagan falls short because of his choices. By highlighting both forms of failure, Kierkegaard also paves the way for further discussion on the prototype, Jesus Christ, who historically concretizes and embodies artful living.

Discussion now turns to the first four discourses in the collection. Particular attention is given to how Kierkegaard's exegesis of Matthew feeds his repeated presentation of what it means to live artfully. The ensuing dialogue focuses on the form of worry listed in the title of each discourse and how it is resisted through artful living.

Discourse One

‘The Care of Poverty’

Kierkegaard focuses the first discourse, ‘The Care of Poverty’ (*Armod*)¹²⁰ around a partial quotation of Matthew 6:31-32: ‘Therefore you should not worry and say, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” - the pagans seek all these things’. The discourse opens with an imaginary conversation between the civil magistrate and a bird, wherein the former requires from the latter more information on his source of food and what he lives on (CD: 13-14). Kierkegaard quips that at the end of the investigation, if the magistrate had his way, he would definitely find the bird guilty of poverty and insist that it belonged in the poor house. Herein one encounters the worldly view of poverty, the bird, ‘if one is to judge according to its external condition’ could be deemed poor (CD: 14). Two things prevent this label from sticking: first of all, the bird cannot become conscious of the category of poverty; secondly, God provides the bird with just enough, ‘the daily bread [*Brød*] is the bird’s livelihood [*Levebrød*]’ (CD: 13). Accordingly, this allows the bird to be poor, yet not poor; its natural ability to live in this way makes it the commendable instructor to the poor that it is. Subsequently, Kierkegaard is really interested in instructing the ‘poor’ person to rise above the potentially debilitating mark of poverty. He does this by detailing a Christian’s response to material lack.

Artful Living and Poverty

The poor Christian, like the bird, lives on the daily bread; unlike the bird he has an awareness of his external condition of poverty and thus comes to the crossroads of how he will respond to this situation: ‘Either Christianly to turn away from the care of poverty by turning onto *the Way* upward, or in ungodliness to abandon oneself to the care

¹²⁰ *Armodens* can also connote the idea of destitution or penury.

of poverty by turning onto the wrong way downward' (CD: 20). Evidence that the proper choice - artful living - has occurred manifests in the speech, thought, and imagination of the individual. These features not only highlight the difference between nature and human beings, they also collide with Kierkegaard's portrait of the pagan. Poverty, over against wealth, creates a more palpable chance for an individual to depend upon God's daily bread. This finds its greatest expression when the Christian prays. 'By praying for it', says Kierkegaard, 'he dismisses the care for the night, sleeps soundly in order to wake the next day to the daily bread for which he prays' (CD: 14).

The act of prayer invokes God as the middle term in a person's relationship to food and drink and invites the eternal into the temporal. Prayer reorients the individual to the extent that food and drink have an 'added flavour' and a 'satisfying quality' that comes from the knowledge that they come *from God*.¹²¹ Thankfulness and faith transform the act of eating into an encounter with God and, from an aesthetic point of view, Kierkegaard shows that understanding the origin of an object contributes to a proper response to it. In prayer, confidence in the provision transfers to confidence in the Provider. Unlike the pagan, the Christian lives for the *source* of sustenance and not for sustenance; indeed, 'what he seeks is not to become satisfied, but the heavenly Father' (CD: 15). Prayer is the opposite of worry. It also sets humans apart from the bird, which, though provided for, is ultimately impoverished by its inability to pray and give thanks (CD: 16). The poor person who prays not only defeats the care of poverty, viewed spiritually, he lives in abundance: 'His wealth increases each time he prays and gives thanks, and each time it becomes clearer to him that he exists for God and God for him' (CD: 16).

¹²¹ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses and the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 18.

Relationship with the Divine consumes the speech of the outwardly poor. Kierkegaard contrasts this with the poor pagan who incessantly chatters about not having enough for tomorrow, his mind is corrupted by the lure of riches. He showcases the counterpoint to Christian living in an extensive speech from the pagan who harshly critiques the Bible for its lack of helpful advice on ‘the proper life-question’ of materialism and earthly goods (CD: 19). The sagacious pagan in the discourse, who excludes God from his finances, embodies the worst poverty of all; he ‘is indeed an inarticulate being; he neither prays nor gives thanks, which is human language in the most profound sense’ (CD: 22). The role of speech (and silence) recurs throughout the descriptions of artful living. As discussion turns to those faced with the possibility of worry over riches, the role of the imagination surfaces.

Discourse Two

‘The Care of Abundance’

Already in ‘The Care of Poverty’, Kierkegaard calls to mind what he sees to be the greatest barrier that riches raise between a human being and seeking first the kingdom of God. Those with abundance, not faced with the daily struggle of having enough, are liable to ‘forget to pray and give thanks’ (CD: 16). Additionally, he pities and deems poor anyone who ‘ha[s] received once for all one’s share for one’s whole life’; such circumstances can cause a self-sufficiency that cheats the individual out of the blessing of daily remembering one’s ‘Benefactor’, ‘God’, ‘Creator’, and ‘Provider’ (CD: 16-17). This does not mean that the rich man is unable to daily give thanks. It does reveal the trappings of excess. The second discourse, ‘The Care of Abundance’ (*Overflood*)¹²²

¹²² Other synonyms include affluence, excess, glut, and the more literal rendering, overflow.

continues Kierkegaard's meditation on 6:31-32 and more fully fills in the range of worry found along the quantitative continuum rich – poor.

Ingratitude and prayerlessness show a forgetfulness of God. In addition, the rich may conclude that their surplus exempts them from the worries of the poor and decisively removes its possibility from their lives. Kierkegaard challenges this kind of thinking:

Wealth and abundance come hypocritically in sheep's clothing under the guise of safeguarding against cares and then themselves become the object of care, become *the care*. They safeguard a person against cares just as well as the wolf assigned to look after the sheep safeguards these - against the wolf (CD: 23).

Riches cannot shelter the soul from worry. First of all, an attempt to eliminate worry's *possibility* with earthly riches amounts to a rejection of what Kierkegaard sees as integral to the fabric of the human being. Borrowing from the terminology of the *What We Learn* discourses, it is part of the gloriousness of humanity to *be able* to worry. Furthermore, like the wolf protecting sheep from the wolf, to point to riches as the source of worry-free living reveals a glaring contradiction. The care of poverty was the desire to be rich, ironically, the same problem consumes the wealthy, 'wanting to be rich, wanting, entirely secured, to continue to be rich, wanting to be richer' (CD: 34). This is the picture of the pagan. Underneath this striving to stay fiscally sound there lurks spiritual poverty - the loss of one's true self. To take sole responsibility for securing the future amounts to 'doing away with God'; it is 'to cease to be a human being'; it is 'to sink, godforsaken and worse than the animal'; and it is 'that most wretched slavery of madness, in abundance to slave for food and drink' (CD: 35). Autonomous living is worry. It plunges a person into behaviours which Kierkegaard deems monstrous. While he never disparages wealth in itself, his interpretation does push the reader to become aware of his or her relationship to surplus. Is it a source of peace and relief? If so, it may also be an idol or a veil which obscures the problem of worry. So what is true abundance and how does the

Christian respond to the circumstances of wealth? The answer begins with an appeal to the bird.

Artful Living and Abundance

The bird flies free from the care of abundance though its provisions are endless. ‘It always takes just exactly *enough*’, says Kierkegaard, ‘lest it come in the remotest contact with the ambiguous knowledge about what is abundance’; as instructor, it teaches how ‘in abundance to be ignorant that one has abundance, bearing in mind that one is a traveler’ (CD: 25). When it comes to the human being, who also happens to hold significant earthly wealth, the appropriation of the lesson offered by nature requires an additional step: forgetfulness of wealth. ‘The rich Christian *does have* abundance but is ignorant of it, and therefore he must *have become* ignorant. To be ignorant is no art, but to *become* ignorant and to be ignorant by having become ignorant – that is the art’, says Kierkegaard (CD: 25). Prayer and thanksgiving, already mentioned above, represent the first step the rich one takes to forget wealth (CD: 32). The next stride entails consciously and continually turning away from the thought of riches. Kierkegaard’s repetition of ‘becoming’ and ‘having become’ stresses the deliberate, active movement to ignorance over against other accidental ways in which one may forget he is rich, i.e. memory loss. To become a ‘formerly rich man’ without technically losing one’s wealth is a process:

To become ignorant in this way can take a long time, and it is a difficult task before he succeeds, little by little, and before he finally succeeds in really becoming ignorant of what he knows, and then in remaining ignorant, in continuing to be that, so he does not sink back again, trapped in the snare of knowledge (CD: 26).

To think properly about possessions entails a slow and hard journey. Kierkegaard’s descriptors show that he takes the long view when it comes to Christian sanctification. Just as riches cannot once for all eliminate the threat of worry, there are no shortcuts to forgetfulness of riches and, until the Eschaton, there is no complete obliteration of the

dialectical tension between faith and worry. So how does one forget about his riches? Kierkegaard answers this by showing how to cultivate mental virtue that rightly grasps the uncertainty of tomorrow, the true nature of personal property, and God's ownership of all things.

How to Forget Riches

Kierkegaard contends that to be rich, one must have both a surplus of goods and a guarantee of tomorrow (CD: 27). The first condition is easily met by many, a guarantee of 'the next day' no one can have; accordingly, he argues that the possibility of death 'this very night'¹²³ steals away the lasting status of wealth, even for the richest person in the world. Because existence cannot be guaranteed tomorrow, neither can riches. Importantly this does not erase the marker of wealth completely; instead, it limits its range of meaning so that the only 'certainty' possible must be expressed thus: 'I am rich today or at least for this moment'. In this context, an important way to combat the care of riches requires that an individual possess a consciousness of mortality: 'When I think that I can perhaps die tonight, "this very night", then, however rich I am, I do not own anything' (CD: 27). An earlier discourse from 1845, 'At a Graveside', sharpens the importance of remembering one's mortality: 'Death in earnest gives life force as nothing else does; it makes one alert as nothing else does . . . the thought of death gives the earnest person the right momentum in life and the right goal toward which he directs his momentum' (TDIO: 83). By creating awareness of finitude, Kierkegaard is encouraging the wealthy reader to live in the present and to consider how no promise of tomorrow might affect her outlook on and use of abundance.

¹²³ Repetition of the phrases 'this very day' and 'this very night' signal a reference to Luke 12.20ff and the parable of the rich fool. Though he never explicitly states this, the intention increases after one realizes that the third Gospel's parallel account of Matthew 6:25-34 immediately follows this parable.

In addition, one learns to forget possessions by meditating on the true nature of riches: 'Riches are indeed a possession, but actually or essentially to possess something of which the essential feature is losableness or that it can be lost is just as impossible as to sit down and yet walk . . . this matter of possessing is a delusion' (CD: 27-28). To illustrate the impossibility of possession, Kierkegaard cites retributive justice as an example. In that instance, unlawful possession is not true possession since the courts can come and take it back at any time. In a more significant way, attempts to grasp riches amount to a form of theft before God, the only one who truly possesses the riches of the earth. Kierkegaard's aim to focus the individual on the God-given moment of today is clear enough and his presentation of the phantom of tomorrow and the reality of death, while not always welcome thoughts, are important in the struggle against the worry that clings to riches. His wordplay, in the mouth of a thief, would certainly not go over well in a court of law and the rhetoric sometimes approaches utopist language and a rejection of private property. These tensions release, however, as he elaborates on ultimate ownership and the task of stewardship.

If wealth is impossible and possession, humanly speaking, is an illusion, what does one do when she appears to lawfully possess something? The answer involves seeking out the one who rightfully owns the goods; God enters the scene as the owner of everything and as the exception to the impossibility of possession. 'It is mine', says God, 'It is all mine' (CD: 28). From this conclusion, an individual's relationship to food, drink, and riches changes from a quest for treasure to the task of properly managing a trust. Everything is a gift, 'the rich Christian bears in mind that he owns nothing except what is given to him and owns what is given to him not for him to keep but only on loan, as a

loan, as entrusted property' (CD: 29).¹²⁴ To more fully explain the concept of stewardship he turns elsewhere in the Gospels to the parable of the unjust steward (Lk 16:1-15)¹²⁵ who, with the threat of homelessness and unemployment looming, goes around canceling various portions of debt owed to his soon to be former master. If the wicked steward had acted thus with his own money, there would be no problem; unfortunately, he unjustly gains favor for himself through an unlawful use of his master's goods. Kierkegaard accentuates the nobility of the otherwise evil steward who, through the wealth of his master, served as a conduit of blessing and forgiveness to others (CD: 29).

For the rich believer, 'it is God's property', as such, 'as far as possible it is to be managed according to the owner's wishes, managed with the owner's indifference to money and monetary value, managed by being given away at the right time and place' (CD: 30). The rich Christian, freed from the trappings of possessions, finds true joy in 'his' riches as he secretly shares them with the aim of helping others to thank and praise God. Artful living, as an expression of charity, is distinguished by its incognito and its other-centered nature.¹²⁶ Additionally, the good steward learns from the bird that he is a traveler who must always assess what he needs for the journey and what to discard. Stewardship releases a person from the care of wealth and is the opposite of paganism, which 'remain[s] heavy, like a stone, upon the earth, even heavier because of the defilement' (CD: 35-36). Artful living as forgetfulness of riches ties in with the discussion of godly diversion in the previous chapter. When it comes to wealth (and

¹²⁴ In *E/O II*, Judge William captures the same idea in his description of a father's proper view of his child: 'Every father will also feel that there is more in the child than what it owes to him. Yes, he will feel in humility that it is a trust and that in the most beautiful sense of the word he is only a stepfather. The father who has not felt this has always taken in vain his dignity as a father (72)'. This broadens the category of gifted possessions to include relationships and expands the applicability of artful living to include the proper perspectives on family and neighbor relationship.

¹²⁵ The theme of riches provides the obvious justification for linking these texts together; additionally, Luke concludes the parable with the passage: 'No servant can serve two masters'. Between the earlier parable of the rich fool and the unjust servant, Kierkegaard brings in the synoptic account of the entire Matthew section.

¹²⁶ This mentality captures earlier sections in the Sermon on how to properly give alms and the petition of the Lord's Prayer on forgiving debts.

poverty) either the thought of possessions distracts from the eternal or the thought of the eternal distracts from the worry of riches. Stanley Hauerwas' comments on the Matthew text help accentuate this reorientation: 'Possessed by possessions, we discover that we cannot will our way free of our possessions. But if we can be freed our attention may be grasped by that which is so true, so beautiful, we discover we have been dispossessed'.¹²⁷ Beyond the diversion of the bird and lily there is the ideal that God 'totally engages the Christian's mind and thought, blots out everything else from his memory, captures his heart forever, and thus he becomes absolutely ignorant' (CD: 33).

Discourse Three

'The Care of Lowliness'

The discourses on poverty and abundance focused on an individual finding out how much he possessed in the world and responding artfully through prayer, forgetfulness, and stewardship. Discourse three, 'The Care of Lowliness' involves a person's journey of finding out his or her power status in the world. This equates to Matthew's admonition: 'Do not worry about what you will wear'; accordingly, this phrase, along with the addendum 'the pagans seek all these things' introduces both this and the fourth discourse on 'loftiness'. Information on one's place in the world may be obtained one of two ways: The first, negative path involves comparing oneself, in this case unfavorably, with others; a person's true identity in the world is found out *Coram Deo*, before God. Both avenues of gaining knowledge of self involve a process; contrariwise, the bird, by nature, avoids any such deliberations: 'the bird is what it is, is itself, is satisfied with being itself, is contented with itself' (CD: 37). This simplicity dialectically signals nature's lower status as well: 'they are immediately at full speed in

¹²⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 81.

being and there is no need at all for any preliminaries to the beginning, and they are not at all tested in that difficulty much discussed among people and portrayed as very perilous – the difficulty of beginning’ (CD: 39). This immediacy provides inspiration for the Christian, though an additional, more blessed step is needed. Instead of comparing oneself to everyone else before finally figuring out one’s status; the Christian takes a short cut which allows her to promptly begin existing as a true self. As long as an individual operates primarily on the ever changing surface of lowly – lofty, she never arrives at a resting place from which to begin her life. The discourse on lowliness prescribes the Gospel’s answer to the struggle for power and influence in the world and the inevitable worry which accompanies it.

Artful Living and Lowliness

Kierkegaard argues that being pronounced as lowly by society should not prove consequential in the task of self-understanding.¹²⁸ Artful living in view of one’s lowliness encompasses turning away from and looking beyond the opinions, titles, and ranks of the world. The pattern of living prescribed is similar to the first two discourses insofar as the individual acknowledges his status, in this case a lack of power, views it as an ‘optical illusion’, and forgets it in favour of the Gospel’s outlook on power (CD: 39). A difference also emerges. Artful living as a lowly person addresses identity issues and steers the discussion toward how to begin on the road of genuine existence. Kierkegaard describes this thus: ‘Oh, what a difficult beginning to existing or for coming to exist: to exist, then to come into existence in order first to exist’ (CD: 39). His language intimates the idea of conversion. The individual begins in awareness of lowliness and its potential effects on selfhood; this ‘first’ existence must be discarded for life to truly begin. Instead

¹²⁸ Behind this conclusion, one might imagine how Kierkegaard’s journey through *The Corsair* ordeal and the aftermath of public shame contributed to this disavowing of popularity.

of striving to become something in the world, the lowly believer ‘sees with the eyes of faith; with the speed of faith that seeks God . . . he has found out from the world or from the others that he is a lowly person, but he does not abandon himself to this knowledge’ (CD:40). With God as the source of identity, even the lowliest of persons (humanly speaking), may live contentedly and confidently before all people. The terminology of conversion continues, ‘the lowly Christian was a human being . . . but then he became a Christian; he became something in the world. And he can continually become more and more, because he can continually become more and more a Christian’ (CD: 41). By emphasizing this transformation, Kierkegaard also avoids the error that lowliness equals Christianity.

The lowly one is encouraged to preach the good news to himself: Christ has stooped down for him and, through his redemptive work, has elevated him to true loftiness. Even in his presentation of the despairing, lowly pagan, Kierkegaard shows that the problem amounts to not believing enough about whom human beings are (CD: 46). The unbeliever rejects the greatness of being the image of God and being identified with Christ in order to create a self-image before the crowd. The one who rejects the true self is the ‘despairing lowly one’, ‘despair (*fortvivle*) is his care’ (CD: 46). To combat this, the individual must think higher of himself according to the teaching of the Gospel. A transfer of values occurs. The word and presence of the God-man usurps all other evaluations of what it means to be a lowly human being. As discussion turns to the care of loftiness, the opposite problem is addressed, the individual must not think too highly of himself.

Discourse Four

‘The Care of Loftiness’

Kierkegaard continues his commentary on Matthew’s expression, ‘Do not worry about what you will wear’, in ‘The Care of Loftiness’. Worry of this nature also arises through comparison, through looking above, or especially below oneself, to those situated in other levels of power. In that gaze, the individual becomes aware of the ‘abyss’ and the possibility of falling. For Kierkegaard this amounts to a continual fear that power will be stripped away; this obsession to maintain rule turns a human being into an animal or worse, into a zombie. His description of the effects of this strain of worry offer sobering connections to the life of a malevolent dictator:

In this glittering of his earthly loftiness he exists before others. But his self does not exist; his innermost being has been consumed and depithed in the service of nothingness; slave of futility, with no control over himself, in the power of giddy worldliness, godforsaken, he ceases to be a human being; in his innermost being he is as dead, but his loftiness walks ghostlike among us – it lives (CD: 58).

Power corrupts and the eminent Christian, if he or she wishes to live artfully in those circumstances, must first beware of just how strenuous such an existence is. In much the same manner as the rich Christian, the task involves consciously forgetting or turning away from the thought of one’s earthly prestige.

Artful Living and Loftiness

Kierkegaard begins this discussion by denoting the difference between an eminent Christian and a Christian who happens to be king, emperor, etc. (CD: 50-51). Only in the former case is there a direct correlation between who a person really is and genuine exaltation; this relationship with God transcends the statuses in the world which are vulnerable to loss and fluctuation. This was the conclusion of the previous discourse on lowliness as well: ‘According to Christian doctrine, there is only one loftiness, that of

being a Christian; everything else is lowly, lowliness and loftiness' (CD: 47). In light of this distinction and like the rich individual, the Christian of high status has a responsibility to properly administer these gifts, a point Kierkegaard acknowledges only in passing (CD: 48). Instead, his dialogue considers how a person can maintain proper perspective, even in the situation of authority. This begins with prayer. 'When he [the powerful] speaks with God, he discards all earthly, all sham pomp and glory, but also all the untruth of illusion' (CD: 51). Theologically, this prostration before God finds its roots first in the conviction that God is not a respecter of persons, and secondly in the ruler's belief that, instead of being indispensable for his subjects, 'it is he who, in order to live, is in need at all times, indeed, every minute, of this God' (CD: 51). He remains silent about his power and thus demonstrates a lack of anxiety about losing it; there is no pettiness and no demanding of his rights; instead, he looks to the prototype of loftiness for mercy. The art is to be 'lofty without being elevated above anyone' (CD: 49).

Furthermore, the reign of God relativizes earthly power and the Christian recognizes ultimately the need to progress from eminent to lowly before he can properly discharge the position God has given: 'No eminent person as such can be saved by him [Jesus] but only as a lowly person. No one can become or be a Christian except in the character of or as a lowly person' (CD: 53). This involves thought and imagination. The eminent one 'surrenders to the power of the conception' and he is 'in the power of an even higher enchantment'; through self-examination and mental virtue this individual knows for certain that, at the drop of a hat, he could leave behind this status without doing harm to his conception of himself (CD: 55). This revaluation of earthly power has ramifications for relationships in which one person ostensibly holds advantage or authority over another (e.g. ruler/citizen). According to Kierkegaard, such distinctions must be trumped by lowliness on the part of the 'powerful' representative, followed by a

constant reminder of true loftiness. Responsibility should not be confused with superiority.

Summary of Discourses I-IV

The first two discourses, through their presentation of artful living, show what it means to not worry about what you will eat or drink (Mt. 6:25). 'Wanting to be rich' is the root of the care of poverty and abundance, and it must be 'spiritually healed' (CD: 20). No matter where an individual stands in relation to money Matthew's message holds out concrete ways to overcome. The imagination plays an important role in the process of artful living as the Christian pictures himself contrary to what the popular consensus might say. The world's categories of rich and poor are secondary and the Gospel inverts them for the individual. Kierkegaard enriches these everyday terms so that they take on a meaning that both comforts and warns a person in the relationship with money. The poor Christian is prayerful and rich. The rich Christian is willfully ignorant and a steward. Poverty does not excuse worry and wealth does not cure it.¹²⁹ Instead, an individual embraces God as a good Father irrespective of his or her financial situation; furthermore, material blessing and poverty are not decisive markers of God's favour or displeasure. New Testament scholar Dale Allison notes how 'the Sermon [on the Mount] does not obviously appeal to our common sense. Those of us who have grown up in the Christian West may perhaps be so used to it that we fail to see how counterintuitive and extreme it is'.¹³⁰ Kierkegaard's inversion of the categories of poverty and abundance helps illustrate the counterintuitive message of Matthew. The reorientation engendered through prayer and forgetfulness elucidates applications from the Sermon, which require a creativity (not

¹²⁹ Leo Stan makes the observation that Kierkegaard's portrait of the greedy poor person also resists the Marxist teaching about the poor as victims of the exploits of the rich. Interestingly, Karl Marx published *The Communist Manifesto* in the same year as *Christian Discourses*. "Endless Liturgy," 67.

¹³⁰ Allison, *Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 25.

fantasy or illusion) that accepts ‘the possibility that God, despite appearances, is active in the world’.¹³¹

Jesus’ call to not worry about what you will wear addresses the issue of identity and status in the world. The third and fourth discourses show that worry about exterior clothing reflects a deeper problem of lacking a true self. Life does not get going until a person knows who she is. For the one who seeks this information from a worldly society a proclivity toward advancement up the ranks invites the problem of worry, and even despair. Kierkegaard is right that everyone holds a relative status in society. Nevertheless, it is not so clear that every unbeliever would necessarily become fixated with becoming something in the world. This does not have to be a fault with his presentation; he is, after all, painting somewhat grotesque pictures in order to cover the various sides of these cares. Kierkegaard also points out how the worldly definition of lowliness and loftiness is corrected by their opposite terms as defined by the Gospel. That is, the boast of and craving for power needs the lowliness found in consciousness of sin and dependence on God; the cry of powerlessness needs a reminder of the highest status of all, child of God and participant with Christ.

His reading suggests that all that really matters for a lowly person is that they are a Christian and he makes no appeal for such a person to aspire to any higher tier of status in society.¹³² Such advice in the revolutionary political climate of his day could be construed as a ploy to squelch movement in the lower echelons of society; more positively, it shows sensitivity to the new opportunities for advancement emerging in his day and offers helpful cautions to those striving to get ahead in the world. The Christian with a high position in the world does not concern himself with strategies to maintain and protect his power; instead, he remembers that God is not impressed by earthly stature.

¹³¹ Ibid., 152.

¹³² See 1 Corinthians 7:20-22

Unfortunately, Kierkegaard merely mentions the positive role to be played by the powerful believer and how he has been entrusted with a legitimate care for others.

The conversation now turns to the final three discourses on presumption, self-torment, and indecisiveness. His elaboration on artful living shifts from the status markers of wealth and power to three sinful attitudes which closely link to the concept of despair found in *Sickness Unto Death*. In this second part of *The Cares*, worry-free living involves maintaining a proper equilibrium in the Creator-creature distinction, the today-tomorrow relationship, and the decision-indecision dialectic. First up is the topic of presumptuousness. The initial section that sets forth the nature of this care is more extensive than the previous and subsequent presentations; this allows space to consider additional scholarship that finds in the fifth discourse a sharp polemic against particular individuals in Copenhagen.

Discourse Five

‘The Care of Presumptuousness’

The fifth discourse, ‘The Care of Presumptuousness’ represents Kierkegaard’s reading of Matthew 6:27: ‘No one can add one foot to his growth’. Presumptuousness is the desire to make the self more than it is or to settle for less than it is; it amounts to inappropriate behaviour before God. Appealing to the excellence of the bird and lily, Kierkegaard maintains that they are free from this care because they ‘*continually will as God wills and continually do as God does*’ (CD: 61). The lily does not crave to be taller and the gray sparrow wishes not to acquire brighter colours, both content themselves with how they are and never put themselves forward in a manner that tempts God. Kierkegaard envies the bird. No one has a shorter movement from ‘thought to accomplishment’ or ‘from intention to decision’, than it (CD: 62). Similarly, the lily

always blossoms into beauty at the right time. The positive portrayal of nature helps set up Kierkegaard's description of how to live free from presumptuousness and what it looks like for a person to will and do as the heavenly Father wills and does. It must also be remembered that, though the bird and lily do will and act in accord with the thought of God, this occurs out of necessity, or naturally and is not the same as when a believer lives free of this care. Now follows a closer look at his definition of presumptuousness in relation to human beings.

First of all, presumptuousness primarily occurs between a person and God, all lesser expressions are derivative of the Creator-creature relationship, which Kierkegaard describes thus: 'Between God and a human being, there is the eternal essential difference of infinity' (CD: 63). Accordingly, to be able to recognize the predicament of presumptuousness one must possess a consciousness of this eternal, relational difference. For those who lack this awareness, Kierkegaard, technically speaking, creates a sub-category of presumptuousness, which, for our purposes, might be labeled as pre-presumptuousness. He writes: 'First and foremost presumptuousness [is] to be spiritlessly ignorant of how a person needs God's help at every moment and that without God he is nothing'; the thought of God has either 'never occurred to them' or after thinking about the Creator in their youth, 'they have completely forgotten him' (CD: 63-64).¹³³ One might classify the former person (to whom God has never occurred) as someone who resembles the classic concept of pagan, one without God in the world. The latter individuals, those who have forgotten God, receive greater condemnation from Kierkegaard and he likens their existence to something below even the beasts. Both parties, regardless of their level of awareness/forgetfulness, are guilty of

¹³³ In this brief section Kierkegaard uses language which alludes to two of the earlier Upbuilding Discourses: 'To Need God is a Human's Highest Perfection' and 'Think about Your Creator in your Youth'. See *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

presumptuousness. Merold Westphal observes how the term ‘pagan’ in this discussion is altered and re-contextualized in order to address Kierkegaard’s nineteenth-century audience:

In biblical times this [pagan] would include the Egyptians, Canaanites, Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans, among others. For Kierkegaard, who did not see himself facing a religious multicultural world as we might see ourselves today, the pagans would be secularists, whether the proletarians who saw the church as nothing more than a prop for the privileged or those whom Schleiermacher called “the cultured among the despisers of religion”.¹³⁴

Westphal’s definition helps clarify the individual described by Kierkegaard, the one who has grown-up in such a way that they have forgotten God – this group represents the spiritlessness of the age addressed in the discourse. This is verified by the fact that Kierkegaard never dwells on the person who completely lacks knowledge of God.¹³⁵ After all, could such an individual even be found in Christendom?

The intentionality of this God-forgetfulness becomes even clearer when Kierkegaard portrays the spiritless individuals as those who seek to put to death the idea and thought of God – an effort he describes as ‘the most dreadful suicide’ (CD: 66). This leads in to his explicit statement on the two forms of fully developed presumptuousness:

Between God and a human being, there is the eternal essential difference of infinity; and when this difference is in any way encroached upon even in the slightest, we have presumptuousness. Presumptuousness therefore is *either* in a forbidden, a rebellious, an ungodly way *to want to have God’s help*, or, in a forbidden, a rebellious, an ungodly way *to want to do without God’s help* (CD: 63).

Returning to the biblical theme of the discourse, the reader learns that attempts to add a measure to one’s life (6:27) is synonymous with either unbelief or superstition. Before we approach the artful, Christian response to this form of care, more attention to the critical aspects of the discourse must first ensue.

¹³⁴ Westphal, "Paganism in Christendom," 18-19.

¹³⁵ This dialogue resembles the discussion in *SUD* on the classic form of paganism, and its relationship to despair. In that instance, despair has a less intentional degree than presumptuousness does in the present discourse. In *SUD*, ignorance of despair ‘is the most common in the world’, it envelops both the classic definition of paganism and the ‘natural man in Christendom’ (45).

Kierkegaard distinguishes disbelief from the ignorance or forgetfulness mentioned above in this way: 'Disbelief wants to deny God and is therefore in a way involved with God' (CD: 67). Kirmmse believes Kierkegaard has as his target the Hegelianism of Heiberg and Martensen, especially insofar as they make out God to be the one that needs man's help.¹³⁶ Textually, his observations have some warrant when viewed alongside Kierkegaard's elaboration on the care of wanting to add a foot:

It certainly would be an enormous foot to add to his growth if a person directly before God were capable of denying God, or if it should even be the case that it is God who is in need of human beings, perhaps, as the wisdom of this age has understood it (if it is at all understandable), in order to understand himself (CD: 67).

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard does not go into detail about the comment which labels as ridiculous the notion that God needs help to become himself. Kirmmse's observation, if applied too rigidly, results in too simplistic a depiction of Heiberg and Martensen, especially since Kierkegaard continues his thoughts on disbelief by describing these individuals as worse than a pagan; they are not just without God in the world, instead, they willfully decide to be 'abandoned by God' (CD: 68). Recalling Westphal's conclusion that the pagans, for Kierkegaard, were the 'secularist' and culturally elite, Kierkegaard's exploration of disbelief would challenge such readers and declare that, despite the success and confidence they find within their contempt for God, they are actually engulfed in anxiety.¹³⁷ This leads to the final form of presumptuousness.

Movement along the continuum of presumptuousness goes from ignorance of being spirit (classic paganism) to disbelief (*Vantro*) to superstition (*Overtro*). Each step brings the individual closer to genuine Christianity. The last form to consider, superstition, occurs when an individual wants God's help, but on his own terms, practically speaking, he wants God to be his slave (CD: 68). As Possén points out, the

¹³⁶ Kirmmse, *Golden Age Denmark*, 344.

¹³⁷ See also Possén, "On Kierkegaard's Copenhagen Pagans", in *IKC: CD*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 39.

superstitious person acknowledges and approaches God, thus sharing the most in common with the ideal Christian presented in the discourses.¹³⁸ Possen goes on to make a case that this final definition singles out Hans Lassen Martensen and an on-going debate on ‘the relation between grace and reason in Lutheran life’.¹³⁹ In this dispute, ‘the burning question here is whether we can *make sense* on our own of the knowledge that redemption provides’; in other words, Martensen takes Luther in a direction that would see redeemed individuals go on to elicit God’s grace to assist in world-historical Hegelian speculation.¹⁴⁰ Kierkegaard objects. Rereading his definition of superstition with Possen’s comments on Martensen in mind shows a concrete example of an individual who ‘wants by inadmissible means to penetrate the forbidden, discover the hidden, discern the future’ (CD: 68). God will not be a slave of Copenhagen’s intellectual elite; instead Kierkegaard calls for a limit to reason, and in its place favours the ability only ‘to acknowledge our inability to wrap our minds around Christianity’s truth – and then to flee to grace’.¹⁴¹

Beneath the intellectual superstition outlined by Possen, there exists a misappropriation of the Gospel’s presentation of the life of Christ. Kierkegaard makes this point forcefully in the sixth discourse: ‘Far be it from us presumptuously to try to gain popularity by fathoming what should not be fathomed. We do not believe that he [Christ] came to the world in order to give us subjects for erudite research. He came to the world to set the task, in order to leave a footprint so that we would learn from him’ (CD: 76-77). Accordingly, Kierkegaard’s discourse on presumptuousness offers a poignant reminder, not just to Martensen and others of his day, but to each generation of

¹³⁸ Ibid., 39.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 50. His argument presupposes Kierkegaard’s knowledge of Magnús Eiríksson’s *Tro, Overtro, og Vantro* (Faith, Superstition, and Disbelief) and his adaptation of its contents. Possen demonstrates how Kierkegaard simultaneously refutes Eiríksson’s reading of *Fear and Trembling* as superstition and reworks his structure as the basis for theological debate with Martensen.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 50-51.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 51.

scholars whose investigations interact with the sacred. I turn now to an investigation of the nature - human distinction and the Christian - pagan distinction in relation to presumptuousness in order to draw out the implications for artful living.

Artful Living and Presumptuousness

Presumptuousness derives from the fact that a human being can be ‘infinitely far from God, in whom he nevertheless lives and moves and has his being’ (CD: 63). On the level of possibility, the distance constitutes the Creator-creature distinction upheld by Kierkegaard in the discussion; it becomes a spiritual problem, however, when a person either ignores, forgets, overly embraces, or tries to extinguish the infinite qualitative difference. Again, the possibility of presumptuousness sets humankind apart from the natural world; artful living entails returning from and responding to this distance through the giving up of self will, by acknowledging that life is *sola gratia*, and by slowly learning to find complete satisfaction in God:

The first thing he must learn is to be satisfied with God’s grace; but when he is in the process of learning this, the final difficulty comes along. Yet to be satisfied with God’s grace, which at first glance seems so meager and humiliating, is indeed the highest and most blessed good – or is there any higher good than God’s grace! Therefore he must learn not to behave with arrogance, not to presume – to be satisfied with God’s grace (CD: 65).

Kierkegaard grants greater clarity on presumptuousness, it also amounts to arrogance, which is an attitude one might not immediately connect with the issue of worry. The slow education away from it restates a theme prevalent throughout the discourses, ‘Apart from Jesus you can do nothing (John. 15:5)’. As a person grows in realizing his or her ‘nothingness’ before God, the possibility of presumptuousness never completely diminishes. While this may be one of his implicit ideas, more importantly, Kierkegaard wishes to make the reader aware of the danger which even surrounds the reception of grace into one’s life. In order to not fall off either side of grace into presumptuousness,

the Christian must continually acknowledge and confess utter dependence on God while he simultaneously recognizes that grace is slippery and cannot be demanded or clung to in forbidden ways.¹⁴²

When a person comes to terms with the possibility of presumptuousness, it has the added benefit of reinforcing a need for grace. This relates to a second distinction between the Christian and the bird and lily: 'In its need, the bird is as close as possible to God; it cannot do without him at all. The Christian is in even greater need; he *knows* that he cannot do without him . . . The Christian is even closer to him; he cannot do without – his grace' (CD: 65). Artful living includes the acquisition of the knowledge of one's neediness. The opportunity to be rescued from arrogance and to experience the grace of God is infinitely more than nature can encounter. This knowledge includes a consciousness of sin which Kierkegaard never divorces from the proper action of fully depending of the heavenly Father. His discussion points to a delicate relationship between a person's free will and a person's inability to live, move, or have being without God. Timothy P. Jackson says this about Kierkegaard's view of the will: 'Freedom is internal to all virtue and vice, and cannot be short-circuited, *even by God*, if responsible ethico-religious agency is to be retained'.¹⁴³ But does Kierkegaard, in his depiction of presumptuous-free living live up to these Arminian tendencies?

In the context of the school of grace promoted in this discourse, perhaps Jackson has overlooked the presence of God's decisive role in Kierkegaard's soteriology. He asserts that Kierkegaard rejects 'irresistible grace'. This may be upheld negatively insofar as human beings can reject their own perception of who they believe God to be; it is not so clear that this autonomy exists positively, that is, when an individual 'decides' to cross

¹⁴² See also Possén's article which considers this question from the angle of taking advantage of the grace of God. "The Voice of Rigor," in *IKC: FSE/JFY*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004).

¹⁴³ Timothy P. Jackson, "Arminian Edification: Kierkegaard on Grace and Free Will," in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Hannay and Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 244.

over to Christianity. Kierkegaard says this about the role of prayer in the battle against presumptuousness: ‘He [the believer] does not insist on helping himself but prays for God’s grace’; again, ‘He understands that *even in order to pray* for his grace he cannot do without God’s grace’ (CD: 64, my italics). For Kierkegaard, ‘God’s grace encompasses the Christian in blessed closeness . . . “His grace comes to the Christian *beforehand*” (Psalm 59:10), so that he may will to be satisfied with God’s grace, and “comes *afterward*” (Psalm 23:6), so that he may not have willed in vain’ (CD: 63-64). From this it sounds as if free will comes up short in its ability to defeat worry - the spiritual life and its most central actions require decisive Divine assistance. The possibility of presumptuousness does underscore the freedom of the will and, to repeat Jackson’s observation, ‘freedom is internal to virtue’; in the mysterious mingling of *sola gratia* and freedom, artful living looks thus:

The Christian has no self-will whatever; he surrenders himself unconditionally . . . with regard to God’s grace he again has no self-will . . . so diminished is the Christian with regard to self-will that in relation to God’s grace he is weaker than the bird in relation to instinct, which has it completely in its power, is weaker than the bird is strong in relation to its instinct, which is its power (CD: 64).

The grace of God is the ruling force in a believer’s life; God’s grace, and not self-will is also the source of power for Christian living. Kierkegaard’s discussion never orients toward the negative ‘freedom’ that manifests in disobedience; in the journals and papers he says this: ‘The most tremendous thing conceded to man is – choice, freedom. If you want to rescue and keep it, there is only one way – in the very same second unconditionally in full attachment give it back to God and yourself along with it (JP 2: 69)’.¹⁴⁴ Recalling Malantschuk’s comments on the greater spiritual cast of the latter discourses, it is clear from this fifth discourse that Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Matthew includes a penetrating psychological treatment of worry and how it manifests in

¹⁴⁴ Jackson affirms this notion with his discussion of Augustine’s separation of *liberum arbitrium* and *libertas* and its connection to Kierkegaard’s agenda of true freedom. Ibid., 249.

the attitudes of human beings. There are also areas of overlap with *Sickness Unto Death* that will be explored subsequently. A similar inventory of the self's interiority surfaces in 'The Care of Self-Torment'.

Discourse Six

'The Care of Self-Torment'

The sixth discourse, 'The Care of Self-Torment' (*Selvplager*)¹⁴⁵ is based on Matthew 6:34: 'Therefore do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own'. Consistent with the structure of the entire collection, Kierkegaard begins with the bird and lily and highlights how, for them, there exists no concept of yesterday or tomorrow, with more emphasis on their inability to contemplate the days ahead. His justification for this is thus: 'The next day is seen only in the mind; and the bird is not tormented (*plaget*) by dreams – but the next day is the obstinate dream that returns' (CD: 70). As for the lily, Kierkegaard points to Matthew's text to reiterate that today it is and tomorrow it is thrown into the furnace; accordingly, these teachers instinctively avoid the care of self-torment, which is Kierkegaard's rephrasing of Jesus' admonition: 'Do not worry about tomorrow'. This temporal boundary does not exclude a proper concern about this moment and today; these go together just as self-torment and tomorrow are a pair. The bird and lily have no struggle with the next day because they lack the imagination and they lack a self. Such is the nature of self-torment because 'the next day lies in the self' (CD: 71).¹⁴⁶ Nature's ability to live in the moment is instinctive. While Kierkegaard's construction of the lily and bird

¹⁴⁵ The term might also include the idea of self-plaguing, self-torturing, or self-bothering.

¹⁴⁶ Walter Lowrie translates this passage thus: 'the next day is derived from the self'; this seems to better capture the role of the imagination, and, in this case, its negative potential to exacerbate anxiety.

point to proper Gospel living, he also insists on their limitations and qualitative difference from humanity.

In reference to the second part of 6:34, Kierkegaard ponders if Jesus' words that 'each day has *enough* worry of its own', really amounts to good news. Does this statement mean to encourage the disciples by telling them that the rest of their lives will include a daily quantity of worry? Kierkegaard answers with an appeal to providence: 'God takes care of us also in this regard; he measures out the trouble that is *enough* for each day; take no more than what is apportioned, which is just *enough*, whereas worry about the next day is covetousness' (CD: 73). Worry about tomorrow turns out to be a form of greed. Matthew's Gospel both encourages the proper type of care and discourages the kind of forward thinking that buries an individual in a covetous relationship with the next day. Instead of being 'contemporary with himself', Kierkegaard proposes that 'most people are apocalyptically, in theatrical illusions, hundreds of thousands of miles ahead of themselves, or several generations ahead of themselves in feelings, in delusions, in intentions, in resolution, in wishes, in longings' (CD: 74). Were he to write a book titled, *The Best Cure for Self-Torment*, its content would only contain Jesus' command to 'Let every day have enough in its own worries'. As he turns to the manifestations of self-torment in the life of the pagan, the discussion revolves around two ideas: death and God-forsakeness. Interestingly, each of these awaited Jesus, though he dismissed them in perfect obedience. Paganism (and modern society) exists largely in fear of them.

Artful living is not the same as the escapism of pagan philosophy which says: 'Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die'. Kierkegaard qualifies and distinguishes it from *carpe diem*. Such a mantra does not conquer the care of tomorrow, 'this very remark echoes with the anxiety about the next day, the day of annihilation, the anxiety

(*Angesten*) that insanely is supposed to signify joy although it is a shriek from the abyss' (CD: 80). The attempt to seize the day in this manner is impossible and correlates with the spiritlessness discussed in 'The Care of Presumptuousness'. As a synthesis, the Christian can live presently for the eternal; as a synthesis, the pagan cannot merely live as a temporal being – he or she is always neglecting the true self: 'The more he attempts to will to dispense with the eternal, the further away he is from living today' (CD: 78). This level of hedonism is bravado; it is fear of death. Instead of using the imagination to cast aside the next day, the pagan 'plunges himself into a frantic stupor in order, if possible, to forget it' (CD: 77).

In addition to trying to escape tomorrow through *carpe diem*, Kierkegaard distinguishes a second false response to the next day wherein an individual lives trapped in constant fear that loss and ruin wait around the corner. This is melancholy and despair. The choice to live in the world without God is the root explanation for this torment; he refuses to cast his cares upon God (CD: 77). For such a person, 'it actually makes no difference to him what kind of day today is . . . he is able neither to enjoy it nor to use it, because he cannot get away from the invisible writing on the wall: tomorrow' (CD: 78). In chapter one, I mentioned how Kierkegaard, in the discussion of anxiety over 'nothing' was careful to distinguish it from fear. With regard to the next day, Kierkegaard employs the terminology of anxiety, but this time the issue of fear does seem relevant to the discussion. The combination of worry/anxiety about the future cannot be divorced from fear of mortality and the dreadful thought that God does not care; Kierkegaard exposes the thought patterns, attitudes, and psychological underpinnings of the costly decision to sell one's life to the future. Now follows the alternative to self-torment.

Artful Living and Self-Torment

To overcome the dizziness that occurs from being too caught up in the future, one must willfully put it out of her mind. Those who wish to defeat the care of self-torment face a persistent enemy and a continual task:

For the bird it is easy enough to *be* rid of the next day – but to *get* rid of it! Oh, of all the enemies that with force or with slyness press in upon a person, perhaps none is as obtrusive as this next day, which is always this next day. To gain mastery over one's mind is greater than to occupy a city, but if a person is to gain mastery over his mind, he must begin by *getting* rid of the next day (CD: 71).

The task called for by Kierkegaard is consistent with the other forms of artful living in *The Cares*. It is a process of becoming a true self, its possibility has roots in a nature-human distinction, and its success is linked to correct thinking and use of the imagination. Kierkegaard insists that too much care for tomorrow encapsulates all 'earthly and worldly' anxiety; such a move puts focus on verse 6:34 as a hermeneutical key for the Matthean passage. Possibility for this relationship with tomorrow exists because humans are 'compounded of the temporal and the eternal' and once again important overlap with themes from *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Sickness Unto Death* appear (CD: 71). Like the path of the rich and powerful Christian, artful living in the face of the next day entails willful ignorance and forgetfulness. Kierkegaard gives two illustrations to sharpen the point.

First of all, the next day is to the believer what the completely darkened audience is to the actor on stage. Staring at the theatre lights, he remains unaware of any specific person that might disturb his performance. Second, like a rower, the one living artfully turns his back on the finish line (CD: 73). Kierkegaard's purpose is to call the individual to a life 'eternally absorbed in today'; to look at the audience disrupts the play and takes the individual out of her role; to turn to face the front of the boat stops all momentum (CD: 73). This leads to the capstone of the Christian's experience, which also turns out to

be the message of Matthew 6:34: contemporaneity with oneself. ‘To be totally contemporary with oneself today with the help of the eternal is also the most formative and generative; it is the gaining of eternity . . . This contemporaneity today is the very task; when it is worked out, it is faith’ (CD: 75). Prayer is central in the task of self-contemporaneity. When the next day oversteps its boundaries in a person’s life, he prays it away; the content of this dialogue with God is a request for provision, strength, and salvation for today. In the end, the person who ‘fill[s] up the day today with the eternal’, is also imitating Christ (CD: 75). More will be said shortly about the role of imitation in the collection as a whole; moreover, in the 1849 discourses, Kierkegaard elaborates further on the idea of Christianly living for today through a discussion of ‘the moment’, I will devote greater attention that topic in the next chapter. Conversation now moves to the final discourse.

Discourse Seven

‘The Care of Indecision, Vacillation, and Disconsolateness’

The concluding discourse of the 1848 collection, on indecision, vacillation, and disconsolateness, revisits Matthew 6:24 and the declaration that ‘no one can serve two masters’. Like the 1847 discourse on blessed happiness, this includes a discussion on the proper execution of the gift of choice. In the earlier piece, Kierkegaard expounds on the uniqueness of the faculty of choice, the inescapability of choice, and the differences between a choice for God and mammon. This time he draws attention to the importance of choosing the Divine in a timely manner and the dangers present for the individual who deliberates too long over the question of Christianity’s either/or. The bird and lily set the initial standard for this wholehearted loyalty (CD: 82). Through his depiction of the pagan, Kierkegaard clarifies the three expressions of worry that reveal a divided heart.

Indecisiveness (*Tvivlraadighed*)¹⁴⁷ is an attitude that views the need for the Good as only incidental. It is a mere ‘triviality’ and the individual lacks consciousness of the pressing need for decision. On the surface, this level of deliberation may appear wise and necessary for such an important question as relationship with God; eventually, however, too much delay must raise some suspicions. As Kierkegaard remarks, ‘there is still one thing about which a need for long deliberation is a very dubious sign: it is God’ (CD: 88). Undoubtedly, he would allow for a certain level of sincere forethought and would not commend impulsiveness in the arena of Christianity. Under scrutiny is an overly cool disposition toward ultimate matters that postures earnestness in an attempt to cover over doubt. Such a mentality reveals a false sense of neutrality, it also commits the error of spiritual consumerism:

God is not like something one buys in the shop, or like a piece of property that one, after having sagaciously and circumspectly examined, measured, and calculated for a long time, decides is worth buying. With regard to God, the ungodly calmness with which the indecisive person wants to begin (indeed, he wants to begin with doubt), precisely this is the insubordination, because in this way God is thrust down from the throne, from being *the master* (CD 88-89).

Indecisiveness is a mishandling of God. To withhold the will necessitates an assertion of autonomy, reveals a lack of genuine consciousness of sin and therefore seriousness, passes judgment on God’s worth and word, and declares an orientation toward unbelief as long as the verdict on God remains unsure. With time, the individual who exists at the disposal of doubt moves on to slave under the master of vacillation.

The care of vacillation captures the idea of fickleness, irresolution, and unsteadiness. Such a person is wobbly and his prolonged indecisiveness has weakened the soul. The ‘power to resist the thoughts’ of the Gospel has diminished; instead, ‘whim rules, also with regard to the question of choosing God’ (CD: 89). From time to time the value of following God dawns on the individual; nonetheless, such moments pass; ‘these

¹⁴⁷ The Danish word connotes the idea of being counseled by, advised by, or at the disposal of doubt.

motions, which have no meaning, acquire no meaning either and leave no trace, except increased sluggishness and laxity' (CD: 89). This is the enfeebling action of vacillation. The individual who thought he could control the freedom to doubt falls prey to doubt. By neglecting to make a choice for God, ironically, he has exercised his will in a harmful way and is now ruled by double-mindedness; 'when vacillation has ruled long enough and, of course, like all ungodly rulers has sucked the blood and wasted the marrow, *disconsolateness* comes to power' (CD: 89).

The third component of care equates to a forgetfulness of God that is actively pursued and a choice to ignore all that is higher. This is disconsolateness (*Trøstesløshed*).¹⁴⁸ With conviction, the individual prefers 'to get rid of the thought of God entirely' (CD: 89). For the person committed to unhappiness, the most uplifting thought of all, the Gospel, is also the most dangerous thought of all. It seeks to bring the greatest bliss to a human being, but not without simultaneously bringing the sobering sting of reality. The bliss is this: 'The thought of being remembered by God, of existing before God' (CD: 89). For the pagan, the task is to forget this talk of bliss and to sink deeper into a life without God; this mentality comes to represent the underlying passion and commitment of the individual. On the outside, such a life may look normal and even find worldly success and envy in its endless pursuits for money, fame, power, or whatever other diversion helps quench the one thing that is necessary. What began as doubt and postponement culminates in an utterly sorrowful existence. Interestingly, this echoes Luther's sentiment in *Bondage of the Will* when he insists that 'uncertainty is the most miserable thing in the world'.¹⁴⁹ Kierkegaard describes this disconsolateness as an 'understanding with oneself, arrived at in dead silence, that everything higher is lost,

¹⁴⁸ The term's wider meaning includes the idea of bleakness, hopelessness, and an inability to be helped by another.

¹⁴⁹ Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 69.

although one can still go on living if only nothing reminds one of it' (CD: 90). To choose disconsolateness is more heinous than defying and cursing God; it amounts to losing the greatest treasure on earth as if it were nothing at all, to losing God without a trace of remorse or sense of self-depletion (CD: 90). The individual who misuses the capacity to choose the highest tramples over his own life as well.

The description of the pagan characterizes a life that is trying to serve two masters. In particular, Kierkegaard diagrams three related cares found in a person who, after coming into contact with the ultimate either/or of the Gospel, attempts to maintain a stance of non-commitment. In the discussion of presumptuousness, I commented on David Possen's theory that Kierkegaard, through his portrait of the pagan, was intellectually sparring with Martensen over the limits of reason in the realm of theology. Possen's theory finds further confirmation here. The same attack against an over reliance on reason emerges in Kierkegaard's account of the Christian, whose 'cheerful obedience does not praise what one understands but what one does not understand' (CD: 85). Loyalty to God does not proceed in complete isolation from understanding but it must not be contingent upon it. The human being oversteps his bounds with the infinite when he reasons out the ways in which the events of life have worked favorably and beneficially for him. Instead, 'proper praise . . . is namely this: by joyous and unconditional obedience to praise God when one cannot understand him' (CD: 86). Kierkegaard insists that obedience must precede human understanding.¹⁵⁰ Otherwise a person subtly replaces trust in God with trust in human wisdom. By grounding this attack against doubt in 6:24, Kierkegaard also highlights the fact that doubt is not so much an intellectual problem as it is an ethico-religious problem. Having briefly overviewed the content of the tri-fold cares

¹⁵⁰ He reiterates this conviction at the end of the 1849 discourse on Matthew 6:24: 'The Gospel knows very well that the way things go is not that a person first understands that what it says is so and then decides to obey unconditionally, but the reverse, that by unconditionally obeying he first comes to understand that it is as the Gospel says' (WA: 34-35).

of this discourse, I now look at how Kierkegaard overturns them with another example of living artfully.

Artful Living and Indecisiveness, Vacillation, and Disconsolateness

Faith, eternal resolve, and joy are the antonyms of indecisiveness, vacillation, and disconsolateness (CD: 85). Kierkegaard details the path to wholeness and serving one master, once again, by contrasting nature's service and the believer's service. The bird and lily wholly serve the master; the Christian not only serves God, he also loves him, 'love unites wholly, unites the dissimilar in love, here unites the human being wholly in God, who is love' (CD: 84).¹⁵¹ Love distinguishes Christian service from the natural submission of nature. Service of God combines with a willing heart and amounts to a life of 'divine service': the Christian becomes 'eternally at one with himself and with the master who is one; and it unifies a person in likeness to God' (CD: 84). The only way to be free – to serve one master – is to serve the God of Christianity. Artful living cannot be equated with any attempt to wholly unite with something or someone less than God. The result will only be ruin.

There are an endless number of things an individual can love most: 'a woman, one's child, one's father, one's country, one's art, one's scholarly studies; but what *every* human being basically loves most . . . is nevertheless his own will' (CD: 84). Artful living not only entails acts of obedience, it includes an individual's passions. There is a way to do all the right things for God and yet still withhold the heart – this is not serving one master. Love is a yielding of the will, not just outward conformity to the rules. Kierkegaard does not condemn devotion and affection toward the individuals, entities,

¹⁵¹ His use of love language corresponds with the major work from the same period, WL. Malantschuk notes how these discourses operate 'from a higher point of view, that is, with the Christian ethic of *Works of Love* as background'. *Kierkegaard's Thought*, 326.

and activities listed above. In each of those instances, the problem does not lie with the chosen objects; instead, it is love and commitment to self-will which turns these otherwise good things into idols, into mammon.

A person's will is the mark of freedom and of being made in the image of God and may bring about the greatest downfall or highest blessedness. Kierkegaard asks the question 'Is the Christian even more obedient than the bird?' In reply, he answers affirmatively, 'the bird has no other will than God's will, but the Christian has another will which in obedience he always sacrifices to God' (CD: 84). This is artful living. Verse 6:24 means that a person cannot serve God's will and his or her own will. Christianity demands everything, but not without duly rewarding the individual: 'it is for your own salvation that it [self-will] is taken away from you, and yet to your own harm there is nothing you clutch so tightly and nothing that clutches you as tightly' (CD: 84). This level of self-relinquishing will not occur as a result of merely human understanding, but out of a revealed *understanding* of the character of God. Namely, that service of God can never result in harm of self since 'his will is certainly my only true good' (CD: 86). The Gospel's call is not cruel or hardhearted, it is 'sheer grace and wisdom' (CD: 84-85).

In *Purity of Heart* Kierkegaard asserts that only the Good (God) remains unchanging and qualifies itself for an object of wholehearted service: 'Pleasure and honour and riches and power and all that this world has to offer only appear to be one thing' (UDVS: 56). The individual who tries to devoutly seek them, travels in a 'continual alteration' endlessly subjected to corruption and change; as a result, pursuit of anything but the Good ends in double-mindedness for 'as the coveted object is, so becomes the coveter' (UDVS: 66). Kierkegaard draws attention to the same problem here, though the explanation for the impossibility of wholeheartedly living for mammon differs. In addition to his benevolence, God's *unchangeableness* makes him the perfect

master and his *ownership* of all he has made makes him the inescapable master; ‘he has to serve God whether he wants to or not’ (WA: 197; JP 2: 952). The one who chooses to live artfully puts his faith in the character of God, gains grace and strength to resolve the good, and enters into a life of joy.

Summary of Discourses V-VII

The existential outworking of presumptuousness corresponds with Kierkegaard’s definition of sin and despair in *Sickness Unto Death*: ‘Sin is before God, or with the conception of God, in despair not to will to be oneself, or in despair to will to be oneself’ (SUD: 77). Presumptuousness, like sin, occurs before God. It entails an encroachment of the Creator-creature distinction through an attempt to posit an illegitimate self, either destructively (disbelief) or creatively (superstition). In each case, the individual both wills and does not will to be himself and worry (despair) is the result of each movement. Kierkegaard also brings the terminology of anxiety into close proximity with the concept of worry. In a summary statement of the discourse he writes, ‘just as grace comes through God to each person who as a Christian draws near to him, so anxiety comes through himself to the person who presumptuously withdraws from God or presumptuously draws near to him’ (CD: 69). This is one of several places Kierkegaard equates the term with worry or care in the discourse. His definition of presumptuousness also feeds his interpretation of 6:27.

From the perspective of modern Matthew studies, Kierkegaard takes the minority view by rendering the text as adding a foot to one’s growth; the majority of translations present the idea of adding time to one’s life span. Luz also goes against the common reading of verse 6:27. He sees the image as ‘a pessimistic wisdom’ and as something ‘in contrast to the two images [bird and lily], this intervening idea of v.27 breathes an air of

resignation. People cannot change the measure God has set for them'.¹⁵² Kierkegaard's comments on finding satisfaction in God seem more positive and proactive than Luz's idea of mere resignation. The Creator-creature distinction not only humbles the individual, it also brings energy, draws him closer to the heavenly Father, infuses joy into his life, and protects against the two pitfalls of this variety of worry. To want to add a foot to one's growth is to desire to become the exception or the extraordinary; this manifests in the arrogance that either wants to alter the self so that it does not need God or the arrogance that wants to change its being so that it has God on its own terms. Both individuals remain in care. Kierkegaard contends strongly that God's wrath remains upon them until they flee to the grace of God (CD 69).

Through his depiction of self-torment and his exploration of different unhealthy relationships with the next day, Kierkegaard offers a commentary on Matthew 6:34. To worry about tomorrow amounts to a fatalistic view of the future and a fear of death. This outlook manifests in two ways. First, there is the dread, rooted in a condition of God-forsakenness, that at any moment everything good will crumble. It also surfaces in a hedonistic lifestyle that ignores the spiritual nature of the self and attempts to drown out the 'day of annihilation' (CD: 77). To not worry about tomorrow reverses the two tendencies reviewed above. The believer turns her back on the next day and concentrates her full efforts on becoming a true self in the present. Kierkegaard's reading of 6:34 does not deny the presence of all care. Instead, he limits its range. This fosters the existential outlook commended continually in the discourses and adds an important image to the presentation of Christian sanctification (artful living) in the Matthew writings. The presence of enough care for each day creates the opportunity to cast these cares upon the heavenly Father, keeps the individual from getting too far ahead of himself, and provides

¹⁵² Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 344. See also here Luz's justification for this translation of the text, which is rooted in linguistics, rabbinic thought, and the history of interpretation.

a reminder that true life in the ‘now’ can only occur in cooperation with God and in full awareness of being both physical and spiritual beings.

Jesus’ words, ‘no one can serve two masters,’ do not permit love and devotion to mammon, even for the person who claims to fully commit to the task. Not only is undivided service of all non-God entities forbidden, it is also impossible. Matthew’s text calls the disciple to an unalloyed loyalty to God which also results in a genuine unification of the self; purity of heart is to will one thing, says Kierkegaard, and from 6:24 he clarifies what that one thing is and what it is not. The text, with its language of service, love, and devotion, repackages the summary of the Law: Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Kierkegaard’s discourse once again puts the spotlight on the gift of choice and depicts a grim picture of what happens when the most important either/or in life is neglected or put off due to intellectual arrogance and doubt. Attempts to master self-will, instead of yielding it to God, end in being mastered by doubt and subjected to its destructive forces. Kierkegaard’s imaginative construction of the pagan shows the dark side of the possibility of choice; even more, it reads out of 6:24 the principle that delay is not the same as standing still. Timely decision for God is a must. In *Either/Or* Judge William belabours this same point with the illustration of an indecisive boat captain. While out at sea, he can certainly entertain doubt about what to do next; however, he is foolish to think that he is not simultaneously drifting from the spot in which the decision is best made (E/O II: 164). The either/or of Matthew is not an invitation to a calm, objective, sustained deliberation. It is an alarm sounded to generate the impatience of faith and need that loves and devotes to the heavenly Father.

Throughout the chapter several accounts of how to properly respond to the cares of the pagans have been organized under the heading of artful living. By returning to this

idea briefly now I wish to highlight how artful living relates to another important theme in *The Cares*; namely, imitation of Christ.

Artful Living and Imitation of Christ

In all seven discourses, when it comes time for Kierkegaard to display the Christian response to the care under consideration, he always includes a gaze at the prototype, Jesus Christ. A few examples will help show this movement. With regard to poverty, the reader is encouraged to see the positive side of temporal poverty; specifically, it reminds the individual that ‘the life of holiness is lived here on earth in poverty, that *he* [Jesus] hungered in the desert and thirsted on the cross; thus not only can one live in poverty, but in poverty one can *live*’ (CD: 16). To have God is to be wealthy; in poverty to thankfully pray and receive from day to day is also to imitate Jesus – the prototype of poverty. Similar scenarios play out in the remaining writings. The task of forgetting one’s wealth defers finally to the teacher and pattern of how the rich should live in this world. The creed of the rich person is thus: ‘He believes . . . that a Christian’s wealth is in heaven; therefore his heart turns there where his treasure must be. He always bears in mind that *he* who possessed all the world’s wealth gave up everything he possessed and lived in poverty, that consequently the life of holiness is lived in poverty, and thus in turn in ignorance of all the wealth that is possessed’ (CD: 32). In this way, Jesus represents the prototype of artful living; above and beyond the bird and lily, he is the example of what a life looks like that, though infinitely wealthy, has extinguished the thought of possessions.

In the case of embracing lowliness, without worrisomely striving to overturn the external circumstances, Kierkegaard spells out further the ramifications of following after Christ: ‘As a *human being* he was created in the image [*Billede*] of God, but as a

Christian he has God as the *prototype* [*Forbillede*] (CD: 41).¹⁵³ There is more to Christian lowliness than humble circumstances. To have God as one's pattern is dialectically both a continual challenge and a constant source of bliss and purpose. Jesus embodies a worry-free relationship to status; his lowliness, however, differs from all other lowliness insofar as it involves an act of the will unsurpassed in the world.¹⁵⁴ Jesus radically identifies with those facing the temptation to become something in the world. Kierkegaard recites the Gospel accounts of how Jesus dodged the pronouncements of men that undulated back and forth between worldly greatness and inferiority and how he trusted unfailingly in his position as the one with whom the Father was well pleased (Mt 3:17). Worry over status is defeated through contemplating the prototype: 'At such a blessed moment when he is absorbed in his prototype, someone else looks at him, the other person sees only a lowly person before him; it was just the same with the prototype – people saw only the lowly person' (CD: 43). It takes eyes of faith to look at the life of Jesus and to envision and believe he is the exalted one; it takes the same kind of sanctified imagination to see oneself through the lens of the Gospel. True enlightenment about one's self and one's dignity comes from God's pronouncement and from spending time in God's presence.

A final instance of the connection between artful living and following the example of Christ is taken from the sixth discourse, 'The Care of Self-Torment'. There Kierkegaard mentioned the importance of becoming contemporary with oneself. In the language of *Practice in Christianity*, the believer who does so is also experiencing contemporaneity with Christ. Beyond the message of the lily and bird and the anti-type of

¹⁵³ The Hongs prefer prototype for the Danish word *Forbillede*. It also may be translated as example, paragon, model, ideal, or pattern. The term reiterates the idea of being before God, the Christian in front of the image.

¹⁵⁴ In this context Kierkegaard is featuring a person whose circumstances are 'accidentally' lowly; he does not take into account the fact that it is possible for an individual to cast aside earthly status and choose an existence of abasement.

the pagan, ‘the Christian has learned or is learning (for the Christian is always a learner) from the prototype’ (CD: 75). Christ is the teacher and example of the artful living that defeats self-torment. ‘He came to the world to set the task, in order to leave a footprint so that we would learn from him’, says Kierkegaard (CD: 77). No one experienced greater trials and temptations to give in to the worry of tomorrow than he who omnisciently bore a future fraught with suffering, poverty, misunderstanding, betrayal, and crucifixion. The next day ‘had no power over him before it came, and when it came and was the today, it had no other power over him than what was his Father’s will, to which he, eternally free, had consented and to which he obediently submitted’ (CD: 77). The bird and lily grant an initial portrait of worry-free life; the pagans show the wrong way to go; Jesus Christ exemplifies how to maintain loyalty to the heavenly Father regardless of one’s external circumstances and internal struggles. This level of connection is not solely derived from 6:24-34; instead, for Kierkegaard, a good understanding of New Testament Christology in general is an indispensable aid in reading Matthew 6:24-34.

Jørgen Bukdahl sees Kierkegaard’s stress on imitation as a direct consequence of the persecution he experienced as a result of the 1846 events surrounding *The Corsair* affair. He writes:

Kierkegaard developed a new view of Christianity, in which Christianity was understood as imitation . . . Now Kierkegaard’s memories of his home in the 1830’s, of the Copenhagen religious awakening movement, of Stormgade, of the religious gatherings out at the limekiln, took on a new relevance . . . Out of this crisis and persecution would arise a mature and decisive Kierkegaard, who knew what he wanted and who would steer his course directly toward the battle he was to wage in *The Moment*.¹⁵⁵

Bukdahl’s comments stress the contrasts associated with Kierkegaard’s religious upbringing. He was raised by a father who showed devotion to the State church and the ministry of Bishop Mynster and who also saw fit to introduce his children to the Moravian pietistic movement of the day: ‘It is clear that the most powerful single

¹⁵⁵ Jørgen Bukdahl, *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 83.

personality in Søren Kierkegaard's life, his father, was profoundly immersed in the emotional and anticlerical lay pietism of Herrnhut, a sect which seems to have served as the vehicle for the urban acculturation of stubborn and vocal forms of peasant religious radicalism'.¹⁵⁶ Bukdahl's comments also bring insight into Kierkegaard's psyche during this time; still, he creates too much discontinuity between the earlier and later works by asserting that Kierkegaard had come up with a 'new view of Christianity'. Even if the early literature does not use the terminology that suggests following after Christ, the idea comes across through the categories of subjectivity and appropriation, which permeate the earlier pseudonyms, especially *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts*. Instead of a new view of Christianity, it was a new way of talking about Christianity that characterizes the later literature. That being said, Bukdahl does demonstrate that the later literature emphasizes aspects of the pietism Kierkegaard experienced in his youth.

Kierkegaard was influenced by these ideas, but he did not take all these attributes on-board. In fact, Lee Barrett proposes that within Kierkegaard's insistence on the unachievable standard of the Law there also lurks a critique aimed at the very 'awakened' circles with whom Bukdahl aligns Kierkegaard; among this group were those who had concluded 'that as growth in the new life unfolded, the progressing saint would need God's forgiving grace less and less'.¹⁵⁷ In the post-1846 literature, Kierkegaard gives greater attention to articulating a proper balance between Law and grace and places emphasis on the life-long journey of sanctification, of imitating Christ. Though I maintain that the idea of following Christ existed before *The Corsair*, in fairness to Bukdahl, *The Cares* does support the explicit centrality of imitation of Christ. As the previous discussion has shown, imitation of Christ serves a mostly positive role in *The Cares*; that is, the believer who looks to the prototype for direction finds treasures, blessing, joy,

¹⁵⁶ Kirmmse, *Golden Age Denmark*, 34.

¹⁵⁷ Barrett, "Kierkegaard's Appropriation of Lutheran Doctrine," 87.

purpose, and adventure. This is contrasted somewhat by the 1851 Matthew discourse, ‘Christ as the Prototype’, with its more polarizing expression characteristic of the battle against the establishment mentioned by Bukdahl. I will return to this later approach subsequently.

Conclusion of *The Cares of the Pagans*

Every human being has a relationship to food, drink, and clothing. As necessities of life, they represent material items that create fertile soil for either worry or for dependence on the heavenly Father. Run through the sieve of comparison, these quantitatively determined categories externally divide and classify individuals into the rich, poor, lofty, and/or lowly; consequently, worry ensues as power and treasure tempt people to get more, to hold on to what they have, or to at least get more than others around them. The first four discourses set out how the Gospel proposes a view of the self that recognizes the temporal and changing state of that outlook on life while it moves beyond it to participate in artful living. Kierkegaard proposes an existential forgetfulness facilitated initially by the lesson of the birds and lilies and finally by the example of Jesus. In Matthew 6:25, Matthew’s Jesus asks: ‘Is not *life* more than food and the *body* more than clothing?’ Kierkegaard’s reading, on one level, shows how the ‘more’ under consideration includes the status markers connected to food and clothing; more importantly, the ‘more’ refers to the wealth and status offered in the kingdom of God. By inverting and expanding on these terms, in view of the Gospel, he offers the reader an attractive, alternative view of life than that found in the majority of modern society. The words that start out as possible triggers of worry become points of reference for kingdom life.

In the final three pieces, worry emerges as a result of ignorance of God, in attempts to willfully live apart from God, through actions that try to control God, in fear of the next day, and by refusal to decisively choose the heavenly Father. Artful living counters these manifestations of unbelief by resorting to grace, by imaginatively forgetting about the next day, and by pursuing purity of heart through a continual setting aside of self-will for God's will. This always amounts to a human being's greatest gain. The terminology of presumptuousness, self-torment, and indecision, informs the reader about the underlying attitudes addressed in Matthew's text while they simultaneously encourage self-examination and cultivation of life *Coram Deo*.

The possibility of worry set forth in *The Cares* complements a similar discussion in *Sickness Unto Death*, whose focus is the related notion of despair. There, Kierkegaard's pseudonym notes both the defect and excellence of despair, 'to be able to despair is an infinite advantage, and yet to be in despair is . . . the worst misfortune' (SUD: 15). Worry too carries with it this dialectic that results from the nature of human beings – that they are a synthesis of the finite and the infinite. This is not the cause of actual despair or worry. The possibility remains, but the state itself does not occur instinctively in the human being. Referring again to *Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus helps solidify the connections between the two works: 'The possibility of this sickness [despair] is man's superiority over the animal; to be aware of this sickness is the Christian's superiority over the natural man; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness' (SUD: 15). This delineates the three relationships explored throughout these discourses; nature-human, Christian-pagan, and human-heavenly Father. Freedom from despair demands that a person 'must at every moment destroy the possibility' (SUD: 15). In *The Cares* Kierkegaard plots out how to deal a similar death blow to the possibility of worry. The answer in both cases is faith, which defined by Anti-Climacus looks like this:

‘In relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it’ (SUD: 14). By faith, an individual properly views herself in her internal dialectical relationships and acknowledges and appropriates a continual dependence upon God. Provisions, clothing, finitude, the future, and self-will are all brought into the proper perspective by faith; this is the trust in the heavenly Father’s providence called for by Matthew. Faith restores and maintains the Creator-creature distinction and combats the ways that worry, in one way or another, undermines, alters, erases, redefines, and avoids the perfect bond of love.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE 1849 MATTHEW DISCOURSES

Introduction

Either/Or and Three Devotional Discourses

In the introduction to this project, Kierkegaard's financial hardships were identified as a partial explanation for his concentrated study of Matthew 6:24-34. A practical outworking of his growing money problems, according to Lowrie, was the publication of a second edition of the pseudonymous work *Either/Or*, a book he accompanied with the third collection of Matthew writings: *Three Devotional Discourses* (*TDD*). Lowrie comments, 'the public had long been clamoring for it [*Either/Or*] and SK at last yielded reluctantly'; he goes on to describe Kierkegaard's ambivalence to the republication:

He was embarrassed by the fact that a second edition of *Either/Or* was called for, and because he needed the money he had to consent to it, though it seemed to him inappropriate that his first aesthetic work should reappear at a time when he was engaged in the most decisively religious production.¹⁵⁸

To be sure, he had turned a corner from the poetic/aesthetic works and was engaged in more thorough going Christian literature. But what was 'inappropriate' about the second edition in Kierkegaard's mind? Even as the first pseudonym, *Either/Or* moves the reader toward the religious through a presentation of the shortcomings of the aesthetic and the ethical spheres of existence. In *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard declares that, 'the religious is present from the very beginning. Conversely, the aesthetic is still present even in the last moment' (POV: 30). He is not ashamed of the content of *Either/Or*; instead, he possesses sensitivity toward a new readership most familiar with the straightforward

¹⁵⁸ Lowrie, *A Short Life*, 210.

religious writings. A similar, internal debate arose a year earlier (1848) with the publication of *Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. On the positive side, that work would silence the critics who contended that, ‘a man who serves Christianity is one who is aesthetically incapable’; on the other hand, Kierkegaard feared that a reversion to that style could potentially mislead or discourage those readers inspired by the ‘strictly and seriously’ Christian deliberations.¹⁵⁹ Regarding the re-publication of the first pseudonym, measures needed to be taken to avoid any confusion. With these concerns in mind, he chose to simultaneously publish the third group of writings on Matthew 6.

The joint publication of a pseudonym and signed work mimicked the initial publishing of *Either/Or* and *Two Upbuilding Discourses* in 1843; nevertheless, two slight differences are worth noting. First of all, after the original publication, Kierkegaard waited almost three months before releasing the upbuilding discourses which served as its counterpoint. In the later instance there is no gap in time, the bird and lily discourses and the second edition of *Either/Or* went out together on 14 May, 1849. This suggests greater deliberateness on Kierkegaard’s part in the pairing of these with the pseudonym, an observation confirmed by Lowrie who points out how Kierkegaard passed over two works in preference for the three devotional discourses.¹⁶⁰ From the Preface to *TDD*, Kierkegaard maintains the distinction that the collection is ‘offered with the right hand – in contrast to the pseudonyms, which were held out and are held out with the left hand’ (WA: 5). Nevertheless, the initial effect of the 1843 staggered release and any anonymity produced by the pseudonymous authorship is lost in 1849. The editors of *Without Authority* describe the relationship between the two works thus: ‘The discourses were not written as a parallel companion volume to the second edition of *Either/Or*, but

¹⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 253.

¹⁶⁰ Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 455.

symbolically, they “came into being at the time – just what I needed”.¹⁶¹ Explicit in the quote from Kierkegaard is the idea that providence was working alongside him in the authorship. In the end, the subject matter of *Three Devotional Discourses* confirms the important connections with the first pseudonym; this is emphatically demonstrated in the second discourse on obedience, through its exposition on Matthew 6.24, ‘No one can serve two masters. *Either* he will hate the one *or* love the other.’ The opening page alone repeats the refrain either/or eighteen times; furthermore, his reiteration of the absolute nature of the choice between God and mammon intensifies a similar discussion initiated by Judge William on the choice between the aesthetic and the ethical (E/O II: 157-178). As Lowrie puts it, their content appears to be ‘written expressly for this purpose’.¹⁶²

In addition to Kierkegaard simultaneously publishing the pseudonym and the discourses, he also chose different terms to describe the collection of discourses. In 1843, he sent out upbuilding (*opbyggelige*) discourses; in 1849, he accompanies the pseudonym with devotional (*gudelige*) discourses.¹⁶³ Returning to Lowrie again, he notes that ‘these are subtle distinctions, but they clearly indicate a sense of progress’.¹⁶⁴ These terms ought not to be viewed as mutually exclusive; instead, ‘devotional’ operates as a sub-category of ‘upbuilding’. The 1849 Matthew discourses, in conjunction with building up, focus the reader on particular spiritual disciplines that align with the practice of Christian piety. These shifts in terminology should not so readily excite a tendency to separate the earlier and later discourses into two sub-genres: immanent and transcendent. As Pattison points out, ‘it is more helpful to emphasize the continuity’.¹⁶⁵ The overlap between *Three Devotional Discourses* and *Either/Or* has also sparked a theory that the discourses

¹⁶¹ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, xiv. The quote is from Kierkegaard’s journals.

¹⁶² Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 455.

¹⁶³ The Danish term, *gudelige*, carries a range of meanings which may include godly (Lowrie), pious, sanctimonious, and religious.

¹⁶⁴ Lowrie, *A Short Life*, 199.

¹⁶⁵ Pattison, *Kierkegaard, the Aesthetic and the Religious*, 155.

represent a continuation of a discussion of the three stages of existence found initially in *Either/Or*. I now briefly turn to this approach to the material.

The Theory of the Stages in the Three Devotional Discourses

In chapter two, a similar discussion occurred on the relationship between Kierkegaard's three stages of existence and the 1847 discourses in *What We Learn*. Turning now to *TDD*, on the surface it looks as if the content could promise more insight into the stages of existence. The first writing, on 'silence', deals particularly with poetry and the poet, an obviously aesthetic notion; the topic of the second discourse, 'obedience', suggests ethical overtones and the discourse treats extensively the unconditional demands of God in the Creator-creature relationship; finally, 'joy', the theme of the last discourse, is easily conceived as a definitive category of the religious. Accordingly, M.W. Sinnett makes a case for this unambiguous, intentional connection between the stages and the two works.¹⁶⁶ He sets out with an interpretation of *Either/Or* wherein Kierkegaard's goal is to negatively appraise the life-view of its three key figures: the poet, Judge William, and the anonymous pastor. His concluding chapter champions *Three Devotional Discourses* as a continuation of this same critique. Commenting on the three main topics of silence, obedience, and joy, Sinnett writes: 'these three qualities then define the challenges successively and cumulatively . . . to the poet, to Judge William, and to the Jylland pastor'.¹⁶⁷ Initially, his application of the material seems to fit with the content of *Either/Or*, where the unknown writer, 'A', explains life in the aesthetic, writer 'B' argues for the superiority of the ethical, and the last word comes from an anonymous sermon writer who promotes an 'Ultimatum' meant to orientate the reader to the religious. In the

¹⁶⁶ Sinnett, *Restoring the Conversation*.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

end, though insightful in places, his presentation simultaneously over-focuses and limits the dynamic of the material too much.

The first discourse on silence does critique the poet; problems arise for Sinnett's view because the second and third discourses continue to promote the poet as the central antagonist who misunderstands the birds and lilies. Kierkegaard's content bursts this compartmentalization. Sinnett's use of the discourses also sidelines other central features (abundantly attested to in the secondary literature) present in the discussion of silence, obedience, and joy which resonate with other major works besides *Either/Or*. Furthermore, such a narrow scope sidelines the importance of the substructure of the Lord's Prayer which weaves through all three writings. To force the material to function primarily in a negative, confrontational manner is to major on a minor theme. I submit that ultimately the primary function of *TDD* is to encourage spiritual devotion – hence Kierkegaard's title and the constant hope and challenge held out to those who may be experiencing suffering. As writings based on the Gospel of Matthew, they portray and promote the kingdom life attested to in the Sermon on the Mount; the single individual addressed by Kierkegaard is multidimensional and every aspect of his or her life is to come under the rule of the Gospel.

Suffering and Three Devotional Discourses

Having considered various ways the collection is juxtaposed with *Either/Or*, I want to now say more about the root problem Kierkegaard addresses in these meditations on Matthew. Instead of the terminology of worry, he introduces the problem of suffering and sets forth ways the Gospel, through the bird and lily, offers a remedy to its presence. For Kierkegaard, suffering is not completely disconnected from worry. In a Communion discourse on Hebrews 4:15, he spells out various forms of suffering in order to

demonstrate how Jesus is able to sympathize with an individual, regardless of the circumstances. The first variety mentioned is ‘temporal and earthly concern, poverty, worry about the future and what that involves’ (WA: 117). Accordingly, the possibility of worry connected with Matthew’s text fits within Kierkegaard’s category of suffering. As Kierkegaard continues in the Communion discourse, he also elucidates a form of sorrow connected with ‘the wickedness of the world’ and the ‘sin and ungodliness of the world’ (WA: 118). In the context of *TDD*, these aspects of suffering also arise and drive the individual away from society to seek relief in the company of nature. Kierkegaard’s depiction of artful living arises in response to these types of suffering. In addition, his interaction with the lily and bird includes a delineation of the suffering of nature and its ‘artful’ response to its unavoidable circumstances.

In Sylvia Walsh’s study of suffering in Kierkegaard’s literature from 1847-1851, she summarizes his view of definitively Christian suffering thus: it ‘is distinguished, therefore, not merely by the *inverse interpretation* Christians bring to ordinary and innocent sufferings in life . . . but also, and primarily, by its *inverse character* and the *contradictory consequences* that entails. It is suffering that occurs as the result of turning to Christianity’.¹⁶⁸ Following from this, there is a suffering common to all people, regardless of their religious convictions, and even though inwardly, the believer may receive it differently than others, it encompasses ‘the usual adversities in life and does not constitute suffering in likeness to Christ’.¹⁶⁹ Conversely, there is a voluntary suffering acquainted with following Jesus. This includes self-denial and the ever-present reality of one’s sinfulness and limitations before God; according to Climacus, it also includes a suffering attached to the knowledge that many remain outside the blessedness of the faith

¹⁶⁸ Walsh, *Living Christianly: Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Christian Existence* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 129.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

(CUP: 582). Christian suffering's 'inverse character' derives from the fact that its presence offers consolation and joy as an evidence of Christian living; the 'contradictory consequences' relate to the seeming absurdity that turning to Christ, instead of alleviating suffering, ushers the individual into a higher form of suffering. Walsh calls this the 'inevitable consequence . . . given the heterogeneity of the Christian conceptions to those of the world and the world's negative reaction to the outward expression of Christian ideal'.¹⁷⁰ These comments help frame the various expressions of pathos in *TDD*, especially those which Kierkegaard transposes upon the bird and lily. On the surface, that nature models suffering seems to point to the universal quality of the suffering. It remains to be seen whether or not there also arises, through artful living, a version of Kierkegaard's qualitatively different category of Christian suffering. Before proceeding to the discourses, a few comments on Kierkegaard's use of the lily and the bird in *TDD* are in order.

Are the Bird and Lily Actively Devoted to God?

Kierkegaard, in his presentation of the bird and lily in this collection (more so than the previous collections) champions them as those who naturally and *willfully* overcome worry and suffering in life. The repeated picture of nature's triumph causes Jason Mahn to suggest that 'Kierkegaard so personifies nature that the lilies and the birds themselves are seen to actively resist temptation to sin. Their silence, obedience, and joy may not be simply "there"; they too might be won over-and-against temptations to despair'.¹⁷¹ Mahn's comment is certainly understandable in view of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the bird and lily, so how does one best understand the meaning of their

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 130.

¹⁷¹ Jason A. Mahn, "Kierkegaard's Three Devotional Discourses and the Felix Culpa Theme," in *IKC: WA*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 105.

conquest of suffering? George Pattison's discussion of the difference between Kierkegaard's and Hegel's outlook on nature helps to frame the importance of how one answers this question:

Hegel invites us to pass through the process of self-externalization to self-enjoyment and, in doing so, to repeat, at a higher level, the dialectical process already discernible in the bird, Kierkegaard invites us . . . to renounce the desire to self-externalization, and, in doing so, to repeat the original relation of simple dependence already manifest in the song of the bird, to return from complexification to the simple, original, unity of the "is".¹⁷²

The question is whether or not the animal kingdom can make progress in its relationship with its environment. According to Pattison, Hegel suggests that it can adapt in such a way that individual creatures gain 'self-independence and self-consciousness'; in the case of a singing bird, this evidences the even greater ability to actually enjoy itself in these surroundings.¹⁷³ It has transcended the merely animal instinct to survive. The bird, in turn, sets the stage for human beings to take this to the next level, which is 'sublated and consummated in reason and freedom'.¹⁷⁴ Hegel reads distinctions into nature between its raw (alimentation), formative, and artistic drives and he ascribes to the bird 'dialectics directed teleologically towards the emergence of the kind of consciousness and the kind of volition found preeminently in humanity'.¹⁷⁵

Pattison maintains that Kierkegaard moves in the opposite direction. Nature's great lesson consists in its lack of independence and self-awareness, this, by definition, grants the bird and lily their exemplary simplicity. This view is ultimately safeguarded by the frequent deconstruction of the bird and lily wherein Kierkegaard erodes first the evolutionary links found in Hegelianism and secondly the seemingly volitional character of the lily and bird. While it may be possible textually, as Mahn shows, to construe nature as a conqueror, Kierkegaard does so only in a poetic fashion. Nature's imperturbable

¹⁷² Pattison, "The Joy of Birdsong or Lyrical Dialectics," in *IKC: WA*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 122-123.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

continuation cannot be separated from its inability to dissimulate and its lack of an active will. To be fair, the contrasting viewpoints between Mahn and Pattison about the level of *becoming* that may be found in nature is somewhat artificial, this becomes evident in Mahn's explanation for how Kierkegaard uses the dialectic introduced between silence/obedience/joy and perishability. He writes, 'Kierkegaard closes the gap between images of natural immediacy and symbols of intentional faith . . . to call into question the poet's pride in having a more difficult task than does nature'.¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard himself notes how he set out to personify nature in *Three Devotional Discourses* with 'even more poetic tone and richness of color' (WA: 198). The characterization of nature is not there to provide clues about his latent natural theology. Westphal makes a similar observation on Kierkegaard's use of the bird and lily: 'This is not theology of nature or natural theology but a heuristic for reading the Gospel text and subjecting ourselves to its authority'.¹⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, with the colourful teaching aid of the bird and lily, leads the reader into deeper devotion to God. Leo Stan, in his article on the bird and lily discourses, notes a similar appeal to these objects, 'nature points to a *visible* familiarity with the beyond, which is psychologically comforting and curative'.¹⁷⁸

The three discourses address the topics of silence, obedience, and joy. Each piece serves as a building block on the next so that silence precedes and leads into obedience, and silence and obedience together culminate in joy. As Kierkegaard illuminates each concept, he simultaneously comments on various sections of Matthew's text and applies them to the life of a suffering individual. Within the artful responses to the pathos of life the Lord's Prayer also plays an important part in the structure of the material. Accordingly, within the examination of each discourse, I will parse out how Kierkegaard

¹⁷⁶ Mahn, "Felix Culpa Theme," 105.

¹⁷⁷ Westphal, "Paganism in Christendom," 22 n.24.

¹⁷⁸ Stan, "Endless Liturgy," 75.

applies the various petitions of the prayer to the terminology and practice of silence, obedience, and joy. This will also create space to interact with New Testament scholarship on the relationship between the Lord's Prayer and the exegesis of Matthew 6:24-34. In line with these aims, each discourse will feature a section on the meaning of the focus words (silence, obedience, and joy), an analysis of suffering, a look at the application of the key concept to suffering, and Kierkegaard's use of the Lord's Prayer in his interpretation of the Matthew passage. This begins with a look at 'silence'.

Discourse One

On Silence

The central purpose of the presentation on silence (*Taushed*) is to help the individual properly respond to the problem of suffering. Kierkegaard's definition of the term entails much more than merely the lack of speech; it involves a reorientation of the self around the goodness of the heavenly Father. As this conversation begins, it is helpful to consider the work of Christopher Nelson, who lays the foundation for the concept of silence, especially as it appears in Kierkegaard's earlier writings. His extensive account starts by flagging the 'apparent hypocrisy' involved in any endeavour to 'speak to the significance of silence'.¹⁷⁹ Without denying the potential awkwardness of this task, the fact that Kierkegaard deliberately *writes* this material, instead of preaching or speaking it helps to reduce this tension. Throughout the prefaces which accompany the upbuilding literature, he communicates his desire to grant the discourses their own life and 'voice' so the earnest reader might hear them, without simultaneously being distracted by him or them. In the end, Kierkegaard would deride those who substitute writing a poem or preaching a sermon on silence, for practicing it; accordingly, the form and content of this

¹⁷⁹ Christopher A. P. Nelson, "Soundings of Silence: The Lily, the Bird, and the Dark Knight of the Soul in the Writings of Søren Kierkegaard," in *IKC: WA*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 45.

piece represents his attempt at promoting silence without breaking the silence. Ed Mooney confirms the success of the upbuilding works in this task: 'They don't ask me to consider the *importance* of quietude. They seem bound to *enact* or *instill* that state of quietude. If I resist, I resist not a claim or viewpoint but the attempt of words to place me somewhere I refuse to go'.¹⁸⁰

Returning to Nelson's study, he looks especially at the pseudonymous works prior to *TDD*, where the presence of silence in an individual remains ambiguous so that one can never be sure if it meant the demonic or the holy. While none of these earlier works comes out exactly where Kierkegaard does in the signed literature, each does 'suggest that there may be another kind of silence, a silence that would constitute the individual's most intimate relationship with that which would save one from the demonic'.¹⁸¹ The appropriately named author of *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio, confirms Nelson's summary: 'Silence is the demon's trap, and the more that is silenced, the more terrible the demon, but silence is also divinity's mutual understanding with the single individual' (FT: 88). It is the latter form which Kierkegaard develops in this discourse; silence is both a prerequisite for and evidence of this 'most intimate relationship'. In contrast, in the case of *Fear and Trembling*, and God's call for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22), the silence is forced upon the Patriarch, who, in light of the abomination of child sacrifice, could not possibly explain the circumstances to his son, friends, or family. This kind of silence brings with it an inescapable ambiguity.

Over against this vagueness, the 'silence' discourse is 'marked by Kierkegaard's attempt to say something that the legion of pseudonymous personae has been either

¹⁸⁰ Edward Mooney, "Words That Silence as They Build: Against a Boundlessly Loquacious Mind," in *IKC: EUD*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003), 110. He also applies this thought to those engaging with Kierkegaard's texts and the sacred literature upon which they are based: 'I must either will to embrace the domain of academic loquaciousness, discussion, and debate, or else will to remain immersed in the mood of worship and prayer that are so central to the discourses' (118).

¹⁸¹ Nelson, "Soundings of Silence," 46.

unable or unwilling to say'.¹⁸² Silence learned from the lily and bird, instead of rooted in the incapacity to communicate the situation of suffering (like Abraham), operates as a holy choice made in the realm where freedom to express the pain is a permissible option. This is guaranteed by the fact that the suffering in the collection is completely removed from any ostensibly unethical action and by a presupposition of a willingness to retreat to God. This does not remove all the ambiguity of silence and Kierkegaard does maintain that lack of speech does not always equate with stillness and faith. Nonetheless, the circumstances are different. The birds and lilies, in simplicity and apart from any ambivalence, naturally practice an imitable quietness that conforms to the will of God. These are the qualities of the silence of the discourse. A reversal occurs. Speech, and not silence, becomes the potential path of evil; as Nelson points out: 'Silence, unconditional silence, is not merely *a* factor contributing to good, but it is rather unconditionally *the* factor contributing to good'.¹⁸³ Nelson's insights pave the way to Kierkegaard's positive presentation of silence where the opposite is not so much demonic, inclosing reserve, but speech. In light of the full affirmation of silence in this context, I now want to look at how Kierkegaard justifies it as a central feature of Matthew's text.

To become silent, according to Kierkegaard, is the same as obeying Jesus' admonition in verse 6:33 to 'Seek first the kingdom of God'. More specifically, to seek first is to pray. On the surface, one may think that speech remains necessary, especially in the task of prayer, which, after all, is talking to God. Kierkegaard, without completely disputing this, offers a counterpoint. Prayer oriented toward seeking first, instead of endlessly asking about the details of how to carry out the task, silently listens to the heavenly Father. A person finds out about proper living in the kingdom by first listening to the king, this precedes other actions and dispels impatience. His interpretation of 6:33

¹⁸² Ibid., 64.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 69.

critiques the mindset that views 'seek first' as a call to rush out into the world and do something. While this emphasis has its place, Kierkegaard, unfortunately, never follows up with his own agenda for what action might look like in society. This propensity to not propose positive, concrete expressions of kingdom life in the world suggests an underdeveloped aspect of his exegesis; regardless, he does clearly prescribe the prerequisite for all such meaningful expressions. Matthew's text does not explicitly mention prayer; nevertheless, this does not mean verses 6:24-34 lack any allusion to prayer. In fact, 6:32 'Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things', is an almost verbatim quote from the introductory words for the Lord's Prayer, 'your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him' (6:8). Accordingly, Kierkegaard's interpretation takes 6:32 as another introductory statement to prayer; this time, what follows are not the various petitions of the Lord's Prayer, but the call to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, which is really another way of saying 'pray'. Discussion of his use of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer continues below and serves as a culmination to the discourse. At this time, having established prayer and seeking God's kingdom as key synonyms for silence, he goes on to show how nature clarifies this artful attribute.

Kierkegaard contends that the type of quiet called for in relationship to prayer, the future, and suffering, one can learn from the bird and lily. At the same time, he restricts and distinguishes this immediate silence as something that, unlike human silence, may never be viewed as an art (WA: 12). In addition, he both denies that a person can tune in to the divine via the silence of nature while he nonetheless asserts that out among the birds and lilies, 'there is silence and also something divine in this silence' (WA: 13). These distinctions suggest a legitimate but limited lesson available from nature. While Kierkegaard is more concerned that most people never even get as far as hearing the

message of silence, he also wishes to temper those, like the poet/Romantic, who want more than is possible from nature. In his depiction of nature, and silence, Kierkegaard elaborates on the key feature of its noiselessness:

The sea is silent; even when it rages uproariously it is silent. At first you perhaps listen in the wrong way and hear it roar. If you hurry off and report this, you do the sea an injustice. If, however, you take time and listen more carefully, you hear - how amazing! - you hear silence, because uniformity is nevertheless also silence (WA: 13).

For the one who has ears to hear, nature expresses a harmony of silence, even with its numerous sounds, where there never occurs a disruption in the relationship between itself and its providential caretaker. To label creation noisy is a misunderstanding.¹⁸⁴ As Kierkegaard points out, only humans' need for noise drowns out and mutes the God relationship; he writes, 'Bear in mind that it was human sin that . . . disturbed the beauty of the whole world where previously everything was so very good, human sin that created a cleft in a world of unity' (WA: 35). In addition to the sinful cacophony, impatience fails to grasp this 'uniformity', as in the case of the one running off to chatter about his or her observations; inversely, reflection is necessary to truly perceive that the 'sea of sound' will never 'break the solemn silence' (WA: 13).

By extension, there exists a possibility for men and women, alone before God, to attain to a godly silence, there is a type and use of language that, like the surf of the sea, 'belongs to the silence' and increases the silence (WA: 13). Godly silence cultivates a solemnity and attunement for the human being that can be maintained even amid the noise of society and without muting the God relationship. The goal is to recognize the possibility in nature and to surpass it by *willfully* entering into the silence. Jason Mahn notes how the Matthew 6 material 'minimizes the merit of birds, lilies, and children in order to stress the exceeding value of one who has left the refuge of untested obedience in

¹⁸⁴ A similar idea is found in an 1839 journal entry about the conversation carried on by trees; 'irrespective of the fact that all the leaves are chatting away (in defiance of all etiquette) at the same time, this is still far from being disturbing, but as it lulls the outer sense it awakens the inner sense'. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, Vol. 2, 43.

order to “return” to childlike trust in the second immediacy of faith’.¹⁸⁵ This anticipates another conversation on artful living, this time, as the application of silence in the midst of suffering.

Silence, Suffering, and Artful Living

Kierkegaard is just as interested in the movement toward silence as he is in enlarging the range of the term. The ability of speech, though a distinguishing difference between humans and nature, actually often proves to be a hindrance to kingdom life. He argues, ‘because the human being is able to speak, the ability to be silent is an art, and a great art precisely because this advantage of his so easily tempts him’ (WA: 10). What the bird and lily naturally are, the believer must *become*. In the previous chapter, Kierkegaard’s presentation of artful living focused frequently on overcoming the causes of worry external to the individual; in this collection, he returns to a description of sanctification similar to the first collection in *What We Learn*. Artful living occurs through a proper or higher use of otherwise distinctly human characteristics.

Jason Mahn describes the motion thus: ‘The very capacity that distinguishes adult humanity from plants, animals, and children becomes surpassingly excellent only when it is not utilized’.¹⁸⁶ Mahn’s comments are appropriate for the present discourse and help to illuminate one aspect of the idea of artful living. It is worth remembering, though, that speech, particularly in *The Cares of the Pagans*, proved central to the Christian’s expression of artful living. Moreover, in the earlier discussion (chapter two) about worship and co-working triumphing over ruling and working, Kierkegaard did not call for cessation from these activities, but for cooperation with God. It is unrealistic to think that Kierkegaard calls the individual to continual lack of speaking. The lack of speech is

¹⁸⁵ Mahn, “Felix Culpa Theme,” 105.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 107.

just the beginning of the spiritual balancing he has in mind. Silence involves the yielding of one advantage to get something even greater. In this way it may be said that, relatively speaking, Kierkegaard spells out the immediacy granted to the image of God, and its negative and positive possibilities; he then shows the surety of something better - a second immediacy in the direction of God. The discourse drives toward a level of spiritual maturity that can meet God in this solitude and carry it back into the world. Kierkegaard, in order to further qualify the call to silence, goes on to discuss suffering and promotes it as a situation where willful silence ought to thrive, and where the gift of speech harms.

In the first discourse, Jesus' 'assistant professors' demonstrate that silence is the best remedy for and response to suffering; on the contrary, speech makes suffering harder, prolongs its duration, and creates unnecessary sadness (WA: 15-16). The bird and lily receive separate treatment. Kierkegaard ascribes to the bird integrity in suffering and not a showy duplicity. This reveals the depth of silence called for in the discourse: not a quiet externality which is contradicted by inner turmoil, whining, and cursing of God and man, but a unity of silence that gains strength from waiting (WA: 15).¹⁸⁷ The exact nature of the bird's suffering is never revealed; in part, this is the work of silence, for it never betrays the root cause. Regardless, its ability to hold its beak accomplishes the following: 'It exempts itself from what makes the suffering harder, the mistaken sympathy of others, from what prolongs the suffering, all the talk about the suffering, from what makes the suffering into what is worse than suffering, into the sin of impatience and sadness' (WA: 15). Not all sympathy makes suffering harder. Kierkegaard has in mind here those who come along to coddle or offer false promises of relief, Walsh labels it a 'cruelty', a mere

¹⁸⁷ Such a description follows faithfully the message on fasting earlier in Matthew 6 where Jesus called for a joyful countenance that hides the inwardness of fasting. Kierkegaard elsewhere calls this move a form of 'godly deceit'.

‘assurance that their plight is not so bad or that their situation will improve soon’.¹⁸⁸ This, coupled with the voice of the suffering one, breeds a childish attitude to the trial and a life-view where struggle can only be interpreted as misfortune. Kierkegaard suggests another inappropriate response, that of poetic rage, which, like a violent storm wishes to express the pain being experienced; this too is ‘a foolish remedy’ as it only serves to intensify the matter (WA: 15). By imitating the silence of the bird, one both avoids the false promise of suffering-free existence and the despairing garrulousness that exacerbates the situation.

The lily too remains silent. This time, Kierkegaard reveals more definitively the nature of all that it quietly bears. Life’s fleeting nature and the inescapable process of decay, observable by all, makes up the content of suffering for the lily: it ‘withers’, undergoes a ‘paling color-change’, and ‘its head droops, feeble and bowed’ (WA: 15-16). These insights derive from Matthew’s comments on the lily, it is here today and tomorrow thrown in the oven (6:30). Equipped with the possibility of speech, a person suffering in a similar manner faces the temptation to respond wrongly to this observable decay. Speech not only prolongs and aggravates suffering, it also makes the true extent of it indefinite; constantly vocalizing the agony muddies the waters so that one never knows where the genuine anguish ends and complaining, impatience, and despair begin (WA: 16). Returning to Walsh’s comments on the two categories of suffering, it is apparent that the trials under consideration in the first discourse possess a universal character. No one, including the flower that tomorrow is burned up (Mt. 6:30), is exempt from death. Kierkegaard qualifies the *response* as religious by connecting it with trust in God’s sovereignty. Stillness in the face of the frailty of life ‘expresses respect for God, that it is he who rules and he alone to whom wisdom and understanding are due’ (WA: 16).

¹⁸⁸ Walsh, *Living Christianly*, 145.

At this point one might challenge Kierkegaard's unbending call for silence, something he sees as so non-negotiable that he continually offers rebuke to anyone who dares to 'break the silence'. Specifically, there is an appropriate time to speak about one's suffering and it is not un-Christian to bear one another's burdens. It is hard to imagine Kierkegaard disagreeing. For that reason, it may be possible to view his instruction on silence as a *first* response to worry and to suffering. After taking it to the heavenly Father and finding stillness and unity with its presence, then comes the time for a healthy sharing of the burden with the community. Regrettably, he never brings the conversation back around to the benefits of community. I now turn to his interaction with the Lord's Prayer and a summary of the material on his concept of silence.

The Lord's Prayer and Silence

Kierkegaard provides numerous vantage points from which to view what it means to be silent, or, more specifically, what it means to seek first the kingdom of God. Silence is an art which is continually refined through practice; it occurs before God, and it is 'the beginning of the fear of God' (WA: 10). Silence is prayer that can even lead to something beyond silence, something 'even more opposite to speaking than silence' (WA: 12). The individual who invests time before the heavenly Father becomes a 'listener'. This level of engagement, as Gregory Beabout confirms, must not be confused with a purely negative or undiscerning openness; after all, 'it is not a personal excellence to be empty or lacking, nor is it good to passively submit to every external force'.¹⁸⁹ Kierkegaard guards against these dangers by delimiting the range of openness with a clear picture of the *telos* of listening silence: an encounter with an omnipotent, loving, heavenly Father. In a journal

¹⁸⁹ Gregory R. Beabout, "The Silent Lily and Bird as Exemplars of the Virtue of Active Receptivity," in *IKC: WA*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 145.

entry from 1835 Kierkegaard beautifully expresses the proper direction of what Beabout refers to as ‘active receptivity’:

In the midst of nature where man, free from life’s often suffocating air, breathes more freely, here the soul opens itself willingly to every noble impression. Here man steps forth as nature’s master, but he also feels that in nature something higher is manifested, something he must bow before. He feels a need to surrender to this power that rules it all.¹⁹⁰

As Beabout notes, ‘Kierkegaard’s goal . . . is to help the reader (and himself) become poetically composed, cultivating the disposition of welcoming openness to divine, personal transcendence, and in so doing, existentially concretizing a unity of the good, the true, and the beautiful’.¹⁹¹ One who is educated by silence becomes aware of being *Coram Deo*, an awareness that is jeopardized and forgotten all too often in the company and conversation of others (WA: 17). The experience of the listener culminates in an earnestness filled with complete self-forgetfulness. It is at this point, that he or she is in the place to both pray and embody petitions from the Lord’s Prayer.

Kierkegaard’s elaborations of the different sections of the Prayer operate circularly so that what he says about the petition further informs both his reading of 6:33 and enlarges the concept of silence. He considers three sections in the discourse. First of all, ‘Hallowed be Your name’ calls the individual from his or her own name, whether it be ‘famous’, ‘wretched’, or ‘insignificant’; God’s name is the focus in prayer (WA: 19). To pray this petition is to keep quiet about one’s own worldly status. This movement has affinities with the discussion in the previous chapter on lowliness and loftiness, to seek God in prayer one must move beyond external markers, whether good or bad, in favour of the name above all names. Secondly, Kierkegaard refers to ‘Your Kingdom Come’, which involves relinquishing personal plans, whether great or small, for one’s life and one’s future (WA: 19). Openness before God does not bring an agenda but surrenders to

¹⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, Vol. 1, 11.

¹⁹¹ Beabout, "The Virtue of Active Receptivity," 146.

the plans God desires to accomplish in heaven and on earth. Finally, to pray ‘Your will be done’ renounces all self will (WA: 19). For the person who finds this silence, the way of life which ‘the Gospel gently and lovingly stoops down . . . and whispers’, Kierkegaard contends that ‘nothing would be impossible’; the individual is in a perfect position to receive the unbounded aid of the heavenly Father (WA: 19). Overcoming suffering and worry, and ultimately, becoming a true self, is intricately bound up in becoming a person of prayer. Out of this silence, there blossoms obedience. This is the topic of the second discourse and Kierkegaard’s third treatment of Matthew 6:24 ‘No one can serve two masters’.

Discourse Two

On Unconditional Obedience

The discourse on silence instructed the reader/listener in how to seek first the kingdom of God. This included a turning away from the chatter, excuse-making, and lack of action portrayed by the poet and the crowd; instead, with a first response of silence, the individual forgets himself, trusts God in the face of the future and suffering, and experiences absolute satisfaction as a willful participant in God’s all-encompassing economy. In the second piece, as discussion switches to verse 6:24, ‘No one can serve two masters’, Kierkegaard wishes the reader to keep close the lesson on being an active listener before God, which serves as an existential building block for the devotional task of obedience. ‘To become silent,’ he says, ‘is the first condition for truly being able to obey’ (WA: 24). In order to qualify what ‘obedience’ means, Kierkegaard describes the nature of Matthew’s either/or, draws attention to various hindrances to this obedience, shows its application in a setting of suffering, and links it to the patience of God. Like the previous discourse, he refers again to three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer which further

aid the reader in grasping the terminology of obedience. The work begins with discussion on the either/or of Matthew 6:24.

The imagined setting of the discourse remains ‘out here in the silence with the birds and lilies’, and the next stage of the instruction begins with a realization of the most important choice in life, ‘either *God* – or, well, then the rest is unimportant’ (WA: 21). Kierkegaard returns to the topic of Matthew’s either/or and anchors its continuation in the person and nature of God: ‘The emphasis falls infinitely upon God,’ while the ‘or’ for the choosing person always leads into opposition to God, a state of being that has no life apart from his existence and goodness (WA: 21-22). While the freedom of choice remains, the consequences of one’s preference of loyalty can never escape a form of dependence on God.¹⁹² Without the ‘either’, who is God, there cannot exist an ‘or’ so that according to Kierkegaard’s logic, it takes the existence of God for there to come into being even the possibility of rejecting him. This repetition of ‘either/or’ escalates the intensity of the related discussion on the gift of choice and delineates the Gospel-determined objects vying for one’s cosmic allegiance (WA: 21). There is a choice of choices in life, between God and anything else, ‘whatever a person chooses, if he does not choose God, he has missed the either/or . . . he is in perdition’ (WA: 21).

Kierkegaard recognizes the unpopularity of this sobering position and he anticipates and voices such opposition in various places in the discourses.¹⁹³ The first dispute arises out of an effort to find middle ground between the opposites presented in 6:24; namely, love and hate, devotion and despising, and God and mammon. In particular, the imaginary resistant one complains that the passage is an ‘overstatement’

¹⁹² This same idea finds expression in *PF*, where Climacus describes the ‘acoustic illusion’ of strength and autonomy present when someone takes offense to the God-Man: ‘The one offended does not speak according to his own nature but according to the nature of the paradox, just as someone caricaturing another person does not originate anything himself but only copies the other in the wrong way’ (51).

¹⁹³ The final Matthew 6 discourse, ‘Christ as the Prototype’, helps the reader to understand the role of the variant opinions in these works; they allow him to get out into the open the unspoken objections, address them, and help another leave them behind (JFY: 151).

and a ‘foolish/false exaggeration’ while he fights for a more comfortable continuum between the various extremes (WA: 22). For Kierkegaard this reveals a lack of spiritual focus and silence:

When there is noise round about you or you are amid distractions, this seems to be almost an exaggeration. There seems to be much too great a distance between loving and hating for one to be able to have the right to bring them so close together, in one breath, in one single thought . . . following immediately upon each other (WA: 22).

The great concern here is with the relativistic thinking of his counterpoint. Kierkegaard rejects hyperbole and exaggeration as viable descriptions of the content of 6:24, and roots his argument, not only in the subject matter of Matthew, but ultimately in the character of God. He calls attention to the principle that: ‘the smaller the number becomes . . . the more inward it becomes, the more an either/or begins to become the law for the relationship’ (WA: 22). This principle is clarified with an analogy. Among lovers and marriage partners the exclusivity of the bond shortens the distance between love and hate and loyalty and treachery; accordingly, ‘God, who certainly does not die, is even closer to you, infinitely closer than two lovers are to each other, he, your Creator and Sustainer, he in whom you live, move, and have your being, he by whose grace you have everything’ (WA: 23). In trivial affairs, the tension of choice lessens; with God in the picture, every other option becomes an infinite polar opposite.

Kierkegaard’s comments also commend an important relationship between practicing spiritual disciplines and reading. Silence not only trains a person to live artfully and face suffering, implicitly, it also helps one properly approach the biblical text. Reading the Gospels requires earnestness. For Kierkegaard, one must be careful to not, inadvertently, or too hastily, downplay an interpretation that embraces the hyper-ideality possible in the text. To do so may impede an encounter with the grace of God; as a result, violence is done to the text when an individual takes it upon himself to mitigate or downplay the message. According to Possén, Kierkegaard held that ‘the voice of

leniency must always be related to, responding to, and admonished by the voice of rigor'.¹⁹⁴ This is something Kierkegaard applied consistently in his biblical reading and Possén's observation is part of a larger, well documented account of this rigor – grace dialectic, and how it progresses from 1847 to 1855. The rebuttal against attempts to lessen the extremeness of 6:24, in the end, suggests that it is actually ungracious to cry 'exaggeration'. Human-crafted leniency will result in a missed opportunity for the Divine relief that comes from the Redeemer. In addition, it will lead to mediocrity in the task of obedience.

Matthew's text does not call for half-measures, it calls for 'unconditional obedience – that if one does not love God one hates him, that if one is not unconditionally and in everything devoted to him one despises him' (WA: 24). Human beings, unlike birds and lilies, are all too well acquainted with responding to God with a divided heart. This is yet another aspect of the loyalty parable. Flowing out of the view that the text is an exaggeration, the reader fails to acknowledge that every sin, despite its relative gravity, is tantamount to 'contempt for God'; trying to serve two masters equates with 'despising God' (WA: 26). The opposite of this divided nature is simplicity and sublimity – features which find expression in the birds and lilies of the Gospel: *'they believe that everything that happens is unconditionally God's will, and that they have nothing whatever to do in the world other than either to do God's will in unconditional obedience or to submit to God's will in unconditional obedience'* (WA: 26-27). Simplicity begins with a strong view of sovereignty. Following Kierkegaard's illustration, faith in God's absolute governance controls the will of the bird and lily in both active and passive ways. To be obedient as a human being begins with absolute receptivity to the radical nature of Matthew's either/or: either God or mammon. In recognition of the incompatibility of

¹⁹⁴ Possén, "The Voice of Rigor," 174.

these opposites, the obedient individual chooses wholeheartedly to follow the heavenly Father as well. The pursuit of simplicity for a person is a complete alignment of the will with God, a point reiterated by Kierkegaard in the subsequent discussion on the Lord's Prayer. With this reading of 6:24 and introduction to 'obedience' in mind, I now turn to the artful practice of obedience in the face of suffering.

Obedience, Suffering, and Artful Living

Kierkegaard expands on the activity and submission of nature to furnish the reader with a clear idea of how a person can similarly respond to the observable pathos shared by nature and human beings. When faced with trials and tribulations, the lily and the bird do not resist God's will with 'half-measures' or 'a little disobedience', neither do they make obedience conditional on things going well for them in the world (WA: 27-28). The lily's suffering has to do with its being 'forgotten', 'superfluous', 'unsought', and 'avoided'; moreover, like discourse one, it continually faces its own transient nature: 'the very moment when it is to blossom . . . it will be snapped off at the same moment, so its coming into existence becomes its downfall' (WA: 28). Now, instead of the temptation to complain, the challenge is to maintain wholehearted enthusiasm for the task of growing, opening, and thriving in the world of plants. The lily succeeds. With 'courage and faith' it keeps at bay its obscurity and 'certainty of downfall'; unhindered, it holds nothing back, but blossoms into unspoiled beauty (WA: 28). Contrariwise, faced with these odds, 'a human being . . . would not fulfill his potentiality, which nevertheless was granted to him, although the briefest existence was allotted to him'; instead of passively submitting, he would break the silence by exclaiming "Why?" and "What's the use?" (WA: 28). This personification addresses the potentially paralyzing struggles of a lowly individual who is facing the certainty of death. With regard to the obscurity in which the

lily thrives, the illustration also shows that it is not necessary to be seen and remembered by others to become oneself. Spirituality is not for show. The difference between the downfall of a plant and a human is only quantitative. This explains the inadequateness of any excuse based on the seeming futility of coming into existence to immediately die. For nature and for humanity, a stint of time passes in-between birth and death. The one who demurs from his or her highest potential on these grounds has fallen prey to despair. Kierkegaard classifies them as ‘stunted and ugly’ and charges them with giving in too soon to the next moment. Following the way of the lily, artful living occurs, in response to suffering, when a person actualizes her full potential irregardless of the external circumstances (WA: 28-29). The suffering in view relates to all living creatures. The response is Christian, which Kierkegaard makes clear through the use of adjectives like obedience, faith, and courage when he describes the flower.

The bird’s suffering differs from that of the lily. Kierkegaard imagines three scenarios that encapsulate its encounter with the ‘harshness of life’. First, ‘for several days it finds its nest disarranged’; next, ‘a naughty child’ mocks its song and ‘disturbs the solemnity’; finally, it ‘must experience the evil of the world’, which manifests as a person who takes pleasure in throwing stones to drive it from its home (WA: 29). In addition to a passive pathos common to all individuals (harshness of life), this suffering arises as a result of an external opposition that cruelly thwarts the calling of the bird. This is reminiscent of what Walsh describes as ‘an outward or external dimension of Christian suffering that is not merely accidental but essential to the definition of becoming and being a Christian’.¹⁹⁵ The hurling of insults and stones suggests that persecution is in view and even carries overtones of the sufferings of Christ; the constant disruption of any semblance of settling echoes one of Kierkegaard’s most frequently quoted verses about

¹⁹⁵ Walsh, *Living Christianly*, 137.

Jesus: 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head' (Lk 9:58). Like the lily, the bird responds with unconditional obedience. It carries on with the work of singing praise to God, rearranging the nest, and building its home 'with the same zest and carefulness as the first time'; it demonstrates an 'indefatigable' perspective, 'everything that happens to it in this way does not really concern it, that is, concerns it only figuratively,' when weighed against its task to trust the Sovereign God (WA: 29). If a bird, which neither sows, reaps, or harvests, encounters antagonism, so much more will the believer, charged with the work of the kingdom of God, artfully face the challenge to configure hostility/suffering as an insignificant distraction compared to obeying the heavenly Father.

Within Kierkegaard's discussion of the lily and bird, the categories of adornment and work re-emerge. The lily blossoms into beauty, which Kierkegaard equates with becoming itself, and casts light on another aspect of not worrying about clothing; the bird, facing the 'evil of the world' continually keeps the focus on fulfilling the work it has been given, thus not worrying about its provisions. The linking of suffering to obedience ultimately finds its bearings, not in the bird and lily, but in Christ. Though the connection remains implicit in these discourses, it finds fuller expression in the previously mentioned Communion discourse on Jesus as the High Priest. Similarly, in *Gospel of Sufferings*, Kierkegaard insists that only through the school of suffering can one truly learn obedience; speaking of Jesus he says:

If it were possible for a human being to learn obedience to God without sufferings, then Christ as man would not have needed to learn it from sufferings. What he learned from sufferings was human obedience¹⁹⁶, because the eternal harmony of his will with the Father's will is indeed not obedience. The obedience belongs to his abasement . . . if this holds true for the pure one, how much more then for the sinful human being (UDVS: 263)!

¹⁹⁶ See Hebrews 5:7-8

As the prototype, Jesus became obedient to death on the cross and Kierkegaard wants to stress how, as the God-Man, Jesus enacted his will and chose obedience in the face of suffering and the real possibility of disobedience.

The discussion of unconditional obedience, topped with the reality of suffering as a Christian, has set high the ideality of Matthew's text. Kierkegaard has amplified the incompatibility of God and mammon, describing them as 'good and evil', that which is in 'mortal combat', and 'two powers [that] are so inimical that the slightest leaning to one side is regarded from the other as the unconditional opposite' (WA: 34). Applied to everyday existence, Matthew's passage brings an awareness of and obligation to every miniscule thought, word, and deed. The character of God necessitates this. If somehow God decided not to speak of himself as 'absolutely No. 1 . . . but merely another something or another, one who indulged the hope that he also might perhaps be taken into account . . . in such a case God would have lost Himself, lost the notion of what He is, and He would not be God'.¹⁹⁷ In addition to exposing less than appropriate attitudes toward the ideal nature of the either/or, Kierkegaard has shown how it is God that establishes the blessedness of choosing the highest and the possibility of thriving in an imperfect world. Kierkegaard does not prescribe perfectionism; instead, he has in mind the idea of attuning to or dialing into the will of God. Evidence for this conclusion comes particularly in his presentation of the patience of God.

Obedience and the Patience of God

In his description of the nature-human difference in *TDD*, Kierkegaard insists that if the heavens and earth *could* and *did* disobey God's will 'they are wiped out at the same

¹⁹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses and the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 335.

moment' (WA: 26). This implies a different response from God toward women and men, who are not instantly 'wiped out' for acts of rebellion. The problem of human disobedience points to a nature-human distinction made clear in the name of God itself; 'to the lily and the bird, God is the fatherly Creator and Sustainer; only in relation to human beings is he the God of patience' (WA: 31). The demand of the either/or from 6:24 is not without grace. Kierkegaard, despite the heavy dose of rigorousness, does not fail to tackle the difficulty of on-going sin, neither does he subscribe to a doctrine of perfectionism. This emerges in his depiction of God's patience. First of all, it is superhuman:

If God were a human being, what then? How long, long, long ago he must – to use myself as an example – have become sick and tired of me and of having anything to do with me . . . No, no human being can put up with that; only the God of patience can do that (WA: 30).

Even the greatest model of human patience could barely begin to exercise this level of endurance. This patience is also unchanging and everlasting: 'He knew it from eternity, knew it from thousands and thousands of years of daily experience . . . that as long as time lasts and the human race in it, he must be the God of patience' (WA: 31). Third, this patience operates dialectically. On the one hand, it 'corresponds to human disobedience'; on the other hand, it promises relief from the same: 'Quite true, it is a comfort, a very necessary and indescribable comfort . . . but it is also a terribly serious matter that human beings not take this patience in vain' (WA: 31). With this, Kierkegaard, after having put the requirement down momentarily with talk of grace and comfort, proceeds with restating the earnestness. Recalling again the study of Possén, he helps catalogue the movement of Kierkegaard's account of God's patience: 'The Gospel's rigorous words serve its lenient purpose – to free the Christian of inessential worries, and indicate that salvation is possible; but this lenient purpose serves, in turn, to leave the Christian face to

face with the Gospel's rigorous words'.¹⁹⁸ In this context, it is not just Kierkegaard's hermeneutic, or the biblical passage, but God himself who relates to his creatures with this infinite balance of gravity and grace. The point-counterpoint appears too much to maintain; God's patience shows his love for humankind, it never ends; still, in view of this 'priceless wealth', one must properly use it or it will turn into the opposite: a source of deep misery and an act of despising God (WA: 32).

This correlates with the prototype-redeemer role of Christ that features in the final Matthew 6 discourse: Jesus is the prototype that upholds and confirms the truth of the ideal and the redeemer who saves from the despair of sin and inability to equally comply (JFY: 159). First comes the either/or, then comes the comfort from the character of God, and this in order to once again carry on with the ultimatum of love or hate, devotion or derision (WA: 32). While Kierkegaard's reading possesses a certain validity and wisdom in the realm of sanctification, it is not so clear that the discussion on the patience of God relates closely to the Matthew text. He does not make any strong textual links. In addition, the rigor-grace motif is not always an appealing outlook on discipleship. There never seems to be room in his description for an unconditional resting in God – the pressure to strive on never ceases so that grace almost looks like a conditional offer. Kierkegaard conveys the idea that God is patient, but only if a person handles it correctly.¹⁹⁹ Following his account of God's patience, he adds a final dimension to the concept of unconditional obedience through further consideration of the Lord's Prayer. This discussion will once again also serve as a summary of the discourse as a whole.

¹⁹⁸ Possén, "The Voice of Rigor," 165.

¹⁹⁹ In other collections of discourses, he chooses to accent leniency or rigour. In the communion discourse on 2 Tim 2:12-13, Kierkegaard calls attention to the juxtaposition of rigour/leniency or, as he also terms it, law and Gospel, side by side but recognizes that sometimes (for example at the Communion table) the lenient must triumph over the rigour (CD: 283).

Obedience and the Lord's Prayer

'Your Will Be Done'

Kierkegaard introduces the petitions of the Prayer in the context of an individual successfully learning unconditional obedience from the lily and bird:

Moreover, then the prayer that is indeed fulfilled anyhow would be fulfilled by you when you pray to God, "Your will be done, as in heaven also on earth," since by unconditional obedience your will is one with God's will and therefore God's will is done by you on earth as it is in heaven (WA: 32).

Similar to the 'silence' discourse, the freedom of the human will, in relationship to the will of God, surfaces again. Kierkegaard adds an almost deterministic aspect to the petition, 'Your will be done'. With or without unconditional obedience, God will see to it that his kingdom comes and his will is done. Obedience thus entails a uniting of the will with God's will in prayer. But what does one make of the predestinarian oriented language found here? Jason Mahn's study helps. He looks at *TDD* as a critique of *felix culpa* theology and inspects two prevalent 'pitfalls' associated with it, 'theodicy and Romanticism'; accordingly, he proposes that 'Kierkegaard critiques the speculative, theodical interpretation of sin as a logical step in the progression of self-consciousness, as well as the Romantic inclination to embrace sin and despair as signs of an individual's depth'.²⁰⁰ In the first place, Kierkegaard maintains the freedom of human beings through a comparison and contrast with the unconditional obedience in nature. Disobedience is not an unavoidable fate. Though it happens to everyone, it is not a necessary force in the world.

The second half of Mahn's proposal tempers Kierkegaard's deterministic language by noting how it is directed toward the tortured poet, whose pain consumes his surroundings in order to feed and express the inconsolable despair. The poet has no interest in learning obedience. According to Mahn, 'the offer of forgiveness and healing

²⁰⁰ Mahn, "Felix Culpa Theme," 86-87.

promises only to rob him of his creativity and complexity . . . he harbors a secret joy over his sin and suffering'.²⁰¹ Contrary to this self-centered 'freedom' and lost innocence, the ideal reader is alerted to the possibility of sin, which, though a sign of blessedness, more importantly, must be viewed as a real danger to be put aside in favor of worship and prayer. Kierkegaard distinguishes two ways of talking about the subject, especially in connection with the accomplishment of the will of God: 'the disobedience of a single person . . . is not capable of doing the least thing without his will, the will of the Omnipotent; it is something else again that his will is done because everything obeys him unconditionally' (WA: 25). In nature, only God's will is done. In Kierkegaard's theology, the same applies for humans, though not always without expressions of insubordination. Sin does not occur apart from the will of God, but this is only through his permissive will, not his activity in the world. This appeal to the omnipotence of God over nature *and* rebellious individuals, serves as a rejoinder to Romantic tendencies and the idea of absolute freedom. It also anticipates a complaint; namely, if nature *must* always obey God, does setting it up as a 'model of obedience' not actually illegitimately make a 'virtue out of necessity' (WA: 30)? In response, he rebukes the one who broke the silence with such a critique and qualifies the nature of human freedom: 'You, too, are indeed subject to necessity. God's will is still done anyhow; so strive to make a virtue of necessity by unconditionally obediently doing God's will . . . that you might with truth be able to say of yourself . . . "I cannot do anything else, I cannot do otherwise"' (WA: 30). According to Mahn, this 'expresses the kind of inner necessity that the Christian who has submitted to the will of God enjoys. One wins true freedom when one's freedom of choice "rushes with infinite speed to bind itself unconditionally by the choice of

²⁰¹ Ibid., 96.

attachment, the choice whose truth is that there can be no question of any choice” (JP 2:1261).²⁰²

The effortless obedience of the lily and bird is no excuse for lack of submission to God, it does, however, show that identification with nature’s necessary, unreflective compliance has limits. No matter how much Kierkegaard wishes to clarify humanity’s ‘necessity’, he cannot, nor would he wish, to overcome the difference: blessedness of the capacity to choose God. By taking Luther’s phrase from the Diet of Worms (I cannot do otherwise), he suggests a Christian existence whose conscience toward God has so developed that he or she harnesses this freedom for its highest end and aligns with the rest of the universe where ‘God’s will is done’. Kierkegaard spotlights the power and responsibility of the human will; conversely, he stresses the sovereignty of God to such an extent that divine necessity almost seems to swallow up the earlier stress on freedom. The capacity of choice in this presentation is an ‘enormous danger’; specifically, ‘the *human being* is placed between these two enormous powers and the choice is left up to him, this enormous danger is what entails that one must either love or hate, that not to love is to hate’ (WA: 34). In Kierkegaard’s case, the deterministic language is best viewed as a rhetorical device more than a proof text of any staunch Calvinistic leanings. The continual swaying back and forth between human agency and Divine will suggests this, as does his greater goal of encouraging the reader to learn from the swiftness of nature’s compliance without overlooking the ‘enormous danger’ of the either/or. To neglect the latter amounts to losing ‘any idea of the love with which God loves him’ and ‘any idea of the power and cunning of evil, and also of his own weakness’ (WA: 35). This leads to the next petition: Lead us not into temptation.

²⁰² Ibid., 106 n.32.

'Lead Us Not into Temptation . . . Deliver Us from Evil'

Unconditional obedience, in connection with the petition 'lead us not into temptation', reveals an important antonym to the ideal of the discussion; namely, 'ambivalence'. To pray for God's leading is to ask for a life of 'sheer simplicity before God' (WA: 32). According to Kierkegaard, where one finds indecision in the spiritual realm, one also finds the presence of the demonic (i.e. the Evil One). In the ensuing discussion of Satan, he first of all limits his ability and maintains that his 'craftiness' and 'snares of temptation' cannot perturb the individual who embodies the simplicity of the Gospel (WA: 32). Importantly, temptation does not come from Satan, though it works as his vehicle for trapping. It is the by-product of ambivalence, its source is the heart of man (WA: 33). In tandem with the first point, the devil, though never to be underestimated, cannot spot the individual who by unconditional obedience has a 'secure hiding place' in God (WA: 32). To qualify this last aspect, Kierkegaard reiterates the reality of on-going sin and provides a nuanced explanation for the petition: 'that is, let me never through disobedience venture outside my hiding place at any time, and insofar as I am guilty of disobedience, then do not immediately drive me out of my hiding place, outside which I am immediately led into temptation' (WA: 32). This definition also gives attention to the question of the forgiveness of sin – a necessary connector to the constant struggle to serve one master.

A contradiction seems to arise. Unconditional obedience is the prerequisite for hiding in God, even though one may disobey and still not have his or her hiding place exposed. Calvin, in his commentary on 6:24, helps to express this tension between sin and loyalty:

They [Christians] groan under this wretched servitude, and are unhappy with themselves, and only serve the flesh with unwillingness and reluctance, these are not said to serve two masters, for their zeal and their efforts are being proven by the Lord, as surely as if the

obedience they displayed were unsullied. This refutes the hypocrisy of those who go gaily on in their vices, as though they could bring together light and darkness.²⁰³

On this account, it sounds as if a Christian sins differently than an unbeliever. Using Kierkegaard's terminology, Christian ambivalence is not the same as pagan ambivalence, but is this position sound? The justification for the difference is relationship with the heavenly Father, consciousness of this ambivalence, and the fact that this petition from the Lord's Prayer falls off the lips of someone who wants to hide in God. Calvin brings this out similarly. The person who has God as master is frustrated with indwelling sin; he or she is troubled and angered by its presence. Kierkegaard's explication at this point offers comfort for an individual on the rocky road of discipleship. He tags the next petition on to this discussion. He who victoriously hides in God is 'delivered from evil'; this portion of the prayer provides yet another angle from which to consider unconditional obedience. (WA: 32). In the end, it also serves as a summary for the content of Matthew 6:24. A proper view of the Gospel's either/or, a striving for undivided loyalty, trust in the patience of God, cultivation of simplicity, and proper use of the ability of choice all contribute to the splendour of obedience described in the discourse. Each facet of the term, when practiced in tandem with the art of silence, manifests in a life of joy.

Discourse Three

On Joy

The section of Matthew's text headlining the third devotional discourse reads thus: "Look at the Birds of the Air; They Sow Not and Reap Not and Gather Not into Barns" – *without Worries about Tomorrow*. "Look at the Grass in the Field, Which Today

²⁰³ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. A.W. Morrison, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1972), 219.

Is” (WA: 36, Kierkegaard’s italics). The individual who heeds the advice will learn ‘joy’. From his presentation of Matthew’s text, Kierkegaard sets the conversation up as a meditation on the dialectic of today-tomorrow; he also reworks the approach to the earlier discourses. Instead of silence or obedience, he substitutes the language of joy. To begin expanding on the term, he appeals to the lily and bird who embody ‘unconditional joy’, ‘they themselves are joy and joy itself’, and wherever they roam, they perfectly communicate this message (WA: 36-37). Joy, in this instance, is absolute integrity, and, as we will see, absolute presence in the moment. This attributing of joy to nature, as usual, serves to lead into a discussion of the main theme – Christian joy. To further elaborate on the concept he exegetes Matthew’s text and its stress on today and addresses possible rebuttals to his reading. He then turns to 1 Peter 5:7 in order to dole out practical advice on getting rid of the idea of tomorrow; the discourse concludes with a return to the Lord’s Prayer and what it teaches the reader about the concept of joy. The journey commences with further delineation of the defining features of Christian joy.

First of all, joy, like obedience in the previous discourse, is unconditional. On the contrary, ‘one whose joy is dependent on certain conditions is not joy itself; his joy, after all, is that of the conditions and is conditional in relation to them’ (WA: 37). As long as the thing which produces joy is temporal, elusive, and quantitative, joy remains at bay. Even if every condition were met, ‘it is still not possible to become more than or anything other than conditionally joyful’ (WA: 38). This also reveals something about the source of joy, it is not found externally in the world and it cannot be equated solely with a good mood or a happy feeling. Progress in joy involves a reorientation of one’s entire being.

Kierkegaard next comments on Matthew’s phrase about the lily, ‘today it is’. This shows the heart of joy, which comes naturally and necessarily to flowers (and birds). A lack of awareness of the next day allows these creatures to carry on wholly in the

moment. In the obedience discourse the bird and lily worked and blossomed unhindered by decay and opposition; here, they do the same, undistracted by the future. He goes on to insist that, for human beings too, ‘tomorrow does not exist’; instead, it is ‘that unblessed day invented by garrulousness and disobedience’ (WA: 38-39). The glaring difference between nature and people comes in the extra step needed on the part of a woman or man to willfully turn away from the next day. In view of that, Kierkegaard speaks further about this joy: it is an ‘infinite emphasis’ on today, joy is ‘truly to be present to oneself’, ‘joy is the present time with the whole emphasis on: *the present time*’, it is the by-product of silence and obedience, and, ultimately, it is to be like God ‘who eternally and infinitely is present to himself in being today’ (WA: 38-39). Recalling the last chapter, what he has in mind here is not paganism and *carpe diem*; instead, each of these aspects of joy come together in what Kierkegaard describes as ‘the moment’ (*Øieblikket*), a Danish term which may be rendered as ‘blink of an eye’, ‘glance’, or ‘gaze of the eye’.²⁰⁴

Kierkegaard anticipates possible objections to his definition of joy. For example, “‘the lily and the bird, they have it easy.’ . . . “but a human being, after all, not only has worry about tomorrow and what he is going to eat but also worry about yesterday with regard to what he has eaten – and not paid for!” (WA: 39). First of all, the complaint clarifies that it is the next day which stifles joy and, like other objections in *TDD*, there is an issue with a proper reading of the text. Those who would prolong problems with Matthew’s passage do so not because of a ‘lack of ability’, but from ‘unwillingness or perhaps even obstinacy’ (WA: 40). Kierkegaard agrees that his construal of the task of joy is difficult, but he goes on to recount the superiority of men and women in comparison to the rest of the created order, and the innumerably greater number of things

²⁰⁴ Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*, 16.

to rejoice over. These include: ‘that you came into existence’, daily provision from God, the five senses, and the fact that all the variety of nature, in some way, operates and exists ‘to delight you’, ‘to give you joy’, and to keep you from boredom (WA: 39-40). It is not a difficult task, as the bird exemplifies, to discover ‘something, or rather enough, to rejoice over’ (WA 37).

Each part of his plea recapitulates earlier findings in the Matthew writings. Humans are the image of God, the rulers of creation, and the recipients of the heavenly Father’s care. Kierkegaard does not wish to chide; instead, he declares that, ‘if this does not give joy, then there is nothing to rejoice over’ (WA: 40). Over against the humanly crafted conditions needed for joy, he pinpoints existentially oriented gifts from God that foment joy passively and actively, inwardly and externally. The presupposition behind this unconditional joy, in addition to relishing the gifts of God, is the decision to forget about the next day and what it holds; he follows this up with counsel on how to tap into this joy, even while suffering and in the face of perishability. This leads to the final discussion of artful living as well.

Joy, Suffering, and Artful Living

The discussion of suffering arises as a response to a dissenting view that joy comes easily for the bird and lily. On the contrary, Kierkegaard points out that, in actuality, ‘the lily and bird do have sorrow also, just as all nature has sorrow’ (WA: 40). While it is true that they *naturally* rejoice, this does not erase the reality of suffering in their lives. Under the influence of chapter eight of the epistle to the Romans, he asserts:

Does not all creation groan under the perishability under whose dominion it was placed against its will? . . . Perishability, perishability, that is the *groan* – because to be under the dominion of perishability is to be what a groan signifies: confinement, restraint, imprisonment; and the content of the groan is: perishability, perishability! (WA: 40-41)

Once again, the anguish has its roots in the temporary nature of existence; specifically, Kierkegaard ties knowledge of this perishability with sorrow over ‘a frightful tomorrow’ (WA: 40). Despite this subjection, the joy of nature continues undiminished; as Pattison notes, ‘the life of the bird, as manifested in its song, also witnesses . . . to the transcending of the sorrow attendant on perishability’.²⁰⁵ Suffering remains as a dialectical component of the life of nature; this accentuates the marvelous overcoming by the bird and lily as they live completely in the now. The consolation of the Gospel for the believer does not remove the reality of death or the frailty of life. As Walsh notes, Kierkegaard witnessed this ‘direct and trivial’ outlook present in Christendom and criticized it as pagan; instead, ‘suffering is viewed as the inverse sign of God’s love and grace’.²⁰⁶

This mingling together of perfect joy and sorrow in the account of the bird and lily also suggests a Christological application not entertained directly by Kierkegaard. He writes: ‘you cannot ask for a better teacher than the one who, despite bearing extremely deep sorrow, is still unconditionally joyful and joy itself’ (WA: 41). Lilies and birds, in this regard, both point to and pale in comparison to the teacher who *willfully* entered a world that was groaning under the power of sin, and, ‘for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame’ (Heb. 11:1). Nelson calls this the ‘loudest’ silence of the discourse: ‘the reader is thus directed (in a rather poetic way) toward an encounter with the one who directed attention to the lily and the bird in the first place – the one about whom the *Three Devotional Discourses* have remained absolutely silent’.²⁰⁷ Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, he also walked the earth as the prototype of life in the moment through an unconditionally joyful relationship with the heavenly

²⁰⁵ Pattison, “The Joy of Birdsong,” 117.

²⁰⁶ Walsh, *Living Christianly*, 144, 146.

²⁰⁷ Nelson, “Soundings of Silence,” 70.

Father.²⁰⁸ Bringing together the three discussions of suffering, silence restricts the range of suffering, obedience thrives and works despite suffering, and joy bursts the fetters and prison of suffering by casting everything upon the God who cares (WA: 41). This is the practical outworking of artful living in the face of the next day and the reality of death.

Kierkegaard elaborates on how to cast one's cares through a reading of 1 Peter 5:7: 'Cast **all** your sorrow **upon God**' (his emphasis). The two emboldened sections of the verse relate to two pitfalls that arise from a reading in which the passage is not 'taken to heart'. For Kierkegaard, the renown of the phrase under deliberation creates the risk of it becoming prosaic and, finally, misapplied as an innocuous cliché for tough times in an otherwise worldly society.²⁰⁹ On the other hand, 'these words have enormous power when they are taken altogether literally; when not taken literally, strictly according to the letter, they are more or less without power, finally only a meaningless platitude' (WA: 41). In order to avoid confusion with modern ideas related to the terminology of 'literal' in biblical interpretation, it is better here to view his comments as a call to a close or thorough reading of the text. This re-labeling finds support in his exegesis of 1 Peter where he wants to ensure that the reader allows the message to take him the full distance required.

Accordingly, Kierkegaard contends that a less than literal reception of the *all* of the passage will result in half-measures and a picking and choosing of which sorrows one thinks necessary to hand over to God. Conversely, this implies that either the individual can handle some of them alone, or, that he or she refuses to absolutely surrender. The ideal casting away prescribed involves 'passion', akin to an intense dislike for the cares,

²⁰⁸ Kierkegaard captures the relationship between false joy, true joy, and the suffering of Christ in an 1839 journal entry thus: 'Christianity also has a joy, not that which is concealed at the bottom of the cup of intoxication but that which smiles up at us from the bottom of the bitter chalice, and which only shows itself more clearly to the same degree that the chalice becomes more bitter'. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, Vol. 2, 8.

²⁰⁹ For a similar discussion on the misappropriation of a biblical phrase see Kierkegaard's discussion in 'Thorn in the Flesh' (EUD: 324).

and ‘faith and confidence’ in the target (God) to which the cares are aimed: ‘To be able to take hold of all one’s sorrows in this way and all at once and then to be able to cast it deftly away and so sure to hit the mark’ (WA: 41-42)! His description of casting begins with a gathering together of sorrow and worry. This activity intimates a spiritual discipline wherein an individual takes careful inventory of every aspect of life in order to continually place it before the God who cares. One problem arises for Kierkegaard in this presentation. How does he reconcile the ongoing presence of sorrow in the lily and bird with the insistence that they altogether cast it off? The simple solution traces back to the ‘Omnipotent One’, who ‘carries the whole world and all its sorrow . . . with extreme lightness’ (WA: 42). The exercise of casting does not remove the reality of sorrow but it does remove its heaviness, and human beings’ improper response to it.

This leads to the other potentially less than full reception of the apostle’s words: ‘If one does not cast it unconditionally *upon God* but somewhere else, then one does not become unconditionally rid of it; it returns in one way or another, often in the form of even greater and more grievous sorrow’ (WA: 42). The pay off for taking *all* care to *God* is, not surprisingly, unconditional joy. Kierkegaard elaborates on and extends the earlier definition of this bliss: ‘to worship the omnipotence with which God the Omnipotent One bears all your sorrow lightly as nothing . . . worshipfully to dare to believe “that God cares for you”’ (WA: 43). Worship equals joy. The one who lacks this delight in God has no one else to blame but himself and his ‘ineptitude’, ‘unwillingness’, ‘conceitedness’, and ‘self-willfulness’ in not emulating the lily and bird (WA: 43).

Kierkegaard’s goal is to ensure that one does not underestimate God’s ability and willingness to help and does not overestimate the self’s ability to handle cares on its own. Admittedly, his presenting the message of the epistle as something embodied by and learned from the birds and lilies oversteps the immediate context of Matthew’s Gospel.

Nevertheless, the fact that Kierkegaard relates these passages shows his own comfortableness with conceptually linking different sections of the New Testament. He applies Peter's advice on cares to the problem of worry raised by Matthew. Thus far we have seen Kierkegaard define joy, defend the definition, and offer concrete advice on practicing it; I now turn to the connections between joy, 6:24-34, and the Lord's Prayer.

Joy and the Lord's Prayer

At the conclusion of the 1849 collection, he relates a final benefit for those who succeed in the lesson of the discourses. Namely, the individual, absorbed 'in praise and worship', has nothing left to say to God but the end of the Lord's Prayer: "'Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever'" (WA: 44). The three ideas (kingdom, power, glory) correspond with silence, obedience, and joy; in line with this everlasting reality, the listener receives 'a today that never ends, a today in which you eternally can become present to yourself' (WA: 44). To pray this petition is to bring defeat to self-seeking, temporal sorrows and worries, and the greatest fear of all, fear of death. Like the thief on the cross, God's people will swiftly 'transition from temporality to eternity' where 'the longest day is granted – to live today, and this very day to be in paradise' (WA: 44-45). This infers that the virtues in these discourses practice the heavenly life. Worry, suffering, and sin meet their match when the individual lives today as it is lived in heaven. When 'the longest day is granted' the Christian will continue life in the moment. What begins on earth continues forever. Kierkegaard switches terms on the reader, the moment of joy also equates with the verb to remain (*bliver*). This remaining in God, on the other side of death, will be unhindered in an artful and endless performance of silence, obedience, and joy. The words of the Lord's Prayer, like the noise of the raging sea, are in unity with silence, they are the language that cultivates and operates within the

moment. As spoken words, they serve as a gateway into the lesson of the Gospel; with silence and obedience accomplished, joy springs forth.

The importance of prayer in all the Matthew discourses springs up first of all from the fact that Kierkegaard places a written prayer at the beginning of each collection. This not only sets the tone of the written material, it also calls the reader into a preparatory act which includes opening oneself up to the meditation on the Gospel of Matthew. Above and beyond the introductory prayers, each collection includes a summons to this spiritual discipline as an integral part of worry free living. The 1849 collection, as we have seen, documents the ways Kierkegaard hears reverberations of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:24-34 and his juxtaposing of the two passages anticipates a similar approach found in twentieth-century New Testament scholarship. Betz, who actually stands as a critic to the later approach, nevertheless comments on the structural placement of the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon and concludes that 'this architecture points to the central importance of prayer for the SM'.²¹⁰ Kierkegaard's approach is unhindered by any current structural debates and, accordingly, he liberally constructs conceptual paths between the ideas of loyalty, image, work, and seeking God's kingdom and the various petitions of Lord's Prayer.²¹¹ More now needs to be said about 'the moment'. This will also grant an opportunity to summarize the three discourses, each of which addresses the topic.

Life in the Moment

Kierkegaard places the presentation of silence, obedience, and joy alongside a picture of how the birds and lilies, despite the various sufferings of life, instantaneously practice each virtue. One of the central ways he expresses this is through the terminology

²¹⁰ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 64.

²¹¹ For a modern example of a more rigid application of the Prayer to the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount see Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco: Word Books, 1982)

of ‘the moment’²¹², this becomes very obvious through the thirteen uses of the word in one paragraph in the silence discourse. While the discussion is presently looking at the idea of joy, by including his earlier treatment of ‘the moment’, it will help to provide a more complete vision of the way of life he has in mind and to summarize this chapter as a whole.

In the silence discourse he describes the moment in various ways. First of all, it is something to make the most of; moreover, it is ‘pregnant with . . . rich meaning’, it sends no advanced notice before arriving, it comes without ‘noise and shouting . . . with a lighter step than the lightest footfall of any creature’; finally, it comes suddenly and ‘stealthily’ (WA: 14). Each of these descriptors denotes the uncontrollability and unpredictability of the moment, which is also the instance where God makes aware to the silent one the convergence of the eternal and the temporal in his or her life. Pattison defines it as the ‘time-fulfilled-by-eternity, the *kairos*’.²¹³ As he continues, Kierkegaard notes that, sadly, ‘the misfortune in the lives of the great majority of human beings is this, that they were never aware of the moment’ (WA: 14). The individual who has cultivated the silence prescribed by Kierkegaard is able to discern where the kingdom of God wants to break into time. In light of the Matthew text, the call to live in this moment serves as a summary of the call to not worry about food and clothing and to not worry about tomorrow. Men and women battle daily with impatience and anxiety about provision and the future; dialectically, this relationship equally grants an opportunity to block out these temptations by living life fully in the present. This equates with using the moment, with prayer, and with seeking first the kingdom of God.

²¹² Kierkegaard develops this category more extensively in *CA* pages 81-93. A fuller discussion of his use of the term could easily fill a substantial monograph; here, I am limiting the conversation to its use in these discourses and how it amplifies his reading of Matthew.

²¹³ Pattison, *Kierkegaard, the Aesthetic and the Religious*, 166.

Discussion of the moment in the obedience discourse begins with reference to the lily. Despite the presence of suffering and downfall, ‘it had one additional beauty,’ says Kierkegaard, ‘to be as beautiful as this despite the certainty of downfall at the same moment (*Øieblik*)’ (WA: 28). While he seems to speak of blossoming and wilting as simultaneous events, this is not quite the case; the blossoming is the present, while the downfall always remains in the future. Applied to human beings, things go wrong when an individual conflates the awareness of future death with the present – it steals away the clarity of the task of the moment. Interestingly, when Kierkegaard does finally turn the discussion to human beings, he also slightly amends the use of the terminology; specifically, he emphasizes the word in his manuscript so that it takes on, not just a temporal meaning, but a conceptual value. It becomes *the moment* (*Øieblikket*). Through unconditional obedience, a person ‘can with unconditional accuracy find *the moment*’ and ‘can make use of the moment, unconditionally undisturbed by the next moment’ (WA: 29). According to Pattison, this moment ‘yields a vision of the meaning of life as lived before the face of the eternal’.²¹⁴ Certainly this is captured and qualified further in Kierkegaard’s application of the term to the loyalty parable of Matthew 6:24. In Pattison’s work, he emphasizes the analogy of vision with the term and shows its critical relationship to a growing spectator oriented culture. One might equally suggest that in *TDD* it stands as a moment of hearing. This is obvious from the first piece on silence. Equally Kierkegaard stresses the sound (*lyd*) of nature as a path to understanding unconditional obedience (*Lydighed*) which, taken from the verb to obey (*at adlyde*) might literally be rendered ‘at the hearing of’.

Returning to the current writing, and the concept of joy, the reader finds that the moment is an absolute presence in the now, with oneself, and with the heavenly Father

²¹⁴ Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*, 18.

(WA: 38-39). Prayer (casting all one's cares upon God) serves a major part in actualizing the Gospel life on display. Kierkegaard contrasts the moment with the poet, who reappears in the closing dialogue insisting on a different construal of things. In Pattison's description of the Romantic, he portrays such a person as one who refuses resolution between earthly and heavenly contrasts, a 'dualism' applies here too, only this time it is between society with human beings and communion with nature (WA: 43).²¹⁵ By contrast, Kierkegaard points out the inescapability of society, even among the birds and lilies; over against the poet's attempt to escape, he reminds the reader that joy derives not from fleeing the human race, but from abiding in God, whether alone or in civilization (WA: 44). Kierkegaard's call to live in the moment is a call to Christian existentialism.

In the history of interpretation of this section of Matthew's Gospel, the abandonment of the next day called for here has elicited harsh critiques which include irresponsibility, recklessness, and being out of touch with reality. Keeping in mind this discussion of the moment, I want to briefly consider how Kierkegaard might respond to these charges.

I noted earlier that Kierkegaard refers to the next day as a non-existent mental invention (WA: 38). This does not mean that the moment is void of longing, wishing, and dreaming; instead, passion and volition find a new direction as they get taken up in the kingdom of God. He captures this balance between making plans and the anxiety of impatience in the 1844 discourse 'To Preserve One's Soul in Patience': 'Patience has discovered the danger and the terror [of the future], but it also comforts: Today we shall do this, tomorrow that, God willing. Are these words not indescribably comforting; do they not take all the premature hardships away from the purpose?' (EUD: 191) To fall behind the moment amounts to despair; to get ahead of the moment creates worry and

²¹⁵ Pattison, "The Joy of Birdsong," 115.

impatience. Kierkegaard recognizes that worry about the next day presupposes some aim or goal for an individual; nonetheless, only when ‘the goal is God’ can the proper dialectic between now and later be maintained (EUD: 191). Emphasis in this earlier discourse falls on not letting failure discourage in such a way that the individual gives up on today; impatience would either destroy or flatter one in such a condition by saying, ‘It is too late’ or ‘There is always tomorrow’. On the contrary, ‘Patience has another phrase, a powerful phrase, just what the anxious one needs: This very day, says the Lord’ (EUD: 200). This not only shows another example of Kierkegaard using the New Testament to define the moment, his comments also help to qualify the proper way a person may go about planning for the future while remaining in the moment. While this helps, the fact remains that he never offers any other perspective on relationship to the future other than the call to turn away from it in favor of today.

This chapter has drawn attention to the devotional nature of these three discourses and tried to promote Kierkegaard’s writings as an example of spiritual theology. His exegesis of Matthew, the primacy of prayer, and the category of the moment all offer encouragement to the single individual struggling with worry and suffering. There does remain a significant polemical side to these works and hints of this have already arisen where his comments on the poet have been mentioned. In conclusion, I want to look more closely at the poet’s proclivity toward escapism in the collection and how it reveals the potential of a much wider audience for *Three Devotional Discourses*.

Conclusion of *Three Devotional Discourses*

The Poet, Suffering, and Modern Society

From a journal entry preceding the publication of the 1849 discourses, Kierkegaard notes how his ‘sketching of nature’ in *TDD* involves the use of poetic

language to 'indicate that the poetic must be put aside' (WA: 198). Commenting on this goal, Beabout notes how, 'in addressing himself to "the poet" . . . and then moving on to claim that the poet's life is really despair, Kierkegaard is rehearsing themes that had been central to his thinking since his years as a student'.²¹⁶ In *TDD* this attack focuses on the Romantic life-view, in part, because the poet represents an appealing, but errant, approximation of the relationship to nature Kierkegaard promotes. The signs for this strategy were posted in another earlier journal entry:

In these discourses, therefore, there will be a development of the conflict between poetry and Christianity, how in a certain sense Christianity is prose in comparison with poetry (which is desiring, charming, anesthetizing and transforms the actuality of life into an oriental dream, just as a young girl might want to lie on a sofa all day and be entranced) and yet it is the very poetry of the eternal (JP 2: 1942/WA: 197-198).

From this passage, the essential gulf entails Christianity's emphasis on practicing the teaching of the text (prose) and the poet's emphasis on perpetuating the endless possibilities present in the life of the bird and lily. The poet's wish-projecting tendencies are bland and boring compared with the authentic choice-making of Christianity. This disagreement should not be taken as a wholesale condemnation on the aesthetic sphere and poetic representation; instead, his judgment concentrates upon the affinity to evade the pressures of life in the real world (oriental dream). Otherwise, Kierkegaard himself unashamedly takes the moniker of poet. As Walsh notes, 'Kierkegaard understands his task as a poet in the later writings to be that of bringing the religious ideals once again into view for his time'.²¹⁷ He is not anti-poetry; instead, he 'rejects the claim of Romanticism that playfully inventing a new self *ex nihilo* makes for a beautiful life'.²¹⁸

Kierkegaard critiques several negative aspects of the poet which revolve around an unwillingness to take directions from the Gospel. Heidi Leihu describes this mentality as aesthetic fatalism, the poet maintains himself by stating 'the impossibility of the

²¹⁶ Beabout, "The Virtue of Active Receptivity," 129.

²¹⁷ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 225-226.

²¹⁸ Beabout, "The Virtue of Active Receptivity," 132.

possible'.²¹⁹ In the discourses, two things must remain impossible to keep the poet happily sad: he cannot become like the bird and lily and he must not let Matthew's message take away the inspiration of suffering. When the poet finds out the Gospel wants him to follow the advice of the bird and lily he exclaims: "How cruel, then, of the Gospel to talk this way to me – indeed, it seems as if it wanted to make me lose my mind . . . I cannot understand the Gospel; there is a language difference between us that, if I were to understand it, would kill me" (WA: 8). The poet's encounter with the Gospel educes daydreams about the bird of his childhood book and the lily of his mother's garden; these represent the zenith of his longing to escape from real-life burdens. Sinnett notes how this character mirrors the poet in *Either/Or*: 'We encounter, thus, the realm of fantasy so familiar to us from *Either*, the poet's "baronial castle" so high above the plane of actuality, and his desperate pursuit of various *divertissement* intended to assuage the despair of everyday existence'.²²⁰ Like the aesthetic author of Book A in *Either/Or*, he is addicted to his melancholy. Evans also sees intentionality in the clinging to sadness so prevalent with nineteenth-century Romanticism; in the case of the discourses, the poet is able to draw aesthetic attention to his own tragedy, this embodiment culminates in his becoming a courageous, tragic hero.²²¹ As the reader discovers, this is the poetic versus artful response to both modern society and suffering. Kierkegaard, in *TDD*, goes on to elaborate on the cause of the poet's suffering and why it is that the reader finds him, like the Christian, out among the birds and lilies.

The poet personifies two errant responses to suffering - inclosing reserve and complaining.²²² Nevertheless, the causes of his suffering represent valid problems found

²¹⁹ Heidi Liehu, *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and Its Relation to Hegel*, Acta Philosophica Fennica, vol. 47 (Helsinki: Philosophical Society of Finland, 1990), 81.

²²⁰ Sinnett, "Restoring the Conversation," 194.

²²¹ Evans, *Kierkegaard*, 83-84.

²²² Kierkegaard spells this out in the Friday Communion discourse on Hebrews 4:15: 'Do not in despair shut yourself up with your sufferings, as if no one, not even he [Jesus] could understand you. Do not

in the modern world. First of all, in the silence discourse, when asked why it is so solemn out among the bird and lily, the poet replies: 'Because there is silence. And his longing goes out to that solemn silence, away from worldliness in the human world, where there is so much talking, away from all the worldly human life that only in a sad way demonstrates that speech distinguishes human beings above the animals' (WA: 12). While the noise of 'busy humanity' can and does harm the solemn silence, it does not follow that it takes away the possibility of hearing the divine voice in society, nor does it remove the possibility of keeping an awareness 'that the human being has kinship with the divine' (WA: 13). As Pattison notes, 'we do not need to turn away from the world to find God if we live in the world with silent assent to God's ordering of all things'.²²³

In the discourse on joy, the poet again cries out against his source of suffering: 'Society, society itself is the trouble, the fact that a human being is the only creature who torments himself and others with the confounded delusion about society and the bliss of society, and all the more so as society, to his and its corruption, becomes greater' (WA: 43). If only he could achieve 'solitude' and 'peacefulness' with the birds, then it would be realistic to cast his cares upon God. The account of the poet's derogatory view of noise and the crowd illuminates a genuine problem, and, though not always done in the manner of the poet, various modes of escape continually multiply in our age. From this angle, Kierkegaard's banter with the poet does not dismiss the problem of suffering in the city, it critiques one particular method for dealing with it; subsequently, his Gospel oriented antidote goes on to treat a condition affecting society at large.²²⁴

complain loudly and impatiently about your sufferings either, as if they were so frightful that not even he would be capable of putting himself completely in your place; do not have the audacity for this falsehood' (WA 118-119).

²²³ Pattison, "The Joy of Birdsong," 124.

²²⁴ For an analysis of Kierkegaard's concern for and awareness of the problems of the city see Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*.

In the opening prayer to the collection Kierkegaard stresses twice how the ‘company of people’ and a ‘crowd of people’ hinder the religious development in view in Matthew’s Gospel (WA: 3). While recognizing the dialectic between earth-heaven and suffering-joy, he offers a very different solution to the otherwise valid observation of the poet. Kierkegaard’s description of the poet functions in a similar manner to his use of the pagan in the previous chapter. Critique of an overly Romantic world-view is only part of the story; he also paints a positive picture of the Christian response to the message of nature and the problem of suffering. It begins with a journey through the school of silence, which is, incidentally, the first thing to go in an industrializing setting. City life can exacerbate worry. This is not the poet’s only issue, however, and in no way can one excuse his rejection of the Gospel; regardless, by recognizing the difficulties of modernity as a contributing factor to worry and suffering, one can expand Kierkegaard’s constructive comments beyond a well-known sparring partner and see his ‘critique’ as aimed at society at large. Beyond the connections with modernity, there is suffering that stems from finitude and even religious persecution. The content of *TDD* is able to address each of these possibilities, and, in the place of escapism, Kierkegaard explores three important ideas that contribute to the interpretation of Matthew 6:24-34 and that help a person to live artfully in the modern world.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MATTHEW DISCOURSES, MARTIN LUTHER, AND MODERN MATTHEW SCHOLARSHIP

Thus far the project has documented Kierkegaard's discourses based on Matthew 6:24-34 and released in 1847, 1848, and 1849. Before looking at the ways in which his commentary compares and contrasts with the work of Martin Luther and modern Matthew scholars, I wish to consider his final discourse on the passage found in, 'Christ as the Prototype'. As I have alluded to already, this work differs somewhat from the previous writings in tone, length, and agenda. I now turn to this discourse on 6:24 and explore how it adds to his treatment of the concept of worry; moreover, it is of interest to consider how its approach and style betray personal changes and development in Kierkegaard's thought and, especially, his relationship to the established church.

'Christ as the Prototype'

Introduction

The final treatment of Matthew 6.24-34 differs from the earlier counterparts insofar as it is not part of an entire collection on the New Testament passage; instead, it is paired with a commentary on 1 Peter 4.7 titled, 'Becoming Sober'. Together the two discourses comprise the posthumously published work, *Judge For Yourself (JFY)*. Initially prepared for publication as an accompanying piece to *For Self-Examination* (1851), Kierkegaard withheld the book's release, primarily in view of his relationship to Bishop Mynster, an obvious target of the work's potent critique. In March 1855 he writes: 'This book is from the time when the old bishop was still living. Therefore it has been kept at a distance both because at the time I understood my relation to the

established order that way and because out of respect for the old bishop I also very much wanted to understand my relation that way' (JFY: 215). It is worth noting that, compared to his retrospective account of maintaining a healthy distance in 1851, in 1855 things were different: 'Now I speak much more decisively, unreservedly, truly, without, however, thereby implying that what I said earlier was untrue' (JFY: 215).

When approaching the discourses of *Judge For Yourself* one finds a decisiveness similar to that of Kierkegaard's final year on earth; the only difference in 1851 were reservations he had on a personal level about an outright attack on Mynster and the established church he was leading. The editors of the English version of *JFY* add that, 'this concern for the limit to criticism of the established order was a corollary of Kierkegaard's hope that Bishop Mynster would clear the air by making an admission and confession of the accommodation of Christianity to the "demands of the times"' (FSE/JFY: xii). Kierkegaard's call for and hope that Mynster would repent and announce that Danish Christendom was not true Christianity necessitated that the content of 'Christ as the Prototype' raise the bar of ideality so that the reader would take notice of the gap between the truth and his or her own religious existence. This agenda and especially the desire for a confession from Mynster, which he works out in the discourse, represents the middle ground between the first three collections on Matthew and, the writings of 1854-1855. Kierkegaard intensifies the problem of sin and lack of conformity to the prototype while he also, somewhat mildly, extends the invitation to all his society to at least acknowledge the failure to follow after the Christ. Because the discourse is unusually long (60 pages), I will proceed by pointing out a few instances where differences arise. The first example comes from his interpretation of the phrase 'no one can serve two masters'.

No One Can Serve Two Masters

Kierkegaard emphasizes the hard facts about the statement ‘no one can serve two masters’ by calling it an ‘eternal truth’ which is unchangeable regardless of how much resistance an individual puts up against its seemingly unreasonable demand (JFY: 151). This focus is meant to reveal that in one way or another everyone falls short of the standard and serves two or more masters in their life. A lessening of the ideal, despite various forms of opposition, is out of the question. Kierkegaard presses this universal inability to serve one master as a way to point out the problem of sin. The opening prayer of the discourse sets up this construal of the loyalty proverb and connects it dialectically to the life of Jesus:

Help us all, each one of us, you who both will and can, you who are both the prototype and the Redeemer, and in turn both the Redeemer and the prototype, so that when the striving one droops under the prototype, crushed, almost despairing, the Redeemer raises him up again; but at the same moment you are again the prototype so that he may be kept in the striving (JFY: 147).

The prayer reveals Kierkegaard’s answer to those who object to a religion based on an unachievable standard. At the same time, he sets out a pattern for growth in holiness. David Cain proposes that this model of sanctification fits together the initial bad news of the Gospel with the good news of the Gospel. Following an allusion in Kierkegaard’s discourse, he defends a ‘cross-star dialectic’ that prevents the souring of the message; first the cross is seen, then the star.²²⁵ This corresponds with the pattern of living suggested in the opening prayer, prototype-Redeemer-prototype. Cain continues: ‘Perhaps someone will say, “Getting the dialectic right is rigor-grace-rigor.” The critical recognition, as with striving, is that the second “rigor” is a different “rigor” from the first.

²²⁵ David Cain, "A Cross in a Star, Getting the Dialectic Right," in *IKC: FSE/JFY*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 322.

The first rigor is desperation. The second is delight. “Rigor-grace-rigor” calls forth *gratitude*.²²⁶

In this way, 6:24 operates similarly to the Law as it exposes sin and the need for atonement.²²⁷ Nevertheless, Kierkegaard distinguishes it from the ‘crushing’ effect of the law: ‘This is not the intention of the Gospel. Its intention is that by means of the requirement and my humiliation I shall be lifted, believing and worshiping – and then I am light as a bird’ (JFY: 153). At the height of this ideality, Kierkegaard proclaims the only way out, the grace of God. The remonstrance against the ‘unattainable’ ideal falters when Christianity responds by proclaiming, ‘No need to worry about the gap of disobedience, Christ’s Atonement can take care of that’ (JFY: 156). Following through with Cain’s comments, relationship with Jesus and his ideal grows and deepens through each new encounter with him as the prototype and as the Redeemer. A second example of Kierkegaard’s different approach to 6:24 comes through his reworking of the concept of ‘mammon’.

God and Sagacity

Christianity’s requirement to serve only one master cannot be altered. Carrying this thought forward and applying the logic of 6:24, Kierkegaard goes on to replace the notion of mammon with the idea of human reason or sensibleness: ‘They are mutually repellent’, he writes, ‘like two opposite poles’ (JFY: 156). Sensibleness (*Forstandighed*), which usually might be translated as understanding, in the context of this discourse,

²²⁶ Ibid., 323. Kierkegaard’s alignment with New Testament scholars on this issue can be seen in Dale Allison’s comments: ‘While moral perfection cannot be achieved, nevertheless one’s character is built up as one earnestly struggles, with no relaxation, to reach the unattainable. The ever-receding and unconquerable ideal recreates those who fix their gaze upon it, steer their course by it, and move themselves toward it’. *Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 14.

²²⁷ Lee Barrett also confirms that Kierkegaard uses imitation of Christ in the place of the Mosaic Law: ‘the life of Christ, the prototype, serves as the law, as the pattern for holy living’. “Faith, Works, and the Uses of the Law,” 89.

captures what he has in mind in the replacement of the term with mammon. This sensibleness is a characteristic of the truly enlightened who have no time for ‘ludicrous exaggeration’; the concept encapsulates the ‘glorious and golden principle: to a certain degree’ and the ‘both-and’ mentality that holds that ‘the unconditioned is madness’ (JFY: 154). Kierkegaard’s critique of this viewpoint is nothing short of a critique of relativism and tolerance. As the discussion unfolds, he goes on to demonstrate that such a mentality is actually aggressive, absolute, and intolerant – most of all with one who actually does serve one master.

Kierkegaard’s expansion of the meaning of the passage so that it pits God and sensibleness against each other represents a common thread throughout the history of interpretation. Like others who have gone before him in the use of the text, the negative term represents that which the writer viewed as most detrimental to the God-relationship in their time.²²⁸ After explaining the general mentality of this sensibleness, Kierkegaard finishes the section by pointing the finger at two specific examples of worldly wisdom that threaten to undermine the unconditional requirement. First of all, there is scholarly doubt, which wishes to prolong or obfuscate matters to such a degree that no decisive, existential application of the passage ensues. Next, there is the esteemed preacher, and his congregation, who turn Christianity into a ‘Sunday ceremony’ of entertaining platitudes that holds no sway over the rest of one’s week (JFY: 159). So why have an impossible requirement, one may ask? For Kierkegaard it is necessary to reveal sin and need and to lead the individual to the equally necessary atonement found in Christ. After stressing the unattainable nature of the truth and condoning the worship of sensibleness, he next shows, through an extensive account of how Jesus served only one master, that the

²²⁸ One earlier example cited in Luz is that of Tertullian, who insisted that you cannot serve God and the theatre or God and marriage. Luz does not disapprove of this interpretative move, though he does make a good point that the further the idea moves away from money, the more it drifts from Matthew’s initial message. *Matthew 1-7*, 336.

impossible has been fulfilled. This leads to a third distinctive aspect of ‘Christ as the Prototype’, a more restrictive definition of what it means to follow and imitate Jesus.

Suffering as Imitation

Despite the unbending and inexhaustible demand to serve only one master, this by no means equates with the impossibility of growing closer to resembling the ideal. Because Kierkegaard has extolled Jesus as *the Word*, this reorients the task to following after (*følge efter*) Christ, or what is also translated ‘imitation’ (*Efterfølgelse*) of Christ. Both Danish terms capture a similar idea though it does seem more natural to translate the latter term as ‘following after’ instead of ‘imitation’. Though valuable lessons, Kierkegaard reflects back on the message of the bird and lily and contends that if following after stopped with them, one would have nothing higher than Jewish Piety. He writes; ‘What is crucial in Christianity is not manifested here at all; to suffer because one adheres to God – or, as it is called, to suffer for the doctrine (*Læren*) – the true imitation of Christ’ (JFY: 187). The doctrine (teaching) he has in mind is not objective content found in a textbook; it is the prototype Jesus Christ. Specifically, just as Jesus perfectly negotiated his relationship to family, nation, career, and marriage so too the follower of the pattern must do the same (JFY: 160, 164, 165, and 170). Suffering for the doctrine, comes to the foreground in this later interpretation and shows Kierkegaard’s growing impatience and directness when it comes to lesser expressions of Christian discipleship.

It must be said that the presentation of the life of Christ in *JFY* is spun to a certain extent and Kierkegaard goes too far, especially insisting that Jesus really did not have a family or a fatherland. This overlooks the complexities of his relationship, especially with his mother Mary, whom he loved and, even on the cross, considered above himself and provided her with another son, the ‘beloved disciple’ in the crucifixion account in John

19:26-27. To say he had no fatherland, moreover, undermines the Jewish identity of Jesus and misconstrues the conflict he had with his own nation. This was born out of passion and loyalty to God's chosen race, not out of him wishing to exempt himself from such categories. Kierkegaard's more general point still deserves attention. These spheres of existence, birth family, nation, workplace, and marriage, represent areas where an individual is most prone to compromise absolute allegiance to the heavenly Father; though Kierkegaard does not go so far as to condemn these situations and relationships common to everyone, he does insist that if an individual wishes to be faithful to God in each of these arenas, suffering will arise.

By stressing imitation, and its association with suffering for the doctrine Kierkegaard wants to shut the mouths of the skeptical doubters who have never once 'ventured a decisive act' for the sake of Jesus and Christianity (JFY: 190-1). He maintains that the sensible age views this as insanity, it is 'to become addicted to Christianity,' and it flies in the face of what 'the preachers proclaim – namely, that Christianity is the gentle comfort, a kind of insurance for eternity' (JFY: 190). From his journal entries from the time and his unwillingness to publish the piece he makes it clear that Bishop Mynster typified the disappointing version of the faith under his scrutiny. For Kierkegaard, imitation is the only way to preserve the true faith. The real madness occurs when the Church interprets Scripture in such a way that it completely suppresses and defuses its power so that Christianity survives only insofar as it 'pleases the secular and earthly mentality' (JFY: 190). As he did earlier, Kierkegaard not only indicts the clergy, he also illuminates how the academy has banished the idea of imitation by introducing doubt through the professor and through scientific scholarship. Kierkegaard stresses that the professor does not exist in the New Testament and that Christianity has done fine without his assistance; moreover, 'no one is as qualified to smuggle Christianity out of

the world as “the professor” is, because the professor shifts the whole viewpoint of Christianity’ (JFY: 195). The academic creates doubt and causes his followers to postpone decisively acting, something Christianity is most interested in.

Kierkegaard’s resistance to even positive uses of historical scholarship which provides ‘assurances’ for the faith stems in part from his conviction that obedience, or, in this context, a decisive act, leads to true understanding and not the other way around. New Testament scholar Daniel Patte’s comments on various approaches to the Sermon on the Mount helps situate Kierkegaard’s particular slant; under Patte’s heading, Kierkegaard’s view would be labeled as ‘imitation as intuitive ethical practice’. In this model of discipleship, ‘the actual practice of discipleship is primary and takes place before reaching certainties regarding the cognitive issues about discipleship’.²²⁹ Patte’s comments, though not directed at Kierkegaard, do help to show that even while Kierkegaard appears to be alone in his aggressive attacks on Copenhagen, he simultaneously is part of a larger tradition which holds similar positions on the role of the Sermon. In a footnote, Kierkegaard concedes that ‘Christian scholarliness’ in earlier ages had its place, the difference then was that the individual engaged in such study never forgot that he was foremost called to express the truth through Christian living (JFY: 195).

A Modest Proposal

As Kierkegaard moves toward the conclusion of the discourse, surprisingly, his proposal for the way forward in the life of imitation takes the form of ‘a leniency’. This leniency derives, in part, from an acknowledgment of his own shortcomings and also out

²²⁹ Daniel Patte, *Discipleship According to the Sermon on the Mount: Four Legitimate Readings, Four Plausible Views of Discipleship, and Their Relative Values* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 38.

of an awareness of the possibility of over emphasizing following after Christ so much that it produces a mentality of meritoriousness before God. Even so, he reminds the reader that his lenient form is different in two ways: it is not done secretly and it is still a lot more demanding than anything else found in his culture. Regarding his own toned down version he suggests that ‘the most lenient way [imitation] can be affirmed is as possibility or, as it is called, dialectically’ (JFY: 196). He adds to this the following application: ‘I do not dare to assert imitation any further than an onerous possibility that can press doubt into silence and press in the direction of humility’ (JFY: 198). In the end, his proposal presses for honesty from his contemporaries, he wants people to own up to the fact that their lives as individuals, and the church and religious academy as well, fall short of the standard of New Testament Christianity.

Alongside this proposal Kierkegaard insists that relativism and watering down the ideal cannot abide as the best solution to the demand of the Gospel; such an approach will end with ‘bourgeois-philistinism’ and ‘spiritlessness’ – the true criterion is discipleship, suffering, imitation, and self-denial (JFY: 199). Because this criterion has been watered-down and relativized, Kierkegaard then sets out four tiers of Christianity for the reader to consider; the task is to judge which of these is the true presentation of the faith and to which existential category he or she may belong.

The four tiers of Christianity he describes are not completely isolated from one another. As the unconditioned requirement is continually diluted crucial components of the true faith dissolve; first goes suffering, then goes an awareness that the faith offends the sensibilities of secular culture, next, any genuine religious interiority is lost to being a good citizen, finally, all that remains is the monstrosity that Kierkegaard calls ‘Christendom’. To reverse this cycle, the ‘*prototype* must be advanced in order at least to procure some respect for Christianity’ (JFY: 209). This begins with genuine confession

and Kierkegaard is the first to do so; he admits to Governance the ‘dubiousness of [his] being a Christian’ (JFY: 207). The other urgent initial reform is alluded to in a final, biting comment about objective scholarship that urges that the faith must escape this ‘realm of . . . doubt and nonsense’ and re-enter the ‘realm of subjectivity’ (JFY: 209). In an afterward, Kierkegaard qualifies the presentation found in the discourse on becoming sober and on discipleship. Specifically, he wants the reader to know that the greatest problem is not the established order itself, but the would-be reformers who step forward with ever new proposals to fix things. In his opinion, it is a ‘sham of wanting to reform without being willing to suffer and to make sacrifices’ (JFY: 213). Reformation in the church cannot occur through individuals motivated by pride and by the desire to gain public favour in the process.

Summary of ‘Christ as the Prototype’

‘Christ as the Prototype’ shares common ground with Kierkegaard’s earlier readings of Matthew 6:24-34 even as it also contains several points of divergence. Most notable of all, Kierkegaard does not even address the topic of *worry* in the 1851 discourse. Another striking change is perceptible in the closing comments from the ‘Moral’ of the discourse. In the earlier writings, Kierkegaard focused much more on the single individual and on providing pastoral care to aid in the defeat of various forms of worry. This does not mean the single individual disappears in the later writing; instead, what emerges is an attempt to prescribe wholesale reform for the Church, academy, and society at large. There were traces of this in the earlier pieces. From time to time polemical elements surfaced that critiqued a worldview too much in line with Hegelianism or, in the case of the poet in the 1849 writings, Romanticism of his day. ‘Christ as the Prototype’ goes much further. The preacher and the professor are actively

undermining Christianity by weakening or objectifying its content so that it has no bearing on an existing human being.²³⁰ Kierkegaard becomes less pastoral and indirect and steps more into the role of polemicist and reformer. On the latter point, it would seem unnatural to call him ‘reformer’ insofar as he does not think anyone can adequately fill the shoes of someone like Luther. Accordingly, his written presentation puts the spotlight on Jesus as example and Redeemer. He, and not sagacious, ambitious men, is the true reformer who embodies the only criterion for genuine transformation; he is the way forward for the Danish Church.

With a presentation of all fourteen discourses now complete, I want to look at other scholarship on the New Testament text. This will grant a glance at the bigger picture of the field of biblical studies and add perspective to Kierkegaard’s reading. It will also provide a chance to then re-enter Kierkegaard’s work, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and, finally, assist in both classifying his discourses and evaluating his place in the world of biblical studies and the history of interpretation. This begins by examining Martin Luther’s influential sermons on Matthew 6:24-34. In addition to viewing how the key figure of Kierkegaard’s religious tradition handled the Matthew text, evidence of Kierkegaard’s indebtedness to and advancement of Luther’s work will arise. This interaction will also feed the discussion in the concluding chapter on the style and genre of Kierkegaard’s pieces.). Before trying to make the case that Kierkegaard explicitly overlaps with and borrows from Luther’s commentary, it is worth setting up the discussion of Luther’s commentary by conversing briefly about what he sees as the appropriate approach to the Sermon.

²³⁰ An even more sarcastic reproach of the Church and academy is found in the 1855 article on the establishment’s ideas of what it means to ‘Seek first the kingdom of God’. This is further evidence of Kierkegaard’s more aggressive application of this section of Matthew’s Gospel (TM: 233-236).

Martin Luther's Sermons on Matthew 5-7

Introduction

In his preface to the collections of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, Luther expresses concern over the misuse of and misunderstanding of this section of Matthew's Gospel. He has three reasons for this apprehension. First, as 'common sayings and texts' it is easy for them to become watered down as they are used more and more throughout 'Christendom'.²³¹ (This was the exact same point we found Kierkegaard making in the discourse on joy and how to cast cares upon God). The more urgent matters follow. For Luther, this first involves the Catholic Church's reading of the text; speaking specifically about chapter five and its treatment of the law he writes: 'Out of this beautiful rose they have sucked and broadcast poison, covering up Christ with it and elevating and maintaining Antichrist'.²³² He condemns their two-tiered spirituality and asserts that they promote a works-based salvation and sanctification and permit that some may exempt themselves from the task of perfection. Luther also speaks out against the schismatic spirits and Anabaptists who 'lean too far to the right when they teach miserable stuff like this: that it is wrong to own private property, to swear, to hold office as a ruler or judge, to protect or defend oneself, to stay with wife and children'.²³³ Luther exonerates himself, convinced that his sermon material finds a safe passage between the Catholics and the Anabaptists.

He also recognizes the presence of the devil and espouses clearly that his evil forces are very interested in encouraging imbalanced, destructive hermeneutical methodology.²³⁴ The Sermon, with its elaboration on the Law and Christian living, demands a literal, yet not wooden, interpretation; its message is not optional, neither does

²³¹ Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 21, 3.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 5.

²³⁴ Ibid.

it intend to foster an elite, monkish attitude in the church. His closing prayer expresses his own hermeneutic well: 'May Christ, our dear Lord and Master, who has opened up the true meaning for us, increase and strengthen it for us, and may He help us to live and act according to it'.²³⁵ Jesus, the giver of the Sermon, is also the one who continually reveals to the reader the true purpose of the content of Matthew's Gospel; biblical interpretation without divine assistance is futile. Within this prayer, there also resides the notion that the life and work of Jesus equally communicates the call of the Sermon. For Luther, sound exegesis leads to and is verified by right living; the appropriation of the text, like its proper interpretation, is a gift – it necessitates the aid of the Triune God.

One finds similar strands of thinking in Kierkegaard and his approach to the sixth chapter of Matthew – especially in the remonstrance against lessening the standard of the text and the importance of appropriation. Luther's dependence on divine help in hermeneutics stands out as something lacking, though not completely absent, from Kierkegaard.²³⁶ Another significant similarity is the way in which both writers exegete the text with antagonists and counterpoints in mind. Nevertheless, they do battle with very different opponents. Instead of the Pope and the Anabaptists, Kierkegaard, at times, is reading against Romanticism, Hegelianism, the cultural elite, and watered down Christendom.²³⁷ Even with these generalities on both commentators' original settings, their readings cannot be fully contained or even necessarily best understood solely through this apologetic lens. Spiritual formation and pastoral care serve as more helpful classifications for the form and content of the material. Discussion now turns to the comparative study where I examine what I consider to be two conspicuous connections:

²³⁵ Ibid., 6.

²³⁶ See Kyle Roberts' discussion of Kierkegaard's 'pneumatological reading' in "God's *Edifying Discourse*," 218-222.

²³⁷ While their audiences certainly differ, if there was an important common ground it would be found in a mutual critique of the clergy of their times.

their use of the lily and bird and their comments on the shared phrase ‘concern about making a living’.²³⁸

On the Birds and Lilies

Luther finds the images of the lily and bird to be part of the continual, sharp rebuke against greed. He describes them as ‘schoolmasters’, ‘theologians’, ‘preachers’ and ‘teachers’, all in the service of the Lord. These descriptors, encountered frequently in Kierkegaard’s writings, confirm most clearly his taking up and using of Luther’s sermons on the Sermon. The bird and lily, for Luther, also serve ‘to rescue us from [greed and concern], to point out to us what we really are, and to make us thoroughly ashamed of ourselves’.²³⁹ Beyond this, he finds an allusion to the distinctiveness of human beings: ‘We are something much higher, nobler, and better than the birds. We are lords not only over the birds but over all living creatures, and everything was given to us for our use and created for our sakes’.²⁴⁰ This is an echo of God’s conversation with Adam and Eve in the garden, to be human is to have dominion and to rule over the earth. Kierkegaard’s reading takes the same trajectory, though he also incorporates into this a discussion of worship. Furthermore, he also gives the bird and lily the label of teacher and schoolmaster, adding his own touch by calling them Jesus’ assistant professors; nevertheless, Kierkegaard diverges from Luther in tone. Whereas the Reformer insists on harshness and a scolding quality for nature’s teachers, Kierkegaard views Jesus’ deferral to the lily and bird as a momentary, gracious reprieve from the otherwise grueling standard set in verse 6:24 and 6:33.

²³⁸ Space does not allow for a more exhaustive, verse by verse comparison; hopefully this survey will confirm the promise of additional comparative studies on Luther’s sermons and Kierkegaard’s upbuilding discourses.

²³⁹ Luther, *Luther's Works*. Vol. 21, 196-197.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

Luther goes on to insert several imaginary speeches into his sermon which he places on the beak of the birds. He tells the story of a caged bird: ‘Sometimes people cage them up to hear them sing. Then they get food in abundance, and they ought to think: “Now I have plenty. I do not have to be concerned about where my food is coming from. Now I have a rich master, and my barns are full”’.²⁴¹ Luther’s un-caged bird is the happiest bird, he sings praises to his Lord all day long; ‘the birds have learned so well the art of trusting Him and of casting their cares from themselves upon God’; compared to fallen man, ‘a little finch, which can neither speak nor read, is his theologian and master in the Scriptures, even though he has the whole Bible and his reason to help him’.²⁴² This sounds strikingly similar to Kierkegaard’s own parable on the wood pigeon and the pigeons in the 1847 discourse on contentment; moreover, he seems to assimilate the same kinds of idea into his treatment of the bird and goes further to suggest how it speaks concerning the gift of work and the greater art of co-working with the heavenly Father.

In the case of the lilies, Luther turns from the question of sustenance to the question of adornment. Lilies are ‘all adorned with lovely colors! Yet not one of them is anxious or worried about how it should grow or what colour it should have, but it leaves these anxieties to God’.²⁴³ When God decides to dress something, it surpasses the greatest efforts of human beings, ‘the king is nothing when compared with a rose or a pink or a violet in the field. In this way our Lord God can adorn anyone whom He chooses to adorn’.²⁴⁴ Luther maintains the theme of greed and possessions, even as he discusses the difference between God’s clothing and the tailor’s clothing; jewelry, precious metals, and fine clothes, for the lily and anyone who wishes to learn from it, cannot compare with the value of heavenly clothes: ‘Though they were to be covered with pure gold and satin,

²⁴¹ Ibid., 197.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid., 199.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

they would still say: “I prefer the adornment of my Master up there in heaven, who adorns the little birds, to that of all the tailors and embroiderers on earth””.²⁴⁵ As was the case with the bird, Luther delineates the brief existence of the lily which shines for a day or two and withers away. He marvels at the relationship between the transitoriness of its covering and how much God seems to waste on the lily’s beauty; this provides his second segue into Christian anthropology: ‘We are His highest creatures, for whose sakes He made all things and to whom He gives everything. We matter so much to Him that this life is not to be the end of us, but after this life He intends to give us eternal life’.²⁴⁶ Though he never comes out and says it, his logic implies the following: if God puts that much energy into beautifying a quickly fading flower, how much more amazingly dressed must the human being be? He ends this section with the familiar, harsh tone, pointing out that it is the devil and the fall of humankind that necessitate the ‘denouncing’ yet ‘sublime’ theology of birds and flowers. Their opposition to us is performed in love: ‘They sing and preach to us and smile at us so lovingly, just to have us believe’.²⁴⁷

This discussion of the lily and adornment intimates the importance of *imago Dei* in understanding Jesus’ appeal to nature; moreover, he appeals to it as proof of God’s faithfulness to provide for his children. Kierkegaard takes things a step further. God dresses the lily. The interesting thing about this, for Kierkegaard, is that its clothing is not something different from its essence. To be a lily is to be beautiful. He applies this logic to the case of human beings so that the greater teaching of the text is that to be human is to be clothed by God – to be made in his image. Awareness of this level of adornment, what might also be termed a Christian view of the self, provides the best weapon with

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 200.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

which one can battle concern over clothing; if God, by exerting his creative power, wove an individual together for eternal life, surely he can see to a few bits of cloth to cover the skin. The utility of *imago Dei* goes beyond this, however. Matthew's use of Solomon shows that worry connects to larger issues of power and prestige in the world; fear and insecurity in these matters leads an individual to try to secure or maintain as high a status as possible. Kierkegaard would view this as an attempt at self-clothing. It is not much different from the impossible feat of adding an inch to one's height mentioned in the preceding verse. The individual who believes that God has made him in his image understands that this indelible mark is the source of his or her status and position in the universe; only then can one properly dwell along the earthly continuum of power and authority. The second idea to consider is the way each writer addresses the difference between needing to make a living and actually worrying over making a living.

On Concern about Making a Living

Luther introduces the idea as he connects verse 6:24 to the subsequent passage on worry, 6:25-34:

Listen now to what serving Mammon means. It means being concerned about our life and our body, about what we should eat and drink and put on . . . sinful worship of Mammon does not consist in eating and drinking and wearing clothes, nor in looking for a way to make a living and working at it; for the needs of this life and of the body make food and clothing a requirement. But the sin consists in being concerned about it and making it the reliance and confidence of your heart.²⁴⁸

The problem is not with human beings needing the necessities of life; it stems from an unbalanced perspective on how much one needs and the manner in which one seeks to meet the needs. In the midst of the genuine danger of Mammon:

Flesh and blood is trying to figure out how much it can get for its security and how it can avoid danger. This is the origin of the temptation called "concern about making a living"

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 193.

[*Sorge der Nahrung*]; of course, the world does not regard it as a temptation but as a virtue, and it praises the people who set their sights on great property and honor.²⁴⁹

Kierkegaard borrows and expands on the concept ‘concern about making a living’ found in Luther’s commentary. In the discourse on contentment, in particular, this concern drove the anxious activity of the wood-pigeon and led to its eventual downfall in Kierkegaard’s fable. He writes, ‘he is in fact trapped or, to put it another way, now he is in fact excluded from the care [*Omsorg*] of providence and abandoned to worry about making a living’ [*Næringssorg*] (UDVS: 178). Kierkegaard develops its definition in various ways. This *Næringssorg* (literally ‘care about food’) arises from an improper relationship to the next day, it is a consequence of worldly comparison with others, it seeks independence from God and thereby misses out on the opportunity to rely on God on a daily basis, and, it dialectically reflects the uniqueness of human beings. Concerning the final point, concern about making a living likewise provides an opportunity for faith: ‘it is a perfection *to be able* to have worry about making a living – precisely in order to conquer this fear, in order to let faith and trust drive out this fear so that in faith’s freedom from care one truly is without worry about making a living’ (UDVS: 194).

While both Luther and Kierkegaard make the important distinction between need and worry, different emphases remain. Kierkegaard’s distinctiveness is shown through the ways he uses the material to contrast human possibility (and its blessedness) with human actuality in the form of worry and sin; Luther proves more balanced in presenting not just the negative aspect of care, but the higher duty of godly care. He qualifies his comments on worry by commending a different type of care: ‘You must not tighten this text too much, however, as if it prohibited any kind of concern at all. Every office and station involves taking on certain concerns, especially being in charge of other people’.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 193

This responsibility falls on government official, clergy, and head of household alike. He describes this as an ‘official concern, which must be sharply distinguished from greed. It is not concerned for its own sake but for the neighbor’s sake; it does not seek its own interests’.²⁵¹ Luther repeatedly turns the issue on its head by suggesting that the ultimate goal is not just to dispel care but to also learn to care about the proper things; in this case, his illustration of the godly ruler makes this point. Kierkegaard alludes to the same idea in ‘The Care of Loftiness’, though he makes it clear that his work is featuring the negative type of care, that which ought to be gotten rid of.²⁵² This does not mean Kierkegaard is not interested in reorienting the reader toward caring about the right things; that this is the case is seen most poignantly in the instance where he distracts the worried one with the transitoriness of nature in order to give him something much more important to worry about; namely, whether he is serving God or mammon.

Summary of Martin Luther’s Sermons on Matthew 5-7

Significant common characteristics arise when Kierkegaard’s reading of Matthew 6:24-34 is compared with Martin Luther’s commentary on the same passage. This section has offered data to support the thesis that the Dane read, was influenced by, and borrowed from the Reformer. Beyond this link, one also can see ways in which Kierkegaard’s own interests and situation resulted in a reception of Luther’s material that not only mimicked, but also furthered the discussion and contribution from the 16th Century. The full import of his direct interactions with Luther would not materialize until the 1850’s and in the lead up to his ‘Attack Upon Christendom’. There, one finds him employing the reformer alongside a more combative and polemical use of the Bible and

²⁵¹ Ibid., 194.

²⁵² Kierkegaard calls it ‘the care that cannot be discussed here, that which is an honour for the person of high standing, that he is solicitous for the welfare of those entrusted to him’ (CD: 48).

as a witness against what has mistakenly been interpreted as Luther's doctrine of *sola gratia*. In the present context, read beside Luther, Kierkegaard takes on the unsuspecting role of being milder in his interpretation of the Sermon. Matthew's Jesus, according to Luther, follows his comments on Mammon 'with many statements, examples, and illustrations, intended to make greed so repulsive to us and to give it such an odious appearance that we will feel like spitting on it'; the task is 'to get rid of care'.²⁵³ Jesus uses satire and employs birds and lilies to shame, embarrass, disgust, and disgrace the disciples away from care. Nevertheless, this rhetoric is not without grace. In fact, it seems inevitable that Kierkegaard borrows not only from Luther's content he also carries forward aspects of his dialectical hermeneutic.

As one without authority, he nevertheless manages to appropriate Luther's thoughts with more gentleness; he also brings greater psychological depth to the text and applies his concept of sin (loss of self) to address the problem of worry in a way that appeals to the modern world. In light of these variances, it must be remembered that Luther's sermons were actually preached from the pulpit and only later written down; this might help to account for the different type of intensity and urgency they express. Kierkegaard's pieces are well-crafted literary works and accordingly he could take the time to more thoroughly develop the stern-mildness dialectic between Jesus' demands and the respite of the birds and lilies. Despite these differences, they share a greater commonality in a commitment to thoroughly address the destructiveness of worry; Luther does this through a ruthless condemnation of greed and uses the text to elevate the heinousness of the love of mammon. Kierkegaard equates worry with a loss of self and displays the manner in which Matthew's Gospel calls for a celebration of being made in the image of God. I will return to the form of Luther's sermons on the Sermon and how it

²⁵³ Luther, *Luther's Works*. Vol. 21, 194-195.

assists in better understanding the genre of Kierkegaard's discourses and his style of biblical commentary. Presently, the exchange turns to three influential modern commentators and how their work might dialogue with Kierkegaard's discourses on Matthew 6:24-34.

Kierkegaard and the Modern Commentary

The study of Kierkegaard's discourses on the Bible is a fruitful exercise, not just for better understanding the rest of his work, but also for gaining insight into the biblical text upon which he writes. Put more simply, Kierkegaard has a strong claim to be considered as a biblical scholar. Accordingly, I believe that both his hermeneutic explored below and the results of his reading deserve a more recognized place in the field of biblical studies. As one standing outside the mainstream he also offers a call to the modern era to reconsider and even broaden the definition of legitimate biblical scholarship. By turning to three recent critical commentaries on the Sermon on the Mount, I hope to further verify how the content of his discourses resounds with the exegesis of modern Matthew scholars. At the same time, through this comparison, differences in methodology, literary style, and application of the text to the reader will also surface. The works under consideration by no means exhaust the types of approaches currently available. I have chosen them, first of all, because each work is well respected in the field; moreover, while none of them elaborate on the topic, they all allude to Kierkegaard's interest in Matthew's text and thus recognize his potential link with Matthew studies. The study of these writers will focus on the methodology they bring to the text and the ways in which their exegesis addresses the issue of worry. I begin with W.D. Davies and Dale Allison.

Davies and Allison

The critical commentary of Davies and Allison,²⁵⁴ like many in its genre, begins with an extensive introductory section on questions of authorship, structure, literary characteristics, sources, dating, and the geographic origin of the text. As they exegete each section of their outline of the Gospel, the pattern narrows so that each pericope of verses is treated around three main themes: structure, sources, and exegesis. This latter framework gives a clue to their particular interest in form criticism and especially structural analysis; accordingly, they argue that the key feature in Matthew, and especially the Sermon on the Mount, is the triadic structure.²⁵⁵ The significance of the triad is as follows. First of all, it helps connect the overall structure of Matthew 5-7 with the three pillars of Judaism first spoken by a rabbi from the Maccabean period, Simeon the Just.²⁵⁶ For Simeon the Just, life was built upon Torah, temple service, and acts of piety; Davies and Allison argue that Matthew has applied this triad to the overall structure of the Sermon as well.²⁵⁷ Additionally, the ubiquity of these structures confirms that it was a 'popular' practice in Matthew's setting, it was something Jesus used a lot, and it held particular value in the task of remembering and passing on tradition.²⁵⁸ Beyond this, they find no significant theological reason for the triadic nature of the text, and, while it certainly helps arrange the material, their conclusions 'do not add up to any grand scheme'.²⁵⁹

The strongest example of the application of this form criticism, for our purposes, comes with their treatment of 6:24. It stands as the third part of a triad whose theme is

²⁵⁴ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 62. See page 64 for a helpful diagram of the triads of the Sermon.

²⁵⁶ To be fair, Allison, in another work, does not commit wholeheartedly to the idea; nevertheless, he describes the relationship as more than a 'coincidence' and suggests that 'the Sermon may . . . have been constructed as a Christian version of Simeon's three pillars, that is, a Christian version of what matters most'. *Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 40.

²⁵⁷ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 134.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 71.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 72.

proper relationship to earthly treasure: 6:19-21 is concerned with ‘not storing it up’; 6:22-23 calls for generosity; and 6:24 calls for service to God, and not Mammon.²⁶⁰ Moreover, verse 24, along with the other sections just mentioned, is itself made up of a triad: thesis statement (no one can serve two masters), two supporting observations in antithetical or compound parallelism (either he will love the one or hate the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other), and concluding remarks (you cannot serve God and Mammon). Alongside the structural commentary, they log data on the sources behind the material and how earlier Jewish and Greco-Roman writers addressed similar themes. Their exegesis also shows frequent interest in the etymology of key terms, highlights redactional elements of the text and its relationship to parallels in Luke, Gospel of Thomas, and Q, and maintains dialogue with other leading scholars in the field.

Regarding 6:25-34, Davies and Allison summarize the material in their comments on verse 25: ‘the sense of this and the following verses, which reaffirm a strong faith in providence, is well expressed by 1 Peter 5:7: “Cast all your anxieties upon him, for he careth for you”’.²⁶¹ (Their choice of summary statements is shared by Kierkegaard in the 1849 discourse on joy) This is followed with several examples of how the teaching on providence continues a prevalent theme from Old Testament and other early Jewish literature. Moreover, the passage answers the question implied in 6:24: If I devote fully to God, how will I take care of myself? In response, they contend that ‘God looks after those who look to God, so those who serve him and not mammon need have no anxiety about life’s basic necessities’.²⁶²

The ensuing commentary addresses the question of worry in the following ways. First, the imperatives to not be anxious ‘are above all intended to soothe the troubled

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 625.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 645. Turning to their reading of 6:25-34 and their contribution to the concept of worry/anxiety, it is worth noting that the section under consideration proves somewhat immune to their triadic findings.

²⁶² Ibid., 646.

soul'.²⁶³ In addition, they stress that rich and poor alike are affected by worry about money, which shows that riches cannot cure worry; faith in the heavenly Father is the solution. Next, in their comments on the birds, they show an interest in citing other literary sources where the argument for God's provision moves from less important nature to humanity.²⁶⁴ On the question of adding a cubit to one's existence, they note the importance of the role of the imagination in Jesus' teaching, 'anxiety is foolish and accomplishes nothing except to put God out of the picture. It is therefore self-destructive, and so far from adding it takes away'.²⁶⁵ Turning to the lilies, Davies and Allison acknowledge the Old Testament connections with the idea of temporality and fragility of life; nevertheless, they insist that the greater message is the fact that God pours out such extravagant care upon them nonetheless.²⁶⁶ With regard to Solomon, mention is made of being clothed in the image of God, though any application to worry remains undeveloped.²⁶⁷ In comparison with the worry-laden speech of the pagans in 6:32, the disciples should realize that: 'If God knows, he will act, because he, the treasury of good gifts and giver of life, cares for his children'.²⁶⁸ Commenting on 6:33, they write: 'To seek God's righteousness and God's kingdom amounts to the same thing. Righteousness is the law of the realm, the law of God's kingdom; and to participate even now in God's eschatological rule one must strive for the better righteousness'.²⁶⁹ Finally, after tracing earlier manifestations of the idea of not worrying about the next day, they summarize the entire passage thus: 'The mental vice of anxiety is to be exorcized at all costs. The mind

²⁶³ Ibid., 646-647.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 649.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 652.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 653.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 654-655.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 657.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 661.

is not to be bicameral, subject sometimes to faith, at other times to anxiety. The truth about God should cast out all fear'.²⁷⁰

For Davies and Allison, Matthew's agenda in 6:25-34 is pastoral. He is not setting up an easy life for Jesus' follower but, through appeal to providence, prepares them for the difficult road. Jesus 'does not guarantee comfort, prosperity, or health. He does not assert that the righteous will flourish . . . and he holds no numbing nepenthe for fortune's slings and arrows. On the contrary, the disciple can expect the buffeting of fortune and difficulty at every turn'.²⁷¹ These trials come to rich and poor alike and the text does not bias one group against the other; it holds out a balanced hope applicable for believers in all financial circumstances. While the writers draw forward the imperatives of the text and its earnest message for the worried individual, one cannot help but think that too much emphasis is placed on critical examination of the passage. The actual argument against worry is sound, though it remains mostly disconnected from the voluminous work on the text's possible sources, form, and philological range. An upbuilding possibility can be found in their study and to say otherwise would be uncharitable. With this in mind, I now turn to the commentary of Hans Dieter Betz, whose work displays a more potent example of the relationship between historical critical methodology and the message of Matthew.

Hans Dieter Betz

In his own word's, Betz's commentary, which considers both the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain, 'intends to be no more than a guide to an informed understanding of this famous text'.²⁷² His introductory chapter sets up the work through a

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 663.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 664.

²⁷² Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*.

rehearsal of key problems in research on the Sermon, a thorough account of the history of interpretation, the literary composition of the text, the genre of both Sermons, and the literary function of the material. Included in this opening section, he offers an extensive conspectus on the Sermon on the Mount which combines literary, form, and rhetorical criticism to produce a nine page, hyper-detailed outline of Matthew 5-7. The ensuing commentary fills in the outline by providing additional introduction, analysis, and interpretation to each section and verse of the Sermon. In the case of 6:24, his analysis and interpretation help highlight a particular interest in rhetorical criticism, which he consistently applies to the text.

First of all, Betz stresses the impressive ‘rhetorical artistry’ of the verse and enumerates how the author employed various features of formal logic.²⁷³ As well, the analysis relates the passage to its Lukan counterpart, which, in turn, derives from the source document Q and displays how the ideology it represents is clearly founded in earlier Jewish wisdom literature.²⁷⁴ In his interpretation, he sets aside some of the more critical tools and focuses on the theological and psychological nature of the material: ‘the verb “you cannot” works at two levels of psychology and theology, the dilemma also being one of ethics . . . “you cannot” addresses the futility of something the addressees are seen as doing, an activity that has no rational reason or purpose’.²⁷⁵ Betz’s reading equally captures the problem of mammon and its absolute incompatibility with service to God: ‘theologically they are antithetical and absolutely irreconcilable’.²⁷⁶ This does not necessitate a call to poverty; instead, as he notes, the earlier context of the Sermon has already discussed proper giving of alms and therefore presupposes the disciples/hearers have possessions. It dramatizes the serious threat of materialism and reminds the

²⁷³ Ibid., 455.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 456.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 457.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 458.

individual that worshipping God is the best and certain path to escaping the entrapment of ‘the materialistic goals in the secular world’.²⁷⁷

Turning to 6:25-34, Betz continues in a similar fashion, paying close attention to the literary/rhetorical structure of the argument and acknowledging it as the first clue to the deeper, theological message. Moreover, because it treats the issue of anxiety, he relates it to the broader Hellenistic context and shows that the discussion is not self-contained: ‘behind our text stands an entire spiritual and intellectual culture dealing with human behaviour, and it is this culture that unites the various themes found in our text’.²⁷⁸ Put another way, the Sermon speaks into the lives of its initial hearers and readers. First of all, Matthew acknowledges that human beings worry about the wrong things and about death and the fragility of existence; Betz demonstrates the latter tendency through a list of Greek and Roman literature from antiquity. Secondly, the idea of providence pervades the passage, connects to the same Greek and Roman literature of the day, and to the wisdom writings of the Old Testament. Matthew applies this principle of providence to the problem of worry, confronts the skepticism of his day, and positively uses the natural order to argue that: ‘it is due to the good Father in the heavens that the world endures despite all the disasters, and that the possibility exists of finding a way through it all. No question, every day has its own troubles, but thanks to God the prudent have a chance for survival’.²⁷⁹

Overall, Betz consistently applies the rhetorical analysis of the text to his actual interpretation and application of the material. One poignant example comes in his insistence on an intentional ambiguity of the Greek terms *psyche* (soul, life) and *soma* (body, person) in Jesus’ question about life and body being more than food and clothing.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 458-459.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 461.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 465.

The result of this structure is that ‘the readers or listeners are confronted with ambiguous language, not to confuse them, but to make them think and to force them to make up their minds’.²⁸⁰ This attentiveness, first initiated on the rhetorical/structural level, is even more clearly manifest as Jesus goes on to call for close observation of nature that leads to the formation of proper, worry-destroying conclusions. Betz orients the material around three, related arguments from providence, against worry. The first argument comes indirectly from nature - God provides for that realm and will do much more for the human being; secondly, and more positively and directly, worry is pagan and, in tandem with providence, God is all-knowing and well aware of the human need for the necessities of life; finally, God is Lord of the present and is the one who provides enough cares for today – problems of the future ‘may neither be known nor overcome until tomorrow has become today’.²⁸¹ Of particular interest, in light of his frequent reference to Greco-Roman (i.e. pagan) treatments of the issue of worry, it would be more balanced for Betz to more fully contrast the Jewish/Christian solution for worry with its pagan contemporaries. Nevertheless, his meticulous form critical work flows coherently into theological exegesis, rooted in the character of God, which, in turn, informs the reader of the ongoing significance of the text today.

Ulrich Luz

Luz, in his approach to the text, also employs the tools of source, form, and redactional criticism. His reading of 6:24 helps to demonstrate a sample of this methodology. First, he demarcates the verse as the third of three, structurally related logia; it is ‘a parable-like maxim, which again has become a proverb . . . the numerous

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 472.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 486.

parallelisms reveal a high degree of Semitic feeling for form'.²⁸² Alongside these structural elements, he argues that the source behind the material is taken word for word from the Q document and he insists upon the Jewish nature of 6:24 and the two preceding logion. These origins help solidify the following conclusion: God is one and wants undivided allegiance, an idea that he links directly to the first commandment: 'You shall have no other gods beside me (Deut. 6:4)'.²⁸³ In addition to the critical tools, Luz also pays particular attention to the history of interpretation and dialogues with interpretative tendencies which arise there. This serves as an excellent point of access into the ongoing significance of the text for modern readers and his summaries provide him the opportunity to re-emphasize aspects of the passage cast aside or muted through its interpretative history.

First of all, in the case of 6:24, he recognizes two patterns of its subsequent interpretation, both which refute the idea that complete renunciation of wealth is the main teaching. He writes: '(a) The text is internalized and related to the correct attitude, the inner relationship to one's possessions. (b) The text is expanded and then becomes the model for different basic human choices in life; it speaks of possessions only along with other matters'.²⁸⁴ In the first situation, the individual is called to be master over mammon; in the second case, mammon represents one of many idols that may lure the individual away from allegiance of God. Luz has no problem with attempts to expand the parable on loyalty so long as the theme of possessions remains central to the interpretation. He justifies this contextually. This entire section of the Sermon speaks of riches and material possessions, 'Matthew actually thinks that money is the place where a person's heart is

²⁸² Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 330.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 334.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 335.

when it is not with God or with the “heavenly treasure”²⁸⁵. Reflecting on the history of interpretation of 6:24, Luz concludes that the Gospel writer pushes for a greater polarity between God and mammon than future interpretative communities: ‘The case so often evoked . . . that wealth does not have to be associated with greed because the heart does not of necessity have to cling to wealth obviously does not reflect [Matthew’s] experience’.²⁸⁶ Put another way, Luz believed that the ideal of Matthew’s text has been watered down through endless commentary.

Turning to 6:25-34, and continuing his work with the history of interpretation of the passage, he notes how ‘few Gospel texts have evoked such harsh criticism’ and cites a list of rants against its naïveté about starvation, work, economic troubles, unemployment, and threats of war. These difficulties, historically, have put sympathetic commentators on the defensive: ‘correspondingly, for long stretches of its history the interpretation of this text reads like an attempt to defend it against attacks’.²⁸⁷ To temper some of these issues, Luz appeals again to past readings: ‘Earlier centuries were almost unanimous about the Christian duty to work, and they presupposed for this text the divine (Gen 3:17-19) and apostolic commandment of work (2 Thess 3: 10-12). Therefore, the scope of this text was frequently reduced to the claim that one is to be concerned about the soul and not about food’.²⁸⁸

He ends the section on 6:25-34 by noting two main directions of thought. The first, in general the Catholic view, sees the admonitions and encouragements directed to the set apart few – the full-time priests and monks of the church; the second approach is predominantly protestant, ‘Matthean concerns relate this text to all Christians’; for both

²⁸⁵ I noted earlier how Kierkegaard, in his final reading of 6:24 steps too far outside the idea of riches by inserting the idol of sagacity in the place of mammon. Ibid., 336.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 337.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 341.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

camps, the debate about renouncing possessions is central.²⁸⁹ Luz sees both positions, at best, as adaptations or, worse, weakening of the message of the Gospel writer. The Catholic outlook, by affirming renunciation of possessions for the chosen few, ends up promulgating a two tier spirituality which Luther also cried out against in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. Upon the second outlook, Luz unleashes a harsher critique:

[This reading is] able to make the text almost completely devoid of meaning. It is able to connect it with a Protestant work ethic, an affirmation of possessions and rational planning for the future that serves the general interest. All that remains is the warning against “despondent worry” and a “despairing heart” that no longer express Christian trust in God.²⁹⁰

This strand of reading has so qualified and defended the text against misunderstanding that it has produced forgetfulness of the danger of wealth and the radical discontinuity between God and mammon Matthew so vehemently emphasized. Luz follows these comments with an attempt to reintroduce the passage’s potentially radical meaning for today: Despite the toll the history of interpretation has taken on the text, it still offers a challenge to a pervasive, Christian justification for riches and a deification of the value of work.²⁹¹

Summary of Kierkegaard and the Modern Commentary

Each of the commentaries examined above share similar insights and concerns with Kierkegaard. These include the providence and omniscience of the heavenly Father, the impossibility of marrying money to God, the futile and self-destructive nature of worry, the frailty and limitedness of human beings, the call to discipleship (giving up one’s will), and an openness to the counter-cultural implications of the text in modern society. There are also differences. Most notably these arise over the question of

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 346.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 348.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

methodology; that is, the journey they take to arrive at their conclusions about the passage on worry. This is plain to see through the lack of material in Kierkegaard's writings on etymology and philology, the structure of the passage, the history of its interpretation (except implicitly in his use of Luther), potential sources behind the text, its genre and other scholarship of his day. In fact, he does not even seem to be attentive to Matthew as the author of the text. He does acknowledge the larger context to some extent through his mention of other sections of the Sermon, his application of the parable of the Rich fool which precedes Luke's account of the material, and a broader use and awareness of the Old and New Testament as a whole.

Kierkegaard was not completely ignorant of trends in German scholarship during his day, and, in a passing note in the 1848 collection he betrays his own opinion on that sort of approach to the text.²⁹² He writes: 'it is lamentable, indeed, almost terrible if true, that an interpreter of Holy Scripture . . . has found occasion in the passage about the lilies to point out that the Crown Imperial grows wild in that region – as if we could then better understand that the lily in its loveliness surpasses Solomon, as if we could then better understand the Gospel, which then would take no notice of the unimpressive lily' (UDVS: 169). This little jab not only shows that Kierkegaard was conversant with critical scholarship, it also implies that he failed to see the upbuilding pay-off of the movement.²⁹³ For that reason, Mogens Müller, in reference to his relationship to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century biblical scholarship, asserts that, 'it must be admitted that Kierkegaard was not in any substantive way influenced by what was going on in this

²⁹² For a good overview of the trends in Sermon on the Mount scholarship during Kierkegaard's time see Barrett, "The Sermon on the Mount," 34-35.

²⁹³ In the first section of *CUP*, pseudonym Johannes Climacus displays a similar disinterestedness in the rising historical critical methodology. In his mind, whether the results proved pro or contra with regard to the inspiration or authority of the Bible, too much interest in such matters inevitably, though subtly, erode away into either unbelief or an unwarranted trust in 'evidence' (24-34).

field'.²⁹⁴ Avoidance of this kind of approach to the text also has to do with the genre of Kierkegaard's discourses, a point I will return to in the closing chapter of the project.

Pinpointing exact ways in which the results of the criticism explored above would have augmented Kierkegaard's reading is not an easy task. This is especially the case since it was not until the twentieth-century that one would know which 'methodological revolutions . . . were the milestones that would influence the future'.²⁹⁵ Interaction with the history of interpretation seems to be at least one avenue available to Kierkegaard which could have brought more weight or punch to the arguments he lays out to counter worry. Evidence of this approach is already there in places where he seems to borrow from Luther, though it is not clear who else from this history he may have been in dialogue with. The void of advice from the community of biblical studies in his discourses does not completely diminish their scholarly character; instead, they are supplemented by the history of ideas from several other related disciplines, factors that help make his work something that endures. While he largely ignored the valuable work from the past, Kierkegaard's own work remains something of interest for the current field, which recognizes the value of earlier readings of the New Testament. Betz describes the profit of the history of interpretation thus:

Past scholarship has made important discoveries that have been forgotten or misunderstood; if recovered and properly understood, these older discoveries can make important contributions even in the present. Thus, the history of exegesis and the current discussions of exegetical problems must be brought to bear on each other.²⁹⁶

Kierkegaard is not the most likely candidate to solve questions on literary composition, genre, authorship, etc. That being said, I do want to entertain one way his reading may help to demonstrate thematic connections between 6:24 and 6:25-34, a gap

²⁹⁴ Mogens Müller, "Kierkegaard and Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship: A Case of Incongruity," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible Tome II* ed. Barrett and Stewart (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 285.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 5.

the other three commentaries maintain in varying degrees in light of their structural and literary analysis. While each work makes an attempt to connect verse 24 to the following passage, the thrust of the interpretation remains focused on its compositional and thematic unity with the problem of greed and materialism addressed in the two preceding logion on treasure and the good eye (6:19-23). Kierkegaard, working from the lectionary of his day, took no thought for separating 6:24 from the rest of the passage; this inherited textual block therefore provides an interesting example of how 6:24 could naturally flow into the rest of the section. Luz acknowledges this possibility in his comments on the lectionary evolution of the text: 'The history of interpretation will show then how the Matthean question about Jesus' followers' renunciation of possessions remained linked to this text and how it was repeatedly subjected to new discussion, not least of all because the mammon saying of v.24 and 6:25-34 were combined as a single pericope for preaching'.²⁹⁷ Kierkegaard's reading promotes 6:24 as the capstone of all that follows: as long as the individual maintains service to mammon, anxiety producing questions about food, drink, clothing, and the next day will continue. Putting God first is the overarching cure for worry.

Putting these critical questions aside, his existentially focused approach to the text and, perhaps even the form of his presentation, offer a reminder about the live possibilities of the New Testament for an individual and demonstrate a presentation of the material which finds its roots in Luther and complements the sermon writing of his contemporaries. Luz concludes his commentary on this section of Matthew by calling the church to ask what it might look like in a modern setting for an individual to give up wealth, profession, and work in order to serve the kingdom of God; he also notes that 'the text does not prescribe anything here, but it does point to directions and open up

²⁹⁷ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 345.

alternative possibilities that we then must actualize ourselves'.²⁹⁸ Significantly, he commends Kierkegaard as the one who has best understood this responsibility; Kierkegaard 'senses how much the text demands as well as how far one's own situation is removed from the text'.²⁹⁹ These flattering words from Luz invoke the terminology of possibility and actuality, clearly key words in Kierkegaard's philosophy of becoming. Luz confirms that Kierkegaard effectively promotes a hermeneutic that resists the temptation to qualify or defend the ideality of Matthew's passage and that imaginatively extrapolates the implications the Gospel presses on our relationship to money, work, and the future. Kierkegaard's reading stresses the goal of true knowledge of self, provides a framework that ensures proper attention to the implications of the passage on future readers, and promotes a theologically-grounded way forward in the removal of worry.

Presently, I want to return to the question of Kierkegaard and the Bible and the recent research explored in the introduction to this project. Specifically, with the various facets of his reading documented and compared and contrasted with the approaches of Luther and three modern Matthew scholars, I now focus attention on various clues he leaves that point to the methodology or hermeneutic he employs when reading the New Testament. This includes a consideration of his outlook on how to read the message of Matthew, characteristics of a good reader, his Christological/theological approach to the Sermon on the Mount, his use of story, and the hermeneutical potential of his concept of artful living. This begins with a look at his interpretation of 6:26, 28 and what it means to look at and consider the bird and lily.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 348.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

Kierkegaard, Hermeneutics, and the Sermon on the Mount

How to Look Properly at the Bird and Lily

Kierkegaard's exposition on the bird and lily provides the clearest access into the discussion on hermeneutics in the discourses. Throughout the previous chapters the focus has been on the results of looking and considering; now, the discussion shifts to Kierkegaard's ideas on how to look at and consider the birds and lilies (6:28, 30). Within this context, his assessments bleed over into the question of how to read the Gospel text. As we have seen, this is not the only way he employs these object lessons found in Matthew; nevertheless, in places, it is possible to construe them as operating as texts for the reader to decipher. Jolita Pons comments how '[they] become either a sign or mirror in which the self can reflect itself and thus compare itself with itself in becoming itself'.³⁰⁰ An individual, through the gaze at nature, receives word about who she really is; this reality also functions as ideality, and a mirror, which reflects back to the same person the ways worry has restrained the biblical self-portrait. Accordingly, from the perspective of hermeneutics, he entertains the question of how to look into the avian and flora mirror.

These are the bird and lily of the Gospel. Accordingly, the discourses, with their insistence on getting alone with them, simultaneously suggest the act of a reader getting alone with the biblical text. Separation from the 'others', is 'the first condition of all religiousness'; for Kierkegaard, apart from this isolation, the entire upbuilding endeavour will fail since God is not in the business of building up '*en masse*' (POV: 117). This underlines his continual call to get out into nature and to escape the pressures and deceitfulness of the crowd. Alone before God, proper hearing of the Gospel occurs. Arguably this Kierkegaardian conviction finds its clearest expression in the 1851

³⁰⁰ Pons, "On Imitating the Inimitable," 185.

discourse on looking properly at God's Word: 'Alone with God's Word – this must one be . . . otherwise it is not reading God's Word or seeing oneself in the mirror' (FSE: 32). There he critiques ways that scholarly methodology might actively avoid solitariness with the Scriptures and thus avoid any accountability to its message. In these collections, his tone is milder; lack of solitude with God leaves unhealthy worries that harm the soul unchecked. Borrowing from his later treatise, one might frame the conversation thus: How to look properly at the bird and lily (UDVS: 162). Matthew's Jesus does not just call for a blank stare at nature, he goes on to tell the disciples what they ought to see; Kierkegaard does the same and what he thinks are the results of this proper gaze has been explored in the previous chapters. By exploring the proper manner of looking, the conversation takes a step back, toward methodology, and various elements of his hermeneutic for Matthew's Gospel arise: 'interestedness' marks the first aspect of his reading policy.

Interestedness and Interpretation

'To Be Contented with Being a Human Being', the first of the writings in *What We Learn*, offers insight into the mindset one ought to bring to the lily and the bird, and implicitly, the New Testament passage. Reversing the order of the text, Kierkegaard begins his exploration of Matthew's metaphor of vision with the lilies in the field (Matthew 6:28-30). The imperative to look at (*betragte*)³⁰¹ presents an 'earnest and solemn' task, comparable to listening to a sermon in a worship service; in addition, it necessitates that one 'pay close attention to them, make them the object - not of a fleeting

³⁰¹ From the infinitive *at betragte* which includes a range of meanings: consider, view, regard, look at. In *PC*, Anti-Climacus compliments the foregoing interactions with what it means to consider (*betragte*); he contrasts it especially with mere objective observation, an improper type of looking which he felt had invaded Danish preaching. Instead, he writes, 'the Christian truth cannot really be the object of "observations." The Christian truth has, if I may say so, its own eyes with which to see; indeed, it seems to be all eyes . . . it is Christian truth that is observing me, whether I am doing what it says I should do' (234).

glimpse in passing but of your consideration' (UDVS: 162).³⁰² The action of considering also includes comparison, which was earlier cited as the cause of worry; dialectically speaking it all depends on the object, there are proper and improper texts to go to when it comes to the problem of worry. The charge to 'look at the bird' (Mt 6:26) elicits additional metaphors for reading:

Look at them . . . in the same way as the fisherman comes in the morning to look at the line that has been out all night, in the same way as the physician comes and looks at the patient, in the same way a child stands and looks when the adult is doing something the child has never seen before . . . not with a divided mind and distracted thoughts, but with concentrated attention and reflection, if possible in wonder (UDVS: 172).

The fisherman comes focused on the task, not 'divided' and 'distracted'; he inspects the line faithfully, day after day, and with hope that sustenance waits on the line; he looks at it like his life depends on it. The physician brings earnestness coupled with 'concentrated attention' and 'reflection'; he searches out any illness or disease that is in need of treatment. Finally, the child experiences the genuine novelty associated with 'wonder', she comes with anticipation, unhindered by stoicism or skepticism. To read this way opens a person up to the Gospel, when treated with nonchalance, the birds and lilies (and the Bible) yield little existential benefit.

Taken together, these elaborations on what it means to 'consider' parallel the prerequisites for being able to educe the wisdom of Matthew's text on worry-free living. From the three illustrations mentioned above, it follows that, for Kierkegaard, both need and interestedness are vital to good Bible reading. On the first point, the individual must recognize that the bird and lily, like the Gospel, speak 'not to the healthy, not to the strong, not to the happy, but to the worried' (UDVS: 160). Concomitantly, he who fixes his eyes on the biblical text with genuine consciousness of sin, does so with what earlier

³⁰² As Ben Witherington comments, 'Verse 28 exhorts that we study diligently the lesson learned from the wildflowers (*katamanthanō* is a *hapax legomena* and means careful study with a view to learning)'. *Matthew*, 152. Similarly Thomas Long notes how the verbs 'invite us to study and to scrutinize the carefree world of nature'. *Matthew*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville,: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 75-76.

pseudonym, Johannes Climacus describes as infinite interest: ‘Christianity, therefore, protests against all objectivity; it wants the subject to be infinitely concerned about himself’ (CUP: 130). The act of reading is a matter of utmost existential importance and this is evidenced particularly by the fact that worry and suffering serve as the two presuppositions of these discourses. While Kierkegaard does not wish these states on his audience, the Gospel passage is best received by the individual who recognizes these issues and searches for a remedy to the problem.

Patte argues that the idea of vision or the sound eye functions as the controlling metaphor of the Sermon on the Mount; in accord with this, he proposes that the Sermon is most concerned with life in the present and the task of ‘moral discernment’.³⁰³ This complements Kierkegaard’s comments on how to look at the bird and lily. In both cases, a healthy eye is necessary to read Scripture, nature, and the self. For Kierkegaard, a sure sign of a healthy eye also includes its ability to see need and sickness within its own being. His method operates like an upward spiral. The sound eye discerns and appropriates the wisdom of the Sermon; in turn, the wisdom of the Sermon grants greater soundness to the existing human being, who, in turn, returns to the text better enabled to discern. This same principle served as a major conclusion for Polk’s work reviewed in the introduction, ‘virtue leads to vision, and vision empowers virtue’; likewise, he writes, ‘the better one reads/lives . . . the more clearly might one love; and the better one loves/lives, the clearer one will read’.³⁰⁴ Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the neediness/sinfulness of the reader provides another dimension to this otherwise virtuous reading theory. He promotes a dialectical aspect to the hermeneutic: awareness of *lack* of holiness and holiness are both integral parts of biblical interpretation. His meditation on

³⁰³ Patte, *Four Plausible Views of Discipleship*, 219.

³⁰⁴ Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 88-89.

what it means to see and consider, when applied by a reader, leads to the appropriation of the text.

Imitation and Interpretation

Above all, the category of appropriation proved to be the greatest common denominator in the secondary literature on Kierkegaard and the Bible. Kyle Roberts structured his entire thesis around a ‘hermeneutic of appropriation’ which he defined thus: ‘Appropriation, in Kierkegaard’s thought, denotes the inward, personal *ownership* of truth, meaning, or in a more concrete sense, linguistic communication (as in a conversation) . . . appropriation is *making truth and meaning (either given through written texts or spoken conversation) one’s own*’.³⁰⁵ Similarly, Jolita Pons stresses how the reader becomes active as a ‘re-creator of the original context and creator of a new interactive meaning’.³⁰⁶ Reading is a stepping stone to becoming a true self. The significance of appropriation in the Matthew literature is further nuanced through Kierkegaard’s attention to following the example of Jesus, especially in the 1848 collection *The Cares of the Pagan*.

Allison, in his study on the Sermon on the Mount, turns to the broader context of Matthew’s Gospel as a way to demonstrate ways Jesus is the fulfillment of the Sermon’s content. He shows convincingly several examples of how the life of Jesus embodies not only the teaching of the Sermon but also the rest of Matthew’s Gospel, this Christological reading carries with it an equally important call for discipleship.³⁰⁷ After listing abuses of *imitatio Christi* throughout history, which include a too literalistic approach and too much reliance on one’s own strength, Allison draws specific attention to Kierkegaard’s

³⁰⁵ Roberts, "God’s *Edifying Discourse*," 2.

³⁰⁶ Pons, *Stealing a Gift*, 39.

³⁰⁷ Allison, *Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 15-25

work by noting that ‘Matthew would surely have contended as strongly as did Kierkegaard that his conception of imitation was not at odds with grace’.³⁰⁸ The previous survey of ‘Christ as the Prototype’ confirms Kierkegaard’s ability to balance imitation and earnestness with the redemption that is found in Christ. While it is encouraging to find someone like Allison referencing Kierkegaard, the larger point here is how the latter goes about connecting the text with the life of Christ and offering it as an existential possibility for the reader. In *The Cares* in particular, Kierkegaard interprets Matthew with the presupposition that Jesus is the prototype who has conquered the causes of worry and who inspires and empowers the individual to do the same. To read the Sermon, for Kierkegaard, means to find the ways Jesus represents the ideality of the text, and to appropriate those same possibilities in one’s own life.

Correspondingly, in the 1847 collection, his exegesis leads the reader into two worry-destroying actions: worship and co-labouring with God. In both instances, Kierkegaard deems the activities as those which resemble God: worship resembles the heavenly Father inversely and work resembles God directly. Throughout the writings, the Sermon operates within a symbolic world in which Jesus stands as the most important expert and image to imitate.³⁰⁹ This exegesis affirms a commitment to ascertaining modes of existence observable in the life of Jesus as he is presented in the Gospels; in addition, this Christological reading is supplemented with other examples of life in the kingdom of God.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 23.

³⁰⁹ See also Patte: *Four Plausible Views of Discipleship*, 317.

³¹⁰ Other instances of this style of interpretation are found in the Friday Communion Discourses in *Without Authority* ‘The Tax Collector’ and ‘The Woman Who Was a Sinner’. See also Sylvia Walsh, “Prototypes of Piety: The Woman Who Was a Sinner and Mary Magdalene,” in *IKC: WA*, ed. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007); Barrett and Stewart, eds. *Kierkegaard and the Bible Tome II*.

Exemplary Interpretation

In addition to Jesus, the most obvious candidates for archetypal status in the discourses are the birds and lilies. Over and over again, he treats them as models of worry-free living. Despite the exhaustive reference to their simplicity and purity, in the end, Kierkegaard demotes and deconstructs them based on their inability to participate in kingdom life through volitional acts of obedience and devotion. Another exemplar, found in the 1847 discourse ‘How Glorious it is to Be a Human Being,’ is the Apostle Paul. Kierkegaard pays homage to him, calling him a ‘great example’ of one who worked with God (UDVS: 199). This is an unmistakable instance where Kierkegaard shines light on a prototypical aspect of a human being’s life - his promotion of the Apostle also shows that he is comfortable interpreting Scripture with Scripture. Similarly, a closer reading of ‘The Cares of the Pagans’ may permit a widening of the scope of those who deserve the moniker ‘prototype’. In his construal of Jesus, as the model of worry-free living to people in all walks of life, whether poor, rich, powerless, or powerful, he never asks the individual to relinquish his or her place on the continuum. As I alluded to in a similar discussion in chapter three, this implies that the life of the Christian he describes in each discourse may also stand as a model for emulation; Kierkegaard is creating his own biblical-based prototypes. The result of this style of commentary is an embodiment of Gospel ideality which is set before the individual to imitate.

Patte’s work, while not explicitly in dialogue with Kierkegaard, offers an outlook on imitation worth mentioning as a way to help refine Kierkegaard’s position. Patte voices his distinctive outlook on Christological readings thus: ‘Jesus’ behaviour needs to be imitated by disciples; it is a model of righteousness for them. But imitating Jesus is a matter of having the same pattern of behaviour (and not the same behaviour): a pattern of

overabundance’.³¹¹ This solves what he sees as the problem of the unattainable nature of the life of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. In Patte’s view, this liberates the reader in such a way that ‘disciples are not confronted by the dilemma of being called to imitate Jesus and of being totally unable to fulfill the higher righteousness that he exemplifies’.³¹² Kierkegaard, by holding up the Apostle Paul and other biblical characters as models of holiness, shares Patte’s conviction that the Bible offers many patterns for imitation. Despite this congruity, it must also be remembered that Kierkegaard would see no need to resolve the ‘problem’ of a person’s inability to fulfill the higher righteousness of Jesus; it fits perfectly with his Lutheran theology and the dialectical role of Jesus as both prototype and Redeemer explicated throughout ‘Christ as the Prototype’. Accordingly, Kierkegaard reads with an openness to the issue of sin; Patte’s wish to alleviate the seemingly unattainable standard, while helpful, must also be careful not to excuse or lessen the earnest ways of the life of Christ.

Fables and Interpretation

In chapter two, when discussing the fable of the lily and bird, I mentioned Kierkegaard’s comments on why he chose to insert the story of the lily and wood pigeon into the discourses. In part he did so in order to grab the attention of a readership that needed an aesthetic boost to help them move toward religious ideas. Put another way, the tales build bridges between the spiritlessness and ignorance of his contemporaries and Matthew’s message on finding contentment as a human being. Recalling a portion of his comments, after chastising those who would not receive such gentle persuasion, he noted that, ‘even the sufferer ought to be able to listen sympathetically to an almost childlike but moving interpretation’ (UDVS: 391). Kierkegaard’s imaginative portrayals serve as

³¹¹ Patte, *Four Plausible Views of Discipleship*, 344.

³¹² Ibid.

indirect accounts of the problem of comparison and worry; simultaneously, they function as biblical interpretation.

This is not the only occasion in Kierkegaard's literature where invented stories re-contextualize and re-present the message of the Bible. Jolita Pons, in *Stealing a Gift*, documents several instances in the pseudonymous writings where a similar method is at work. She describes the significance of these re-workings thus: 'In rewriting the Bible, Kierkegaard gives it a twofold presence: he both appropriates its content and imitates its writing pattern . . . it is not merely a narrativization, but a creative reworking that produces a parallel text rather than a parallel reading of the same text'.³¹³ To further demonstrate his method, Pons turns to the four stories Kierkegaard crafted in *Fear and Trembling*, all based on the narrative of Genesis 22. There the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio imaginatively recounts Abraham's inner turmoil surrounding the call to sacrifice Isaac and each time the story slightly changes in order to show other possibilities that could have occurred in addition to the biblical account. This approach shows some affinity with what James Kugel describes as 'narrative expansion'. These narrative expansions 'can consist of anything not found in the original biblical story – generally, an additional action performed by one or more of the people in the story or additional words spoken in the course of the events'.³¹⁴ Such stories expand, apply, re-contextualize, and defend the Scripture passage on which they are based and thus fictively exegete the text. Or, as Pons says in the case of Kierkegaard, the rewritten passages 'prepare the way for the reader's existential relation to it [the text]'.³¹⁵

While Kugel's study overlaps with the fictitious stories explored by Pons in her work, It is not so clear that narrative expansion (or haggadah) captures exactly what

³¹³ Pons, *Stealing a Gift*, 70.

³¹⁴ James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 6.

³¹⁵ Pons, *Stealing a Gift*, 70.

Kierkegaard is doing hermeneutically in these discourses. The fables operate in such a way that the meaning to be discovered from them is extrinsic to the literary devices. He tells the story only to make a point rather than as a way of extending the life of the text or handing down a tradition to subsequent members of the community; moreover, it would be hard to imagine someone coming after him to deem the fables as authoritative or further expanding his literary pieces. Both of these practices were important aspects in the Jewish practice of re-writing the Bible.³¹⁶ This does not mean that the stories he has crafted do not help the reader to find other possibilities in the text. One sign of the effectiveness of the two fables is seen in Walsh's reading of the parable of the lily and how she finds a clear warning for women seeking self-identity through comparison or through the seductive voice of men. Similarly, in my own reading I drew out possibilities that connected to the account of the fall in Genesis 3 and the loss of innocence in the Eden narrative. Kierkegaard's stories allow an individual to personalize the dangers of worry; as a parallel text they are also able to be read back into the biblical account and expand its intra-textual meaning.

In *For Self-Examination* Kierkegaard, in his essay on how to read God's Word, provides a clue that his own storytelling is patterned after the Bible. He turns to well-known stories from the Bible, e.g. Nathan's rebuke of King David (2 Sam 11.2-12:15) and The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10.25-37) that prompt the original hearers to include themselves in the story. Following Pons, the actuality set forth in these passages simultaneously provides layers of possibility with which the hearers in the passage and the subsequent readers may engage. Both texts explored in FSE involve the telling of a parable in order to expose the objectivity in the hearers (David and a lawyer) and to engage them in appropriation. Two types of objectivity emerge in the discussion: David

³¹⁶ Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 8.

holds a self-righteous, passionate objectivity while the lawyer holds a sceptical, detached objectivity. In the case of Matthew, Jesus initiates the entrance into the imaginative world of the lily and bird. Kierkegaard follows this cue and accentuates it through a comical/fantastic account of these characters. Just as Nathan told David that he was the man and Jesus told the lawyer to go and do likewise; so also, Kierkegaard tells us that we are the lily, we are the bird.

Beyond these two fables, the discourses as a whole maintain a literary quality which is not merely seen in the overall imaginative account of the life of the lily and bird in the discourses. He also frequently includes imagined speeches from those who would disagree with the proposed wisdom of Matthew's text. This too has hermeneutical significance. In one version of these rhetorical rants, Kierkegaard is able to invite the reader to mock and to deem as silly the entire idea of winged animals and flowers that struggle with worry (UDVS: 166, 174). If he successfully educes this response from the reader it may help him or her to simultaneously pass the same judgment on human worry. It too is silly, unnecessary, and, as the conversations show, self-destructive.³¹⁷ His use of story, dialogue, illustration, and related literary techniques throughout his literature might also be explored in a way similar to how narrative theology approaches the Bible. Accordingly, one could examine the fictitious stories Pons mentions, the Seducer's Diary, or the parable of the king in *Philosophical Fragments* by asking how they are *doing* theology as well as exegesis.³¹⁸ That research withstanding, these characteristics in the

³¹⁷ On a related note, Hauerwas writes: 'The precise role of narrative is to offer us a way of experiencing those [destructive] effects without experimenting with our own lives as well'. Stanley Hauerwas with Richard Bondi and David B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame; London: University of Notre Dame, 1977), 37.

³¹⁸ Narrative theology is most interested in maintaining the centrality of the biblical narrative in the task of theology and preserving the irreducibility of its story when it comes to presenting the 'system' of theology it conveys. As I mentioned in regard to the fables, one cannot say that Kierkegaard's narratives are irreducible in the same sense as Scripture; nevertheless, if we are going to grasp his theology, his imaginative constructions cannot be discarded in the process. For more on narrative theology see Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991); Hauerwas,

Matthew material ultimately function in a homiletical fashion. They aim to make indelible marks on the reader's memory and to help him or her connect Matthew's story to their own place in the world.

Artful Living and Interpretation

In various ways, I have highlighted places in the discourses where Kierkegaard first presents either the distinctiveness of human beings or situations unique to human beings and then promotes a related, though superior activity, which constitutes worry-free and artful living. These features include being clothed in God's image, being a synthesis of the temporal and eternal, the ability to rule and subdue the earth, the gift of work, the faculty of choice in the realm of the religious, and the capacity of speech. Life situations explored include suffering, poverty, wealth, lowliness, and power. Each of these attributes, whether ontological or accidental, tells something about whom and what a human being is before God and in the world; each of these attributes is also closely identified with the terminology Kierkegaard uses to catalogue the concept of worry. He approaches Matthew's Gospel with a view toward Christian anthropology; this is another way of saying he interprets the passage theologically. As we have seen, artful living takes these gifts and circumstances to the next level through activities such as worship, co-working with God, willful forgetfulness of riches, power, and the next day, stewardship, silence, and more. This two step activity also encapsulates a prominent mood of the Sermon on the Mount; this resonates with Patte's earlier comments on the Sermon's call to walk in patterns of overabundance. Artful living certainly stresses the appropriation side of his hermeneutic; nonetheless, it is intricately connected to Kierkegaard's exegesis, rooted in Christian anthropology. His interpretative strategy shows the seriousness and

depth of the issue of worry and how it affects the core of an individual's identity. This also means that the techniques he offers for dealing with worry, while not always immediately satisfying on the surface, in the end promote spiritual processes that foment the Sermon on the Mount's ideals for relationship with God and relationship to society.

Summary Kierkegaard, Hermeneutics, and the Sermon on the Mount

Both explicitly and implicitly, Kierkegaard provides hints about the reading strategy he employs in his approach to the Sermon on the Mount. Humility, need, earnestness, and interestedness capture key traits of a good reader; together, these presuppositions culminate in an imitation of Jesus and a move away from worry to faith. These existential tools for reading operate within a construal of the Sermon where Jesus' life represents the idyllic picture of the teaching of the text. To read Matthew's passage on worry is to read, first the life of the bird and lily, but ultimately to contemplate Jesus' perfect fulfillment of the Gospel and to appropriate the strategies he employed to defeat the anxieties that undermine life in the kingdom of God. Kierkegaard's hermeneutic also shows a nuanced relationship between demand and grace; taking his cue from Matthew's presentation, the material is 'fighting in many ways for the eternal to be victorious in a person, but in the appropriate place . . . it does not forget first and foremost to relax into a smile' (CD: 12). The unbending impossibility of serving two masters and seeking first God's rule and righteousness interplay with the indirection and softer portrait of the bird and lily, this earnest-gentle dialectic, for Kierkegaard, proves to be indispensable for interpreting the Sermon on the Mount.³¹⁹ Therein, his programme to reintroduce

³¹⁹ Kirmmse makes a good observation about Kierkegaard's broader textual circle which goes back and forth between the epistle of James (sternness/works) and the Sermon on the Mount (grace); this view needs adjusted slightly in order to encapsulate the significant attention to sternness in Matthew as well. In light of critical scholarship's documentation of James' dependence on the Sermon, it also offers a potentially fruitful comparison between his treatment of James and Matthew in the discourses. *Golden Age Denmark*, 341.

Christianity functions dialectically as it seeks to maintain the tension and balance of classic Lutheran theology. His interpretation is also literary in nature. After finding the central themes and teachings of the passage he carefully builds a literary world around the message of Matthew that facilitates proper and imaginative interaction with the text. Finally he comes to the text to find the anthropological teaching it promotes and the applications this theology holds for the individual engaged in battle with the different forms of worry.

The chapter has explored instances in the Matthew writings where Kierkegaard prescribes and describes various tenets of good reading through his exegesis of the verbs to look at and to consider and more. In addition, a survey of Martin Luther's sermons on the Matthew text and a look at modern commentaries on the Sermon on the Mount helped to show Kierkegaard's originality, his commonality with other biblical scholars, ways he could have been better informed by his contemporaries, and, finally, how his reading fits in with recent summaries on the history of interpretation of Matthew 6:24-34. Each discussion reflects the major goal pursued throughout this project, to spotlight how the discourses answer the question, 'What do we learn about Kierkegaard's interpretation of Matthew's Gospel?' Before moving to concluding comments on the genre of the writings and his place in biblical studies and the history of Sermon on the Mount interpretation, a final summary of his commentary now follows.

Conclusion: Kierkegaard's Interpretation of Matthew 6:24-34

Verse 6:24, 'No one can serve two masters', represents for Kierkegaard the cosmic either/or. As such, its earnestness is able to awaken an individual from self-pity and worries and alerts him of the things that matter most. Matthew's loyalty proverb

stresses the absolute incompatibility of God and any other master and, for Kierkegaard preeminently presses the reader to exercise the glorious gift of choice. To not do so is the same as making a choice for the world and turning one's life over to the rule of doubt; on the other hand, to choose wisely is to enter into blessed happiness in the kingdom of God. The passage also calls for wholeheartedness. According to Kierkegaard, this can only be obtained through serving God; all other masters lack the essential unity necessary for integrity in one's allegiance. Over against wholeheartedness there is the problem of ambivalence. To only serve one master includes a constant recognition of spiritual battle and the need to ask the heavenly Father to not lead the individual into temptation. Finally, service of God is unconditional obedience. Kierkegaard balances this demand with a reminder that the God the individual serves is patient and forgiving as one travels on the road of discipleship.

Kierkegaard's interpretation of the admonition against worrying about food, drink, and clothing (6:25) begins with a proper view of providence. By observing and following the cues of the lily and bird (with earnestness and interestedness), an individual learns contentment and looks to the heavenly Father to provide garments and daily bread (6:26, 28). Clothing, food, and drink link to deeper questions about a person's place in the world; through worldly comparisons an individual falls prey to the worry associated with the relative categories of wealth and power. To only live for acquisition and status is pagan (6:31). Accordingly, Kierkegaard's reading signals theological realities to combat these challenges. Above and beyond his interactions with the bird and lily, God has adorned human beings with his image and designed them for dignity, which includes the task of ruling and subduing the earth and the greater calling of worshipping the heavenly Father. Similarly, God has given his creatures the gift of work and the ability to participate with him as co-workers. In addition to these ontological truths, Kierkegaard

proposes that worry over food, drink, and clothing is defeated by willfully forgetting the temporal categories of wealth and status and relishing the spiritual riches and loftiness granted to a Christian. Ultimately, the warning of 6:25 finds its fulfillment in Jesus' life as it is documented throughout the Gospels; to not worry about adornment and food is to imitate Christ.

Next, in his interpretation of 6:27 and the inability of worry to add a foot to one's stature, Kierkegaard explicates the nature of presumptuousness. Matthew's words signify the fixedness of the Creator-creature distinction and, to attempt to add a foot amounts to an effort to overthrow this infinite qualitative difference. It manifests in either superstition or disbelief. The former practice presumes upon the heavenly Father by trying to use him as a means to an end; the latter practice presumes that the grace and help of God is unnecessary in this life. To tamper with the Creator-creature distinction is to will the impossible; it is also to foolishly trying to improve on perfection. In opposition to these worry-oriented behaviours, Matthew calls the individual to give up self-will and to embrace this distinction, which means finding complete satisfaction in the grace of God.

Instead of paganism, which is characterized by pursuing food and clothing (6:31), Matthew calls for confidence in God's awareness of and concern for our needs (6:32). In line with this omniscience, an individual seeks first the kingdom and righteousness of God (6:33). For Kierkegaard, this seeking begins in prayer and silence; this involves turning away from society's outlook on and relationship to possessions. Instead, confident that the heavenly Father will provide 'all these things', the believer is reoriented in such a way that money and power, when possessed are merely tools given by God to be put into use for the benefit of the kingdom and other people. Moreover, unless this level of trust in God as provider of 'the rest' occurs, there will always be a

divided heart (6:24) and the seeking first will not obtain. Subsequently, Kierkegaard connects the Lord's Prayer to 6:33. To seek first means to pray 'hallowed be Thy name, thy kingdom come, and thy will be done'. This brings an appropriate silence to an individual's earthly status, pursuits, and agendas, only then has God truly been put 'first'.

Finally, in 6:34, and the call to not worry about tomorrow, Kierkegaard finds an expression of Christian existentialism. The ability to worry about the next day testifies to the gloriousness of humanity as a synthesis of the temporal and eternal; instead of covetously getting ahead of oneself, Matthew calls a person to life in the eternally significant moment. To worry about the future is a form of self-torment for Kierkegaard and ultimately reflects lack of faith, fear of death, and a mentality of god-forsakeness. Each day does have enough trouble of its own. Accordingly, this implies that God always brings to his children the perfect amount of daily care, along with the grace to properly respond. Paganism tries to drown out the next day or resigns itself to fate. On the contrary, to not worry about tomorrow means to continually cast one's care upon a loving God; it also means to live in tune with what God requires today. Only then can a person become contemporary with himself and with the heavenly Father; like the lily, an individual ought to fully blossom in the moment, irregardless of what lies ahead. Kierkegaard describes this way of life as unconditional joy, it embodies the final words of the Lord's Prayer, where God's kingdom, power, and glory are all that matter. To live in this moment is also eschatological; it anticipates the eternal day that awaits those who follow Matthew's message on worry-free existence.

CONCLUSION

WHAT KIND OF MATTHEW SCHOLAR IS KIERKEGAARD?

Kierkegaard's discourses come together to offer a reading of every verse and phrase from Matthew 6:24-34. Moreover, in the previous chapter it became clear that his material overlaps, not merely with other Kierkegaardian studies but with the research of New Testament scholars. As a way of closing this project, I want to entertain a few possibilities for how to classify the genre of Kierkegaard's Matthew 6 discourses.

The Genre of the Discourses

Lectio Divina

The Matthew discourses represent the fruit of Kierkegaard's personal decision to take seriously the Gospel's admonishment to look at and consider the lily and bird. In the first chapter I suggested this through a survey of circumstances that helped lead him to this text. As a result, Kierkegaard applied his own hermeneutic to Matthew and crafted discourses which encourage devotional or *pro nobis* readings. To tease this out, I want to return to the topic of *lectio divina* touched on briefly in chapter two and apply it to aspects of Kierkegaard's literature. Up front it should be noted that this is not meant to force Kierkegaard's methodology or discourses into a box; instead, the association may hold out helpful ways of viewing the genre of the writings.

As a process, *lectio divina* moves the individual through four stages with the Bible or other sacred text: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation (*lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*). Returning to Michael Casey's work, these approaches correspond with the reader's intellect, memory, conscience, and spirit; in

order, the four senses aid the reader in ‘understanding the text’, ‘contextualizing the meaning’, ‘living the meaning’, and ‘meeting God in the text’.³²⁰ ‘What begins as reading becomes reflection or meditation; this leads to prayer and ultimately to contemplative union with God,’ says Casey.³²¹ From the presentation of Kierkegaard’s hermeneutic in the last chapter, it is not too far-fetched to conclude that his approach to the Bible shares important traits with each of the four rungs of *lectio divina*.³²² Currently, instead of continuing the discussion from the perspective of hermeneutics, I want to suggest that the discourses themselves operate as spiritual treatises from which another pilgrim may profit and find encouragement. Kierkegaard’s hope for this level of interaction is captured in the preface to *What We Learn*.

In the preface, he describes the collection of discourses as superfluous (*Overflod*) and as insignificant (*ubetydelig*), titles not directed to his own interaction with the text but with the uncertain outcome of their interaction with a future readership. At the same time, the preface communicates how their superfluous character can be transformed into an abundance or overflow (*Overflod*) that finds significance (*Betydning*) for the one who would appropriate the fruit of his labours (UDVS: 157). This is Kierkegaard’s way of describing the writings as possibility literature. It also means that how one approaches them can make all the difference in the world. Whether explicitly or implicitly, Kierkegaard has embedded the writings with the movements and mood of *lectio* and the reader is encouraged to participate in concerned reading, meditation, prayer, and, finally Kierkegaard displays, on more than one occasion, a taste of the blessedness of contemplation. For instance, in *TDD* he crafts interconnected building blocks which culminated in joy. After traveling through the lessons of silence and unconditional

³²⁰ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 57.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² See also Martin Andic’s article that links Kierkegaard’s reading of scripture to *lectio divina* and includes his knowledge and interaction with that tradition of holy reading. “The Mirror,” in *IKC*, ed. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 336.

obedience, the suffering one finds release. Unconditional joy is simplicity and full awareness of God's caring presence; the individual is completely present to himself, there is nothing left to do except praise God for his rule, power, and glory – to arrive at this joy is akin to arriving at the state of *contemplatio*. Likewise, in 'The Care of Lowliness', the believer arrives at a 'blessed moment' and 'he is absorbed in his prototype' (CD: 43).

Without trying to force the discourses into only one box, it does seem certain that they welcome the practice of *lectio divina* and hold out promise as aids in leading readers into unhindered encounter with God. In Kierkegaard's portraits of contemplation, one finds confirmation that his model of religious instruction does not generate endless demand on an individual that is destined to lead to spiritual fatigue; instead, for Kierkegaard, there also exist legitimate times of respite from the struggle. Keeping in mind his dialogue with Luther, it is also important to remember that Luther had his own version of sacred reading for the proper pursuit of theology. While he shared *meditatio* and *oratio* with the monastic tradition, he replaced *contemplatio* with *tentatio/Anfechtung*. Kierkegaard's discourses welcome Luther's stress on suffering and trial as integral to spiritual development; this is especially seen in the 1849 collection and the final piece 'Christ as the Prototype'. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard does not discard the experience of *contemplatio*. Perhaps Luther shared this conviction as well. As Dennis Ngien notes: 'Luther regarded *Anfechtung* as a "delicious despair," for hidden in it is precisely its opposite – God's delightful comfort'.³²³

In an earlier upbuilding discourse, he balances the idea of being caught up in the divine with the goal of becoming a true self:

We are not saying that knowing God or almost sinking into a dreaming admiration and a visionary contemplation of God is the only glorious thing to do; God does not let himself be taken in vain in this way. Just as knowing oneself in one's own nothingness is the

³²³ Dennis Ngien, *Luther as a Spiritual Adviser: The Interface of Theology and Piety in Luther's Devotional Writings*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007), 131.

condition for knowing God, so knowing God is the condition for the sanctification of a human being by God's assistance and according to his intention. Wherever God is in truth, there he is always creating. He does not want a person to be spiritually soft and to bathe in the contemplation of his glory, but in becoming known by a person he wants to create in him a new human being (EUD: 325).

In this context, he is exploring the notion that a human being's highest perfection is to need God. Kierkegaard is careful to not condone the kind of contemplation that is superficial, self-absorbed, or overly-mystical. In the midst of his qualifying remarks, he nevertheless maintains the priority of an intimate experience with God, only without the spiritual softness. Applied to the Matthew discourses, Kierkegaard's writings serve as mid-wives that help give birth to *contemplatio*; in turn, a person becomes truly present before God. Hauerwas and Pinches help capture the kind of opportunity created by Kierkegaard's upbuilding writings: 'Contemplation, as an activity focused on those things which cannot be other than they are, seems to promise the kind of permanence that can make us impervious to outrageous fortune'.³²⁴ In the case of the Matthew material, Kierkegaard spells out the unchanging realities of God and his providence and the ineradicable marks of being made in the image of the heavenly Father. Close reflection on the theology and anthropology of the discourses can then blossom into creative acts of Christian living. In addition to viewing the Matthew writings as classic devotional writings, I also want to comment briefly on their sermonic qualities.

Are the Discourses Sermons?

Another important thing to remember when trying to classify the genre of these writings is Kierkegaard's frequent reminder throughout the upbuilding literature that they are *not* sermons. Among other things, this reflects the care he took to carefully craft the material with literary artistry and flare; it does not mean they cannot still operate in a

³²⁴ Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Robert Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 11.

sermonic fashion. That this is true helps to explain Kierkegaard's consistent insertion of both an opening prayer and a presentation of the Gospel text in its lectionary context (the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost). It also confirms the reason he closely followed the style of other sermon collections of his day.³²⁵ In view of these qualifications, Kierkegaard created a literary discourse that, if read attentively can foster an opportunity for the individual to 'preach' the good news to himself. Such a motive compliments the conversation on *lectio divina* and a construal of his discourses as spiritual treatises for devotion. Two other of Kierkegaard's emphases further accentuate this view. First there is his insistence on being one 'without authority'; this suggests, in part, that the discourses were not meant to replace, but augment the Sunday sermon, even if he felt most preaching of his day had gone bad. Secondly, his frequent reminder to 'read out loud' accommodates the idea of preaching to oneself, it was also a common method of instruction in the monasteries where *lectio divina* was practiced. Furthermore, in his youth, Kierkegaard was personally influenced by written sermons which were read aloud as part of his own family's devotion. To pursue the question of the sermon-like nature of these writings, I return to Hans Dieter Betz's work on the history of interpretation and his assessment of Martin Luther's sermons on the Sermon on the Mount.

Betz begins his commentary with an exploration of the history of interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Of particular interest is the high status he grants to Luther's contribution to the field, he goes so far as to consider its influence to be similar to that of Augustine's landmark Matthew commentary, which held the highest status for over 1000 years. 'Most important', says Betz, 'are Luther's *Weekly Sermons on Matthew 5-7*, preached between October 1530 and April 1532 in Wittenberg'.³²⁶ Luther's students

³²⁵ For a treatment of the relationship between the upbuilding discourses and the sermons of Mynster see Pattison, "The Art of Upbuilding."

³²⁶ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 15.

actually were responsible for their publication, though later Luther himself returned and crafted an accompanying preface for the collection. According to Betz, the finished product became:

A commentary of a new kind, even though the ancient tradition of the learned homily may be named as the precursor. The *Weekly Sermons* are not devoid of scholarship; on the contrary, they show a condensation of scholarship in the understanding of the Sermon that must have been the result of long and deep meditation and scrutiny prior to their delivery.³²⁷

I noted earlier how Kierkegaard's journals from the late 1840's tell of his taking up of Luther's sermons and reading them on a consistent basis. This reading also finds fruition in the 1851-1852 companion pieces of *For Self-Examination* and *Judge For Yourself* where Luther appears as the misrepresented individual in Kierkegaard's Danish society; as one scholar has put it, an important task in these works is to 'reintroduce Luther to Lutheranism'.³²⁸ These factors, in tandem with the conspicuous continuity between the content of the discourses and Luther's Matthew sermons, recommend a similar classification of Kierkegaard's work;³²⁹ the discourses resemble what Betz describes in Luther. They are 'learned homilies', they are not 'devoid of scholarship', and they are the result of 'long and deep meditation and scrutiny'.

Betz's high appraisal of Luther's work, Luther's influence on Kierkegaard's discourses in content and form, and Kierkegaard's decision to steer clear of historical critical questions all contribute to an understanding of the mode of writing found in the Matthew 6 material. Alongside this perspective, there remains the prospect that Kierkegaard's use of the sermon-like genre operates subversively as well. Pattison has

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Craig Q. Hinkson, "Will the Real Martin Luther Please Stand Up! Kierkegaard's View of Luther Vs. The Evolving Perceptions of the Tradition," in *IKC*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 38.

³²⁹ I recognize the difficulties associated with proving definitively that Kierkegaard's content was influenced by Luther's sermons; nevertheless, even should that theory fail, the overlaps in style and presentation remain.

shown a similar pattern in Kierkegaard's use of the *feuilleton* literature of his day.³³⁰ Even with the possibility of dissidence, Kierkegaard does not aim to deconstruct the art of the sermon. He is trying to resuscitate it. Along the way, he has produced scholarly sermons made up of a complex exegesis that combines verse by verse interpretation, creation theology, artistic imagination, psychological depth, an anatomy of sin, a doctrine of sanctification, a call to cultivate spiritual disciplines, and a critique of nineteenth-century Copenhagen. Cumulatively, they offer the reader a spiritual glossary for the interconnected problems of anxiety, despair, suffering, and worry. Contentment, gloriousness, blessed happiness, poverty, abundance, lowliness, highness, presumptuousness, self-torment, indecision, silence, obedience, and joy, expanded and enlivened by Kierkegaard's interpretation, provide touchstones and warning signs for the individual facing the challenges of modern life. His contribution shows an ongoing possibility for how to write a biblical commentary and what he borrows from the past is augmented by the originality he brings.

The bulk of this thesis has accentuated the content of Kierkegaard's Matthew discourses. By promoting the material as an excellent companion for the act of *lectio divina* and highlighting their similarities to the sermon-commentaries of Martin Luther, I have attempted to also shed some light on the form of this portion of Kierkegaard's literature.

Is Kierkegaard a Biblical Scholar?

I bring the project to a close with a brief reflection on why Kierkegaard unreservedly deserves the title of 'biblical scholar'. In the first place, he was formally trained in Bible, interpretation, and hermeneutics at the University of Copenhagen. Hugh

³³⁰ Pattison, *Crisis of Culture*.

Pyper notes the following details of one of his professors, Henrik Clausen, 'His students were well trained in such rigorous examination of the text, and Kierkegaard's habit of going through a scriptural verse considering each word in succession has some precedent in Clausen's practice'.³³¹ The techniques learned from Clausen also involved extensive work with the Greek and Hebrew texts; moreover, beyond Kierkegaard's close readings (which we have encountered in the Matthew material), his abilities in philology and language resulted in an astonishing and extensive translation of parts of the Acts of the Apostles and several of the epistles of the Greek New Testament into Latin. Commenting on this achievement, Bruun and Jensen note how this too was directly related to his course of study at the university and they argue textually that his own translation rivals and improves upon Jerome's Vulgate.³³² These two examples from his time as a student confirm that Kierkegaard ably interacted with the biblical text at the highest academic and intellectual standards of his time. Secondly, as one versed in the discipline, he was able to critically assess the methodological approaches and interpretations on offer in his own day.

By 1851, he had likely given up hope on any sort of appointment in the academy and therefore felt free to speak his mind on what he anticipated to be major problems with treating the Bible as any other academic book. We have already encountered a portion of this critique in 'Christ as the Prototype', where Kierkegaard harshly assesses the whole idea of the 'professor'. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that his reservations were particularly aimed, not at biblical studies in general, but at certain overly rational/historical critical strains of the enterprise. Whether or not his construal of the activity and motives of those doing historical criticism is completely accurate, the fact

³³¹ Hugh Pyper, "Henrik Nicolai Clausen: The Voice of Urbane Rationalism," in *Kierkegaard Research: Reception and Resources*, ed. Stewart (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 43.

³³² Niels W. Bruun and Finn Gredal Jensen, "Kierkegaard's Latin Translations of the New Testament; a Constant Dialogue with the Vulgate," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible Tome II: The New Testament* ed. Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 223.

that these endeavours ‘shift the whole viewpoint’ is something that should not be so quickly dismissed. Recalling Bauckham’s response to this attitude in Kierkegaard, I noted in the first chapter that he thought Kierkegaard had gone too far. Instead, Bauckham recommends ‘a hermeneutical approach which transcends the opposition between learning about the text and hearing the text’s address’; he promotes a middle ground where ‘relatively objective methods . . . need not exclude the passionate interestedness which Kierkegaard rightly expects of anyone who reads Scripture as God’s Word’.³³³ While this may be helpful, if there are pockets of Christianity dominated by ‘professorial-scholarly Christianity,’ Bauckham’s measures, though fitting on an individual level, fail to address the systemic issues in the academy today.³³⁴ Perhaps Kierkegaard’s concerns can also call for self-critical reflection on how the pursuit of publication, prominence, and job security might beget ungodly alliances with the world and a misuse of the Old and New Testament.

Kierkegaard’s critical reflections on his own era also parallel similar movements in the current field of biblical studies and his insistence on subjectivity overlaps with a renewed awareness today of the impossibility of neutrality and agenda-less reading of texts. Rowan Williams notes how both conservatives and post-liberals (for different reasons) complain that ‘historical criticism, while purportedly neutral in philosophical terms, in fact has an agenda that is at least implicitly hostile to the theological use of Scripture in any serious way’.³³⁵ The conservatives argue for the legitimate use of pre-modern exegesis of the Bible where theological questions and conclusions can feed and be fed by the text; the post-critical group insists that the ‘historical-critical method represents a model of epistemological dominance that has to be challenged, the pseudo-

³³³ Bauckham, *James*, 9.

³³⁴ He defers to the past where ‘there have always been scholars who lived by God’s word as they heard it in Scripture just as earnestly as they studied the texts’. *Ibid.*, 5.

³³⁵ Rowan Williams, “Historical Criticism and Sacred Text,” In *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology*, ed. David Ford (London: SCM, 2003), 217.

neutrality of Western modernity which disallows an ‘interested’ reading from the perspective of minorities, in the name of a rational discourse claiming universality’.³³⁶ The issues pointed out by Williams’ are complicated and the debate is ongoing in the world of biblical scholarship, it is not my intention to resolve these at the end of this project. If granted a hearing today, I cannot imagine that Kierkegaard would try to shut down the machine of historical-criticism; instead, he would continually stress that those involved in the discipline always bear in mind that they are existing human beings, before God, and, in the case of Matthew’s text, prone to worry. Put another way, detached objectivity in this field is impossible to sustain and it is to our own detriment to try, he reminds us to beware of the ‘scholarly’ tangent that, in the end, fails to contribute to theology and subjectivity.

In addition to the polemical edges of the two groups Williams highlights, out of this critique there have emerged a plethora of alternative (and academic) approaches to the biblical record. Janice Capel Anderson comments on this growing trend in Matthew scholarship, and, choosing the metaphor of dance, she notes that ‘the differences among scholarly dance partners have become even more apparent . . . approaches have increasingly established themselves as distinct alternatives’.³³⁷ She also recognizes that despite the different movements on the floor, each, in its own way is also dancing with Matthew’s Gospel. This does not mean that anything goes now and the legitimacy of different approaches still must be judged by the quality of the reading. That being said, Anderson’s comments reveal that the scholarly climate is ready to receive the literary based interpretations of someone like Kierkegaard. In addition to this openness, as we have seen, his place at the table finds further confirmation in the commentaries of Luz,

³³⁶ Ibid., 217

³³⁷ Janice Capel Anderson, “Matthew: Sermon and Story,” In *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 250.

Betz, Kissinger, and Allison not to mention a seminar dedicated to his study of the Bible at the Society for Biblical Literature's annual conference.

Later in his article, Williams defines a sacred text as that in which 'the context is always more than the social-ideological matrix. This cannot be established, of course, by historical study or phenomenological analysis. It arises from a reading context that assumes a continuity between the world of the text and the world of the reader, and also assumes that reader and text are responding to a gift, an address or summons not derived from the totality of the empirical environment'. There is a remainder of meaning after the various empirical methods have done their work on the biblical text. This is where Kierkegaard's reading shines, he provides us with a valuable portrayal of the relation between text, reader, and the one summoning and offering grace behind the text; his content aligns with leading scholars in the field and his presentation interprets the text and engages the reader in creative, meaningful ways.

Kierkegaard, through his discourses, is also a 'theological interpreter' of the Bible. Borrowing from Rusty Reno's definition, this refers to an individual with 'knowledge of and expertise in using the Christian doctrinal tradition . . . qualified by virtue of the doctrinal formation of their mental habits'.³³⁸ Bauckham confirms the notion by describing him as one who 'leads us into the theological and existential dimensions of the text in a way that purely historical exegesis fails to do'.³³⁹ As Kierkegaard's work in the Old and New Testament gains more exposure, it is still possible that the issue of method will present an obstacle to recognizing and appreciating the relevance of his exegesis of the Bible. I hope that my earlier comments on the variety of procedures in modern scholarship, in addition to the foregoing commentary on Matthew, help to eliminate this unnecessary impediment. It would be lamentable for biblical (and

³³⁸ Found in the editor's preface to Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 12.

³³⁹ Bauckham, *James*, 172.

Kierkegaardian) scholars to completely overlook not only his intentional and frequent return to the passage in Matthew, but the many other related discourses based on the Bible. In these fourteen Matthew discourses, one finds clarification of and connection to central themes of his body of literature, like anxiety, choice, freedom, and indirect communication that welcome more attention from a community of Kierkegaard scholars that has, relatively speaking, paid less attention to the direct religious writings.

Above all, this exploration of his discourses has sought to heighten awareness of a comprehensive reading of Matthew 6:24-34 from a person whose contribution to the history of ideas continuously grows. It is hoped that this thesis will spark further interest in and create more space for Kierkegaard's existing contribution to the discipline of biblical studies.³⁴⁰ It seems fitting to let him have the final word, which encapsulates his hesitancy toward overly objective/critical uses of the Bible and his commitment to a reading of Scripture that embraces spiritual theology: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ did not bring any doctrine into the world and never delivered lectures, but as the *prototype* required *imitation*, yet by his *reconciliation* expels, if possible, all anxiety from a person's soul' (JFY: 209).

³⁴⁰ Beyond this field, in light of the pastoral and illustrative aspects of the writings, as a textbook, his religious discourses would be a fitting addition to seminary courses on homiletics, religious education, and pastoral counseling as well.

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