

Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* [c. 500 CE]¹

CHAPTER I: *What is the Divine Darkness?*

“Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness; Guide of Christians to Divine Wisdom; direct our path to the ultimate summit of your mystical knowledge, most incomprehensible, most luminous and most exalted, where the pure, absolute and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness, and fill our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories surpassing all beauty.”

Let this be my prayer; but do, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that you may arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with it that transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of yourself and of all things you may be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.

But these things are not to be disclosed to the uninitiated, by whom I mean those attached to the objects of human thought, and who believe there is no superessential Reality beyond, and who imagine that by their own understanding they know it that has made Darkness Its secret place. And if the principles of the divine Mysteries are beyond the understanding of these, what is to be said of others still more incapable thereof, who describe the transcendental First Cause of all by characteristics drawn from the lowest order of beings, while they deny that it is in any way above the images which they fashion after various designs; whereas they should affirm that, while it possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the Universal Cause) yet, in a more strict sense, it does not possess them, since it transcends them all; wherefore there is no contradiction between the affirmations and the negations, inasmuch as it infinitely precedes all conceptions of deprivation, being beyond all positive and negative distinctions.

Thus the blessed Bartholomew asserts that the divine science is both vast and minute, and that the Gospel is great and broad, yet concise and short; signifying by this, that the beneficent Cause of all is most eloquent, yet utters few words, or rather is altogether silent, as having neither (human) speech nor (human) understanding, because it is super-essentially exalted above created things, and reveals itself in Its naked Truth to those alone who pass beyond all that is pure or impure, and ascend above the topmost altitudes of holy things, and who, leaving behind them all divine light and sound and heavenly utterances, plunge into the Darkness where truly dwells, as the Oracles declare, that ONE who is beyond all.

It was not without reason that the blessed Moses was commanded first to purify himself and then to separate himself from those who had not undergone purification; and after the entire purification heard many trumpets and saw many lights streaming forth with pure and manifold rays; and that he was thereafter separated from the multitude, with the elect priests, and pressed

¹ This is Arthur Versluis' (2005) revision of the translation published by the Shrine of Wisdom. Versluis' version is at <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeII/MysticalTheology.html>

forward to the summit of the divine ascent. Nevertheless, he did not attain to the Presence of God itself; he saw not it (for it cannot be looked upon) but the Place where it dwells. And this I take to signify that the divinest and highest things seen by the eyes or contemplated by the mind are but the symbolical expressions of those that are immediately beneath it that is above all. Through these, Its incomprehensible Presence is manifested upon those heights of Its Holy Places; that then It breaks forth, even from that which is seen and that which sees, and plunges the mystic into the Darkness of Unknowing, whence all perfection of understanding is excluded, and one is enwrapped in that which is altogether intangible, wholly absorbed in it that is beyond all, and in none else (whether oneself or another); and through the inactivity of all reasoning powers is united by one's highest faculty to It that is wholly unknowable; thus by knowing nothing one knows That which is beyond one's knowledge.

CHAPTER II: *The necessity of being united with and of rendering praise to it that is the Cause of all and above all.*

We pray that we may come unto this Darkness which is beyond light, and, without seeing and without knowing, to see and to know that which is above vision and knowledge through the realization that by not-seeing and by unknowing we attain to true vision and knowledge; and thus praise, superessentially, it that is superessential, by the transcendence of all things; even as those who, carving a statue out of marble, abstract or remove all the surrounding material that hinders the vision which the marble conceals and, by that abstraction, bring to light the hidden beauty. It is necessary to distinguish this negative method of abstraction from the positive method of affirmation, in which we deal with the Divine Attributes. For with these latter we begin with the universal and primary, and pass through the intermediate and secondary to the particular and ultimate attributes; but now we ascend from the particular to the universal conceptions, abstracting all attributes in order that, without veil, we may know that Unknowing which is enshrouded under all that is known and all that can be known, and that we may begin to contemplate the superessential Darkness which is hidden by all the light that is in existing things.

CHAPTER III: *What are the affirmations and the negations concerning God?*

In the *Theological Outlines* we have set forth the principal affirmative expressions concerning God, and have shown in what sense God's Holy Nature is One, and in what sense Three; what is within It which is called Paternity, what Filiation, and what is signified by the name Spirit; how from the uncreated and indivisible Good, the blessed and perfect Rays of its Goodness proceed, and yet abide immutably one both within their Origin and within themselves and each other, co-eternal with the act by which they spring from it; how the superessential Jesus enters in essential state in which the truths of human nature meet; and other matters made known by the Oracles are expounded in the same place.

Again, in the treatise on *Divine Names*, we have considered the meaning, as concerning God, of the titles of Good, of Being, of Life, of Wisdom, of Power, and of such other names as are applied to it; further, in *Symbolical Theology* we have considered what are the metaphorical titles drawn from the world of sense and applied to the nature of God; what is meant by the material and intellectual images we form of it, or the functions and instruments of activity attributed to it; what are the places where it dwells and the raiment in which it is adorned; what is meant by God's anger, grief and indignation, or the divine inebriation; what is meant by God's oaths and threats, by Its slumber and waking; and all sacred and symbolical representations. And it will be observed how far more copious and diffused are the last terms than the first, for the theological doctrine and the exposition of the *Divine Names* are necessarily more brief than the *Symbolical Theology*.

For the higher we soar in contemplation the more limited become our expressions of that which is purely intelligible; even as now, when plunging into the Darkness that is above the intellect, we pass not merely into brevity of speech, but even into absolute silence of thoughts and of words. Thus, in the former discourse, our contemplations descended from the highest to the lowest, embracing an ever-widening number of conceptions, which increased at each stage of the descent; but in the present discourse we mount upwards from below to that which is the highest, and, according to the degree of transcendence, so our speech is restrained until, the entire ascent being accomplished, we become wholly voiceless, inasmuch as we are absorbed in it that is totally ineffable. But why, you will ask, does the affirmative method begin from the highest attributions, and the negative method with the lowest abstractions? The reason is because, when affirming the subsistence of That which transcends all affirmation, we necessarily start from the attributes most closely related to It and upon which the remaining affirmations depend; but when pursuing the negative method to reach That which is beyond all abstraction, we must begin by applying our negations to things which are most remote from It.

For is it not more true to affirm that God is Life and Goodness than that God is air or stone; and must we not deny to God more emphatically the attributes of inebriation and wrath than the applications of human speech and thought?

CHAPTER IV: *That it that is the pre-eminent Cause of all things sensibly perceived is not itself any of those things.*

We therefore maintain that the universal and transcendent Cause of all things is neither without being nor without life, nor without reason or intelligence; nor is it a body, nor has it form or shape, quality, quantity or weight; nor has it any localized, visible or tangible existence; it is not sensible or perceptible; nor is it subject to any disorder or inordination nor influenced by any earthly passion; neither is it rendered impotent through the effects of material causes and events; it needs no light; it suffers no change, corruption, division, privation or flux; none of these things can either be identified with or attributed unto it.

CHAPTER V: *That it that is the pre-eminent Cause of all things intelligibly perceived is not itself any of those things.*

Again, ascending yet higher, we maintain that it is neither soul nor intellect; nor has it imagination, opinion reason or understanding; nor can it be expressed or conceived, since it is neither number nor order; nor greatness nor smallness; nor equality nor inequality; nor similarity nor dissimilarity; neither is it standing, nor moving, nor at rest; neither has it power nor is power, nor is light; neither does it live nor is it life; neither is it essence, nor eternity nor time; nor is it subject to intelligible contact; nor is it science nor truth, nor kingship nor wisdom; neither one nor oneness, nor godhead nor goodness; nor is it spirit according to our understanding, nor filiation, nor paternity; nor anything else known to us or to any other beings of the things that are or the things that are not; neither does anything that is know it as it is; nor does it know existing things according to existing knowledge; neither can the reason attain to it, nor name it, nor know it; neither is it darkness nor light, nor the false nor the true; nor can any affirmation or negation be applied to it, for although we may affirm or deny the things below it, we can neither affirm nor deny it, inasmuch as the all-perfect and unique Cause of all things transcends all affirmation, and the simple pre-eminence of Its absolute nature is outside of every negation—free from every limitation and beyond them all.

☆ **Azriel of Gerona, *Commentary on the Sefirot* (excerpt) [c. 1200 CE]**⁹

Anything visible, and anything that can be grasped by thought, is bounded. Anything bounded is finite. Anything finite is not undifferentiated. Conversely, the boundless is called Ein Sof, Infinite. It is absolute undifferentiation in perfect, changeless oneness. Since it is boundless, there is nothing outside of it. Since it transcends and conceals itself, it is the essence of everything hidden and revealed. Since it is concealed, it is the root of faith and the root of rebellion... The philosophers acknowledge that we comprehend it only by way of no.¹⁰

Emanating from Ein Sof are the ten sefirot [divine aspects]. They constitute the process by which all things come into being and pass away. They energize every existent thing that can be quantified. Since all things come into being by means of the sefirot, they differ from one another; yet they all derive from one root. Everything is from Ein Sof; there is nothing outside of it.

One should avoid fashioning metaphors regarding Ein Sof, but in order to help you understand, you can compare Ein Sof to a candle from which hundreds of millions of other candles are kindled. Though some shine brighter than others, compared to the first light they are all the same, all deriving from that one source. The first light and all the others are, in effect, incomparable. Nor can their priority compare with its, for it surpasses them; their energy emanates from it. No change takes place in it—the energy of emanation simply manifests through differentiation.

Ein Sof cannot be conceived, certainly not expressed, though it is intimated in every thing, for there is nothing outside of it. No letter, no name, no writing, no thing can confine it. The witness testifying in writing that there is nothing outside of it is: “I am that I am.” Ein Sof has no will, no intention, no desire, no thought, no speech, no action—yet there is nothing outside of it.

⁹ Translated by Matt, Daniel C. (1995). *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*. Harper Collins, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ This is a reference to the “negative” theology in writers like Pseudo-Dionysius, Moses Maimonides, etc.

☉ Ibn Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (excerpt) [c. 1235 CE]¹¹

There Is No Existence Except Allah

He is and there is with Him no before or after, nor above nor below, nor far nor near, nor union nor division, nor how nor where nor place. He is now as He was. He is the One without oneness and the Single without singleness. He is the very existence of the First and the very existence of the Last, and the very existence of the Outward and the very existence of the Inward. So that there is no first nor last nor outward nor inward except Him, without those becoming Him or His becoming them. He is not in a thing nor a thing in Him, whether entering in or proceeding forth. It is necessary that you know Him, after this fashion, not by learning nor by intellect, nor by understanding, nor by imagination, nor by sense, nor by the outward eye nor by the inward eye, nor by perception. By Himself He sees Himself and by Himself He knows Himself. His veil, that is, phenomenal existence, is but the concealment of His existence in His oneness, without any attribute. There is no other and there is no existence for any other than He. He whom you think to be other than Allah, he is not other than Allah, but you do not know Him and do not understand that you are seeing Him. He is still Ruler as well as ruled, and Creator as well as created. He is now as He was, as to His creative power and as to His sovereignty, not requiring a creature nor a subject. When He called into being the things that are, He was already endowed with all His attributes and He is as He was then. In His oneness there is no difference between what is recent and what is original: the recent is the result of His manifestation of Himself and the original is the result of His remaining within Himself.

There is no existence save His existence. To this the Prophet pointed when he said: “Revile not the world, for Allah is the world,” pointing to the fact that the existence of the world is Allah’s existence without partner or like or equal. It is related that the Prophet declared that Allah said to Moses: “O My servant, I was sick and thou didst not visit Me: I asked help of thee and thou didst not give it to Me,” and other like expressions. This means that the existence of the beggar is His existence and the existence of the sick is His existence. Now when this is admitted, it is acknowledged that this existence is His existence and that the existence of all created things, both accidents and substances, is His existence, and when the secret of one atom of the atoms is clear, the secret of all created things, both outward and inward, is clear, and you do not see in this world or the next, anything except Allah, for the existence of these two Abodes and their name, and what they name, all of them are assuredly He.

When the mystery—of realising that the mystic is one with the Divine—is revealed to you, you will understand that you are no other than Allah and that you have continued and will continue, without when and without times. Then you will see all your actions to be His actions

¹¹ This is from chapter 1 of Arabī’s book, but it also found in a separate treatise appearing under a variety of titles, including ‘Al-Risāla al-Wujūdiyya’ and ‘Kitāb al-Ajwiba’. Translation is from Margaret Smith, (1950) *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*. London: Luzac & Co., pp. 98-101. [Small changes were made to improve style, but unfortunately, I wasn’t able to make it gender-inclusive, given the predominance of pronouns.]

and all your attributes to be His attributes and your essence to be His essence, though you do not thereby become He or He you, in either the greatest or the least degree. “Everything is perishing save His Face,” that is, there is nothing except His Face, “then, whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of Allah.”

Just as he who dies the death of the body, loses all his attributes, both those worthy of praise and those worthy of condemnation alike, so in the spiritual death all attributes, both those worthy of praise and those to be condemned, come to an end, and in all the man’s states what is Divine comes to take the place of what was mortal. Thus, instead of his own essence, there is the essence of Allah and in place of his own qualities, there are the attributes of Allah. He who knows himself sees his whole existence to be the Divine existence, but does not realise that any change has taken place in his own nature or qualities. For when you know yourself, your “I-ness” vanishes and you know that you and Allah are one and the same.

✠ Meister Eckhart, selections [c. 1300 CE]¹²

From *Sermon 4*

...And so in truth, if you would find this noble birth, you must leave the crowd and return to the source and ground whence you came. All the powers of the soul, and all their works—these are the crowd. Memory, understanding, and will, they all diversify you, and therefore you must leave them all: sense perceptions, imagination, and especially all that you have in mind or in view. Only then you may find this birth—but not otherwise...

Accordingly, the question arises whether it is possible to experience this birth through certain things which, although they are divine, yet they come in through the senses from without? I refer to certain ideas of God, such as, for example, that God is good, wise, merciful, or other ideas that are creatures of the reason, and yet divine. Can one have the experience [of the divine birth] by means of these? No! Truly no. Even though [these ideas] are all good and divine, still they are conveyed through the senses from without. If the divine birth is to shine with reality and purity, it must come flooding up and out from God within you, while all your own efforts are suspended and all the soul's agents are at God's disposal.

This accomplishment, when it is perfect, will be due solely to God's action while you have been passive. If you really forsake your own knowledge and will, then surely and gladly God will enter with God's knowledge shining clearly. Where God achieves self-consciousness, your own knowledge is of no use, nor has it standing. Do not imagine that your own intelligence may rise to it, so that you may know God. Indeed, when God divinely enlightens you, no natural light is required to bring that about. This [natural light] must in fact be completely extinguished before God will shine in with divine light; God will bring inside with God whatever you have given up a thousand times over—and God will bring a new form that contains everything within itself.

...[N]either knowledge of all creatures nor your own wisdom nor all your knowledge can bring you so far as to know God in a *divine* way. If you wish to know God in a divine way, your knowledge must become pure ignorance and forgetfulness of yourself and all creatures.

Now you might say, "Well sir, what use is my intellect then, if it is supposed to be empty and functionless? Is that the best thing for me to do—to raise my mind to an unknowing knowledge that can't really exist? For if I knew anything at all it would not be ignorance, and I should not be empty and bare. Am I supposed to be in total darkness?" Certainly! You cannot do better than to place yourself in darkness and in unknowing. "Oh sir, must everything go then, and is there no turning back?" No indeed, by rights there is no returning. "But what is this darkness? What do you call it? What is its name?" The only name it has is 'potential receptivity', which certainly does not lack being nor is it deficient, but it is the potential of receptivity in which you will be perfected. That is why there is no turning back from it. But if you do turn back, that is not on account of any truth, but because of something else—the senses, the world, or the devil.

...Do you ask how *useful* it is to realize this potential, to keep yourself empty and bare, to give yourself up solely to this this darkness and ignorance, without turning back? It offers the chance to gain that which is all things. And the more barren you are of self and ignorant of all things, the nearer you are to that estate. Of this barrenness it is said in Hosea "I will lead my

¹² Translated by Matthew Fox, (1980) *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Doubleday. [Small changes were made to improve style, to be gender-inclusive, etc.]

beloved into the wilderness and will speak to her in her heart.” The true word of eternity is spoken only in solitude, where people are made desolate and alien to themselves and all multiplicity...

Now you might say “Oh sir, is it really always necessary to be barren and estranged from everything, outward and inward: the powers and their work, must that all go? It is a grievous matter for God to leave one without support, as the prophet says ‘Woe is me that my exile is prolonged’ (Ps. 120: 5). It is difficult if God prolongs my exile here, without either enlightening or encouraging me or working within me, as your teaching implies.”

“If one finds oneself in *this* way in pure nothingness, is it not better to do something to beguile the gloom and desolation, such as praying or listening to sermons or doing something else that is virtuous, so as to help himself?” No! Understand this truly that remaining quite still for as long as possible is best for you. You cannot exchange this state for any other without harm. That is certain... You cannot think or desire to prepare yourself more quickly than God can move in to prepare you. But even if it were shared, so that you did the preparing and God did the working or the infusion—which is impossible—then you should know that God must act and pour Godself into you the moment you are found ready. Do not imagine that God is like a human carpenter, who works or not as desired, who can do or leave undone at whim. It is different with God: as and when God finds you ready, God has to act, to overflow into you, just as when the air is clear and pure the sun has to burst forth and cannot refrain. It would surely be a grave defect in God if God performed no great works in you and did not pour great goodness into you whenever you were found thus empty and bare.

In the same sense the masters write that in the very instant the material substance of the child is ready in the mother's womb, God at once pours into the body its living spirit which is the soul, the body's form. It is one instant, the being ready and the pouring in. When nature reaches her highest point, God gives *grace*: the very instant the spirit is ready, God enters without hesitation or delay. In the Book of Revelation it says that our Lord declared to humanity “I stand at the door knocking and waiting; whoever lets me in, with that person I will sup” (Rev. 3:20). You need not seek God here or there, God is no further than the door of your heart, there standing and waiting patiently for whoever is ready to open up. No need to call to God from afar: God can hardly wait for you to open up. God longs for you a thousand times more than you long for God: the opening and the entering are a single act.

Now you might say “How can that be? I can't feel God.”—Pay attention. Your being thus aware is not in your power but in God's. When it is suitable, God self-discloses, and God can hide when God wishes. This is what Christ meant when he said to Nicodemus “The spirit breathes where it will: you hear its voice but do not know where it comes from, or where it is going” (John 3:8). In so speaking he contradicted himself: “You hear, yet you *do not know*.” After all, it is by hearing we come to know. Christ meant that by hearing it is imbibed or absorbed, as if to say, you receive it, but unawares. You should know, God cannot leave anything void or unfilled, God and nature cannot endure that anything should be empty or void. And so, even if you think you can't feel God and are wholly empty of the Divine, that is not the case. For if there were anything empty under heaven, whatever it might be, great or small, the heavens would either draw it up to themselves or else, bending down, would have to fill it with themselves. God, the Lord of nature, does not allow that anything be empty or void. Therefore, stand still and do not waver from your emptiness; for at this time you can turn away, never to turn back again.

From *Sermon 22*:

...we are not wholly blessed, even though we are looking at divine truth; for while we are still looking at it, we are not in it. As long as you have an object under consideration, you are not one with it. Where there is nothing but One, nothing but One is to be seen. Therefore, no one can see God except when blind, nor know God except through ignorance, nor understand God except through folly.

From *Sermon 23*:

The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving.

From *Sermon 12*:

These three dimensions represent three kinds of knowledge. The first is sensual: the eye sees things at a distance. The second is intellectual and is much higher in rank. The third represents [the function of] that aristocratic agent of the soul, which ranks so high that it communes with God, face to face, as God is. This agent has nothing in common with anything else. It is unconscious of yesterday or the day before, and of tomorrow and the day after, for in eternity there is no yesterday nor any tomorrow, but only Now, as it was a thousand years ago and as it will be a thousand years hence, and is at this moment, and as it will be after death. This agent reaches God in God's hiding space, or as the Scripture says: in God, above God and through God.

Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (excerpts)¹

The problem we are considering is not the truth of Christianity but the individual's relation to Christianity. Our discussion is not about the scholar's systematic zeal to arrange the truths of Christianity in nice tidy categories but about the individual's personal relationship to this doctrine, a relationship which is properly one of infinite interest to him. Simply stated, "I, Johannes Climacus [= Kierkegaard, using a pseudonym], born in this city, now thirty years old, a decent fellow like most folk, suppose that there awaits me, as it awaits a maid and a professor, a highest good, which is called an eternal happiness. I have heard that Christianity is the way to that good, and so I ask, how may I establish a proper relationship to Christianity?"

I hear an intellectual's response to this, "What outrageous presumption! What egregious egoistic vanity in this theocentric and philosophically enlightened age, which is concerned with global history, to lay such inordinate weight on one's petty self."

I tremble at such a reproof and had I not already inured myself to these kinds of responses, I would slink away like a dog with his tail between his legs. But I have no guilt whatsoever about what I am doing, for it is not I who is presumptuous, but, rather, it is Christianity itself which compels me to ask the question in this way. For Christianity places enormous significance on my little self, and upon every other self however insignificant it may seem, in that it offers each self eternal happiness on the condition that a proper relationship between itself and the individual is established.

Although I am still an outsider to faith, I can see that the only unpardonable sin against the majesty of Christianity is for an individual to take his relationship to it for granted. However modest it may seem to relate oneself in this way, Christianity considers such a casual attitude to be imprudent. So I must respectfully decline all theocentric helpers and the helpers' helpers who would seek to help me through a detached relationship to this doctrine. I would rather remain where I am with my infinite concern about my spiritual existence, with the problem of how I may become a Christian. For while it is not impossible for one with an infinite concern for his eternal happiness to achieve salvation, it is entirely impossible for one who has lost all sensitivity to the relationship to achieve such a state.

The objective problem is: Is Christianity true? The subjective problem is: What is the individual's relationship to Christianity? Quite simply, how may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity? The problem concerns myself alone; partly because, if it is properly set forth, it will concern everyone in exactly the same way; and partly because all the other points of view take faith for granted, as trivial...

The Objective Problem of the Truth of Christianity.

...The inquiring, philosophical, and learned researcher raises the question of the truth, but not the subjective truth, that is, the truth as appropriated. The inquiring researcher is interested, but he is not infinitely, personally, and passionately interested in a way that relates his own

¹ Translation from Louis Pojman (1987), *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, Wadsworth.

eternal happiness to this truth. Far be it for the objective person to be so immodest, so presumptuous as that!

Such an inquirer must be in one of two states. Either he is already in faith convinced of the truth of Christianity—and in such a relationship he cannot be indefinitely interested in the objective inquiry, since faith itself consists in being infinitely concerned with Christianity and regards every competing interest as a temptation; or he is not in faith but objectively considering the subject matter, and as such is not in a condition of being infinitely interested in the question.

I mention this in order to draw your attention to [this]... , namely, that the problem of the truth of Christianity is never appropriately set forth in this objective manner, that is, it does not arise at all, since Christianity lies in decision. Let the scholarly researcher work with indefatigable zeal even to the point of shortening his life in devoted service to scholarship. Let the speculative philosopher spare neither time nor effort. They are nevertheless not personally and passionately concerned. On the contrary, they wouldn't want to be but will want to develop an objective and disinterested stance. They are only concerned about objective truth, so that the question of personal appropriation is relatively unimportant, something that will follow their findings as a matter of course. In the last analysis what matters to the individual is of minor significance. Herein precisely lies the scholar's exalted equanimity as well as the comedy of his parrotlike pedantry.

The Historical Point of View.

...When one raises the historical question of the truth of Christianity or of what is and what is not Christian truth, we come directly to the Holy Scriptures as the central document. The historical investigation focuses first on the Bible.

...[L]et us assume first that the critics have established everything that scholarly theologians in their happiest moments ever dreamed to prove about the Bible. These books and no others belong to the canon. They are authentic, complete, their authors are trustworthy—it is as though every letter were divinely inspired (one cannot say more than this, for inspiration is an object of faith and is qualitatively dialectical...).

...And so it comes to pass that everything we hoped for with respect to the Scriptures has been firmly established. What follows from this? Has anyone who didn't previously have faith come a single step closer to faith? Of course not, not a single step closer. For faith isn't produced through academic investigations. It doesn't come directly at all, but, on the contrary, it is precisely in objective analysis that one loses the infinite personal and passionate concern that is the requisite condition for faith, its ubiquitous ingredient, wherein faith comes into existence.

Has anyone who had faith gained anything in terms of faith's strength and power? No, not the least. Rather, his prodigious learning which lies like a dragon at faith's door, threatening to devour it, will become a handicap, forcing him to put forth an even greater prodigious effort in fear and trembling in order not to fall into temptation and confuse knowledge with faith. Whereas faith had uncertainty as a useful teacher, it now finds that certainty is its most dangerous enemy. Take passion away and faith disappears, for certainty and passion are

incompatible. Let an analogy throw light on this point. He who believes that God exists and providentially rules the world finds it easier to preserve his faith (and not a fantasy) in an imperfect world where passion is kept awake, than in an absolutely perfect world; for in such an ideal world faith is unthinkable. This is the reason that we are taught that in eternity faith will be annulled.

Now let us assume the opposite, that the opponents have succeeded in proving what they desired to establish regarding the Bible and did so with a certainty that transcended their wildest hopes. What then? Has the enemy abolished Christianity? Not a whit. Has he harmed the believer? Not at all. Has he won the right of being free from the responsibility of becoming a believer? By no means. Simply because these books are not by these authors, are not authentic, lack integrity, do not seem to be inspired (though this cannot be demonstrated since it is a matter of faith), it in no way follows that these authors have not existed, and above all it does not follow that Christ never existed. In so far as faith perdures, the believer is at liberty to assume it; just as free (mark well!); for if he accepted the content of faith on the basis of evidence, he would now be on the verge of giving up faith. If things ever came this far, the believer is somewhat to blame, for he invited the procedure and began to play into the hands of unbelief by attempting to prove the content of faith.

Here is the heart of the matter, and I come back to learned theology. For whose sake is the proof sought? Faith does not need it. Yes, it must regard it as an enemy. But when faith begins to feel ashamed, when like a young woman for whom love ceases to suffice, who secretly feels ashamed of her lover and must therefore have it confirmed by others that he really is quite remarkable, so likewise when faith falters and begins to lose its passion, when it begins to cease to be faith, then proof becomes necessary in order to command respect from the side of unbelief.

So when the subject of faith is treated objectively, it becomes impossible for a person to relate himself to the decision of faith with passion, let alone with infinitely concerned passion. It is a self-contradiction and as such comical to be infinitely concerned about what at best can only be an approximation. If in spite of this, we still preserve passion, we obtain fanaticism. For the person with infinite passionate concern every relevant detail becomes something of infinite value. The error lies not in the infinite passion but in the fact that its object has become an approximation.

As soon as one takes subjectivity away—and with it subjectivity's passion—and with passion the infinite concern—it becomes impossible to make a decision—either with regard to this problem or any other; for every decision, every genuine decision, is a subjective action. A contemplator (i.e., an objective subject) experiences no infinite urge to make a decision and sees no need for a commitment anywhere. This is the falsity of objectivity... Objectively speaking, this method produces results in great supply, but it does not produce a single decisive result. This is as is expected, since decisiveness inheres in subjectivity, essentially in passion and maximally in the personal passion that is infinitely concerned about one's eternal happiness.

Becoming Subjective.

...Philosophy teaches that the way to truth is to become objective, but Christianity teaches that the way is to become subjective, that is, to become a subject in truth. Lest we seem to be trading on ambiguities, let it be said clearly that Christianity aims at intensifying passion to its highest pitch; but passion is subjectivity and does not exist objectively at all...

The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby changes existence into something indifferent, something vanishing. The objective way of reflection leads away from the subject to the objective truth, and all the while the subject and his subjectivity become indifferent, and this indifference is precisely its objective validity; for all interest, like all decisiveness, is grounded in subjectivity...

For objective reflection the truth becomes an object, something objective, and thought points away from the subject. For subjective reflection the truth becomes a matter of appropriation, of inwardness, of subjectivity, and thought must penetrate deeper and still deeper into the subject and his subjectivity. Just as in objective reflection, when objectivity had come into being, subjectivity disappeared, so here the subjectivity of the subject becomes the final stage...

In order to elucidate the difference between the objective way of reflection and the subjective way, I shall now show how subjective reflection makes its way back into inwardness. The highest point of inwardness in an existing person is passion, for passion relates to truth as a paradox, and the fact that the truth becomes a paradox is grounded in its relation to an existing subject...By forgetting that we exist as subjects, we lose passion and truth ceases to be a paradox, but the knowing subject begins to lose his humanity and becomes fantastic and the truth likewise becomes a fantastic object for this kind of knowledge.

When the question of truth is put forward in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth as an object to which the knower is related. The reflection is not on the relationship but on whether he is related to the truth. If that which he is related to is the truth, the subject is in the truth. When the question of truth is put forward in a subjective manner, reflection is directed subjectively to the individual's relationship. If the relation's HOW is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if the WHAT to which he is related is not true.

We may illustrate this by examining the knowledge of God. Objectively the reflection is on whether the object is the true God; subjectively, reflection is on whether the individual is related to a what in such a way that his relationship in truth is a God-relationship. On which side does the truth lie? Ah, let us not lean towards mediation and say, it is on neither side but in the mediation of both of them.

The existing individual who chooses the objective way enters upon the entire approximation process that is supposed to bring God into the picture. But this in all eternity cannot be done—because God is Subject and therefore exists only for the subjective individual in inwardness. The existing individual who chooses the subjective way...comprehends this dialectical difficulty in all its pain because every moment without God is a moment lost—so important is the matter of being related to God. In this way God certainly becomes a postulate

but not in the useless sense in which it is often taken. It becomes the only way in which an existing individual comes into a relation with God—when the dialectical contradiction brings passion to the point of despair and helps him embrace God with the category of despair (faith). Now the postulate is far from being arbitrary or optional. It becomes a life-saving necessity, so that it is no longer simply a postulate, but rather the individual's postulation of the existence of God is a necessity.

Now the problem is to calculate on which side there is the most truth: either the side of one who seeks the true God objectively and pursues the approximate truth of the God-idea or the side of one who is driven by infinite concern for his relationship to God. No one who has not been corrupted by science can have any doubt in the matter.

If one who lives in a Christian culture goes up to God's house, the house of the true God, with a true conception of God, with knowledge of God and prays—but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous land prays with the total passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest on the image of an idol; where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God, although he worships an idol. The other prays in untruth to the true God and therefore really worships an idol.

...Let us consider Socrates. Today everyone is playing with some proof or other. Some have many, some fewer. But Socrates! He put the question objectively in a hypothetical manner: "if there is immortality." Compared to the modern philosopher with [let's suppose] three proofs for immortality, should we consider Socrates a doubter? Not at all. On this little "if," he risks his entire life, he dares to face death, and he has directed his life with infinite passion... But those who have the three proofs do not at all pattern their lives in conformity with the idea. If there is an immortality, it must feel disgust over their lackadaisical manner of life. Can any better refutation be given of the three proofs?² These crumbs of uncertainty helped Socrates because they hastened the process, inciting the passions. The three proofs that others have are of no help at all because they are dead to the spirit, and the fact that they need three proofs proves that they are spiritually dead. The Socratic ignorance that Socrates held fast with the entire passion of his inwardness was an expression of the idea that eternal truth is related to an existing individual, and that this will be in the form of a paradox as long as he exists; and yet it is just possible that there is more truth in Socratic ignorance than is contained in the "objective truth" of the philosophical systems, which flirts with the spirit of the times and cuddles up to associate professors.

The objective accent falls on *what* is said; the subjective accent falls on *how* it is said. This distinction is valid even for aesthetics and shows itself in the notion that what may be objectively true may in the mouth of certain people become false.... In the ethical-religious domain the accent again is on the *how*. But this is not to be understood as referring to decorum, modulation, delivery, and so on, but to the individual's relationship to the proposition, the way

² Compare this with the following from Kierkegaard's journals: "In relation to their systems, most systematizers are like one who builds an immense castle and lives in a shack nearby: they do not live in their own gigantic systematic buildings. But spiritually that is a crucial objection. Spiritually thinking one's thought must be the building in which one lives—otherwise everything is upside down."

he relates himself to it. Objectively it is a question simply about the content of the proposition, but subjectively it is a question of inwardness. At its maximum this inward *how* is the passion of infinity and the passion of the infinite is itself the truth. But since the passion of the infinite is exactly subjectivity, subjectivity is the truth. Objectively there is no infinite decision or commitment, and so it is objectively correct to annul the difference between good and evil as well as the law of noncontradiction and the difference between truth and untruth. Only in subjectivity is there decision and commitment, so that to seek this in objectivity is to be in error. It is the passion of infinity that brings forth decisiveness, not its content, for its content is precisely itself. In this manner the subjective *how* and subjectivity are the truth.

...When subjectivity is truth, the definition of truth must include an expression for an opposition to objectivity, a reminder of the fork in the road, and this expression must also convey the tension of inwardness. Here is such a definition...: the objective uncertainty, held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth available for an existing subject. There where the way swings off (and where that is cannot be discovered objectively but only subjectively), at that place objective knowledge is annulled. Objectively speaking he has only uncertainty, but precisely there the infinite passion of inwardness is intensified, and truth is precisely the adventure to choose objective uncertainty with the passion of inwardness...

Now the above definition...is an equivalent description of faith. Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty. If I can grasp God objectively, I do not believe, but because I cannot know God objectively, I must have faith, and if I will preserve myself in faith, I must constantly be determined to hold fast to the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the ocean's deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, and still believe.

...What is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has entered time, that God has entered existence, has been born, has grown, and so on, has become precisely like any other human being, quite indistinguishable from other humans. The absurd is precisely by its objective repulsion the measure of the inwardness of faith. Suppose there is a man who desires to have faith. Let the comedy begin. He desires to obtain faith with the help of objective investigation and what the approximation process of evidential inquiry yields. What happens? With the help of the increment of evidence the absurd is transformed to something else; it becomes probable, it becomes more probable still, it becomes perhaps highly and overwhelmingly probable. Now that there is respectable evidence for the content of his faith, he is ready to believe it, and he prides himself that his faith is not like that of the shoemaker, the tailor, and the simple folk, but comes after a long investigation. Now he prepares himself to believe it. Any proposition that is almost probable, reasonably probable, highly and overwhelmingly probable, is something that is almost known and as good as known, highly and overwhelmingly known—but it is not believed, not through faith; for the absurd is precisely faith's object and the only positive attitude possible in relation to it is faith and not knowledge...

Objective faith: what does that mean? It means a sum of dogmas. But suppose Christianity is nothing of the kind; suppose, on the contrary, it is inwardness, and therefore also the paradox, so as to push away objectively; and thus to acquire significance for the existing individual in the inwardness of his existence, in order to place him more decisively than any judge can place the accused, between time and eternity in time, between heaven and hell in the time of salvation.

Objective faith: it is as if Christianity had also been heralded as a kind of little system, although not quite so good as the Hegelian system; it is as if Christ—yes, no offense intended—it is as if Christ were a professor, and as if the Apostles had formed a little professional society. Truly, if it was once no easy thing to become a Christian, I believe now it becomes more difficult every year, because by now it has become so easy to become one—one finds a little competition only in becoming a speculative philosopher. And yet the speculative philosopher is perhaps most removed from Christianity, and perhaps it is far preferable to be an offended individual who nonetheless continually relates himself to Christianity, than to be a speculative philosopher who supposes he has understood it...

Subjectivity culminates in passion. Christianity is the paradox; paradox and passion belong together as a perfect match, and the paradox is perfectly suited to one whose situation is to be in the extremity of existence. Indeed, there never has been found in all the world two lovers more suited to each other than passion and paradox, and the strife between them is a lover's quarrel, when they argue about which one first aroused the other's passion. And so it is here. The existing individual by means of the paradox has come to the extremity of existence. And what is more wonderful for lovers than to be granted a long time together with each other without anything disturbing their relation except that which makes it more inwardly passionate? And this is what is granted to the unspeculative understanding between the passion and paradox, for they will dwell harmoniously together in time and be changed first in eternity.

But the speculative philosopher views things altogether differently. He believes but only to a certain degree. He puts his hand to the plow but quickly looks about for something to know. From a Christian perspective, it is hard to see how he could reach the highest good in this manner...

Subjectively, what it is to become a Christian is defined thus: The decision resides in the subject. The appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness which is specifically dissimilar to all other inwardness. What it is to be a Christian is not determined by the *what* of Christianity but by the *how* of the Christian. This *how* corresponds with one thing only, the absolute paradox. Accordingly there is no confused chatter that being a Christian is to accept, and to accept, and to accept very differently, to appropriate, to believe, to appropriate by faith very differently (all of these merely rhetorical and fictitious characterizations); but to *believe* is specifically dissimilar from all other kinds of appropriation and inwardness. *Faith is the objective uncertainty along with the repulsion of the absurd seized in the passion of inwardness, which just is inwardness potentiated to the highest degree.* This formula applies only to the believer, no one

else, not to a lover, not to an enthusiast, not to a thinker, but simply and solely to the believer who is related to the absolute paradox.

...So rather let us openly mock God, as has been done before in the world: this is always preferable to the demeaning air of self-importance with which one would prove God's existence. For to prove the existence of one who is present is the most shameless insult, since it is an attempt to make him ridiculous; but regrettably people haven't the faintest idea of this and out of sheer seriousness see it as a pious undertaking. But how could it occur to anyone to prove that he exists, unless one had allowed oneself to ignore him, and now makes it all the worse by proving his existence before his own nose? The existence of a king, his presence is generally acknowledged by the fitting attitude of subjection and submission: what if in his great presence one were to try to prove that he exists? Is that how one should proceed? No, that would be making a fool of him, for one proves his presence by the attitude of submission, which may have many different forms according to the customs of the country: and so it is also with God, that one proves his existence by worship—not by proofs. A miserable unknown author, who is brought from his obscurity by some later enquirer, may well be very pleased that the enquirer succeeds in proving his existence, but an omnipresent being can only be brought to a ridiculous embarrassment by some thinker's pious blundering.