



## Figuring Kierkegaard's Religious Individual

Roy Martinez

Volume 59, numéro 3, octobre 2003

Christianisme et fragmentation

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/008793ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/008793ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Martinez, R. (2003). Figuring Kierkegaard's Religious Individual. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 59(3), 521–533. <https://doi.org/10.7202/008793ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Dans le schème des concepts chez Kierkegaard, les actes de piété et les styles de vie ascétiques si colorées et manifestes que soient leurs formes déclarées ne constituent pas d'eux-mêmes l'individu religieux. Il y a plus. Suivant la logique de cette ligne de pensée, nul ne peut savoir qui est un individu religieux. Bien plus, cette ignorance bénie s'applique également à la personne même qui, en toute sincérité, s'arrogerait une pareille identité. C'est bien là, à tout le moins, le sens d'une théorie qui s'esquisse, par exemple, dans *L'École du christianisme*, *Le concept d'angoisse* et le *Postscriptum aux miettes philosophiques*.

# FIGURING KIERKEGAARD'S RELIGIOUS INDIVIDUAL\*

Roy Martinez

Department of Philosophy  
Spellman College, Atlanta

*RÉSUMÉ : Dans le schème des concepts chez Kierkegaard, les actes de piété et les styles de vie ascétiques si colorées et manifestes que soient leurs formes déclarées ne constituent pas d'eux-mêmes l'individu religieux. Il y a plus. Suivant la logique de cette ligne de pensée, nul ne peut savoir qui est un individu religieux. Bien plus, cette ignorance bénie s'applique également à la personne même qui, en toute sincérité, s'arrogerait une pareille identité. C'est bien là, à tout le moins, le sens d'une théorie qui s'esquisse, par exemple, dans L'École du christianisme, Le concept d'angoisse et le Postscriptum aux miettes philosophiques.*

*ABSTRACT : In Kierkegaard's scheme of concepts, acts of piety and ascetic styles of living — however colorful and conspicuous their ostensible forms — do not eo ipso constitute the religious individual. There is more. According to the logic of this train of thought, no one can know who is a religious individual. To aggravate matters, this blessed ignorance pertains also to the very person who would in all sincerity arrogate such an identity. So, at least, run strains of a theory adumbrated, for example, in Training in Christianity, The Concept of Anxiety and Concluding Unscientific Postscript.*

---

Kierkegaard's interest in the idea of personal religiosity is rooted in his radical understanding of the New Testament kerygma. On his accounting, Jesus taught a doctrine that rendered everything *i den mest ubetingede Uensartethed med denne Verden* ("in the most unconditional heterogeneity to this world").<sup>1</sup> Further, this interest was tempered by his profound disappointment with what he perceived to be an egregiously distorted application of the Christian message by the "established" Church of Denmark. Therefore, in addressing the question of spiritual well-being or personal integrity, Kierkegaard was not only taking "Christendom" to task — the term he used for the watered-down construal of Christianity — but he was also challenging the ostentatious or self-proclaimed "Christian" to show his hand on the basis

---

\* References in this study to the Danish edition of Kierkegaard's collected works : A.B. DRACHMANN, J.L. HEIBERG and H.O. LANGE, ed., *Samlede Vaerker*, Second Edition, 15 vol., Copenhagen, Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag, 1920-1936. This edition, revised and updated by Peter P. ROHDE, was reprinted by the same publisher in 20 volumes, 1962-1964. This is the edition I have used. The abbreviation *SV* is followed by volume number.

1. Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Attack upon "Christendom,"* trans. Walter Lowrie, Boston, The Beacon Press, 1956, p. 19. Hereafter, *Attack. SV* 19, p. 26.

of the faith inaugurated by Christ. In sum, Kierkegaard maintained that “official Christianity is not the Christianity of the New Testament, does not resemble it any more than the square resembles the circle, no more than enjoyment resembles suffering, or loving oneself resembles hating oneself, or desiring the world resembles renouncing the world, being at home in the world resembles being a stranger and a pilgrim in the world [...]”<sup>2</sup>

It is against the backdrop of these incompatible frameworks that the present study must be pursued. A caveat, however, needs to be registered. As suggested by our initial reference to some pseudonymous works, the strategy employed in this inquiry is purely poetic.<sup>3</sup> Recourse is made to *Attack* solely for the purpose of shedding explanatory light on figuring the religious individual in Kierkegaard’s thought. Moreover, in *Attack*, Kierkegaard informally yet forcefully brings to the fore the ideality he sees imbued in the teaching of the New Testament, which he formally and heuristically treats in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, as well as elsewhere in the authorship. Hence, in accordance with the spirit of the aesthetic works, I shall confine myself to the realm of the imagination by considering a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne and another by Graham Greene in order to illustrate my point. And my point is that on Kierkegaard’s view, the religious individual cannot be identified as such because nothing in the visible world can ever serve as an index to the infinite inwardness that characterizes a relationship with God. It should be noted that these two stories were not selected at random. I had read Greene’s story first. About two years later I chanced upon the one by Hawthorne. The religious theme in both works, especially the contrast in their treatment of it, actually prompted me to undertake the task of figuring the religious individual in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous literature. In other words, it was the apt coincidence of the two stories that inspired this study.

As we shall soon see, the protagonist in Hawthorne’s story considers the religious life as an external display of the acknowledgment of sin, while one of Greene’s characters treats the question of faith as an internal struggle between sincerity and self-doubt. The significance of the distinction between the external and internal is expressed by Climacus: “The religious posits decisively an opposition between the outward and the inward, posits it decisively as opposition, and therein lies suffering as an existence-category for the religious life, but therein lies also the inner infinity of inwardness inwardly directed.”<sup>4</sup> The suffering that accompanies the religious life is

2. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

3. Another word on strategy is in order. The term “figuring” that features in the title of our study has been chosen advisedly. For the term “figure” has a “pleasant ambiguity in referring to individuals as well as to verbal expressions. The word derives from the Latin for ‘form’ or ‘shape’ (including the shade of the departed). When we say that an autobiography presents the ‘figure’ of a man, we dwell on a mental image of him along with the linguistic strategies by which that image has been conveyed” (Avrom FLEISHMAN, *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983, p. 50). Apart from its reference to autobiography, this description is pertinent to our title.

4. Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1941, p. 264, n. *SV* 9, p. 249, n. 1.

here being predicated as “the inner infinity of inwardness inwardly directed” (*Indvorteshedens indre Uendelighed ind efter*). In spite of its seeming redundancy, this phrase suggests two seminal insights : First, subjectivity or a person's inner life cannot be represented in any outward form ; hence, it eludes perceptual representation or conceptual formulation. Secondly, the terms *infinity* and *inwardness* are affiliated with the notion of *spirit*. Spirit, in turn, is incommensurate with whatever is finite or determinate.

So, try as one may to demonstrate the contrary, inwardness and outwardness are too heterogeneous to speak the same language, *pour ainsi dire*. In effect, the best way to depict spirit is to say that it has “the character of a force or inner energy, the power to transform.”<sup>5</sup> The reason for this transcendent license on the part of spirit is due to its kinship with the divine. For aught we know, divinity estranges itself from the human by affirming its radical or inexhaustible difference from it, which is that while the human is limited and tendentious, the divine is salubriously unlimited and open towards the good, and that it has no obligation to yield to definitions or submit to conventional structures or comply with social norms.<sup>6</sup>

Further, the human in us tends to domesticate spirit, to streamline it to its own notion of selfhood, personal identity, and integrity. Also, since divinity resists any kind of this-worldly restriction and control,<sup>7</sup> the individual who would be religious *suffers* because of the tension generated by an apparent contradiction : the demand for a vital synthesis or an organic integration of the human with its supreme radical other. This is another way of saying that religious suffering results from the intrinsic discord between the creature comforts to which human immanence inclines and the sovereign reality that characterizes the divine as imperative and transcendent. The paramount, and perhaps the most daunting and anxiety-laden characteristic of transcendence is its utter alienation from the regularity or predictability that renders our existence sustainable on a daily basis.<sup>8</sup> For transcendence is undifferentiated, indeterminate, and

5. Yves CONGAR, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997, p. 11.

6. It is for this reason that the Jutland priest delivers his sermon on the tenet “that against God we are always in the wrong” (Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Either/Or Volume Two*, trans. Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959, 343ff).

7. Compare the following : “In his *Treatise on the Holy Spirit* (written in 375), Basil of Caesarea described the Spirit as having a nature that is not limited and not subject to change, ‘intelligent, infinite in power, unlimited in greatness, not governed by time and the centuries and generous with his own goods’” (Yves CONGAR, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 11).

8. In a note referring to observations made by Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* on sin, ethics, and repentance, Haufniensis writes : “Either all of existence (*Tilvaerelsen*) comes to an end in the demand of ethics, or the condition is provided and the whole of life and existence begins anew, not through an immanent continuity with the former existence, which is a contradiction, but through a transcendence. This transcendence separates repetition from the former existence (*Tilvaerelse*) by such a chasm that one can only figuratively say that the former and the latter relate themselves to each other as the totality of living creatures in the ocean relates itself to those in the air and to those upon the earth” (Søren KIERKEGAARD, *The Concept of Anxiety : A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. Reidar Thompse in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 17. Hereafter, *The Concept of Anxiety*). This figuration, which refers to the “totality” of the heterogeneous ways of being on land, sea, and air, bespeaks the possibility of the “leap” from immanence to transcendence despite their mutual ontological divide. The reason why it is possible for immanence and

infinite. From the perspective of mere human nature, transcendence is a virtual *nothing* and is *nowhere*. On this basis, an encounter with transcendence as total otherness, insofar as it is that to which the individual is nonetheless essentially oriented, induces anxiety.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Haufniensis writes : “If [...] the speaker maintains that the great thing about him is that he has never been in anxiety, I will gladly provide him with my explanation : that it is because he is very spiritless.”<sup>10</sup> For the reasons mentioned above, this very anxiety will presumably be more pronounced in Greene’s characters than in Hawthorne’s protagonist.

In Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil,” the Reverend Hooper, a young parson from a small New England town, one day shocked his parishioners out of their wits by his singular attire : “Swathed about his forehead, and hanging down over his face, so low as to be shaken by his breath, Mr. Hooper had on a black veil.”<sup>11</sup> The verbal reaction of members of his congregation is striking as well : (1) “I can’t really feel as if good Mr. Hooper’s face was behind that piece of crape ;” (2) “I don’t like it ;” (3) “He has changed himself into something awful, only by hiding his face ;” (4) “Our parson has gone mad.”<sup>12</sup> Whatever else these interjections may signify, they are, from the standpoint of his fellows, quite revealing. For here is a supposed minister of God, who, instead of standing up in front of his congregation as he usually does as a paradigm of virtue, on this Sunday morning wears a veil that ostensibly portrays him as a nefarious sinner. More, he knows that his bizarre habiliments, which lend him a spectral appearance to boot, are such that his immediate social environment *will* unmistakably divine the meaning of his anamorphic posture. After all, people may wonder, “why in the world would my pastor cover his face with a black veil ? And in church, while he preaches ?” We may hazard that Hooper wants his parishioners to think that he is *not* really the man *they* consider him to be. It may also be the case that *the parson* regards himself such a sinner that he uses the medium of the black veil to convey this conviction in a symbolic way. But suppose we were to ask : “Reverend Hooper, Who are you ?” We wonder how *he* would respond. Hooper could say, “I am a minister of God, quite aware of my secret sins.” There is every reason to believe that his parishioners would agree with him. Nevertheless, with this rejoinder Hooper would not have touched the nerve of the issue. For the question seeks, in Ricœur’s telling terms, the *ipse*, and the Reverend would have simply dealt with the *idem*.<sup>13</sup> As I have written elsewhere, the *who (ipse)* is that dimension of self-

---

transcendence to intersect at all (at the “instant” or “moment” when a person makes a decision) is because, in Kierkegaard’s world, every human existence is planned religiously. Parenthetically, this final clause may smack of an Augustinian moment.

9. To say that a person is essentially oriented towards transcendence is tantamount to claiming, as Haufniensis does, that “[e]very human life is religiously designed” (*The Concept of Anxiety*, p. 105).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
11. Nathaniel HAWTHORNE, “The Minister’s Black Veil,” in Donald MCQUADE, Robert ATWAN, Martha BANTA *et al.*, ed., *The Harper American Literature. Vol. One. Second Edition*, New York, Harper Collins College Publishers, 1994, p. 1739.
12. *Ibid.*
13. “Let me recall the terms of the confrontation : on one side, identity as *sameness* (Latin *idem*, German *Gleichheit*, French *mêmeté*) ; on the other, identity as *selfhood* (Latin *ipse*, German *Selbstheit*, French *ipsé-*

hood which resists, or eludes, definition, objectification, or specific characterization. In temporal terms it is commensurate with the future, and as such keeps itself indefinite, open, undeterminable. Another term for this, *mutatis mutandis*, is subjectivity. The *what (idem)* consists of an aggregate of attributes — the determinations of such elements as name, status, and origin which are readily available to satisfy the quest for social assimilation or the psychological need to identify with a group. Since this aspect of our ontological make-up is tangible and definite, it incites the deep-seated urge in us to overemphasize the *idem*, i.e., the medium of sameness, and for that reason, to overlook that in us which is intractable, the agent of radical conceptual innovation, the means of inspiration, the *topos* of grace, the *ipse*.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, how can Hooper *demonstrate*, as he apparently wishes to do, *who* he is? What language can he use, short of forfeiting his subjectivity-cum-singularity, to identify the *ipse*? Whatever he shares with members of his culture and other human beings, e.g., language (words, signs, gestures) cannot do justice to his singularity and subjectivity precisely because were he to succeed in representing this subjectivity in full force, he would in the same breath abrogate himself, snuff himself out as *ipse*. Whatever he shares in common with others, that is, whatever is representable, recognizable, and identifiable, is finite *only*. But Hooper is, to use the language of the pseudonyms, a synthesis of the finite and the infinite. The infinite dimension of Hooper, which he cannot circumscribe, manipulate, or control, in effect eludes his calculative grasp. In other words, however the Reverend Hooper conceives of himself, whatever he thinks of himself, however he projects himself, it is tempting to conjecture that he is more concerned with *himself* (reducing himself to the finite) than with God. That, in fact, is why he most certainly wears the veil. The veil is nothing other than a medium of communication between the parson and his congregation and, by implication, the world at large. It conveys to them Hooper's altered *image of himself*. More, it is likely that the parson does all this to convince himself and his parishioners that he is *now* a religious individual. Be that as it may, in Kierkegaard's lexicon, which is permeated by the play of irony and humor, the Reverend Hooper misses the mark because he is, peradventure, too engrossed with the external, with worldliness. The basic effort of his life seems to be to so impress his congregation and community that they would think of him as a repentant sinner, a man of God *par excellence*, a veritable *archetypus religiosus*. But the veil, as an item in the world, does not, cannot, bespeak inwardness. Hooper, by using the veil as a sign or symbol of his relationship with God, betrays his very distance from God. Had Hooper an authentic relationship with God, he would not have reverted to an outward manifestation of his repentance. Remember, it is not against people that he has supposedly sinned; it is against God. In this regard, we ask: why would the parson feel compelled to announce to the whole world the miserable state of his soul? Would God not have acknowledged his repentance in inwardness? After all, according to the present line of reasoning, in-

---

*ité*). Selfhood [...] is not sameness" (Paul RICŒUR, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 116).

14. Roy MARTINEZ, "Existential Angst and Ethnic Cleansing," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, LXXVII, 1-2 (1994), p. 201.

wardness has no outward expression.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, never can it transpire (or so it seems), in the religious sphere *à la* Kierkegaard, that Hooper's veil can be mistaken for the inner man. Paradoxically, and by analogy, that kind of perfection remains in the pagan world, and pertains in particular to Parrhasius.<sup>16</sup> At this juncture, Greene's story enters the fray.

Greene's piece is titled "A Visit to Morin." And Morin is the author of, among other significant works, *Le Diable au Ciel*. Morin, a noted Catholic writer from France, wrote fifteen books that exerted such influence on his readers that many of them were tempted, or in fact converted, to the Catholic religion. At a certain point in his career, however, the writer himself ceased to believe. He is no longer a practicing Catholic, but for sentimental reasons and as a carry-over from his childhood, he attends Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. True to himself, he refuses to take Communion even on this singular occasion. When his interlocutor, the Englishman Dunlop, inquires about the reason for this abstention and surmises that it is due to the author's loss of faith, Morin replies: "Do you think that would keep anyone from the Confessional? You are a long way from understanding the Church or the human mind, Mr. Dunlop. Why, it is one of the most common confessions of all for a priest to hear — almost as common as adultery. 'Father, I have lost my faith.' The priest, you may be sure, makes it himself often enough at the altar before he receives the Host."<sup>17</sup> We shall return to this point a trifle later. In the meantime, it behooves us to dwell somehow on the interlocutor himself, Mr. Dunlop.

Dunlop began to read Morin's books at the age of sixteen while studying French with Mr. Strangeways from Chile. Even as a schoolboy, Dunlop already showed signs of intellectual maturity and a pronounced curiosity about theology and matters relating to the question of faith. In fact, the bulk of his reading seemed to have concentrated on the impact of religion on human life. After perusing Morin's works, however, Dunlop developed such an intense interest in Catholicism that he was even

- 
15. That is why Kierkegaard writes: "The inward orientation of silence is the condition for cultured conversation; chattering is the caricaturing externalization of inwardness, is uncultured" (Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, ed. and trans. Howard V. HONG and Edna H. HONG, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 99). This means that whenever an attempt is made to render outward what is inward, the result is nothing but galimatias.
  16. Sir Paul HARVEY, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1937, p. 307, p. 454. The story is recounted by Pliny that two masters of painting in Antiquity, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, participated in a contest to produce illusion. Zeuxis succeeded in painting a still-life of grapes that were so impeccable in portrayal that birds alighted to peck at them. Then Parrhasius showed Zeuxis a painting covered by a veil. When the latter tried to remove it, he discovered that the veil itself was the painting.
  17. Graham GREENE, *Collected Short Stories*, London, Penguin Books, 1986, p. 226. Cf.: "'Saints,' cried Fr McMahon, and his body trembled as he spoke, 'when they found themselves assaulted by the temptation of the flesh, cast themselves into bushes of piercing thorns, and then wrapped their bleeding bodies in rough sackcloth.' And his eyes closed and he crossed the altar, holding his hands before his eyes as if to shut out the vision that his words called to his mind. For there in front of him was his temptation of the flesh, looking up at him, and he knew that he could not cast himself into a bush of piercing thorns to escape it. He knew in his heart that temptation was stronger than he. He knew that his soul was filled with desire, unconquerable desire for Lily McSherry, and he knew that he was a priest and that she was 'His Neighbour's Wife'" (Liam O'FLAHERTY's novel, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, Dublin, Wolfhound Press, 1997, p. 43).

tempted to convert to it. Worthy of note is the fact that throughout the story Dunlop refers to himself as a non-believer. In this regard, it would make sense to characterize him as an atheist were it not for the fine distinction he makes between “belief” and “faith.” Here, we reconnect with the reason why, at Midnight Mass, both Morin and Dunlop were the only attendants who did not receive Holy Communion. But let us first take a closer look at each of these two individuals before focusing on the leitmotiv of the story itself.

Dunlop, we recall, entertained great intellectual promise. His relationship with his teacher, Mr. Strangeways, was so close that they spent countless hours discussing literature, literary criticism, and religion. More, Strangeways was so impressed by his pupil that, as the latter admitted years later, “I think he had pictured me in the future as a distinguished writer for the weeklies on the subject of French literature — perhaps even as the author of a scholarly biography of Corneille. In fact, after an undistinguished war-record, I obtained a post, with the help of influential connections, in a firm of wine-merchants.”<sup>18</sup> The implication here is that were Strangeways to meet his former pupil today, he would be sorely disappointed that a young man’s promising future culminated in mere mediocrity. It is also possible that Dunlop himself is frustrated at his own failure in life. Yet, at a first approach, this failure is not *social* in nature. In other words, Dunlop seems soberly unaffected by the fact that instead of becoming a scholar, he ended up selling superlative vintages. If failure is the right word to use in this context, then it must be characterized as *psychic*. For Dunlop’s problem consists of a ceaseless struggle in the core of his soul crying out for a solution which by his own contrivance he cannot attain. As a bachelor and wine merchant, Dunlop travels frequently and is almost always *alone*. The fact that he is single becomes especially acute during the Christmas holidays when families usually assemble to celebrate the birth of Christ. As he puts it: “Business had brought me to Colmar — we had found it necessary to change our agent there, and as I am a single man and find the lonely Christmases of London sad and regretful, I had chosen to combine my visit with the Christmas holiday.”<sup>19</sup> Quite excited about the prospect of escaping the dreariness of urban isolation, Dunlop continues: “One does not feel alone abroad; I imagined drinking my way through the festival itself in some *Bierhaus* decorated with holly, myself invisible behind the fume of cigars. A German Christmas is Christmas *par excellence*: singing, sentiment, gluttony.”<sup>20</sup>

Notice the hedonistic strain in this passage. Desperation is also embedded in it. Suffocatingly empty as his life seems to be, Dunlop mistakenly thinks that indulging his senses to the brim will occasion the kind of fulfillment that only spiritual nourishment can in fact provide. It is to his credit, however, that he strenuously strives to rectify his flawed existence. Dunlop does this by making a sincere effort to believe. From his initial encounter with Morin’s literary works, the narrator has been trying to attain belief in God. It is not surprising, therefore, that no sooner had he learned that

---

18. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

20. *Ibid.*



his favorite author resided in the vicinity of Colmar than he set out immediately to find him. Still in pursuit of discovering a means to believe, Dunlop approaches the eighty-year-old author for help. But what Morin tells him says a lot about Morin himself: "If you are one of those who come seeking belief, go away. You won't find it here."<sup>21</sup> While Dunlop seeks belief, he does not yet believe. He confides to the novelist: "You see, M. Morin, I don't believe either. I'm curious, that's all."<sup>22</sup> Although Dunlop does not elaborate on what he means by being *curious*, from a theological perspective his statement carries more weight than he might have thought possible. On the other hand, judging from his professional interest in theology, Morin may be familiar with what we are about to consider. And what we observe is that Saint Augustine, among others, has dealt with the notion of *curiosity* as it relates to God. In this regard, it is worth noting that some of Morin's readers refer to him as an "Augustinian."<sup>23</sup> That may explain why he tells Dunlop: "Curiosity is a great trap."<sup>24</sup> Let us proceed with caution.

Among today's scholars, Blumenberg has studied the varied career of the notion of *curiositas* and has shown that its tradition is long and complicated.<sup>25</sup> Suffice it to say that in Augustine *curiosity* functions as a cognitive appetite that is motivated primarily by vanity and pride to comprehend the things of this world as opposed to taking a sincere interest in one's own salvation and by implication in the Creator of the world. Note that *interest* is to be construed in its Latin sense of *inter-esse* (to integrate one's being, in this case, with God's will). With regards to *curiosity*, then, Augustine states: "inest animae per eosdem sensus corporis quaedam non se oblectandi in carne, sed experiendi per carnem uana et curiosa cupiditas, nomine cognitionis et scientiae palliata" ("[...] there pertains to the soul, through the same senses of the body, a certain vain and curious longing, cloaked under the name of knowledge and learning, not of having pleasure in the flesh, but of making experiments through the flesh").<sup>26</sup> Of course, in formulating the matter so simply we run the risk of losing sight of Augustine's intellectual sophistication and the subtlety of his conceptual scheme of things. As we have pointed out earlier, however, Blumenberg has conducted such a superb study of *curiositas* that we enthusiastically refer the reader to his work.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, let us return to Dunlop. On the basis of our interpretation of *curiositas* and our knowledge of Dunlop up to this point, it would not be remiss to claim

21. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

25. For more on the tradition of *curiositas*, see Chapters Four and Five of Hans BLUMENBERG, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, MA, The M.I.T. Press, 1985.

26. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Vol. I, Bk X, Ch. XXX, trans. William Watts, Cambridge, Harvard University Press (coll. "Loeb Classical Library"), 1996, p. 174.

27. It is interesting to note this observation: "[...] Gadamer questions whether Blumenberg has adequately grasped the nature of curiosity because he does not recognize the teleological orientation of all human theorizing" (Elizabeth BRIENT, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2002, p. 24, n. 24).

that his curiosity is verily a function of his unbelief. Stated in a different way, Dunlop is misguided in thinking that he can with impunity maintain a dispassionate or spectatorial attitude towards his own *vital center*, the core of his being which inextricably links to the very Subject of his pistic quest. Yet, Dunlop in all fairness seems earnest in wanting to believe. If this is the case, then why the inward malaise, why the inner discord ? In order to even attempt a response, we need to take a closer look at Morin.

On entering Morin's house, Dunlop quickly observed that "there was a great deal of theology, some poetry, and very few novels" on the writer's bookshelves.<sup>28</sup> Now, after taking stock of the many tomes on theology in Morin's library, Dunlop, who craves to believe, requests his host to recommend a theologian for this particular pistic purpose. But the writer replies with a dose of acid : "No. Not if you want to believe. If you are foolish enough to want that you must avoid theology."<sup>29</sup> Notice that matters of belief and foolishness are uttered in the same breath. Notice too that the discipline of theology — the very study of God — is castigated and relegated to irrelevance if not outright futility. The reason why Morin holds theology in so low an esteem is because he thinks that "the scholastic arguments for the existence of God" are woefully inadequate.<sup>30</sup> On this issue Morin might have been aiming his darts at Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, especially if, as a Catholic, he is indeed an Augustinian ! But a more compelling reason for his cavalier dismissal of theology is the distinction he makes between *belief* and *faith*.<sup>31</sup>

At a critical moment of interlocution, Dunlop interjected the remark : "I thought you made it perfectly clear that you had lost your faith."<sup>32</sup> To which Morin, with characteristic abrasiveness and acerbity, replied : "I told you I have lost my belief. That's quite a different thing."<sup>33</sup> If Morin is in fact an Augustinian and claims to have lost belief in contradistinction to faith, then he would concur with Kierkegaard's reservations about Saint Augustine's concept of faith. On Kierkegaard's accounting, what Augustine means by faith is no whit different from what the Greeks understood by *pistis* (belief : an inferior knowledge that has reference to the probable).<sup>34</sup> Be that as it may, the gist of the distinction between belief and faith amounts to this : *belief*, in its capacity as a species of knowing, may be induced or generated by the subject through

28. Graham GREENE, *Collected Short Stories*, p. 223.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

31. It is of interest to note that Greene relates himself to this short story. Let us listen to one of his friends : "[...] he told me on different occasions that each day he found he had less 'belief' but more 'faith.' By 'belief' he meant the kind of faith that is based on reason, or better still, on the reasons that support one's faith — in other words, to use the language of theology, faith assisted by 'motivation for credulity.' His short story 'A Visit to Morin,' deals directly with this matter of 'faith' and 'belief' (Leopoldo DURAN, *Graham Greene : An Intimate Portrait by His Closest Friend and Confidant*, trans. Euan Cameron, London, Harper San Francisco, 1994, p. 98).

32. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

34. For more on Kierkegaard and Augustine on *faith*, see Roy MARTINEZ, "Kierkegaard's Critique of Augustine's Concept of Faith," Chapter One in *Kierkegaard and the Art of Irony*, Amherst, Humanity Books, 2001.

will and effort. In this sense, belief is immanent. After all, one may verily *will to believe*. *Faith*, on the other hand, has an otherworldly provenance and is directly imparted to the person as a gift. Its *fons et origo* is independent of the individual even though it requires her decisive participation. Within the context of Augustine's scheme of things, this gift of faith is pre-ordained insofar as every human soul is made by God for Himself. That is why, for both Augustine and Kierkegaard, a person cannot possess an integrated self without acknowledging God as an integral part or constitutive component of his or her being. Thus, Saint Augustine writes : "fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te" ("Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee").<sup>35</sup>

On the basis of the distinction under analysis, Morin acknowledges the inability of *mere man* to achieve salvation on his own terms. That is why he tells Dunlop : "I used to believe in revelation, but I never believed in the capacity of the human mind."<sup>36</sup> By this statement Morin seems to imply two things : On the one hand, as someone born into Roman Catholicism, he uncritically accepted the doctrine of revelation as an article of faith ; on the other, when, qua intellectual, Morin tried to understand or grasp by sheer mental means the mystery of God's disclosure of Himself to the world, he unbelievably failed. An old man now — but still a Catholic — Morin seems to have realized the folly of hubris and at the same time discerned with wisdom and conceptual clarity the limits of what it means to be human. In other words, the time for belief, with its corresponding conceit, has petered out. It has auspiciously given way to faith, which is born at the boundary of human finitude and divine transcendence. Finally, Dunlop makes a significant observation : "I had never seen," he said, "a man less at home himself. It was as if he were camping in a house that belonged to another."<sup>37</sup> This statement should be construed both literally and metaphorically. In the first instance, it refers to the loneliness that befell Morin after his wife passed away. In a deeper sense, it signifies the restlessness of someone who feels estranged from his surroundings. But is this not the very meaning of the import of faith ? What, in other words, is faith if not the admission that there is a discrepancy between ourselves and our ontological condition ? That the object of our thirst — rather, the *subject* of our aspiration — does not quite reside within our purview ? That it is not available to us on the strength of our actions alone ? Dunlop's<sup>38</sup> life is a spiritual wilderness, virtually akin to the earlier phase of Morin's own quest for salvation. Like some of the pseudonyms — Climacus and Taciturnus and de Silentio, for example — Dunlop's interest in religion consists of a disengaged intellectual curiosity.

35. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Vol. I, Bk I, Ch. I, p. 2 ; *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine. Volume One*, p. 3. In a similar vein, Moltmann asserts : "In the restless heart that is due to his creation, man is engaged in the quest for God, whether he knows it or not" (Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993, p. 64).

36. Graham GREENE, *Collected Short Stories*, p. 224.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

38. It is of interest to note that Dunlop's professional association with wines, in conjunction with the seeming aesthetic phase of his life, coincides with the motif of "In vino Veritas" in *Stages on Life's Way*.

Not so Morin ! This failed Catholic, this miserable stellar writer, this cantankerous octogenarian, is not at peace with himself. And the reason for his inner unrest has already been intimated. For unlike Dunlop, who appears to seek belief in order to satisfy an urge of the understanding, Morin hangs on to faith. If Dunlop's life seems to verge on the vacuous (and chances are that is precisely what he is trying to convey about himself), then maybe he is also surreptitiously admitting to himself that what he seeks he is unable to find. In fact, given Dunlop's able attuning to the world as such, and the ease and comfort with which he comports himself in it, his inability to find what he seeks in this familiar zone may very well indicate that the object of his search resides elsewhere. But Dunlop's search for belief is motivated by a negative cause. That is, because his actual life seems to be going nowhere, Dunlop deems it necessary or expedient to seek an alternative way of living — but always on his own terms. And Morin ?

At this stage of his life Morin believes that hints have been made to him that a better *something* is promised from a completely different source. Remember when he said that he *used* to believe in revelation ? Well, that was then. This is now. Now, without any intellectual effort on his part to *grasp* God's disclosure of Himself, Morin seems to have accepted the grace bestowed on him to view life through the eyes of faith. If so, Morin has died to the world in which Dunlop abortively attempts to live a meaningful life. For the faith which he has embraced indicates his death to this world in which he thought he could revel and at the same time hold his peace. He realizes that this world is wanting ; that it is not sufficient unto itself. His reputation as a successful and influential writer no longer suffices. The caducity, the evanescence, the fugacity of the world stare him starkly in the face. Morin is supposedly now a different man. He has transformed his life into something new. "A new life, yes, and this is no mere phrase, as when the word is used for this or that, whenever something new begins to stir in us ; no, a new life, literally a new life — for (observe this well !) death comes in between, this thing of being dead ; and a life on the other side of death, yes, that is a new life."<sup>39</sup> It is this change (if that is what it is), this radical transformation — this *metanoia* — that would distinguish Morin's faith from Dunlop's striving to believe. But the problem we face, in accordance with the tenor and thesis of this study, is whether we can identify Morin as religious and Dunlop, not ? In other words, since Morin has admittedly attained faith, and Dunlop has not yet even learned to believe, would it not be reasonable to regard Morin as religious ? And what about the Reverend Hooper ? His idiosyncrasy notwithstanding, and in view of his veiled visage, might he not be religious after all ?

At this juncture, the irony that pervades Kierkegaard's works comes into play. For everything I, as a writer, have said about Hooper, Dunlop, and Morin might have to be discounted or disavowed because I have no access to their inwardness. My views of them are determined by my own understanding of what a human life ought to be, which in turn are conditioned by my prejudices, wiles, whims, preferences,

---

39. Søren KIERKEGAARD, *For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself*, trans. Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 96.

fancies, predilections, and inclinations. Who am I, in other words, to say to another that the way to relate to God is thus? It ought not to be forgotten, after all, that an Augustinian strain permeates Kierkegaard's scheme of concepts. In this regard, Kolakowski writes: "The Augustinian doctrine implies that whenever we actually use our will — or our faculty of making a choice — we invariably use it against God; as a result of our self-induced corruption in original sin, we are never free in the sense of being able to choose between good and evil." He goes on to say: "If it is our own will that makes the decision, it chooses itself, that is evil. By choosing good we do not really choose; we rather renounce the choice in favour of the divine will that operates in us in the form of grace."<sup>40</sup> Does not this summary of Augustine's thought express the gist of the Jutland priest's edifying discourse that "mod Gud have vi altid uret" ("as against God we are always in the wrong")?<sup>41</sup> Even when a person performs an act that is seemingly good, so long as it conforms to the principles of this world, it is *not* good. As a religious quality, *good* resides in an "inversion"<sup>42</sup> ("en Omvendthed") of, or an "unconditional heterogeneity" ("ubetingede Uensartethed") to, the world. Further, any attempt to contrive a formula or develop an algorithm for this transformation — to become *good* — is bound to fail because it would be an instance of mere worldliness. In other words, every human being looks out for herself, is on the *qui vive* for *her* good. For this reason, an individual's notion of "what is good" and *the good* do not coincide. For the former bears the individual as its measure, whereas the latter's frame of reference is God Himself. Among other things, this means that on a natural level a human being will do everything she possibly can to avoid any kind of suffering. But the person who would heed Christ's command to follow Him *must* not only determine to endure suffering, but must also discern the *promise* in suffering, because perfection can be attained only through tribulation, where tribulation is understood in its spiritual sense as "the how" ("det Hvorledes") of suffering. Phrased differently, by a reversal of thought — the spiritual eclipsing the natural — one rejoices in suffering, believing (with firm conviction) that "Traengselen er Veien" ("tribulation is the way").<sup>43</sup> "For when we speak like this we are not saying that the good man some time in another world will be victorious, or that his cause some time in this world will be victorious; nay, but he conquers while he lives, in suffering he conquers while he lives, he conquers in the very day of suffering."<sup>44</sup> Such, then, is the *good* person or the religious individual. She eventuates in eclipsing the world; she emerges at the moment when she lets the spiritual take total possession of the natural or, to put it in a different way, when she renounces the world's dominion over her.

40. Leszek KOLAKOWSKI, *Metaphysical Horror*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988, p. 84.

41. Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Either/Or. II*, trans. Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959, p. 343. *SV* 3, p. 311ff.

42. Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Gospel of Sufferings*, trans. A.S. Aldworth and W.S. Ferrie, Cambridge, James Clarke & Co., 1955, p. 136. *SV* 11, p. 302.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 97. *SV* 11, p. 270.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Now, the individual who would perform this feat eludes recognition by those whose measure or norm is still the world. After all, by what criteria would they recognize the transformation ? That is why Climacus writes : “den sande Religieusitet er den skjulte Inderlighed, ikke tør udtrykke den i det Udortes, fordi den derved verdsliggjøres” (“true religiosity is that of the secret inwardness, he dares not express his religiosity outwardly, because this would infect it with worldliness”).<sup>45</sup> But there is more. Climacus's locution can easily give the impression that the individual *knows* that she is religious but has no way of expressing it in the world. That is not the case. The religious individual cannot know that she is religious for the reason that even if she “rejoices in suffering,” or thinks that she lives according to Christ's command, she is still in the world, and thus cannot, from a religious angle of vision, evaluate herself. For if she did, she would be compelled to use the only standards available to her : those of the world. And that, to be sure, would be another instance of worldliness. It is for this reason that the religious individual remains *incognito* : to herself and to others.<sup>46</sup> That, at least, is the yarn spun by some of the pseudonyms. But take note : Kierkegaard in private person seems to support it.

So, what can we say about the Reverend Hooper, Dunlop, and Morin ? Are they *religious* ? Reader, as you have observed, I've tried my best to answer. Now, I request your assistance : Are *they* religious ?

---

45. Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1941, p. 454. *SV* 10, p. 185.

46. Hannah Arendt's observation is pertinent : “The one activity taught by Jesus in word and deed is the activity of goodness, and goodness obviously harbors a tendency to hide from being seen or heard [...]. For it is manifest that the moment a good work becomes known or public [most importantly, even to the doer of the deed himself], it loses its specific character of goodness, of being done for nothing but goodness' sake [...]. Good works, because they must be forgotten instantly, can never become part of the world ; they come and go, leaving no trace. They truly are not of this world” (in Elizabeth BRIENT, *The Immanence of the Infinite*, p. 41, n. 56).